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"THE CAD OF THE SIXTH."

By Frank Richards.



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The Cad of the Sixth



**A Splendid Double-Length School
Tale of Harry Wharton & Co.**

By FRANK RICHARDS.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Nugent Major's Difficulty.

"**H**AVE you fellows seen my minor?" Frank Nugent, of the Greyfriars Remove, asked that question in a rather anxious tone. He had been asking it up and down Greyfriars for the last quarter of an hour, without eliciting any satisfactory reply. He had asked Wharton and Bob Cherry and Hurree Singh,

but the chums of the Remove had seen nothing of Nugent's minor. And as they were just going out for football practice, it is possible that they did not give the matter much thought. Nugent, who wore a worried look, walked round the Close, glanced into the gym, hunted along the passages and in the Form-rooms. Then he came out of the School House unsuccessful, and found Bulstrode and Skinner talking at the door, and asked them the question.

"Have you seen my minor?"

Bulstrode grinned.

"Anxious about your minor?" he asked.

"Well, yes, in a way," said Nugent. "I've heard—I mean, I want to speak to him. Do you know where he is?"

"Yes."

"Well, where is he?"

"That's telling," said Bulstrode, with a grin. "He's having a good time, that's all. You can leave him alone to enjoy himself."

"Where is he?"

"Find out!"

Frank Nugent's hands clenched hard, and his eyes blazed. Ever since Nugent's minor had come to Greyfriars, Frank had been more or less uneasy about him. The spoiled child of home had not yet found his place in the Second Form at Greyfriars. He was continually in scrapes, from which he expected his major in the Remove to extricate him. But it was not a mere boyish scrape that Frank was thinking of now. It was something more serious than that he was anxious about.

"Now look here, Bulstrode," said Nugent. "Young Monson told me that my minor was fagging for Carberry this afternoon. Carberry's gone out, with Loder and Carne, and I want to know if my minor's gone with them."

"Well, as a matter of fact, he has," said Bulstrode, with a yawn. "I'm not in the habit of noticing Second Form fags, but I happened to see him go."

"Do you know where they are gone?"

"Yes."

"Where?"

"My dear chap, I'm not an information bureau," said the Remove bully, grinning. "If you want to know, find out! I took up your minor, and was going to make something of him. You sat down on that. Well, now you can look after him yourself, without any assistance from me."

"Yes, you cad!" exclaimed Nugent fiercely. "You were teaching him to smoke, and to get into trouble with the masters!"

Bulstrode yawned portentously.

"I'm getting bored with your minor," he remarked. "Let's change the subject. How are you getting on with the footer?"

"Look here——"

"It's a nice afternoon. I think I'll go and get a little practice in myself. Coming along, Skinner?"

"Yes, rather!" said Skinner. "May as well."

"Stop a minute, Bulstrode."

"Can't, my dear fellow."

And Bulstrode walked away. Nugent ran forward with blazing eyes, caught him by the shoulder, and swung him back. Bulstrode staggered, and almost fell, catching at the balustrade of the steps in time to save himself.

"Why, you confounded, cheeky puppy!" he exclaimed angrily. "What do you mean?"

"You know where my minor is," said Nugent, between his teeth. "You're going to tell me."

"Well, I won't, then!"

"You jolly well will," said Nugent, drawing a deep breath, "or——"

"Or what?"

"Or I'll make you!"

Bulstrode stared at him, and burst into a laugh. The biggest, burliest fellow in the Greyfriars Remove was not afraid of Frank Nugent. There were two fellows in the Form who could lick Bulstrode. One was Harry Wharton, the captain of the Lower Fourth; and the other was Mark Linley, the lad from Lancashire. Tom Brown, the New Zealand junior, was about Bulstrode's equal. But there was no other fellow in the Remove whom the bully could not have licked easily, and certainly the slim and handsome Nugent was no match for him.

But Nugent was in deadly earnest all the same.

His fists were clenched, and his eyes were blazing, as he stood facing the bully of the Remove.

Bulstrode grinned at Skinner, who grinned back.

"You'll make me, will you?"

"Yes!"

"Then you'd better begin, for I'm not going to tell you anything!"

"Put up your hands, you cad!"

"Rats!"

Bulstrode did not trouble to put up his hands. But he soon had no choice in the matter, for Nugent advanced upon him, hitting out.

A smart tap on the chin made Bulstrode stagger, and his eyes flashed with anger.

"Well, if you will have it!" he exclaimed.

And in a moment more they were at it hammer-and-tongs. Bulstrode had to recede at first from Nugent's furious attack. Nugent was unusually excited, and in a savage and

determined mood. He hit out hard and fast, and Bulstrode went back pace after pace.

But weight and strength began to tell. Bulstrode ceased to retreat, and then he advanced in his turn.

Nugent would not give way a step, and he stood firm as a rock, and received the heaviest punishment.

Bulstrode was getting decidedly the better of it now.

He grinned maliciously as he hammered at his slimmer and lighter antagonist, who had plenty to do to guard his blows without returning any of them.

"Now, you cub!" said Bulstrode. "Now you're going to get a lesson!"

"You cad!"

"I'll make you take that back on your knees!"

"Oh, draw it mild," said Skinner. "He's had enough, Bulstrode—let him alone."

The Remove bully scowled.

"Mind your own business, Skinner."

"Don't be such a beastly bully!"

"Your turn'll come next, if you don't shut up, Skinny!"

Skinner thrust his hands into his pockets and walked away. Nugent staggered back under a heavy blow, and sat down on the lowest step of the house. At the same moment Mr. Quelch, the master of the Remove, looked out of the doorway with an angry frown.

"Bulstrode!" he exclaimed. "Nugent!"

The two juniors started. They had not thought of it, but it was a reckless proceeding to fight in front of the School House door.

"Ye-e-es, sir!" stammered Bulstrode.

"How dare you! Go into the house, immediately, both of you! You are both detained for the afternoon!"

"Oh, sir——"

"Not a word! Go!"

"If you please, sir——"

"Another word, Nugent, and I will cane you as well!" said the Remove master sternly.

Nugent bit his lips. There was no help for it. The two juniors went into the house, and Nugent went slowly and heavily into the deserted Remove Form-room. The half-holiday was only beginning, and it was a fine clear day. From the Close came the sounds of merry voices and laughter and shouting. The Form-room seemed dreary and depressing. But Frank Nugent was not thinking of the lost holiday or his detention. He was thinking of his younger brother, who had gone out with Carberry, Loder, and Carne—the three choicest blackguards in the Sixth Form of Greyfriars.

What was he to do?

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Taking a Message.

"BUNTER!"

Billy Bunter, the Owl of the Remove, paused, and blinked round through his big spectacles.

He had a paper bag in his hand, which evidently contained a couple of tarts. Bunter's stealthy movements seemed to indicate that he was seeking a quiet place to devour the tarts without fear of discovery, so that he might not be called upon to share them with some greedy fag.

The fat junior was close to the door of the Remove Form-room when his name was called.

"Who's that?"

"Come in, Billy!"

"Hallo! Is that you, Nugent?"

Bunter looked relieved as he entered the Form-room. Frank Nugent was not the fellow to insist upon sharing his tarts, and Bunter felt that they were safe.

Nugent was looking worried and troubled. He had been in the Form-room a quarter of an hour. He had not ventured to leave it, for he could not escape from the passage without passing Mr. Quelch's study door, and he was pretty certain to be seen. He wanted to get word to his chums in the Close; but the house was deserted on the fine half-holiday, and he had looked up and down the passage from the door in vain, till Billy Bunter appeared.

Billy Bunter was not generally welcomed with open arms anywhere; but Nugent could have hugged him at this moment.

"Bunter, I want you to run——"

"Oh, really, Nugent! I don't feel much like running this afternoon. Besides, I want to eat these tarts. There was that chap Snoop watching me in the tuck-shop, and I know he wants to go halves."

"I want you to run down to the footer ground——"

"Oh, really——"

"And speak to Wharton for me."

"Why can't you go yourself?"

"I'm detained."

"Oh, I see! Well, you were an ass to get detained, you know," said Billy Bunter, seating himself comfortably on a

form. "Look here, I don't mind going when I've eaten my tarts. I'd do any little thing to oblige a chap in my own study."

"It's important!" exclaimed Nugent, angrily. "You'll go now!"

"I can't, you know. Wait till I've eaten my tarts."

Nugent looked wrathfully at the fat junior. He was greatly inclined to bundle him out of the Form-room, neck and crop. But, he remembered, that although he could turn Bunter out of the room, he could not make him take the message to Wharton. So he contained his impatience.

After all, two jam-tarts were not likely to detain a fellow like Bunter long. As a matter of fact, they took exactly half a minute each.

Then Billy Bunter slipped off the form.

"I'm ready now, Nugent," he announced.

"Go to Wharton—he's playing footer—and tell him I want to see him at once, in the Form-room," said Nugent.

"Is that all?"

"That's all."

"What do you want to see him for?" asked Bunter inquisitively.

"Mind your own business. Go and take my message."

"Oh, really, Nugent—"

"Will you go?" roared the exasperated junior, advancing towards Billy Bunter, with his fists clenched.

The Owl of the Remove backed away towards the door in alarm.

"Oh, certainly, Nugent! Of course I will! But—"

"Then go, confound you!"

"All right. But there's a little matter—look here, I've got a postal-order coming this evening," said Bunter, in a confidential tone. "It's for ten shillings. Could you advance me five on it?"

"Will you go?"

"Well, half-a-crown then, and you shall have it back immediately the postal-order arrives," said Bunter.

"Go, you young fathead!"

"Look here! Make it a bob, then, and I'll give you back one-and-six out of the postal-order."

Nugent clenched his fists hard. He was inclined to give the Owl of the Remove the licking of his life at that moment. But he restrained himself. Billy Bunter was the only possible messenger.

He groped in his pockets, and discovered a shilling. He tossed it to Bunter, who caught it on his nose, and gave a yelp.

"Ow! Oh, really, Nugent—"

"Now, buzz off and tell Wharton."

"Certainly. I say, you couldn't make this five, could you? I'd let you have it all back out of the postal-order, or put it down to the account, just as you like. I—ow!—ah!—all right, I'm going!"

And Billy Bunter darted out of the Form-room just in time to escape the indignant Nugent's boot.

Bunter did not stop running till he was at the end of the passage, and then he paused to take breath as he discovered that he was not pursued. He continued on his way at a more moderate pace.

"The beast!" he murmured. "The beast—mean beast! Fancy not making it five, when I offered to let him have it back with interest this evening! There's simply no getting on with some people, they're so unreasonable. What's the good of a bob to me? It's hours to tea-time, and I'm fearfully hungry."

And Billy Bunter grunted discontentedly as he left the house.

He blinked in the direction of the football-field, and took two steps in that direction, and then paused, and turned his steps towards the school shop.

"I'm feeling awfully faint," he murmured. "Better have a snack before I go and speak to Wharton."

And he went into the tuckshop. Mrs. Mimble, the gardener's wife, who kept the school shop within the precincts of Greyfriars, looked out of her little parlour, saw who her customer was, and did not stir.

Bunter rapped sharply on the counter with the shilling.

"Mrs. Mimble! Mrs. Mimble!"

"Oh, go away, Master Bunter!"

"Really, Mrs. Mimble—"

"I will not allow any credit," said Mrs. Mimble, from the parlour. "I can't afford to give my things away. You never pay, Master Bunter. Go away!"

"If you don't want my custom, Mrs. Mimble, I can take it elsewhere," said Billy Bunter, with a great deal of dignity, imparted by the knowledge that he was actually in possession of a coin of the realm, and did not want credit this time. "If you like to look this way, you'll see that I've got the money."

Mrs. Mimble sniffed, and came into the shop.

"I think I'll have tarts," said Bunter thoughtfully. "Lemme see—the penny ones are fourteen a shilling, aren't they, Mrs. Mimble?"

"Thirteen a shilling," said Mrs. Mimble.

"Oh, really, you know—"

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PENNY.

"And you can take them or leave them," said the good dame aggressively. "You ought to pay me that shilling off the account."

"Oh, really, Mrs. Mimble, I do wish you would try to be a little more businesslike! It really seems to be impossible for a woman to understand business."

"I understand that you owe me eleven shillings, Master Bunter."

"Yes, but that's an old account," explained Bunter. "I'm starting fresh now on a cash basis. Don't you understand?"

Mrs. Mimble sniffed.

"I suppose the jam-puffs are fourteen a shilling," said Bunter, changing the subject; for it really seemed hopeless to make Mrs. Mimble understand business. Business, with Bunter, seemed, like charity, to cover a multitude of sins.

"Thirteen," said Mrs. Mimble.

"Oh, really, you know, thirteen's an unlucky number, and—"

"You can have twelve, Master Bunter."

"Oh, really, you know—"

"You're wasting my time, Master Bunter."

"Oh, very well," said Bunter, with dignity, "I will take the thirteen, but I fear that in future I shall have to transfer my custom to Uncle Clegg's in the village."

"Which I hope he will find it more profitable than I have done," said Mrs. Mimble.

Bunter grunted, and selected his thirteen tarts, and paid over Nugent's shilling. He ate the tarts slowly and methodically. Thirteen jam-tarts would have been enough, in all conscience, for any ordinary junior. But Bunter finished them and was still game, so to speak. He cast a longing glance at Mrs. Mimble's counter, over which Mrs. Mimble was watching him with a grim expression.

"I say, Mrs. Mimble, I've a postal-order coming this evening—"

"Good-afternoon, Master Bunter!"

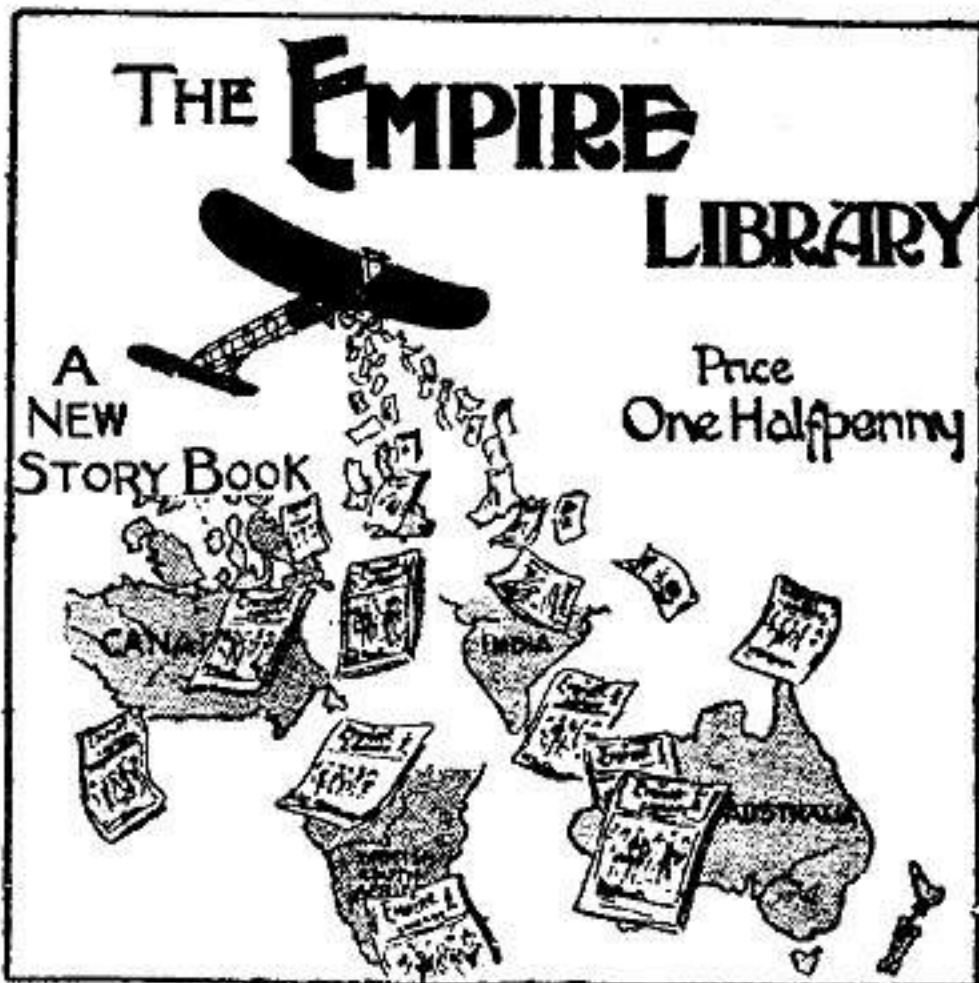
And Billy Bunter drifted disconsolately out of the tuckshop. There was a shout from the football-field of "Goal!" and Bunter suddenly remembered that he had not delivered Nugent's message to the captain of the Remove.

"Blessed lot of trouble taking these blessed messages," grumbled Billy Bunter. "I suppose I've got to do it, or Nugent will be waxy, and will cut up rusty at tea-time. I'm blessed if I know why I should fetch and carry and take messages for people. Huh!"

And the fat junior rolled away discontentedly to the junior football-ground, where Harry Wharton & Co. were hard at footer practice. Nugent, from the Form-room window, watched him wrathfully. He had seen the fat junior go into the tuckshop, and raged. But he was too far off even to call out to Bunter. He could only chafe and wait for him to reappear.

But Billy Bunter made his way to the footer ground at last, with slow and discontented footsteps, and Nugent watched him go.

NOW ON SALE



ALL OVER THE EMPIRE.

A Double-Length Tale of Harry Wharton & Co. By FRANK RICHARDS.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Bunter Interrupts the Game.

"PASS, you duffer!"

"Kick, kick!"

"Go it, Wharton!"

"On the ball, Bob!"

"What a lot of rot this football is," murmured Billy Bunter, as he stopped by the ropes round the junior ground, and blinked at the excited players, who were being watched by groups of equally excited juniors. "And this isn't a match at all, only a blessed Form practice."

"On the ball!"

"Go it!"

"I say, you fellows! I say, Wharton!"

"Go it!"

"Clear, there!"

"Play up!"

"Wharton—I say, Wharton! Nugent says——"

"Go it!"

Billy Bunter stepped over the ropes, and advanced towards the players. There was a yell from a dozen voices.

"Get off the ground!"

"Get out!"

"Buzz off!"

"Oh, really! I say, you fellows——"

"Get off!"

"Bunk!"

"I've got a message for you, Wharton——"

The ball flew past Billy Bunter, and there was a rush of players after it. The fat junior thought an earthquake had happened for a moment.

He found himself lying on the ground, blinking up at the blue sky, and wondering how on earth he had got there.

The rush of players had passed over him, leaving him like a wreck left by receding waves.

Billy Bunter sat up.

He blinked round the field, and mumbled indignantly.

"Beasts! Blessed if I deliver any rotten message now. Nugent can come and deliver his rotten messages himself."

And Bunter ambled towards the edge of the field. There was a roar.

"Look out!"

Bunter blinked round.

As he did so, a swooping football caught him fairly under the chin, and sent him whirling.

"Ow! Yow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well stopped!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ow! Ow! My neck's broken! I'm killed! Oh, oh, oh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Harry Wharton ran up, laughing. He was afraid that the fat junior might be really a little hurt, and he lifted him up.

"Sorry, Bunt! What on earth did you get on the field for?"

"Ow!"

"Where are you hurt?"

"Yaroor! My backbone's dislocated, and my jugular vein is sprained. I've got a pain in my head, and another in my heart, and an ache in my leg!"

"Then you're a hopeless case, and it's no good wasting time over you," said Bob Cherry. "Let him alone, to die in peace, Wharton, and let's get on with the game."

"Oh, really, Cherry——"

"Buck up!"

"I say, Wharton, I've got a message for you from Nugent. He's detained in the Form-room, and wants you to go and see him."

"Oh, rats!"

"He says it's important."

"Oh, all right!"

"Hang it, you might offer a fellow a little assistance, after you've nearly crippled him with your beastly football," grunted Bunter, as Wharton turned to go.

Harry Wharton did not even seem to hear him.

"You fellows keep on," he said. "I'll buzz across and see what's the matter with Frank."

"All right!"

"I say, Wharton——"

But Wharton was already gone. The ball was in play again, and Billy Bunter skipped off the field to avoid further catastrophes.

Wharton ran lightly towards the house, only staying a moment to throw a coat over his football-clothes. He hurried into the Form-room, and found Nugent there. The junior had seen Wharton coming, and he had turned to the door of the Form-room to meet him.

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Harry stared in surprise at his chum. Nugent bore only too plainly the traces of his fierce encounter with Bulstrode.

"Great Scott! What have you been doing with your face, Frank?" exclaimed Harry.

Nugent grinned faintly.

"Knocking it against Bulstrode's knuckles," he said.

"You've been fighting with Bulstrode."

"Yes. Look here, I'm in a rotten fix; Harry! Quelch caught us fighting, and he's detained me for the afternoon. My minor has gone out with Carberry and Loder and Carne."

Wharton's brow set a little.

He had been prepared to like Dick Nugent, for Frank's sake, when the youngster came to Greyfriars. But it was a hard thing to do. The youngster had many good qualities. But he was so spoiled, so wilful, and unreasonable, that it was not easy to deal with him. He gave his major a great deal of unnecessary trouble, and though Nugent did not seem to resent it himself, Harry could not help doing so. Harry's opinion was that a sound licking every now and then would do Nugent minor worlds of good; but he did not care to say so to his chum.

Harry was not surprised to hear that Dick Nugent was in trouble again. The chief difficulty in the matter was, that when Nugent minor was in trouble of this sort, he preferred to remain in it, and strongly resented any attempt to get him out.

"Fagging for them, I suppose?" said Harry abruptly.

"Yes. You know what it means, fagging for those cads," said Frank anxiously. "They've gone to the Golden Pig or the Green Man, or some such place, for a certainty—drinking, smoking, and playing cards. It was through Carberry, as much as anything, that young Levison got into the ways that led to his being expelled. If anything came out, Carberry wouldn't stand by a chap. He'll make use of my minor, and amuse himself by making the young ass smoke and play, and he'll throw him over in a moment if it suits him."

"I know that."

"Bulstrode knows where they are. I was going to look for Dick, but Bulstrode wouldn't tell me where the cads were gone, and I punched his head, and then Quelch dropped on us."

Wharton set his teeth.

"If Bulstrode knows he shall be jolly well made to tell!" he exclaimed. "But what do you want us to do, Frank? If you're detained you can't go after young Dick."

Nugent shook his head.

"No, I can't. Will you go, Harry?"

"Dick won't listen to me. He won't listen to you, for that matter. What good would it do, Frank?"

"You could make him leave them, Harry. You could take him away by force if necessary. If you don't go I shall make a run for it and risk Quelch."

"You needn't do that, Frank. I'll go, if you like. But where are they?"

"Bulstrode knows."

Wharton shut his teeth hard.

"Then Bulstrode shall tell us! I'll take some of the fellows along in case Carberry & Co. cut up rusty."

"Thanks awfully, Wharton! It's rotten for me to be stuck here like this, but——"

"That's all right—we'll do our best. You can rely on us to that extent, anyway," said Harry quietly.

"I know I've no right to bother you about my minor," said Nugent, colouring. "But——"

"Yes you have! If you can't bother a chum who can you bother?" said Harry with a smile. "I'll buzz off now, and see about it."

"Thanks, again!"

Harry Wharton quitted the Form-room with a nod. He left Nugent pacing anxiously to and fro, with a worried wrinkle on his young brow.

Bulstrode was in the Close, talking to Stott and Skinner, as Wharton came out, and the captain of the Remove walked directly over to him. Bulstrode looked at him cautiously, prepared for trouble at once by Harry's expression.

"You know where young Nugent has gone?" said Wharton.

Bulstrode shrugged his shoulders.

"How should I know?"

"You told Nugent you knew."

"Well, suppose I do?"

"I want to know—I'm going to look for him. Will you tell me where he is?" said Harry, as civilly as he could.

"I don't see why I should."

"You should—out of common decency and civility."

"Well, I won't, then!" said Bulstrode angrily.

"I've no time to fight with you now, Bulstrode, and I don't want to get detained for the afternoon as Nugent has done," said Wharton quietly; "but you are going to tell me where Nugent minor has gone with Carberry."



Dr. Locke was seated at his writing table, evidently busy. He looked up, however, as Carberry came in.
"Well, Carberry, what is it?"

"Are you going to make me?" said Bulstrode, with a sneer.
"Yes. I'll call some of the fellows, and we'll duck you in the fountain and then frog's march you round the quad," cried Wharton.

Bulstrode hesitated. He could see that Wharton was in earnest. He would have had no great objection to a fight, which would probably have got Wharton into trouble as well as himself, but he strongly objected to a ragging.

"Oh, I don't know that I need keep it secret," he said sulkily. "It's no business of mine, of course."

"Well, where is he?"

"I heard Carberry say something to Loder about meeting at the Waterside Inn, that's all."

Wharton knitted his brows.

The Waterside Inn was about half a mile down the Sark, and was well-known to be one of the most shady places in the county.

He had heard that Carberry sometimes frequented the place to meet a betting set there, and he was not surprised to hear that the three choice spirits of the Sixth were gone there now, but to take Nugent minor there—a fag of the Second Form—a lad of little more than twelve years!

Wharton's eyes gleamed with anger and indignation.

"Thank you!" he said quietly.

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"WINGATE'S SECRET."

He hurried away in search of his chums. It was no good his going alone to the inn; the bullies of the Sixth would be more likely than not to duck him in the river, and he would return unsuccessful after all.

Bulstrode shrugged his shoulders.

"The chap who undertakes to look after Nugent minor will have his hands full," he remarked. "I don't envy Wharton."

And Skinner and Stott said together "What-ho!"

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

The Smart Set.

"SMOKE!" said Loder.

"Yes," said Carberry. "Chuck over some of the fags."

Loder obeyed the elegant request. The cigarette-box dropped on the table beside Carberry, the prefect, and he selected a cigarette.

The three blackguards of the Greyfriars Sixth were seated at an open window in the Waterside Inn.

It was a warm day for the time of year, and the three seniors were glad to have the window open, for the small oak-panelled room was already growing thick with the fumes of tobacco.

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& Co. By FRANK RICHARDS.

It was a cosy room enough, with a roaring fire in the open grate, and sporting prints on the walls. There were cards on the table, showing how the three seniors meant to amuse themselves that afternoon while their more manly Form-fellows were playing football.

Under the window, three or four feet below the sill, was a path close by the river; within a biscuit's toss from the window the river flowed, and a boat was moored to the willows.

The "smart set" of the Sixth thus had a way of escape open to them in case of the unlikely event of the visit of a master to the inn. But the Waterside Inn was such an out-of-the-way place that this was not likely to happen.

Dick Nugent sat in an armchair, with his feet on the fender, in a mood of delight strangely mingled with alarm and remorse.

He was very proud of being taken up by the Sixth-Formers. He felt that it was a great distinction to be allowed to accompany Carberry & Co. on their surreptitious visits to the inn.

At the same time he was uneasy. He knew that he was doing wrong, for one thing, though he would not admit it to himself in so many words.

He could not help thinking, too, of his brother. But the knowledge that Frank would be annoyed and grieved if he knew of this, had, strangely enough, the effect of making Dick feel angry and obstinate.

He would not give it up to please his major, that was certain. After all, he was old enough to look after himself, and it was none of Frank's business.

Carberry glanced across at the Second Form fag.

"Nugent!"

"Yes!" said Dick, coming out of his reverie with a start.

"Get me a light."

"Yes."

Nugent minor looked round for the matches.

"Get a live coal in the tongs," said Carberry. "That's the best sort of a light. You'll learn these things—"

"Right-ho!" said Nugent minor cheerily.

And he picked up the tongs and extracted a glowing coal from the grate.

"Careful with that blessed thing!" growled Carne, as Nugent minor whisked the live coal past him. "Don't drop it!"

"All right!"

Nugent minor, a little nervously approached the coal to the cigarette Carberry had in his lips. Carberry touched the tip of the cigarette to the glowing coal, and began to puff.

But the tongs were old-fashioned ones, with a loose joint, and Dick's anxious compression of them to keep the coal tightly grasped had disastrous results.

The ends of the tongs slipped, and the coal was squeezed out between them, and dropped.

"Look out!" exclaimed Loder.

But the warning came too late.

The live coal dropped on Carberry's knee, and the prefect started up with a wild yell.

"Ow! Oh! I'm burnt! You young idiot!"

The coal dropped on the floor, where it singed the carpet, filling the room with a strong smell. Dick Nugent stared at it in dismay, and dodged round the table as the angry prefect reached towards him.

"You clumsy young fool!" exclaimed Carberry, rubbing his leg in intense anguish. "I'm burnt!"

"I couldn't help it!"

"Ow! Oh!"

"The tongs slipped," said Dick. "I—I'm sorry. I really couldn't help it."

"I'm burned all the same, whether you can help it or not!" yelled Carberry. "By George, I'll wring your stupid neck for this!"

He rubbed his leg furiously. He was really scorched, and a hole had been burnt in the leg of his trousers. He rose to his feet, but Loder caught him by the arm.

"Let the kid alone, Carberry. He couldn't help it."

Dick Nugent stood on the other side of the table, prepared to bolt from the room at an instant's notice.

His afternoon out with the Smart Set of the Sixth was not turning out so well as he had anticipated. This little accident with the coal seemed likely to mar the whole affair.

But Carberry restrained his temper, and sat down again.

"I'm sorry, Carberry," said Dick. "It was the tongs."

Carberry grunted.

"You're a clumsy young idiot, but never mind! Don't you jolly well light a cigarette that way again, that's all."

And it was some time before Carberry was restored to anything like good temper. Dick Nugent was careful to keep as far from him as he could. Carberry had "taken him up," but Carberry's temper was always an uncertain quantity.

"Get the drinks mixed, young Nugent," said Loder, leaning back in his chair and stretching out his legs. "Not too much soda for me."

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"Same here!" said Carne.

Dick Nugent hesitatingly obeyed. He had never had anything to do with intoxicating liquors before, and the smell of the brandy as he poured it out made him feel sickly. He felt a kind of awe for a fellow who could drink brandy and soda without being sick.

"Now where are the cards?" said Carberry.

"Here they are," said Nugent minor.

"Good! Now for a quiet little game. Do you play nap, young Nugent?"

"I have played nap for nuts," said Dick shyly.

Carberry grinned.

"Well, you're jolly well not going to play for nuts now!" he said. "We'll play for penny points, so that you can come in. You can't afford more."

Dick turned red.

"I—I'd rather not play for money," he said awkwardly. "It—it would be—be gambling."

Carberry gave him a dark frown.

"Have you come out here this afternoon to preach, young Nugent?"

"N-n-no, but—"

"Then shut up, and do as you're told!"

"Yes, but—"

"Oh, hold your tongue!"

Dick Nugent held his tongue. Almost before he knew what was happening he found himself playing cards for money. The three seniors smoked and sipped their drinks as they played, and Dick accepted a cigarette from Loder.

"Well, this is what I call comfy!" said Loder presently.

"Just so!" said Carberry. "How do you like being a man, young Nugent, instead of fagging about a muddy field after a filthy football?"

"I like this," said Nugent minor a little doubtfully.

As a matter of fact, the close, smoky atmosphere of the room was making him feel a little giddy and sick, and the mention of the football field, with its open space and fresh air and healthy exercise, made him wish he was back at Greyfriars in the playing fields.

But he would hardly admit that to himself, and certainly not to his patrons of the Sixth Form.

"Hallo, you're having bad luck, young Nugent!" said Carberry presently. "You've got to pay up again! What the dooce do you keep on going nap for?"

"I thought I could make it."

"Well, pay up!"

Nugent minor paid up. His pocket-money was all gone now, and he was feeling the miserable depressed feeling of an unsuccessful gambler.

"Your deal," said Carberry.

"I—I haven't any more money!"

Carberry laughed.

"Oh, that's all right! I'll lend you five bob to go on with."

"But—but suppose I lose—"

"Well, never mind!"

"But—then—I can't pay you, Carberry!"

"I sha'n't send in a writ if you can't," said Carberry, with a grin.

And so Dick Nugent began to play with borrowed money, and it was not long before he lost that, too.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

On the Track.

"I SAY, you fellows—"

"Oh, buzz off now, Billy!"

"Yes; but I say—"

"Rats!"

Harry Wharton, Bob Cherry, Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, and Mark Linley were going down to the gates of Greyfriars. Wharton's chums, though not very willing to leave the footer, had acceded without grumbling, and they had quickly changed into their clothes for the expedition to the Waterside Inn.

Billy Bunter, who never seemed to miss anything, in spite of his short sight, spotted them as they went down to the gates, and came ambling after them as fast as his fat little legs could carry him.

"Look here, you fellows!" exclaimed Bunter, keeping pace with the sturdy stride of the Removites by breaking into a rapid trot. "Look here! I'm coming with you!"

"Oh, go and eat coke!"

"Oh, really, Wharton! I think it's jolly mean of you to go and have a feed on your own without inviting a fellow in your own study!"

"We're not going to have a feed."

"Then where are you going?"

"Nowhere that matters to you! Run away and play!"

Billy Bunter declined the invitation. He trotted along

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beside the chums of the Remove, puffing and blowing from his unaccustomed exertions.

"I say, you fellows," he gasped, "I really——"
"We'd better go by boat," Harry Wharton said. "It will save time, and a pull on the river will be ripping."

"Good!"
"Oh! I suppose you're going to have a picnic on the island, Wharton?"

"No, you young ass!" said Harry impatiently. "We're going to look for somebody, that's all! It's nothing to interest you!"

"Well, I suppose I can come in the boat, if I like?" said Bunter sulkily. "I can steer, you know."

"You can't steer!" said Bob Cherry bluntly. "And you jolly well can't come in the boat! Go and eat toffee!"

"Look here, if one of you chaps could lend me five bob off a postal-order I've got coming to-night——"

"Br-r-r-r!"

"I don't want to put it down to the account, you know. I want to start fresh with you fellows on a basis of ready cash——"

"Oh, do shut up!"

Wharton and Mark Linley dragged a boat out of the boathouse, and it was run into the water. The chums jumped into it, and Billy Bunter was following, when Bob Cherry gave him a gentle poko on the chest with the end of an oar.

Billy Bunter gave a tremendous gasp, and sat down violently on the plank landing-stage.

"Ow!"

"Now, you stay there, and don't bother!" said Bob.

"Yarrah!"

"Shove off!" said Harry.

Bunter blinked at the chums as they prepared to shove the boat off. He was little given to sticking to the truth himself, and as a result he was constantly suspecting others of untruthfulness. He was more convinced than ever now that there was a feed in prospect, and that the chums of the Remove intended to leave him out of a picnic on the island in the river.

But William George Bunter, the ventriloquist of Greyfriars, was not to be got rid of so easily.

"Wharton!"

It was a sudden, sharp voice—the very tones of Mr. Quelch, the master of the Remove.

Harry Wharton looked round, for the moment not suspecting Bunter.

"Yes, sir?"

"Where are you taking that boat?"

"We are going to row down the river, sir."

Wharton made the reply, but he stared blankly round as he did so. Mr. Quelch was not in sight, and there was no one near but Billy Bunter, who had picked himself up. While Harry was scanning the bank in search of the Remove-master, Bunter slipped into the boat, and plumped himself down in the stern seat.

"Get out!" roared Bob Cherry.

"I—I say, you fellows, I'm coming with you!"

"Where on earth is Quelch?" exclaimed Harry Wharton, in perplexity. "He can't be in the boathouse."

Mark Linley smiled.

"I think Bunter could explain," he remarked.

Harry turned wrathfully to the fat ventriloquist. He understood at once now.

"Is that another of your tricks, you young ass?" he exclaimed.

"Oh, really, Wharton——"

"Look here, we're not going for a feed or a picnic, and you may as well jump out. Don't be a silly ass!"

"I'd rather come with you fellows, you know."

Bob and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh were already shoving off. Billy Bunter clung on to the gunwale with a determined grip, and Wharton gave it up. The boat glided out into the river, and floated down towards the Waterside Inn.

Bunter shivered.

Wharton was steering, and the others were rowing. Bunter sat idle, and there was a cold wind blowing on the river.

"I say, you fellows, I'm c-c-cold!"

"Did you expect to find it like July?" said Bob Cherry.

"It's generally cold on the river at this time of the year."

"Any of you got a coat?"

"No."

"I think some of you might have brought a coat. You'll make me catch my death of cold between you!" grunted Bunter.

"Take an oar, and keep yourself warm!"

"You know jolly well I've got a delicate constitution, Bob Cherry, and any violent exercise is likely to do me a great deal of harm!"

"Then sit still and shut up!"

"Oh, really, Cherry——"

"Shut up!" roared Bob.

And the Owl of the Remove relapsed into sulky silence.

The boat, in the current and propelled by the oars, glided swiftly down the river, and the school was soon lost to sight.

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sight. Deep, dark woods, mostly leafless now and bare, lay round the shining river. Ahead, a spiral of smoke rose over the trees, and it indicated the Waterside Inn. The juniors were soon in sight of it—a little, old, rambling building with quaint chimney-pots and red tiles.

"Well, there's the place!" said Bob Cherry.

The oars were taken in, and the boat floated down gently till it was opposite the inn. Wharton steered it into the shadow of the trees and bushes that grew along the path on the bank.

Billy Bunter blinked in surprise at the chums.

"I say, you fellows, you're not going to have a feed at a place like the Waterside Inn, are you?"

"No, ass!"

"Then what are you going there for?"

"That's our business!"

Bunter blinked indignantly at the Removites.

"Do you mean to say that there isn't going to be a feed, after all?" he exclaimed.

"Ass! Didn't we tell you so?"

Bunter simply glowered with indignation.

"And you've brought me all this way for nothing—catching a cold on a beastly chilly river!" he exclaimed. "I must say I'm surprised at you, Wharton!"

"Oh, shut up!"

"Look here——"

"Another word, you young ass, and I'll shove you over the side!" growled Bob Cherry, making a movement towards the fat junior. "You'll give the alarm!"

"The—the alarm!"

"Yes. Shut up!"

The juniors made the boat fast to the willows. Harry Wharton silently pointed out a second boat that was already moored there. They knew it was a Greyfriars boat at a glance.

"Not much doubt about their being here," remarked Bob Cherry.

"No; it's certain now."

"But where are they—and young Nugent?"

"Hark!"

From an open window close by the juniors came a well-known voice. It was Carberry's.

"Nap!"

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Chucked Out.

HARRY WHARTON & CO. drew close together under the window, silent, and breathing hard.

The black-sheep of the Sixth were there, without doubt. Was Nugent minor with them? And, if he was, how were they to get him away?

There was a mumble of voices from the room. Cigarette-smoke was floating out at the open window. After a few minutes Carberry's voice came again:

"Good! Cash up!"

"That's the last of my tin!"

Wharton started as he heard that voice—Nugent minor's.

"That's young Dick!" he muttered.

"And he's gambling with those blackguards!" muttered Bob Cherry, his face hardening. "The young rascal! He wants a licking badly!"

"It would serve them right to bring the beaks down on them, just as they are, only a fellow can't sneak!" muttered Harry angrily. "The cads! Anyway, I'm going to have Nugent minor out of that!"

"How?"

"Well, I'll ask him to come first!"

"If you show yourself in there, there'll be trouble. Harry! Carberry will be wild, and you know what beastly bullies they are!"

"Still, I think I shall try."

"Oh, all right!"

"You fellows lie low for a bit."

"I say, Wharton——"

"Shut up, Bunter!"

Harry Wharton stepped up to the window-sill, and looked into the room. For the moment he was not observed. He saw the glasses on the table, the haze of cigarette-smoke, the cards and the money. He saw the grinning faces of the three seniors, and the dismayed countenance of Nugent minor. The boy had consistently lost all the time, and he was in debt to Carberry now, and still losing.

"Dick Nugent!"

Harry Wharton's voice made the occupants of the room jump.

All of them turned their heads and stared towards the window.

Wharton put his hand on the sill, and vaulted lightly into the room. Carberry, Loder, and Carne stared at him in angry amazement.

"You cub!" exclaimed Carberry. "What do you want here?"

"I want to take that kid out of your blackguardly company," said Harry, eyeing the bully of the Sixth unflinchingly.

Carberry started to his feet.

"What! What's that?"

"You heard what I said. Nugent minor, will you come?"

Carberry clenched his hands, and moved forward, but Carne restrained him.

"Hold on, Carberry! Let the kid take his choice."

Carberry burst into an angry laugh.

"All right. Are you going with Wharton, Nugent minor?"

Dick Nugent's eyes gleamed.

"No!" he exclaimed hotly.

"Your brother asked me to fetch you, Dick," said Harry quietly.

"My brother be hanged! I'm not coming!"

"Good for you," said Loder. "The kid's got spirit!"

"Well, you've had your answer, Wharton," said Carberry, with a sneer. "I've a jolly good mind to give you a licking for your cheek; but—well, there's the window. Get out!"

Wharton did not stir.

"Are you going, you young fool?"

"Not without Dick Nugent."

"I tell you I won't come!" cried Nugent minor shrilly.

"I'll do as I like. I won't be ordered about, by my brother or you either. Mind your own business!"

"It is my business to keep a silly kid out of the hands of a set of blackguards like these rotters," said Wharton.

Carberry, Loder, and Carne were on their feet in a moment.

"Well, you will have it," said Loder. "Collar him!"

"Let me alone, you cads! I——"

"Collar him!"

The three seniors grasped Wharton at once. He struggled fiercely, but he was, of course, helpless against so many, and he was dragged to the window.

"Chuck him into the river!" said Carberry.

"Good! Ha, ha, ha!"

Wharton was pushed upon the window-sill, and the three bullies tried to fling him across the path into the water. But he clung to the sill, and as they let go, he dropped upon the riverside path instead.

Dishevelled and red and angry, he picked himself up there, and glared back at the window, at which the bullies of the Sixth stood grinning at him.

"Hallo, here's the whole family, I see!" exclaimed Carberry, as he caught sight of the other juniors on the path.

"You cad!" exclaimed Wharton. "You would look pretty sick if we told at Greyfriars what we had seen here."

Carberry laughed.

"You'd have to prove it, my boy."

"I wish the Head would come along and catch you, that's all."

"Thanks. Good-bye!"

The Sixth-Form bullies, laughing, left the window, and the juniors looked at one another ruefully. They went back to their boat to consult. Wharton put his collar straight, and dusted his clothes. His face was set and hard. He could be very determined, not to say obstinate, and his temper was fully roused now. He was determined not to return to Greyfriars without Nugent minor.

"Well, we don't seem to be getting much forrarder," Bob Cherry remarked ruefully.

"I say, you fellows——"

"Oh, shut up, Bunter!"

"But I've got a suggestion to make," said the fat junior, blinking at them. "It was what Wharton said about the Head that put it into my mind."

"Well, what is it? Quick!"

"You know what a splendid ventriloquist I am——"

"Oh, blow your ventriloquism!" said Bob Cherry crossly.

"The blowfulness is terrific," murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Yes; but I could imitate the Head's voice, you know——"

Harry Wharton started.

"By Jove! That's an idea!"

"Well, even babbling idiots have good ideas sometimes," said Bob Cherry grudgingly. "It wouldn't be a bad wheeze."

"It's a good one. Bunter can hide in the ivy close to the window," said Mark Linley. "They won't see him, and it will be easy."

"Good!"

"Oh, I have lots of good ideas," said Bunter, who swelled like the frog in the fable at a word of commendation. "If

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it wasn't for jealousy in my own study, you'd hear more of them. I——"

"Oh, ring off!" said Harry abruptly. "Look here, it's a good dodge, and if you succeed in giving those cads a good scare, I'll stand you a dozen tarts at the tuckshop."

"Good! Mind, it's a bargain."

"Honour bright."

"I'll work it," said Bunter confidently. "You chaps get out of sight, so that they'll think you're gone. I'll hide in the ivy."

"Mind they don't see you."

"Oh, that's all right! You know how jolly keen I am."

"Rats!"

"Look here, Cherry——"

"Oh, get to business, and brag afterwards!" growled Bob Cherry, in disgust. "Don't keep us waiting here all day."

Bunter blinked at him, and then stepped out of the boat in scornful silence. He trotted towards the window, the chums watching him through the leafless thickets. Bunter had nearly reached the window when he suddenly seemed to remember something, for he started, stopped, and turned back.

"I say, you fellows——"

"Well, what is it?" said Wharton.

"It's a rather important point——"

"What's the matter? Do you think you can't manage the ventriloquism after all?"

"Oh, no, that's all right!"

"Can't you get cover in the ivy?"

"Yes, that's easy enough. It's about the tarts."

"The—the tarts!"

"Yes—the tarts you're going to stand me, you know."

"Well, what about the tarts you young porpoise?"

"I—I suppose you meant twopenny ones?"

The chums of the Remove glared at Bunter. He backed away uneasily, blinking at them with wary eyes.

"I—I thought I'd have that point settled, Wharton. It's no good leaving a point like that to be settled afterwards. Did you mean twopenny ones?"

"Yes, you ass, if you like. Get on with the washing."

"Good!"

And the Greyfriars ventriloquist approached the window again.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

A Scare for the Smart Set

"CARBERRY!"

The owner of that name gave a wild jump as the deep, stern voice rolled in at the open window.

The seniors had resumed their game, and Dick Nugent, with a fresh loan from the prefect, was joining in it. They were playing, and chuckling over the incident of the "chucking out" of Wharton, when the deep voice interrupted them.

Carberry gave a faint gasp.

"The Head!"

"Carberry! Loder! Carne! Is it possible? Can I believe my eyes?"

It was the very voice, to the life, of Dr. Locke, the revered head of Greyfriars. The three seniors were on their feet, with pallid faces.

Public disgrace and expulsion from the school—that was what that discovery meant!

Carberry stood for a moment with his knees knocking together, and then he made a wild bolt for the door. Loder and Carne followed him.

They were outside the room in a twinkling. Dick Nugent, startled and frightened and irresolute, remained standing by the table.

"Nugent minor!" the terrifying voice went on.

"Oh, sir!"

"What are you doing here?"

"I—I—I——"

"Wretched youth!"

Dick started. It was not like the doctor to speak like that, and he was surprised, too, that the Head was not to be seen. Why was he speaking through the window and keeping out of sight?

Dick stepped desperately to the window to see the worst.

But Billy Bunter was equal to the occasion.

"Return at once to the school, Nugent minor."

"Yes, sir!" gasped Dick.

He looked out of the window.

The Head's voice was heard no more, neither was he to be seen. Dick stood there looking out, his face white, and his heart beating like a hammer.

Meanwhile, the three seniors were in a more unhappy frame of mind than the fag. They had rushed out of the room, knocking against each other in their haste; but once outside, they stopped.



The cane lashed and rang upon Billy Bunter's portly person, and he skipped and howled like a dervish.

"What's the good of bolting?" said Loder savagely.

"We're known."

"He's seen us," said Carne.

"We've got to prove a confounded alibi somehow," said Carberry savagely. "After all, the room was shady, and he never even put his head in. If we could work up an alibi, we could make him think he was mistaken, perhaps, with a little hard swearing."

"Jolly hard swearing would be wanted, I should say, to make him believe that. Why, he spoke to us all three by name."

"Yes; but it's a chance," said Carberry desperately. "You know he's shortsighted, and if we can get to Greyfriars before him, we can get up some sort of a proof that we never left the place all the afternoon. Ionides will swear we were in his study."

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"Well, it's a chance."

"Come on, it depends on getting back to the school before the Head."

"Going, young gentlemen?" said a fat, red-faced man, meeting the seniors in the tiled passage, and looking at them in surprise.

"Yes, Hanway," said Carberry hurriedly. "We've been spotted. Some confounded ill-luck brought Dr. Locke walking along the river-path, and he somehow spotted us through the window."

Mr. Hanway, the host of the Waterside Inn, whistled softly.

"That's bad, young gents."

"Yes, rather. If he comes in, you're to swear blind that we haven't been here."

The landlord grinned.

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"Trust me for that, Master Carberry."

"Come on," said Carberry. "If the coast's clear, we can get to the boat. If not, we shall have to take a cut through the woods."

The three seniors hurriedly left the house. In their selfish concern for themselves, they had utterly forgotten the presence of Nugent minor in the inn. As a matter of fact, they had completely forgotten the sag's existence.

Carberry put his head out of the gate on the river path, and cautiously looked round. Dr. Locke was not in sight. Whether he had stepped into the room by the window, or gone round to the main entrance of the inn, did not matter, the coast was clear for the moment, and they had a chance to cut across to the drooping willows where the boat was moored.

"Quick!" muttered Carberry.

The three seniors ran across the path into the willows. Then Carberry uttered a howl of angry alarm.

"The boat!"

"My hat! It's gone!"

They halted by the water's edge in dismay. Carberry's furious glance swept up and down the bank. The boat was not there; but the next moment he caught sight of it out in the river. There on the broad bosom of the Sark floated the empty boat, towing to another in which four juniors sat.

Harry Wharton & Co. sat in their boat grinning at the furious seniors on the bank. They had taken the boat out into the river, and a dozen yards of deep water separated them from the angry seniors.

"Look," muttered Loder, "there's the boat!"

Carberry gritted his teeth.

"I can see it."

"Those young cads have got it."

"Wharton!" called out Carberry as loudly as he dared, for he was in terror of the Head hearing his voice. "Wharton!"

"Hallo!"

"Hush! Bring back that boat."

"Eh?"

"Bring that boat back."

Wharton put his hand to his ear, as if he could not quite catch the subdued voice of the Sixth-Former.

"Eh? What did you say?"

"Bring that boat here," said Carberry, in a shrill whisper.

"Speak louder."

"Hush!"

"Eh?"

"Hush, I say!"

"What for?"

Wharton almost shouted the words, and Carberry cast a fearful glance round.

"Hush, you fool! The Head!"

"What?"

"The Head's here!"

"Bosh! The Head's at Greyfriars."

"I tell you he's here!" said Carberry, in agony. "Bring back that boat, there's a good chap. We've got to get away. We shall be expelled. Don't you understand?"

Wharton shrugged his shoulders.

"Serve you jolly well right. All the better for Greyfriars."

"The betterfulness will be terrific."

Carberry ground his teeth. He would have liked to hurl a torrent of abuse at the juniors, but he dared not. The Head might come in sight round the corner of the inn at any moment.

"Wharton! Don't be a cad. You see we're in a fix. Bring back the boat like a decent fellow. I—I—I'm sorry we chucked you out of the window."

Wharton appeared to relent.

"Are you all sorry?" he asked.

"Yes, yes, yes!"

"Let the others speak for themselves," said Wharton coolly. "Are you sorry, Loder? Are you sorry, Carne?"

"Yes, yes!" grunted the two seniors. "Yes, we're sorry."

"Are you awfully sorry?"

"Yes," said the seniors together, between their teeth.

"Are you awfully, fearfully sorry?"

"Ye-es."

"Oh, all right; you can have the boat, then!" said Wharton disdainfully. "You wouldn't make me eat humble pie like that if I were going to be expelled fifty-times. Your blessed Smart Set doesn't seem to have much backbone. But perhaps smart sets don't go in for backbones. The best thing you fellows can do is to leave off being smart, and start being decent. Shove the boat over, kids!"

The juniors pulled to the shore, and sent the seniors' boat drifting in.

Carberry, Loder, and Carne sprang into it eagerly, and pulled away without a word to the Removites.

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The chums watched them with a grin. The ventriloquial wheeze had worked out even better than they had ventured to anticipate.

Dick Nugent dropped from the window to the path, and scuttled away into the wood. Harry called to him, but he did not hear, and he was lost to sight in a moment. Bob Cherry burst into a chuckle.

"I think that kid's had a scare that will do him good," he murmured.

"What-ho!"

"Bunter! Bunter!"

Billy Bunter came out of the ivy with a cheerful grin upon his fat face. The fat junior was very pleased with himself.

"I say, you fellows, that was ripping, wasn't it? You don't often come on a chap who can ventriloquise like that."

"Blessed is he that bloweth his own trumpet," grunted Bob.

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"But you did jolly well," said Bob. "I'll give in to that. Even a silly, fat, conceited duffer can do some things."

"Look here, I—"

"Jump into the boat!" said Harry. "Let's get back to Greyfriars. I think we've fairly done the Smart Set this time, and Bunter has earned his tarts."

And the chums agreed that he had.

"A dozen?" said Bunter, as he stepped into the boat.

"Yes."

"Twopenny ones, you remember."

"Yes," said Harry, laughing.

And Bunter's face beamed like a full moon.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

Rogues in Council.

CARBERRY, of the Sixth, walked up and down his study, his hands deep in his trousers pockets, his brows corrugated with troubled thought. His eyes gleamed under his bent brows.

Carberry was anxious.

He had reached Greyfriars in safety with Loder and Carne. Now he was trying to think out what course he had better pursue.

That the Head had seen him at the Waterside Inn seemed to admit of no doubt.

What was to come of it?

Carberry had often sailed very near the wind, but this time it seemed to him that all must be up, and that Greyfriars was destined to lose his company. What lie could possibly save him now?

The door of the study opened, and Carberry stopped, casting a quick and apprehensive glance towards it. He fully expected to see the imposing form of Dr. Locke.

But it was only Loder who entered.

Loder looked quickly round the study, as if he expected to see the Head there, and then drew a deep breath of relief and came in.

"Seen him yet?" he asked.

"Who?" asked the prefect, though he knew perfectly well to whom Loder was alluding.

"The Head."

"No."

"I haven't, either."

"And Carne?"

"I don't know. He's gone to change his clothes. He thinks a change of appearance may be some good. The Head can't have seen us very clearly through the window there."

"But he called us by name."

"We shall have to brazen it out somehow," said Loder desperately. "Can't we work up some yarn about going there to look for some junior who was out of bounds?"

Carberry started.

"By Jove! I never thought of that."

The door opened again, and the two rascals looked round guiltily. Carne came in, with a worried and troubled face.

"Have you seen him?" he asked, as Loder had done.

"No."

"What is he lying low for?" said Carne gloomily. "It's rotten. I'd rather have it out, and done with, and know the worst."

"This gives us time," said Carberry. "We may get out of it yet. I suppose Dr. Locke hasn't got back to Greyfriars yet, as a matter of fact. He wouldn't get here as quickly as we did, you know."

"He's here," said Loder.

"How do you know?"

"I asked Wingate."

"You ass!" exclaimed Carberry. "You've given us away."

"I haven't! I didn't say anything about the Head being

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out. I simply asked Wingate if he knew where he was. He said he was in his study."

"Oh, good!"

"Then he has come back," said Carne. "He must have got over the ground pretty quickly. What is he lying low for? Why hasn't he sent for us, or come here?"

"Can't make it out."

"It means bad business. My only hat! What will the people at home say if we get sacked?"

Carberry laughed bitterly.

"You two won't be sacked. I shall be. I'm a prefect, and he will reckon that makes it worse. I suppose it does. You two will be made an example of somehow, and I shall be expelled."

"I suppose you're right."

"We've got to get out of it somehow," said Carberry. "It's no good waiting for the thunderbolt. We've got to face the music. Now, then, what is the story we're to tell? We must all hang together, and have it right to a hair's breadth. We're jolly lucky to have time to think. Is it a case of mistaken identity? Did the Head mistake others for us when he looked in at the window? We might get Ionides to swear that we were here all the time."

"Ionides wouldn't. He'd tell any number of lies, but he wouldn't run the risk of that."

"Then the only chance is a yarn that a junior was supposed to be there, and we went to look for him," said Carberry. "I went as a prefect, as in duty bound, and you two fellows came to help me in case there should be any trouble with the rascals at the Waterside Inn."

Loder and Carne could not help grinning.

"Well, that's jolly good!" said Loder. "But the Head must have seen us at the table—with the cards on it, too."

"And then, if we were there innocently, why did we scoot?" exclaimed Carne, shrugging his shoulders. "We ought to have stopped and explained to the Head."

Carberry snapped his teeth.

"Hang it, that's a fresh difficulty! Can't you fellows think of something? Can't you use your heads? Why did we buzz off like that?"

"Because—because we were so taken aback."

"Idiot! Why should we be so taken aback if we were there innocently?"

"It's a blessed problem," groaned Loder. "I give it up. Suppose we make a clean breast of it to the Head, and say we're devilish sorry."

"And get expelled."

"Looks like that, anyway."

"We've got to get out of it, I tell you. We were there with laudable motives, looking after a junior who had gone astray," said Carberry. "That's settled. The only thing to explain is why we buzzed off when the Head called through the window. It's a pity we didn't think of this at the moment, but then we should never have had the nerve to brazen it out then. Why did we buzz off—?"

"The kid was going, and we went after him," suggested Loder.

"H'm!"

"Well, I can't think of anything better than that."

"It will have to serve," said Carberry, after a moment's thought. "Now, as to the kid who was there—the young blackguard we went to rescue from his low associates. I wish we could make out that it was Wharton."

"No good. He was with the other fellows."

"We must make it somebody—who? You see, whoever we pick on in a hurry, may be able to prove that he was somewhere else."

"My hat!"

"What's the matter?"

"What about Nugent minor?"

"Nugent minor!"

"Yes. He was there, you know—was really there."

Carberry's gloomy face lighted up.

"Splendid."

Not a single scruple did the cad of Greyfriars feel in thus planning to sacrifice his dupe to his own safety. If the sacrifice of the fag was necessary, it would not cost Carberry one pang.

"My word," he said, "that's a ripping scheme. We went there to save Nugent minor, and he can't deny having been there. The people at the inn would bear witness, if necessary. That's the story. Mind you stick to it. We had reason to suppose that Nugent minor was getting into bad habits. What reason, quick?"

"Found him smoking once."

"Good. Found him smoking behind the gym," said Carberry. "That happens to be true, too, which is an advantage. Always shove in as much truth as possible when you're telling a crammer. Walking down the towing-path, we heard a familiar voice in the place, and stepped in at the window to see what was there, eh? Found Nugent minor playing cards with a set of rascals—were trying to point out to him the error of his ways, when the Head dropped on us."

"You ought to be a lawyer, Carberry, old man," said Loder admiringly.

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"It's settled," said Carberry, with a sigh of relief. "Thank goodness we had a scapegoat."

"What price the kid, though?" said Carne, in whom all conscience did not seem to be so dead as in Loder and Carberry.

"What do you mean? What about him?"

"It's rough on the kid, that's all."

Carberry sneered.

"Don't be an idiot, Carne. It's no time to begin that rot when it's a question of saving ourselves from being sacked. Besides, he will only be flogged, and we can make it up to him afterwards somehow."

"Yes; that's all right."

"The question now is, whether we ought to wait to be called up by the Head, or go to him frankly and explain," said Carberry thoughtfully. "Which should we do if we were innocent in the matter?"

"Explain to him, of course," said Loder.

"Then, we'll go or, rather, I'll go, and explain as a prefect, and you fellows can be ready to back me up if necessary."

"Good."

And Carberry, considerably relieved in his mind, but nervous still, made his way to the Head's study, little dreaming that the Head of Greyfriars as yet did not know a single syllable about the matter, and that he would receive his first enlightenment from the lips of Carberry himself.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

Bunter's Tarts.

"TWO PENNY ones," said Billy Bunter.

The chums of the Remove had strolled into the tuck-shop at Greyfriars. They were completely satisfied with the result of their expedition in search of Nugent minor. The fag had escaped, but the party at the inn had been broken up by means of Billy Bunter's ventriloquism, and the cads of the Sixth had been thoroughly scared, and Dick Nugent himself had received a lesson that would probably last him for some time. Harry Wharton was anxious to go to Frank in the Form-room, and tell him what had happened, but Billy Bunter had to be satisfied first. Bunter felt that he had earned his tarts, and he didn't want any delay in the matter.

"A dozen, Mrs. Mumble, please," he said, with dignity. "Twopenny ones, please."

Mrs. Mumble made no motion to take the order till she had glanced at Harry Wharton, and received a nod from him in confirmation. Then she set out a plate of tarts.

Bunter eyed them with keen appreciation.

"Jolly good," he said, taking the first one, and removing nearly half of it with a single bite. Billy Bunter was not an elegant eater when he was hungry: "Aren't you fellows going to have some?"

"Certainly," said Bob Cherry, helping himself from the plate.

Bunter blinked at him in alarm.

"Here, hold on."

"Eh?"

"You let my tarts alone."

"Why, you just invited me to have some," said Bob, eating the tart serenely. "You must be off your onion, Bunter."

"I—I meant, weren't you going to buy any," said Bunter.

"Oh, you should have explained yourself," said Bob, taking another tart from the plate. "You should make your meaning clear. Thanks."

"Look here—"

"You see, I've accepted your invitation now," said Bob, taking a third jam tart, while Bunter even left off eating in his deep indignation and alarm. "When I accept a chap's invitations, I always try to do justice to the feed, you know."

"You—you—"

"I must say these are jolly good tarts," said Bob Cherry, between big mouthfuls. "Let's have a race, and see who can eat the greater number. This is my fourth."

"You—"

"Here goes for the fifth—"

"You let my tarts alone," shouted Billy Bunter. "Here, Wharton—I say, Wharton—"

But Harry Wharton was walking out of the tuck-shop, laughing. He was going to the Remove Form-room to see Nugent. Billy Bunter remained in the shop with Bob Cherry and the plate of fast-diminishing tarts.

Bob Cherry was evidently in earnest. He was starting on the sixth tart before Bunter was on his fourth. The fat junior wasted no more time in vain expostulations. He started bolting the tarts to make sure of what were left. Jam tarts are palatable articles of diet, but it does not do to bolt them too rapidly. Something went down the wrong way, and Billy Bunter began to choke.

"Gro-groo-groooooh!"

"What's the matter, Bunt?"

"Groo-oh-oh-ohh!"

"What a row to make when a chap is eating tarts?" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "What's the matter?"

"Groo-ohh!"

"Are you talking Esperanto?"

"Goo!"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! He's choking!" exclaimed Bob, apparently noticing the fact for the first time, and he began to thump Bunter on the back to relieve him.

The thumping, however, seemed to have an opposite effect to that intended, for Billy Bunter began to choke and splutter worse than ever.

"Ow! Yow! Groo— Yaroo! Groo! Ugh!"

Slap, slap, slap!

"Ow! Stop it! Yah!"

"I'm trying to make you better."

"Groo-ohh!"

"Oh, it's no good trying to help a chap like you!" said Bob, as Bunter squirmed away out of his reach.

"Gerrooh!"

"Any more tarts?"

"You beast!" howled Bunter, finding his voice at last. "You've scoffed them. I'm not going to have my tarts scoffed."

"But you invited me—"

"Yah! My tarts—"

Bob Cherry chuckled, and threw a shilling on the counter.

"Give Bunter some more tarts, Mrs. Mumble, please."

"Certainly, Master Cherry."

"It was only a joke, Bunter," said Bob. "I only wanted to see how you would look if you had to share the tommy."

Bunter blinked at him.

"Of course, you know, I'd share my last crust with a chum, Cherry," he said, as he helped himself from the plate Mrs. Mumble pushed across the counter.

Bob Cherry grinned.

"Oh, all right. I'll begin again."

"Ow—oh—er—you see, I—I said my last crust," said Bunter hastily. "I shouldn't mind sharing my last crust with you. I didn't say tarts, though."

"You fat humbug!"

"Oh, really, Cherry! There's a difference between crusts and tarts, I suppose?"

Bob Cherry laughed, and quitted the tuck-shop, leaving Billy Bunter to an uninterrupted feed.

Bob made his way to the Remove Form-room, where he found Wharton and Nugent. Frank was chuckling over Harry's account of the discomfiture of the Smart Set.

"But where is Dick?" Nugent asked, becoming grave.

"Oh, he's come back all right," said Bob Cherry. "I say, isn't your detention up yet, Frank?"

"Another quarter of an hour."

"Good. Then we'll go and get tea ready."

"Right-ho! If you see my minor—" Nugent hesitated.

"Well, what about him? Do you want me to give him a licking for going to the Waterside Inn?" asked Bob Cherry. "I don't mind in the least."

Nugent laughed.

"No. I want you to ask him to tea in Study No. 1."

"Oh, certainly."

Wharton and Cherry left the Form-room, and while Harry obtained some supplies for tea, Bob Cherry looked round Greyfriars for Nugent minor. But he did not find him. He looked up and down the passages, in the Second Form-room, in the gym., in the junior common-room, but Nugent minor was not to be seen.

Had he not returned to Greyfriars?

Bob Cherry wondered.

Was it possible that he had been so scared by the supposed discovery by the Head that he was absenting himself from the school?

Bob Cherry looked a little worried as he made his way to the study in the Remove passage, where he found tea ready, and Wharton and Nugent and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh ready for it.

Frank Nugent looked up quickly as he came in.

"Have you seen my minor?"

"No; he doesn't seem to be about," said Bob Cherry. "I suppose he will turn up."

And then Nugent looked worried, too.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

Carberry Wishes He had not Spoken.

"COME in!" Carberry felt a tremor run right through him as the deep voice of the Head of Greyfriars bade him enter the study.

The cad of the Sixth hesitated a moment, and then, bracing himself, as it were, for the ordeal, he opened the door, and went in.

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Dr. Locke was seated at his writing-table, with papers before him, and a pen in his hand, and was evidently busy.

He looked up, however, as Carberry came in, patiently, and laid down his pen.

"Well, Carberry, what is it?"

Carberry could not help staring a little.

The Head seemed to have been busily occupied and to be quite unaware of any cause of uneasiness on the part of the prefect.

How was it that the doctor had returned so rapidly to the school, and had settled down to his work so comfortably?

Carberry was surprised, and more surprised than ever at the perfectly ordinary and nonchalant manner of the Head.

"If you please, sir—"

The Head looked at him over his glasses.

"If this is a matter of importance connected with your duty as a prefect, I am willing to give you some minutes, Carberry," he said. "Otherwise, I am very busy at the present moment, as you see."

"It is important, sir."

"Go on; explain!"

"I—I am afraid you have been under a wrong impression with regard to Loder and Carne and myself," said Carberry, stammering. "I wished to correct that impression; that is all, sir."

The Head looked straight at him.

"I do not understand you."

"I—I mean, sir, I hope you will not judge by appearances, because I had put myself in a suspicious position by doing my duty as a prefect."

The Head did not speak for a moment. He adjusted his glasses, and looked at the prefect keenly, and moved his revolving-chair a little so as to face directly the Sixth-Former.

"Explain yourself, Carberry."

"Certainly, sir. I—"

"To what matter are you referring?"

"The affair at the Waterside Inn, sir, of course," said Carberry, in wonder. "You have not forgotten it, sir? If I had thought you regarded it as trifling, I should not have come here to explain. I was afraid you had jumped to a wrong conclusion regarding my presence there."

"Your presence there?"

"Yes, sir."

"When were you there?"

"This afternoon, sir."

"You were at that disreputable place," exclaimed the Head—"that place, which has been distinctly placed out of bounds, to the knowledge of the whole school?"

Carberry was more and more astonished. The Head spoke as if it were news to him—as, indeed, it was.

"You—you saw me there, sir," stammered Carberry.

The Head almost jumped.

"I saw you there?"

"Yes, sir."

"You must be dreaming, Carberry. What makes you imagine that I saw you at the Waterside Inn this afternoon?"

"You—you spoke to us through the window, sir," stammered Carberry, more and more astounded as the strange interview proceeded. "I—I thought you had come to a wrong conclusion about us, and—"

"You think I was near the inn this afternoon?"

"You spoke to us, sir."

"Nonsense! I have not left the precincts of the school to-day at all."

Carberry staggered.

"It—it was not you, sir?"

"Certainly not."

"But—but you spoke—"

"Nonsense! You did not see me, I presume?"

"No, sir; but your voice—"

"I suppose someone imitated my voice, for an absurd joke," said the Head. "If I knew who it was, I should cane him for impertinence."

"Oh, sir, it—it was all a mistake, I see!" stammered Carberry. "It's—it's all right, sir."

And the prefect turned towards the door. If ever a fellow felt like kicking himself hard, it was Carberry at that moment. He had broached the subject to the Head without the slightest necessity; he himself had set the doctor on the track. He would have given worlds to be safe outside the Head's study. But he had an inward premonition that Dr. Locke would not let the matter drop now, and he was right. His hand was on the handle of the door, but the Head's voice stopped him.

"Stop!"

Carberry turned back.

"Yes, sir."

"I must know something further of this matter, Carberry. You say that you and Loder and Carne were at the Waterside Inn this afternoon—a disreputable place out of bounds,

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where the boys of this school are strictly forbidden to go. You say that you went there to do your duty as a prefect. I must know more. This looks to me like a serious matter, and it must be investigated."

Carberry groaned inwardly.

But he was in for it now. There was nothing for it but to brazen the matter out, and tell the story that had been agreed upon between Loder and Carne and himself. Nugent minor was to be the scapegoat.

"Very well, sir. If—if you left the matter in my hands, sir, I think I could deal with it as a prefect."

"I must know the particulars first."

"Well, sir, we had reason to think that a junior was getting mixed up with the set there, and I thought I ought to look into it. I had caught the kid smoking, and he had been seen near the Waterside Inn, too. I thought I would stroll down there and look for him, and, if he was there, bring him away. I thought I would cane him, and then the matter could drop without any fuss?"

"Did you find him?"

"Yes, sir."

"A junior belonging to Greyfriars was there?"

"Yes, sir."

"Loder and Carne had gone with you, you say?"

"I thought I had better take them, sir."

"Why? A junior was not likely to resist a prefect, I presume?"

"No, sir; but there is a rough gang of fellows at the Waterside, and I thought it would be safer to have a few friends with me. I might have been ducked in the river."

"Yes; that is true. And you found the junior you suspected?"

"Yes, sir."

"What was he doing?"

"I am afraid he was gambling, sir."

"You are not sure?"

"No, sir, as he nipped away the moment he saw us. Then I heard your voice—I—I mean, the voice I took for yours, and—"

"The junior escaped?"

"Yes, sir."

"But not before you had recognised him?"

"No, sir."

The Head was silent for some moments. He sat with his eyes on the prefect's face, gazing at him as if he would read his innermost thoughts.

"Carberry," he said, at last, "before you tell me the name of the junior in question, I must make an observation. There is a junior in the Remove Form against whom I know you have a prejudice. You have twice, at least, brought charges against him which have been proved to be unfounded. If the junior you are about to name is Harry Wharton, of the Remove, I warn you to be careful. I shall look upon any charge you make with the gravest doubt."

Carberry bit his lip.

"It is not Wharton, sir."

"Ah!"

"Neither is the junior in the Lower Fourth at all."

The Head looked relieved.

"Very good, Carberry; you may go on. Who is the boy?"

"Nugent minor, sir, of the Second Form."

Dr. Locke started.

"What! A Second Form boy?"

"Yes, sir."

"You are quite certain of what you say, Carberry?"

"Loder and Carne are witnesses, sir, if required; but I hardly think that Nugent minor will have the nerve to deny the truth."

"Very good. Is he in the school now?"

"I suppose so, sir."

"Then find him, and send him to me at once; or, rather, I will send someone else to look for him. You remain within doors, in case I should send for you."

"Certainly, sir."

And Carberry rejoined Loder and Carne in his study. The Head sent for Nugent minor, but Nugent minor was not to be found.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

Absent.

WHERE was Nugent minor?

That was a question that was troubling more than one person at Greyfriars.

The chums of the Remove had fully expected to find him at Greyfriars on their return; but from what they could discover, he had not appeared there.

No one had seen him since he had gone out with Carberry, Loder, and Carne, and it was pretty clear that after the incident at the Waterside Inn he had not returned to the school.

Why?

Frank Nugent was worried, and his chums were worried, too. They had done their best, under the circumstances, to get Nugent minor away from his rascally companions,

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but it seemed that the result was to be more far-reaching than they had anticipated.

No one supposed for a moment that anything had happened to Nugent minor—anything in the shape of an accident.

It was quite clear that he was keeping away from the school of his own accord.

And the chums of the Remove discussed the matter gloomily enough as the time drew near for call-over.

Of the scene in the Head's study and the unintentional betrayal of the whole matter by Carberry, they knew nothing as yet.

But they knew that Nugent minor would be missed if he were absent from call-over, and that in that case there would be an inquiry, and the fact that he had been at the Waterside Inn would probably come to light.

"It's rotten," said Harry. "Who could guess that the young ass would play the giddy ox in this way?"

Nugent shook his head.

"It's all right; you fellows couldn't guess. It can't be helped. Of course, he thought it was really the Head who discovered him, and he's afraid to return to the school and face the music."

"I suppose so."

"I don't wonder at it, come to think of it," said Bob Cherry. "Carberry & Co. were scared out of their wits, and young Dick must have been scared, too. But then what's his game in staying out? He knows he must return some time."

"He can't have run away from school, surely!" exclaimed Mark Linley.

Nugent started.

"I shouldn't wonder. He's a young ass, and accustomed to having his own way in everything at home," he said bitterly. "I shouldn't be surprised in the least."

Harry Wharton's brows wrinkled.

"Then you think he means to stay out, Frank?"

"Yes."

"We shall have to look for him."

"I suppose so—hallo! There's the bell for call-over!"

The chums hurried down to the school hall.

They had some faint hope of discovering Nugent minor among the Second-Formers, but the hope was speedily dissipated.

Dick Nugent was not in his usual place.

There was no sign of him in the ranks of the Second Form, and some of the fags were looking excited, evidently having missed him and discussed what could have caused him to cut call-over.

Mr. Capper, the master of the Upper Fourth, was taking the call-over, and when Nugent minor failed to answer to his name, he marked him down as absent.

The Famous Four left the Hall with glum brows.

"The young ass means to stay out!" said Bob Cherry. "That's as clear as daylight! What are we to do?"

"Find him," said Harry.

"And bring him back by force?"

"Yes, if necessary. But when we explain that it was a jape at the inn, and not the Head at all, he will be willing to come back."

"But where are we to look for him?"

"That's the puzzle."

"The puzzleness is terrific."

"Nugent!"

Frank Nugent started as the voice of Mr. Quelch, the Remove-master, fell upon his ears. Mr. Quelch was standing in the doorway of his study, with a clouded brow. Frank hastened towards him.

"Yes, sir. You called me."

"Do you know where your brother is?"

Frank coloured.

"No, sir."

"He has missed call-over."

"Yes, sir."

"The Head wishes to see him."

Frank started.

"The Head, sir!"

"Yes, Dr. Locke wishes to see him very particularly—a most important matter. Have you any idea where he is to be found?"

Frank shook his head.

"I don't think so, sir."

Mr. Quelch's brow grew very grave.

"It appears, then, that Nugent minor is deliberately absenting himself from the school," he said.

"I—I hope not, sir," faltered Nugent.

"Well, he must be found. The Head wishes to see him at the earliest possible moment. I may as well tell you that it is a very serious matter, Nugent. I think you had better go and look for your brother. You may take your friends with you, and I will give you a pass out of the gates."

"Thank you, sir."

"And when you find him," said Mr. Quelch, with some emphasis, "tell him that he had better return to the school at once—that it will be better for him."

"Yes, sir."

The Form-master wrote out the pass, and Nugent took it and hurried back to his chums.

He explained to them, and they immediately fetched their caps and coats, and left the School House in a body. The Form-master's pass enabled them to go out and look for the missing fag without breaking bounds. The chums of the Remove were looking troubled as they crossed the dusky Close.

"What on earth does the Head want to see him for?" Harry Wharton exclaimed abruptly. "The Head isn't likely to take official notice of such a thing as missing call-over."

"He's heard something, I suppose," said Nugent miserably. "He may have got some hint of where Dick was this afternoon."

"Phew!"

"That would mean trouble for Dick."

"The troublefulness would be terrific."

"I say, you fellows—"

"Oh, shut up, Bunter!"

"But I say, you fellows, if you are sneaking off quietly to have a feed, what I say is this, that—"

Bob Cherry gave the fat junior a gentle push on the chest that made him sit down in the Close, and the chums walked on and left him there, blinking.

They passed out of the school gates, and the dusky roads and shadowy fields and woods lay before them.

But where should they look for Nugent minor? That was the question!

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

Cash in Advance.

CARBERRY came into his study with a curious expression on his face—an expression in which doubt and uneasiness and relief were strangely mingled. It was a time of stress for the bully of the Sixth, and he did not yet know how it would end.

Loder and Carne were equally anxious. Carberry had told them of the curious result of his interview with the Head, and they had agreed in blaming him for having put his foot in it—though they were as astounded as he was at the discovery that it was not really Dr. Locke who had spoken to them that afternoon at the Waterside Inn. Their only chance of safety now lay in placing the whole blame upon Nugent minor, and upon that they were all agreed—the only question was, how would it turn out?

Loder and Carne were smoking cigarettes and gloomily discussing the situation, when the prefect came in again. They looked at him with apprehensive inquiry.

"Any news?"

"Yes," said Carberry.

"Well?"

"Nugent minor is staying out."

"Staying out?"

"Yes. He has cut call-over, as you know, and he hasn't turned up since. It's the bedtime of the Second Form, and he hasn't shown up."

Loder and Carne stared.

"What does the young ass mean by that?"

"Don't you see?" said Carberry, with a grin. "He thinks it was the Head who found us at the inn, the same as we thought, and he's afraid to come back to the school."

"The young ass!"

"It's all the better for us. It bears out what I've told the Head. And the longer the kid stays away, the blacker it all looks against him. His staying out is a proof of guilt, and the Head must have made up his mind about it already."

"Good!" said Loder.

"It's rough on the kid," said Carne slowly.

"Oh, rats!"

"What puzzles me," said Loder, "is, who was it that imitated the Head's voice and gave us that scare?"

Carberry gritted his teeth.

"I don't know. I wish I did."

"I'd like to have him in my study for a quiet ten minutes, anyway," remarked Carne. "Of course, it must have been a Greyfriars chap."

"Of course."

There was a tap at the door.

In an instant the cigarettes were thrown into the fire, and Carne was waving a newspaper to and fro to dissipate the smoke. The Smart Set of Greyfriars broke the rules with impunity as a rule, but they were always in terror of the axe,

so to speak. If it should be a master coming to the study, there might be trouble.

But it was not a master.

Carberry opened the door, and a fat form and a pair of big spectacles loomed up in the dusky passage before him.

It was Billy Bunter.

Carberry scowled. He had been startled for nothing, and his natural impulse was to make the Owl of the Remove smart for it.

"What do you want?" he snarled.

Bunter blinked at him nervously.

"I—I want to speak to you, Carberry."

"Come in, then."

Billy Bunter entered the study.

Carberry opened the door, and placed himself in the way of Bunter's retreat to it. Then he signed to Loder to throw him a cane that was lying on the table.

Bunter blinked round him uneasily.

"I—I say, you fellows—"

"Where will you have it?" asked Carberry, taking the cane in his hand, and making it sing in the air.

"I—I'd rather not have it at all, th-thank you," stammered Billy Bunter. "You—you see, I—I came here on an important matter—awfully important."

"Come here," said Carberry, as the fat junior retreated round the table.

"I—I'd rather stay here, thank you. Look here, Carberry, you'd better let me alone, I can tell you!"

"What do you mean, you fat cub?"

"I—I came here on business. I thought you might like to cash a postal-order for me."

"Eh?"

"I'm expecting a postal-order to-morrow, and it can't be for less than a pound," said Billy Bunter. "I thought you fellows might like to cash it in advance."

"You cheeky young ass!" exclaimed Carberry, in blank astonishment. "Do you mean to say you've had the nerve to come here to cadge of the Sixth?"

"Oh, really, Carberry, I don't think you ought to call it 'cadging'! I simply want you to cash a postal-order in advance, and you can decline if you like. But I really think that one good turn deserves another."

"One good turn!" repeated the prefect. "What are you driving at?"

"Well, I was thinking of helping you to keep it dark about being at the Waterside Inn this afternoon!"

Carberry's brows contracted.

"There's no need to keep it dark," he said steadily. "We went there to fetch away a junior who was playing cards with a set of low betting-men, and I have already explained that to the Head."

Billy Bunter stared.

"M-m-my only hat! Have you—have you really put it like that to the Head! I—I should never have thought of anything like that!"

"You saw us after we had left the inn," said Loder. "I suppose you jumped to the conclusion that we had gone there to gamble, or something of that sort?"

"But I saw you through the window."

"What?"

"You were playing cards for money, and smoking and drinking."

"You lying cub!" said Carberry savagely. "If you dare to say a word like that in the school, I'll skin you!"

"Of course, I shouldn't say a word about a chap who was going to cash a postal-order for me," said Bunter, blinking at him. "If you like to oblige me in that small matter, of course, you can depend upon me to be friendly."

The three seniors stared blankly at Bunter.

They had always regarded him as fat, lazy, stupid, greedy—but that he had this depth of cunning in his nature, they had never suspected.

"My only hat!" ejaculated Loder.

"The cheeky cub!" growled Carne. "Kick him out, Carberry!"

But Carberry did not move.

He knew at once that the fat junior must be telling the truth—that he must have seen what passed in the room at the Waterside Inn overlooking the river.

If Bunter told his tale at the present juncture, it would certainly have the effect of spoiling the plot the three rascals had laid to save themselves at the expense of Nugent minor. Bunter must be kept silent, for a day or two, at least.

If he spoke afterwards, the fact that he had kept silent so long would discredit his evidence, and he could hardly confess that he had been guilty of what virtually amounted to blackmail.

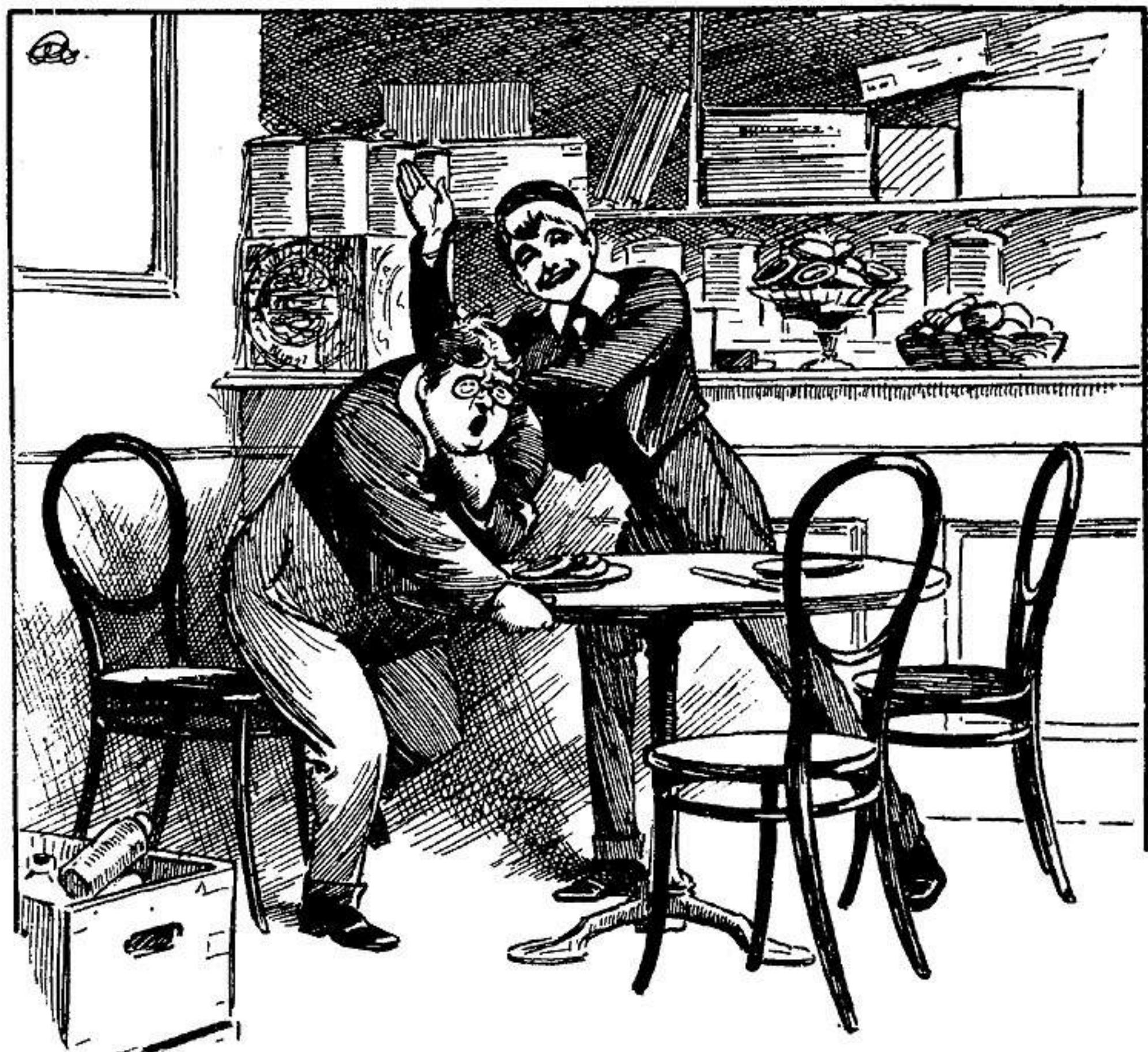
Carberry drew his lips tighter.

"How much do you want?" he said slowly.

"Oh, really, Carberry, that is a curious way of putting it. I don't want you to give me anything."

The prefect gritted his teeth.

ANSWERS



"Hallo, hallo, hallo! He's choking!" exclaimed Bob Cherry, and he began to thump Bunter on the back to relieve him. But Billy Bunter began to choke and splutter worse than ever. "Ow! Yow! Groo!"

"I should like you, as a personal favour, to cash a postal-order for me," said Bunter. "There isn't the smallest risk, you see, because the order is coming by the first post to-morrow morning, and you can have it as soon as it arrives."

"How much?"

"Well, I expect the postal-order will be for a pound, but it might be more. Suppose you give me two pounds, and take the postal-order, whatever amount it is for? I think that's a fair offer, as you stand to gain a great deal if it happens to be for a large amount."

"I will give you a pound," said Carberry.

"Well, I dare say I could make that do," said Bunter. "Of course, I should prefer the full amount of the postal-order, as I am rather short of tin. But I suppose I could make a pound do for the present."

"I had a postal-order to-day," said Carberry, with a wicked gleam in his eyes. "You can have it if you like."

"Oh, all right! I can cash it at Mrs. Minble's."

"Very well."

Carberry went to his desk, and took out a postal-order for a pound. It was quite blank, no name having been filled in upon it.

"There you are, Bunter!"

Bunter's round eyes glistened behind his spectacles. He could hardly believe in his good luck. The utter meanness of the action he was guilty of never seemed to enter his mind at all.

His fat fingers fastened upon the postal-order.

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"Was this sent to you, Carberry?" he asked.

"Yes."

"The name isn't filled in."

"All the better, as it happens. You can fill in your own name, and then nobody will know that I gave you the postal-order."

"Good! That's a good dodge!"

"Here's a pen," said Carberry.

He dipped a pen in the ink, and handed it to Bunter. Loder and Carne watched him in astonishment. They could not make Carberry out at all just now.

"Thanks!" blinked the fat junior.

He filled in the postal-order to himself, "William George Bunter," blotted it, and put the order in his pocket. He was eager to go, now. Money always burnt in his pocket, and he was already thinking of the tuckshop and unlimited tarts.

"By the way, Carberry," he remarked, as he edged towards the door, "it's just barely possible that my postal-order may not arrive by the first post in the morning. I suppose you won't mind if it's delayed till the afternoon, or perhaps the evening?"

Carberry grinned.

"Not at all."

"And—and you fellows needn't mention this circumstance at all," suggested Bunter. "No need for the whole school to know about this little business transaction."

"Not at all."

"Good! I'm much obliged to you, Carberry, and I'll do as much for you some time."

And the Owl of the Remove quitted the study. Carberry carefully closed the door behind him, and turned to his companions with a wicked glitter in his eyes.

Loder burst out at once.

"What on earth's the game, Carberry?"

Carberry shrugged his shoulders.

"Can't you see?"

"Blessed if I can. You've wasted a pound on that young cub, but as soon as he's blued the money he will be back here for more. You can't give him a pound a day, I suppose?"

"No; hardly. It hits me hard, parting with that, but it was worth it; and, of course, you fellows will stand your whack."

"I don't know about that."

"If it keeps him quiet for a day or two, it will be all right," said Carne slowly. "But you know Bunter. He will be back here to-morrow at the latest—perhaps to-night—for more. That pound won't last long when he begins to eat, and perhaps to stand feeds to the other young cads."

"I know that."

"Then why—"

"That's why I gave him the postal-order. That order wasn't sent to me. I bought it in Friardale to-day to send to a bookmaker by post. Don't you see? When Bunter has disposed of that order, he's in my power. He can't say I gave it to him without confessing that he was blackmailing me."

"Ah!"

"And I should deny it, too. He has taken my postal-order, filled in his name on it, and cashed it. I can prove by the number that it was mine. If Bunter ventures to give us an atom of trouble after this, I'll have him up before the Head for stealing my postal-order, and have him expelled as a thief, too."

Loder and Carne stared at the prefect.

"Well, you've got a head!" said Loder admiringly.

"By Jove, yes!" said Carne. "The fat young fool is in our hands as soon as he's disposed of the postal-order."

"And that will be within five minutes, I expect."

And in that, at least, Carberry was right.

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

Bunter's Postal Order.

BILLY BUNTER walked down the hall with a new swagger in his walk.

The air of importance about the fat junior was so evident that the other fellows could not help noticing it.

"What's the matter with Bunter?" asked Tom Brown.

"Something on his chest," remarked Ogilvy. "Some new scheme, I suppose. Hallo, Bunter! Where have you been growing that swagger?"

"Oh, really, Ogilvy—"

"What's that in his paw?" exclaimed Bulstrode. "A postal-order, by George!"

"What!"

"My hat!"

"The postal-order at last, Bunter?"

Billy Bunter blinked round at the growing circle of curious juniors.

Bunter's attachment to the truth was not a close one. Though, to do him justice, he was too stupid to have a very clear idea of where the line lay that separated truth from falsehood.

He had the gift of imagining that whatever he wished to be the case really was the case, and hence arose his habit of telling what the other fellows called "whoppers" without a pang.

"Yes, it's a postal-order," he said.

"How much?"

"A pound."

"Phew!"

"Great Scott!"

"Where did you get it?"

"Found it!" said Skinner. "Found it in somebody's pocket, of course!"

"Oh, really, Skinner—"

"We ought to help him cash it, before it gets lost," said Stott. "Are you going to the tuckshop, Bunter?"

"Yes."

"I'll come with you."

"And I!"

"Yes, rather!"

And Skinner linked his arm affectionately in Bunter's, and Snoop took possession of the fat junior's other arm.

"Oh, all right!" said Bunter, who was almost as fond of showing off as of eating, which is saying a great deal.

"I don't mind standing a feed."

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"Good!"

"Three cheers for Bunter!"

"Flip, hip, hurrah!"

"What's that blessed row about?" exclaimed Wingate, looking out of his study.

"Oh, it's all right, Wingate!"

"Is it? You'd better shut up, or I'll be among you with a cane!"

"But there's been a remarkable happening."

"What's happened?" asked the captain of Greyfriars, with a suspicious glance at the humorist of the Remove.

"Bunter's received a postal-order!"

"Oh, really, Skinner—"

"He has, really," said Skinner. "It's a real postal-order, too, for a pound. Fancy that!"

Wingate laughed, and went back into his study. Like everybody else at Greyfriars, he had heard of Billy Bunter's expected postal-order—the postal-order that was always expected, and never came.

Billy Bunter was marched out into the Close in the midst of a crowd of Removites.

They had not quite got over their surprise at seeing Bunter really in possession of a real postal-order; but they were all agreed upon one point, that it was wise to make hay while the sun shone.

There was hardly a fellow there to whom Bunter did not owe money, and it was only fair that now he was in funds, there should be a general feed.

Quite a little crowd poured into the school tuckshop, and hammered on the counter to bring Mrs. Mimble out of her little parlour.

The good dame came out with a cheerful smile upon her face at the sight of so large a gathering.

"Hurry up!" exclaimed Bulstrode. "Bunter's standing a feed!"

"Good old Bunter!"

Mrs. Mimble's face clouded over.

Billy Bunter was the last customer she ever desired to see, and she had no intention of allowing him to stand a feed in her shop till he had shown that he was in possession of the necessary cash to settle up for it.

"Really, Master Bunter—"

"Ginger-pop, Mrs. Mimble—"

"Jam tarts."

"Cream puffs."

"Really, young gentlemen—"

"Hurry up!"

"If Master Bunter has the money—"

"Oh, really, Mrs. Mimble—"

"Well, you know what you are, Master Bunter. You never pay your debts, and I cannot allow you any credit."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, really, you know," said Bunter, blinking at Mrs. Mimble. "Women are so unbusinesslike. What does it matter to you whether I settle immediately, or leave it till the following day? But I've got plenty of cash now, Mrs. Mimble, if you care to cash a postal-order for me."

Mrs. Mimble sniffed.

"I will when I see it, Master Bunter."

Bunter laid it upon the counter.

"Here it is, Mrs. Mimble."

Mrs. Mimble took the postal-order, and looked at it. Then she put on her glasses and looked at it again. It was made out to William George Bunter, and there could be no mistake upon that score.

"Well, is it all right, or would you like to examine it under a microscope?" asked Billy Bunter sarcastically.

"It's all right, Master Bunter."

"Then trot out the grub."

"Certainly!" said Mrs. Mimble, all smiles now.

She put the postal-order away, and gave the change to Bunter. And, to do the fat junior justice, he did expend the sovereign royally as long as it lasted.

The juniors set to work upon tarts and ginger-pop, with a reckless disregard of the probable indigestion to follow.

Billy Bunter looked after himself pretty well, and a fat, shiny look soon appeared upon his face—an indication that he had had quite enough to eat, though he showed no inclination whatever to stop.

"One pound one shilling and fourpence," said Mrs. Mimble, in an ominous tone.

"Oh, you're making a mistake!" said Skinner. "I'll have some more tarts."

"One pound one shilling and fourpence!"

"Oh, really, Mrs. Mimble—"

"One pound one shilling and fourpence, Master Bunter!"

"You had better let it run up to the two pounds, and I will settle the other to-morrow, when I am expecting another postal-order."

"Nothing of the kind, Master Bunter. One pound one shilling and fourpence, please!"

"Oh, very well," said Bunter, with great dignity, "I shall have to owe you the one-and-fourpence till I get my postal-order to-morrow. Sorry, you chaps, but it's all over. But you can rely on me to stand another feed to-morrow."

"Bravo, Bunter!"

"Not getting any more postal-orders to-night, I suppose?" grinned Skinner.

"The post's in," said Snoop.

"There may be a letter for Bunter in the rack at this very moment," said Trevor solemnly, "stuffed full of postal-orders."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's quite possible," said Bunter. "I'll go and see."

And the fat junior toddled off. But he hardly paused to glance at the letter-rack in the hall. It was to Carberry's study that he went.

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.

The Search.

"WHERE shall we look for him?"

It was Frank Nugent who asked the question, in a hopeless tone.

Where were they to look for Nugent minor?

The five juniors stood in the dusty road outside the school gates, and they did not know in which direction to turn their footsteps.

Dick Nugent was deliberately keeping away from the school. But where was he staying? Had he taken the train for his home—as was quite possible? Was he lurking near Greyfriars—afraid to show himself—perhaps in the wood or the thickets?

It was a troublesome problem.

It was Hurree Jamset Ram Singh who made a suggestion. The dusky Nabob of Bhanipur had been thinking deeply.

"I have an honourable and esteemed idea," he remarked.

"Go it, Inky!" said Bob Cherry briefly.

"May not the unhappy and foolish young person have returnfully gone back to the Waterside Inn, to hide himself there?" suggested the nabob. "He was not likely to take the honourable train to his home."

"Why not?"

"Because it is a long journey, and there would be a requirefulness for cash to pay for the esteemed ticket."

"Dick had some money," said Nugent.

"You forget that he had been playing cards with the esteemed sharpers of the Smart Set," said the Nabob. "I think it extremefully improbable that he had any money left in his honourable pockets."

Wharton nodded quickly.

"I didn't think of that!" he exclaimed. "But it's quite true. It's jolly unlikely that the kid had any money left after gambling with those sharpers."

"Right!" said Frank. "And, without any money, he couldn't take his ticket home, and he couldn't put up at any place without paying. He's either hanging about in the wood, or he has gone back to the Waterside. They would take him in there on Carberry's account."

"Exactly, my worthy chum."

"Then let's look in at the Waterside first," said Harry briskly. "I think it's quite possible that he's there, and that we shall find him."

"I hope so," said Nugent fervently. "If he stays away overnight, the Head will have to let my people know, and it will worry them horribly. I want to keep all this away from mother if I can."

"Well, if he's there, we'll have him!"

"Come on, then!"

The five Removites hurried up the road towards the river, and followed the towing-path to the Waterside Inn.

They came in sight of the lights of the inn, gleaming through the trees and dancing on the rolling waters of the Sark.

As they drew near the building the sound of a loud chorus came ringing through the quiet of the night.

There was evidently a merry company gathered at the Waterside Inn.

Bargemen from up the river, fishermen from Pegg, and all kinds of characters gathered at the Waterside of an evening, and there were ample reasons for the Head's placing it out of bounds for the boys of Greyfriars.

The juniors stopped on the towing-path outside the inn.

There was the building before them, but where were they to look for Nugent minor?

"Suppose we go in and ask for him?" said Bob Cherry. "I suppose the landlord will have to give us some answer."

"Not if he's hiding the kid there," said Nugent.

"Let's scout round first, anyway," said Harry Wharton.

"Young Nugent will probably be in fear of being searched for, and he may have hidden himself in the barns, or in some unlikely corner. That's where we ought to look for him."

"Good!"

"The goodfulness is terrific."

The chums entered the inn yard, and, avoiding the lighted THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 107.

NEXT
WEEK:

"WINGATE'S SECRET."

EVERY
TUESDAY,

The "Magnet"
LIBRARY.

ONE
PENNY.

and noisy building, they made for the outbuildings behind the inn.

In that range of unlighted sheds it was quite possible that Nugent minor had hidden himself from the expected search.

The junior, at all events, would hardly be taking a part in the uproarious jollity of the company assembled at the inn.

Harry Wharton paused in the dark doorway of the barn and looked in.

Nugent had brought a lantern with him, and he now lighted it, and flashed the light into the barn.

Bob Cherry uttered a sharp exclamation.

"Look!"

A youthful form was stretched upon a heap of straw, asleep.

The round, boyish face was resting upon one arm, and the curly hair drooped over it. The face looked tired and worn. Even in sleep the boy was troubled.

It was Nugent minor!

"Dick!" muttered Nugent.

"Poor kid!" said Wharton. "He looks as if he had been through it, and no mistake."

Nugent advanced towards the sleeper.

He stretched out his hand, and shook Nugent minor gently by the shoulder. Dick started into broad wakefulness.

He stared, in a startled, terrified way at his brother, and blinked his eyes in the lantern-light.

"What—what—"

"Dick!"

"It's you, Frank!"

"Yes; I've come to take you back—"

Dick Nugent sprang to his feet. His face was white, and his eyes flashing. Recollection had returned in a moment.

"Take me back!"

"Yes. I—"

"I won't come—I won't come!"

"Listen to me—"

"I won't come! You want to see me flogged and expelled, I suppose! I won't come back to Greyfriars!"

"But—"

"I won't!"

"It's all a mistake. Let me explain. I— Stop him!"

Without listening to his brother, Dick Nugent made a wild rush to the door to escape.

Harry Wharton grasped him, and received a right-hander on the chest that sent him staggering.

In a moment more the junior was out of the barn, and running hard.

Wharton gasped for breath.

"He's gone!" exclaimed Bob Cherry.

Nugent bit his lips.

"The young fool! He thinks we've come to take him back to be punished! After him!"

"Come on!"

Mark Linley was already close on the track of the running fag. The others ran after him, and the sound of Dick's quick footfalls in the darkness guided them.

Wharton was half afraid that the fag would rush into the inn, and seek safety among the rascals there gathered; but he did not. That would have meant a rough time for the chums of Greyfriars. But, fortunately, the fag took another course.

He dodged through the inn yard, leaped a low fence, and ran swiftly towards the river.

"After him!" panted Nugent.

The Removites ran hard.

Mark Linley was ahead, and overhauling the fugitive rapidly. Dick Nugent turned on the brink of the river, and cast a desperate look behind.

The outstretched hand of the Lancashire lad was close behind him.

"Keep off!" muttered Dick wildly—"keep off! I won't be taken back, I tell you!"

"It's all a mistake!" panted Mark. "You're not—"

"Keep off, or I'll jump into the water!"

"I tell you—"

"Collar him!" shouted Bob Cherry.

Nugent minor set his teeth hard, and sprang out into the river.

Splash!

The five juniors halted on the bank, staring in blank dismay at the dark waters. For a moment they were dumb-founded.

"The young ass!" exclaimed Harry.

Splash!

It was Mark Linley who was in the water now. The Lancashire lad remembered, what had escaped the others for the moment, that they were near the dangerous pool, and that Dick's reckless action had placed his life in peril.

"Linley!"

"He's in!"
 "Good heavens!"
 The boys strained their eyes over the dark water. Where was Dick Nugent—where was the Lancashire lad?
 "Linley!"
 Nugent threw off his jacket. Wharton grasped him by the arm.
 "Hold on, Frank! It's too late now! Linley's got him, or—"

He did not finish.
 The moon was showing a silver edge over the trees. If it would but shine out a little clearer!
 "Linley! Mark Linley!"
 There was a gleam of silver on the water. Bob Cherry gave a shout.
 "Look!"
 In the gleam of the moon, two heads were seen on the silvery water, and Nugent minor was in the grasp of Mark Linley.
 The Lancashire lad was struggling towards the shore.
 Frank Nugent plunged into the water, and in a few seconds reached his side.
 "Dick!"

But Nugent minor made neither sound nor motion as his brother grasped him. He was insensible.
 The chums of the Remove reached down to them and dragged them out through the crackling rushes.
 Mark Linley gasped for breath as he shook the water from his clothes.

"God bless you, Linley!" panted Frank.
 Then he bent over his brother, who lay still and silent where they had laid him. A horrible fear for a moment tugged at Frank Nugent's heart.
 But Dick Nugent was living.
 He was breathing, and the colour was already returning to his cheeks. A load was lifted from Frank's heart as he saw it.

THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER.

A Painful Surprise for Bunter.

CARBERRY threw his cigarette into the fire, and looked round as his study door opened. The cad of the Sixth was alone. Loder and Carne were gone. Billy Bunter came into the study without knocking, and closed the door after him. There was a half-nervous, half-impudent look about Billy Bunter that Carberry understood perfectly well.

The fat junior stopped with the table between him and the prefect, and blinked across it at Carberry in a doubtful sort of way.

"Well?" said Carberry.
 "Well," said Bunter, "I—I—I thought I'd give you a look in, Carberry, to—to see if—if you had a sovereign to spare."

"A sovereign!"
 "Yes. I've got another postal order coming to-morrow, as well as the one I mentioned to you—it simply can't fail to arrive—in fact, I'm expecting the two by the same post. I suppose you'd have no objection to cashing it for me in advance?"

Carberry rose to his feet.
 There was a spiteful gleam in his eyes, which Billy Bunter was too shortsighted and too preoccupied to see.

The cad of Greyfriars crossed to his desk, and Billy Bunter blinked after him, fully believing that he had gone there for money.

"A postal order would do, Carberry," he said. "Either that or cash, I really don't mind which. I— Oh! Hallo! Oh!"

Carberry had taken, not a postal order, but a cane, from his desk.

He strode swiftly over towards the fat junior, and seized him by the back of the collar with his left hand, and brought the cane into play with his right.

The cane lashed and rang upon Billy Bunter's portly form, and he skipped and howled like a dervish.

"Ow, ow, ow! Help! Yow! Groo! Oh, oh, oh!"

Carberry compressed his grip so as to choke Bunter's cries by tightening his collar, and the howls died away into stifled stutterings.

And still the cane rose and fell.
 All the spite he had been compelled to suppress was bubbling up now, and finding an outlet.

Billy Bunter was not getting what he expected in Carberry's study, but he was certainly getting what he deserved, and more.

The fat junior struggled, and choked, and gasped.
 He would have given all the feeds he had ever enjoyed, or ever expected to enjoy, to get away from that stinging, lashing cane.

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But there was no escape for him.
 Carberry lashed and lashed until his arm was tired, and then he flung the fat junior from him, and hurled the cane into a corner.

"There!" exclaimed Carberry, panting for breath.
 "That's a lesson for you, you blackmailing young thief!"

"Ow, ow, ow!"
 "Now get out of my study!"
 "Ow! Yow!"

Carberry sat down, breathing heavily. His exertions had tired him. Billy Bunter staggered to his feet. He was wriggling and squirming with pain, and tears were chasing each other down his fat cheeks.

"Ow, ow! You—you beast!" he gasped. "I'll go straight to the Head!"

The prefect gave a sneering laugh.

"Go, then!"
 "I—I—I'll tell him about your smoking and-drinking at the Waterside Inn! I'll have you expelled from Greyfriars, you cowardly beast!" blubbered Billy Bunter.

Carberry laughed again.
 "You had better explain to him about the postal order at the same time, Bunter, or somebody else will be in danger of being expelled."

"Eh?"
 "I had a postal order for a pound in my study," said Carberry deliberately. "I had bought it to send to someone, and it wasn't filled in with a name. I have missed that postal order."

"You—you gave it to me."

"Gave it to you?"

"Yes, certainly."

"My dear porpoise, you're dreaming. I've given you nothing—nothing except a thrashing, and I expect I shall give you a few more of them."

Bunter backed hastily towards the door.

"Just another word, before you go," said Carberry. "I have missed a postal order from my study, and I had taken the number."

"You—you gave—"

"So long as you don't give me any trouble, I sha'n't say anything about missing that postal order, Bunter."

Billy Bunter stared at the prefect with wide-open eyes. He did not fully understand as yet how completely he had placed himself in the power of the cad of Greyfriars.

"But if you say a word about me, or cause me any kind of trouble," went on Carberry significantly, "then I shall inquire about that postal order. I have the number, and can easily prove that it belonged to me—and I shall, of course, deny having given it to anybody."

"Oh!"

"Do you understand?"

"Ye-e-es," gasped Bunter

"Now get out of my study, and don't let me see you again in a hurry."

Billy Bunter left the study without another word.
 Even his obtuse brain had grasped the situation at last, and he realised that he was in a dangerous position.

His scheme for raising money was at an end, and if with his usual loquaciousness he allowed a word to slip regarding Carberry and the visit to the Waterside Inn, it would bring down the vengeance of the prefect upon him.

Bunter felt as if he had escaped from the den of a wild beast as he stepped into the passage, and hurried away.

Tom Brown met him as he went into the hall, and glanced in surprise at his white, startled face. The New Zealand junior laid a kindly hand on his shoulder. He did not like Bunter's meanness, but he could feel for anybody in distress—and that Billy Bunter was in distress was plain enough to the most casual glance.

"Anything wrong, Bunter?"

The fat junior blinked at him dazedly.

"Ye-e-es, Brown."

"Can I help you?"

"Ye-e-es. Lend me a pound."

Tom laughed.

"Why don't you say a hundred, Bunter?" he asked. "I could lend you a bob, I think, if you really need it."

Bunter shook his head.

"A bob's no good. Do you know whether Wharton has come in or not?"

"Not yet."

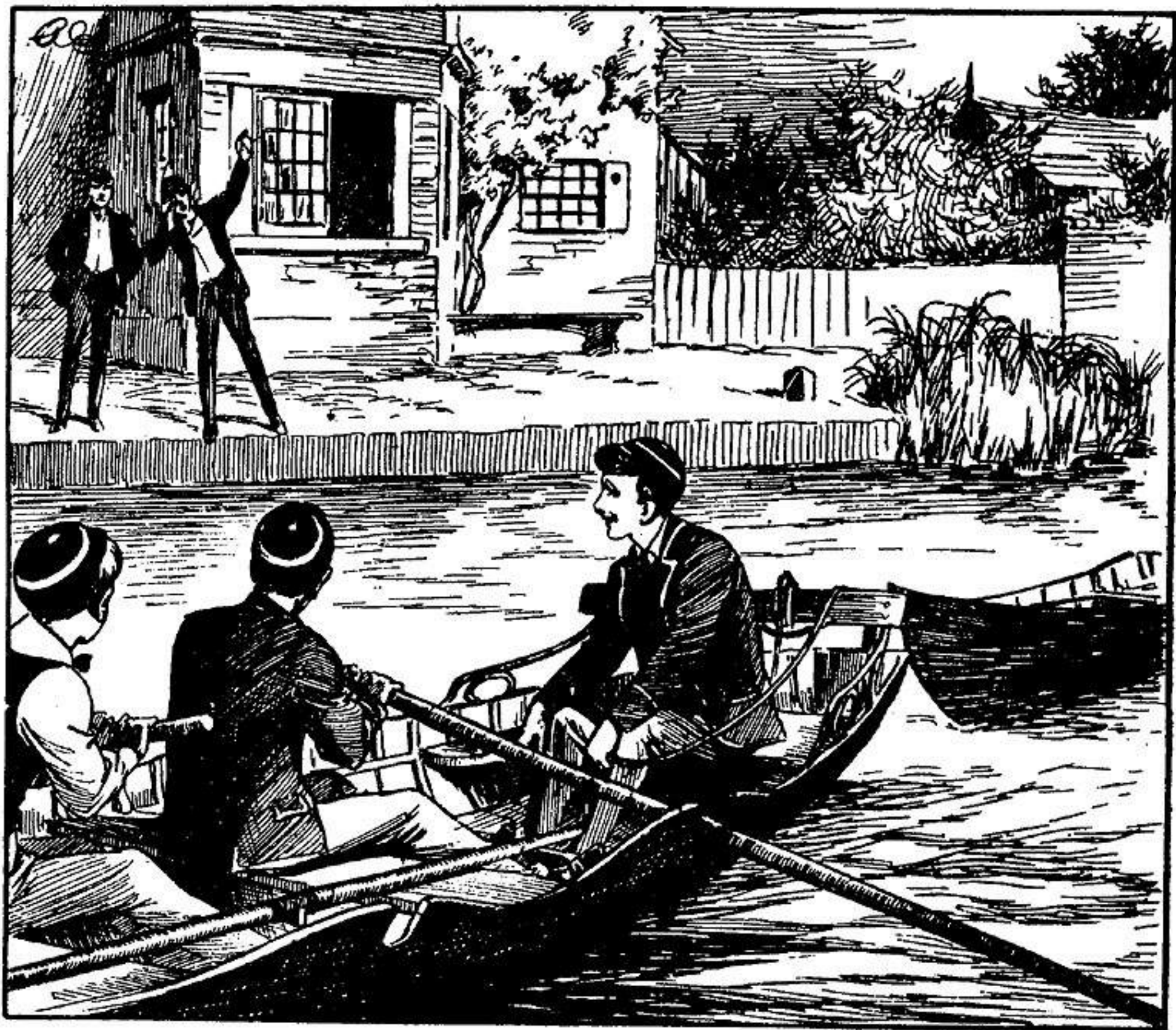
Billy Bunter rolled on, leaving the New Zealand junior looking after him very curiously. Bunter crossed the Close to the school shop. It was empty, and he rapped on the counter for Mrs. Mimble.

The good dame came out.

"Have you come to settle up the one-and-fourpence, Master Bunter," she asked, in a most discouraging tone.

Bunter groaned inwardly. This was a bad beginning, considering what he had come there to request.

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"Wharton!" called out Carberry, as loudly as he dared, for he was in terror of the Head's hearing his voice. "Wharton! Bring back that boat!"

"N-n-no, Mrs. Mimble," he stammered.

"Then what do you want?"

"It's—it's about that postal order," said Bunter haltingly. "There—there was a slight m-m-mistake about it."

Mrs. Mimble's face hardened into stone.

"Indeed!"

"Ye-es. As—as a matter of fact, it was the wrong postal order," said Bunter desperately. "I—I suppose it will be all the same to you, Mrs. Mimble, if you give me that one back, and I give you mine instead?"

"Certainly, Master Bunter, if you have one."

"Oh, really, Mrs. Mimble, I hope you don't doubt my word?"

"Well, where is it, then?"

"It's—it's coming to-morrow morning by the first post," said Billy Bunter. "There isn't the smallest doubt on the subject, you know—it will be here as soon as the postman can get here in the morning. Just give me that one now, and you shall have mine as soon as ever it comes, Mrs. Mimble."

"You can bring it to me as soon as it comes," said Mrs. Mimble coldly. "Then I will give you this one, if the amount is the same."

"Oh, really—"

The dame made a movement to retire into her parlour. Bunter grew desperate.

"Mrs. Mimble! I—I really must have it! There was a—

a mistake, and the postal-order w-w-wasn't for me. Do you understand?"

"I understand that you are a bad, dishonest boy, Master Bunter. The postal order was made out to you in your own name, and you are telling untruths now."

"I—I put in the name myself."

"Then did you steal the postal order?"

"N-n-n-no; it was given to me."

"Then if it was given you, it is yours."

"The—the chap wants it back," mumbled Bunter miserably. "I—I can't explain, but I must have that postal order, Mrs. Mimble—I must!"

"You can have it if you pay me the value," said Mrs. Mimble. "Not otherwise. I do not believe a single word you say, Master Bunter."

And Mrs. Mimble retired into her parlour, deaf to Bunter's voice. The fat junior blinked after her, and drifted out of the tuckshop. The attempt to recover possession of the postal order had been a complete failure. Billy Bunter was utterly at the mercy of the cad of Greyfriars—unless Harry Wharton could save him. It was of the captain of the Remove that Bunter thought at once—he was in the habit of laying all his troubles on Wharton's shoulders, and there was to be no exception this time. Bunter wandered disconsolately down to the gates to wait for the Famous Four to come in.

NEXT
WEEK: "WINGATE'S SECRET."

A Double-Length Tale of Harry Wharton
& Co. By FRANK RICHARDS.

THE SIXTEENTH CHAPTER.

Nugent Minor's Return.

NUGENT MINOR opened his eyes. He stared wildly up at the faces looking down upon him. He was very white in the gleam of the moonlight.

"Wh-what has happened?" he gasped.

Wharton looked at him sternly.

"You've had a narrow escape, that's all, and you owe your life to Mark Linley, who risked his to save you."

"Not so bad as that," said Mark, with a smile. "I don't think I was in any danger."

"Anybody would have been in danger so near the Pool."

"Yes, rather!" said Bob Cherry. "We ought really to give young Nugent a good hiding, but I suppose we shall have to let him off."

"The supposeness is terrific!"

"Let me go!" muttered Dick Nugent. "What do you want to take me back for? I started back to school, after—after the Head found me there, but—I didn't dare to show up. I was going to cut it, but I had no money."

"It's all a mistake," said Nugent. "You think the Head found you at the Waterside Inn with Carberry and his set."

"Yes. He spoke to me through the window. It was after Wharton came."

"It was a jape."

"What!"

"We made Bunter imitate the Head's voice, to scare those cads and break up the party," explained Nugent.

"The Head knows nothing about it."

Nugent minor gave a gasp.

"The Head knows nothing about it?"

"Nothing at all."

"Then—then I—"

"You've been scared about nothing," said Bob Cherry.

"The best thing you can do now is to hurry back to Greyfriars, and take a licking for missing call-over."

Nugent minor rose to his feet.

"I don't mind a licking," he said. "It wasn't that I was afraid of. But to be expelled from the school—"

"Well, it's all over now," said Nugent. "Come back and get some dry things on, or you'll catch your death of cold!"

"You, too, Linley," said Harry, "better get a run back to Greyfriars."

"Right you are!"

"I suppose I was missed at call-over?" said Dick, as the juniors turned up the towing-path towards the school.

"Yes."

"And you fellows came out to look for me?"

"Yes. Mr. Quelch sent us. The Head wants to see you!"

Dick started.

"The Head wants to see me! Then he knows something?"

"It must be about missing call-over, I suppose."

"That's a matter for the Form-master. The Head wouldn't bother himself about a little thing like that."

"Well, I don't know what it is, but I don't suppose it's anything serious."

Dick Nugent halted.

"Look here, I suppose this is honest injun?" he remarked.

"You're not gammoning me to get me to go back quietly to the school?"

Nugent flushed red.

"Can't you take my word?" he demanded.

"Well, yes; but—"

"I tell you the Head was nowhere near the Waterside Inn this afternoon, and it was a ventriloquial jape, your hearing his voice."

"Oh, all right! But I don't see what he wants to see me for so particularly, in that case!" said Dick sulkily.

"Well, you'll soon see."

Dick Nugent hesitated. He was half inclined to refuse to return to Greyfriars until matters were more certain. But the Removites were round him now, and he had no choice in the matter.

Harry Wharton & Co. had their eyes upon him, and were certainly not inclined to allow him to escape.

Dick realised it, and he tramped on doggedly towards Greyfriars. There was no help for it now, and he had to face the music, whatever it was.

The juniors reached the school at last.

Gosling grunted as he admitted them.

"Nice goings hon—I don't think!" he remarked. "I know wot I would do if I was the 'Ead. I would lick you all till you couldn't walk, that's wot I'd do! Wot I says is this 'ere, why should a 'ard-working man be dragged out of his lodge at this time of night, and away from his—"

"Gin!" suggested Bob Cherry.

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"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Wot I says is this 'ere—"

But the Removites did not wait to hear what Gosling had to say. They went in, and nearly ran into a plump figure as they turned towards the School House.

"I say, you fellows—"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo, Bunter!"

"I say—"

"Say it to-morrow," said Bob; "we're tired! Come on, you chaps!"

"But I say, Wharton—"

But the juniors tramped on, and Bunter was left to explain to the idle winds. He grunted, and followed them, breaking into a trot to keep up.

"I say, you fellows, I'm in an awful difficulty—"

"Go hon!"

"Been eating too much again?"

"Oh, really Cherry—"

"Here we are!" said Harry, as they entered the lighted hall. "Hallo, it's close on bedtime, too! The Second have gone to bed an hour ago."

Mr. Quelch came out of his study.

He glanced towards Nugent minor, and his brows contracted a little.

"Nugent minor, so you have returned?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did he return willingly, Wharton, or did you have to bring him back by force?"

"He walked back of his own accord, sir."

"Ah! I am glad to hear it. How did you come into that wet state, Nugent minor, and you, too, Linley?"

Mark coloured, and Nugent minor dropped his eyes. Mr. Quelch glanced at all the juniors sharply, but did not press the question.

"Well, well, go and change at once; and then, Nugent minor, you will go to the Head's study. He wishes to see you particularly. I will go and acquaint him with your return."

And the master of the Remove walked away.

Nugent minor looked startled.

"What is he looking so jolly solemn about?" he demanded.

"This isn't merely a matter of missing call-over!"

Harry Wharton shook his head.

"I can't quite make it out, kid."

"The Head must know something about what happened this afternoon at the Waterside Inn," said the Second-Former nervously.

"I hope not."

"I—I've a good mind to make a bolt for it!" muttered Nugent minor. "I don't see why I should go through with it!"

"Don't be a fool!" said Frank. "You can't bolt! We won't let you, for one thing, and the gates are locked, for another! Don't be a coward! If the Head knows about you, he must know about Carberry and Loder and Carne, too, and a fag wouldn't be punished as much as a senior for a thing like that."

"But—"

"And you jolly well deserve to be punished for being such an obstinate, blackguardly young ass!" said Frank savagely.

"Look here—"

"Oh, go and change your things! If you don't show up in the Head's study pretty soon, he'll send for you!"

And Nugent minor, with a clouded face, made his way up to the Second Form dormitory.

THE SEVENTEENTH CHAPTER.

Before the Head.

"H E'S come back!"

"By George, so he has!"

"I thought he had cut it for good."

"And I jolly well hoped he had!"

The remarks were made by Gatty, Myers, and several more of the Second Form at Greyfriars, as Nugent minor came into the Second Form dormitory.

Many of the fags were awake, for the Form was too excited about the absence of one of its members to go to sleep easily.

Gatty sat up in bed as Nugent minor came in and turned on the light.

The lad flushed as the remarks fell upon his ears.

He was not popular in his Form.

His cocky and overhearing ways were not likely to make him popular, and he had not yet learned to change them, being, in fact, in the Second Form at Greyfriars, a great deal like a square peg in a round hole.

To the chipping he constantly received from his Form-fellows, Nugent minor opposed, as a rule, a sullen or sometimes angry defiance.

That, too, made matters worse, and his hasty and

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unreasonable temper made a temptation to the fags to worry him when they were in want of something better to do. It had become a common amusement in the Second Form to rag Nugent minor and make him "flare up."

Nugent minor did not care, or thought he did not care, for the estimation in which he was held by the other fags.

He consoled himself by seeking the society of the seniors who were willing to take him up, and he gladly dropped into the ways of Carberry's set, and he felt himself quite a man at being allowed to share the surreptitious pleasures of the Smart Set.

And the more he was seen with the seniors, the less his own Form liked him, for they could not help suspecting that the prefect would receive information from him on many points that the fags would rather have kept hidden; and, in fact, Nugent minor, without dreaming of anything of the sort, was set down as something of a sneak.

But though he had hardened his heart against the Second Form, it gave him a pang as he heard the remarks that greeted his entrance into the dormitory.

No one had missed him, or cared whether he came back or not. If they had any feeling on the point, it was a desire that he would stay away.

The boy's lip trembled a little as he began to change his clothes.

No one asked him how he had got wet—no one cared to know. The fags who cared to take any interest in him at all were looking at him with mocking grins.

"What did you stay away for?" demanded Gatty.

"Oh, he's been keeping it up with the Smart Set!" said Myers. "Drinking and gambling, and that sort of thing!"

"I shouldn't wonder!"

"And now he's found out, he'll be expelled, and serve him jolly well right!"

"What-ho!"

"Oh, shut up!" said Nugent minor.

"What's that?"

"Shut up, can't you?"

"I'll jolly soon shut you up!" said Gatty, leaping out of bed. "You'll have to learn to speak in a different way to your Form captain, my son!"

"Bah!"

Nugent minor had his clothes off now, and was hanging them over the end of his bed to dry. Gatty ran at him, and Nugent swung round his dripping trousers, and caught the head boy of the Second a terrific swipe across the face with them.

Gatty gave a yell and reeled over, falling with a bump upon the floor.

"Ow! Ow!"

The Second-Formers, far from sympathising, gave a howl of laughter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Gatty staggered to his feet.

"My hat! I'll pulverise you!" he shouted.

Nugent minor gritted his teeth.

He threw down his clothes, and placed himself in a posture of defence.

"Come on, then!" he exclaimed.

And Gatty ran at him like a bull.

In a moment they were grappling, and reeling to and fro in fierce combat. The door of the dormitory opened, and Frank Nugent looked in.

An angry frown crossed his face.

"What on earth are you up to?" he cried. "The Head's waiting to see you, Dick."

"I don't care!"

"Stop that at once!"

"Rats!"

Frank Nugent strode forward, and seized Gatty with one hand, and Nugent minor with the other, and tore them apart with a powerful wrench.

Gatty went reeling to the floor, and Dick Nugent would have fallen too if his major had not kept hold of him.

"Don't be a fool, Dick. What do you want with fighting now?" exclaimed Frank sternly.

"He began it," said Dick sullenly.

Gatty jumped up.

"And I'm jolly well going to give him a licking for his cheek," he exclaimed. "You get out of our dorm., you Remove boulder!"

"Stand back, Gatty!"

"Bosh!"

"It's a cad's game to hit a fellow when he's down," said Frank. "My brother is in trouble enough already."

Gatty's expression changed.

He dropped his hands, and looked considerably sheepish.

"Well, I didn't think of that," he said. "I don't want to go for a chap who's down on his luck. But he's enough to make a saint waxy."

"Well, let him alone."

"Oh, all right!"

And Gatty tumbled into bed.

Frank stood and waited while Nugent minor finished changing his clothes. The lad made himself tidy, and the brothers

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left the dormitory together, Frank turning out the light. They left the Second Form discussing the matter.

"It was a bit thick to go for him, under the circumstances," said Miller.

"Well, I don't know," said Gatty. "I'm sorry. But he's a cad. I can't stand that chap, and that's the plain truth. What does he want to hang round with Carberry for—the worst bully in Greyfriars?"

"He doesn't really know the ropes yet."

"Then it's time he did. I know I should be jolly well pleased if he were sacked from Greyfriars."

"Well, I suppose nobody would be sorry to see the last of him."

And in that opinion the Second Form concurred heartily.

Frank and his minor descended the stairs in silence. Frank accompanied the lad to the door of the Head's study, and left him there.

Nugent minor tapped, and entered.

Dr. Locke was alone in the room.

He turned his chair a little, and looked fixedly at the fag as he came in, with a drooping head and flushed face.

Dick Nugent stood before him, his eyes on the carpet.

"You have returned!" said Dr. Locke.

"Yes, sir."

"I hear that you returned of your own accord, when you were found by the Remove lads?"

"Yes, sir."

"You absented yourself, I suppose, from a fear of the consequences of your action in visiting a disreputable place?" said the Head.

Dick started.

Frank had assured him that it was not the Head who had spoken to him at the Waterside Inn, and that Dr. Locke knew nothing of his visit there. But the Head's words showed that he knew all about it.

The fag stood silent, and troubled.

Exactly how much the Head knew he could not guess, and he did not dare to speak for fear of making a blunder.

"I am waiting for your answer, Nugent minor."

"Yes, sir."

"You do not deny having been to the Waterside Inn?"

"No, sir."

"You knew it was out of bounds?"

"Yes, sir."

"Yet you went there."

Dick was silent.

The Head did not speak for some moments. He was seriously angry with the scapegrace of the Second Form, yet he could not help observing that the boy had given him frank and truthful replies. Whatever Nugent minor had done, there was certainly no disposition on his part to save himself by telling untruths.

"I hardly know what to say to you, Nugent minor," said the Head at last. "You went to the Waterside Inn, knowing that it was out of bounds, and knowing that it was a disreputable place?"

"Yes, sir."

"If you were not a new boy at Greyfriars, and if you belonged to a higher Form at this school, I should expel you," said Dr. Locke.

Nugent minor hung his head.

He had come near—very near—to being expelled once before, and the recollection of his feelings at the time rushed over him like a wave.

What a fool he had been!

"As it is, I shall punish you very severely," said Dr. Locke. "I had hoped that you would have some excuse to offer—it even occurred to me that you might have been led into this by some boy older than yourself."

Dick started again.

Was it possible, then, that the Head did not know that Carberry and the others had been with him at the Waterside Inn?

The fag shut his lips hard.

Whatever happened, he was not the lad to betray his associates. Carberry & Co., had deserted him at the inn, but Dick's lips were closed concerning them.

The Head was watching him narrowly.

He was accustomed to reading faces—and Dick's face was frank enough—and generally an indication of the thoughts within.

Dr. Locke leaned forward a little towards him.

"Nugent minor!"

"Yes, sir."

"Did you go alone to the inn, or was somebody else with you—someone from this school?"

Dick's lips were closed.

"Answer me, Nugent minor."

The lad did not speak.

A slight smile crossed the doctor's face.
 "Do you not see, Nugent minor, that it is useless to remain silent?" he said. "If you went alone to the inn, you would naturally tell me so—your silence only proves that you had a companion or companions."

Dick flushed.

"I was not alone, sir."

"Very good! Who was with you?"

Dick's face set obstinately. He might be flogged, or he might be expelled, but he would never reply to that question.

THE EIGHTEENTH CHAPTER.

Bunter Requires Help.

"I SAY, you fellows!"

"Oh, shut up, Bunter!"

Harry Wharton & Co. were standing in the passage, waiting for Nugent minor to come out of the Head's study. Frank Nugent was too anxious about his brother to leave the spot, and his chums remained with him—concerned for him if not so much for his minor.

Billy Bunter had been looking for them, and his fat face lightened a little as he caught sight of the group of juniors in the passage.

He came up with his rolling gait, and gave Harry Wharton a dig in the ribs with his knuckles to notify his arrival.

But the chums of the Remove were in no mood to be bothered by Billy Bunter.

"I say—"

"Get out!" growled Bob Cherry. "No time for your babble now. Get away!"

"The get-awayfulness is terrific."

"I'm in a fearful fix," said Bunter tearfully. "I say, you fellows, you might stand by a chap in your own study. I suppose you don't want me to be expelled from Greyfriars?"

Harry Wharton turned and looked at him.

"What do you mean?" he demanded. "Is this some more of your rot?"

"No, it isn't."

"What have you done, then?"

"Nothing. Only fallen into a trap laid for me by a beastly rotter!" said Bunter. "I hope you chaps will believe that I didn't steal the postal-order?"

Wharton started.

"What's that?"

"Carberry gave it to me. I swear he gave it to me, and handed me the pen to fill in my name on it, too."

"What are you talking about?"

"The postal-order."

"What postal-order, ass?"

"The one I cashed for the feed. You fellows might have had some if you had been in, only you were gone off about that young ass, Nugent. Carberry gave the postal-order to me to cash in advance to one that I'm receiving to-morrow, and now he says he'll accuse me of stealing it, you know."

Harry Wharton took the fat junior by the shoulder and shook him.

"Now tell me plainly what you mean," he exclaimed.

"Ow! Don't shake me like that, you—you'll make my glasses fall off, and if they get broken you'll jolly well have to pay for them."

"Will you explain, you fat young duffer?"

"I'm trying to as fast as I can. I told Carberry I had a postal-order coming to-morrow morning, and he offered to cash it for me in advance."

"Don't tell lies!" said Harry savagely.

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"Do you really mean to say that Carberry gave you a postal-order for a pound?"

"Yes."

"What for?"

"As cash in advance for—"

Wharton shook the fat junior till his teeth rattled.

"Now tell me the truth, or I'll lick you!" he exclaimed angrily.

"Ow! Ow!"

"Oh, kick him out!" said Bob Cherry. "You'll never get any truth out of him, anyway; and if he's in a fix, it's his own business."

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"Shut up!"

"But I say, you fellows, you ought to help a chap in your own study, you know. Carberry gave me the postal-order. I told him I had one coming—yes, I did, really!—but—but I dare say he thought one good turn deserved another, you see!"

"What do you mean?"

"Why, I mentioned to him that I wouldn't tell anybody about seeing him at the Waterside Inn, you know."

Harry Wharton's brow darkened.

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"You young cad! You mean you extorted money from him—blackmailed him?"

"Oh, really, Wharton, I don't think you ought to accuse me of a thing like that. I really don't know why you chaps are always running me down."

"He gave you a postal-order?"

"Yes, for a pound. Then I asked him to lend me some more—"

"You greedy young rotter!"

"Oh, really, Cherry! And then he said he hadn't given me the postal-order, and he knew the number, and if I said a word about him he would accuse me of having stolen it. Now you see how the matter stands."

"Serve you right!"

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"You extorted money from him, and it serves you right," said Harry sternly. "If the Head knew the facts I think he would expel you."

"Well, one good turn deserves another, you know," said Billy Bunter feebly.

"You—you miserable worm!"

"That's a nice way to talk to a chap who comes to you for advice," said Billy Bunter indignantly.

"I've a jolly good mind to give you a licking here and now!"

Bunter started back in alarm.

"You've disgraced yourself and your Form, and us!" exclaimed Wharton.

"Oh, really—"

"What have you done with the postal-order Carberry gave you?"

"I cashed it with Mrs. Mimble."

"You must get it back."

"She won't give it to me."

"I suppose she won't without its value. Do you want to swindle her as well as blackmail Carberry, you unscrupulous young rascal?"

"Look here, I don't think you ought to call me names just because I've got into a fix. I don't think it's chummy."

"Only a young blackguard would get into such a fix," said Harry angrily. "I suppose I have got to get you out of it, as usual."

"If you like to lend me a pound—"

"I haven't the money. I shall have to get the postal-order back from Mrs. Mimble on tick."

Billy Bunter's face cleared at once.

"That's all right, Wharton. She'll trust you. Look here! You can get the postal-order back, as she trusts you. You might as well get a feed at the same time. I don't mind coming and helping you to carry the things—"

Bunter stopped suddenly, as Harry, quite out of patience, boxed his ears. He staggered away with a howl, and Harry walked away. Billy Bunter blinked at the grim-faced Removites in almost speechless indignation.

"Well, of all the beasts!" he stuttered at last. "What did Wharton do that for?"

"Oh, don't talk to me!" growled Bob Cherry. "I've got no patience with you. I don't know how Wharton stands you! If I were in his place I'd leave you to take the consequences of what you've done, you young thief!"

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"Oh, shut up!"

And Bob Cherry looked so dangerous that Billy Bunter thought he had better shut up. He relapsed into silence, with a decidedly injured expression.

THE NINETEENTH CHAPTER.

Accuser and Accused.

THERE was silence in the Head's study.

Dr. Locke looked fixedly at the fag standing before him, and Nugent minor's eyes were on the carpet.

The boy knew how much he was risking by his silence, and his face was uneasy and troubled.

But the obstinate lines about his mouth showed that he was determined.

Whatever happened, Nugent minor did not mean to betray the seniors who had led him into the scrape.

"I am waiting for your answer, Nugent minor."

Dick Nugent was silent.

"You refuse to reply?"

"I—I—"

"You did not go alone to the Waterside Inn?"

"No, sir."

"You had a companion—more than one, perhaps?"

"Ye-e-es, sir."

"You refuse to name them?"

Dick Nugent raised his eyes to the Doctor's face at last.

"I—I can't, sir."

"Why cannot you?"

"I—I— It would be caddish—rotten! I—I can't."

The Doctor's face softened a little.

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"I can respect your motives, Nugent minor, but it is your duty to speak out when you are questioned by your head-master."

The fag's lips closed again.

"Very well," said the Head quietly, and he touched a bell. "I shall obtain the information from another source, I have no doubt." He glanced up as a servant answered the bell. "Please send Master Carberry to me."

Nugent minor stared at the Head. Did Dr. Locke, then, know that Carberry had been there? In that case, why his questions?

The fag felt as if he were enveloped in some strange mystery—in a maze in which he could discover no path. Silence was his refuge.

In a couple of minutes Carberry entered the study. His face was a little pale, and he carefully avoided looking at Nugent minor. Rascal as he was, the cad of the Sixth felt some compunction, and he did not desire to meet Dick's eyes when his treachery was revealed.

"Carberry, Nugent minor has returned, as you see. It appears that when he went to the Waterside Inn he was not alone. I have a strong suspicion that he was led into this wretched business by some lad older than himself, who should have known better. From a mistaken sense of honour, he persists in keeping silent, and will not name his companions. Now, when you went to the inn to look for him, did you not see anything of them?"

Carberry shook his head.

"No, sir. I saw only Nugent minor."

"You are sure?"

"Quite sure, sir."

Nugent minor's jaw dropped.

He was so astounded that he could only stare blankly at the cad of Greyfriars. It seemed to him as if his head were turning round.

What did it all mean?

The fag could not grasp the facts for the moment. He understood that Carberry—Carberry, of all people—was appearing in the light of his accuser—that was all.

"I wish very much to discover who it was that accompanied Nugent minor to the inn," said Dr. Locke. "I feel convinced that it was an older lad, more deserving of punishment."

"I fancy there is a mistake, sir. I did not see anyone else there."

"Nugent minor has admitted that there was someone else, but refuses to give the name."

"I can offer no suggestion, sir."

"Once more, Nugent, answer my question," said the Head. "This is not a time to keep silence. If you were a little more accustomed to school life you would know that I am being very patient with you. The prefect who discovered you at the inn unfortunately did not see who your companions were, but I must have their names."

Dick Nugent gasped for breath.

"He—he discovered me?" he stammered.

"Certainly."

"I—I—"

Dick broke off. He could not speak. He could only stare and gasp helplessly, and for the moment the figure of the false friend, the treacherous tempter, danced before his eyes.

Carberry tightened his lips. The tug-of-war was coming, he knew—it was his word now against the fag's—and he was a prefect—he was unaccused—he had had the first blow. He had little doubt of the result.

The Head was looking very curiously at Nugent minor. He could see that there was more in this than had as yet met his eyes.

"What is the matter with you, Nugent minor?" he asked quietly.

Dick found his voice.

"Did you say he discovered me at the inn, sir?" he panted.

"Yes."

"Did he report me to you?"

"Yes, very properly. It was his duty as a prefect."

"And—and but for him you would not—not have known that I had been there at all," stammered Nugent minor.

"No, probably not."

"Oh, the cad—the cur!"

The words burst passionately from the fag.

Dr. Locke knitted his brows.

"Silence, Nugent! How dare you!"

"He—he told you?"

"It was Carberry's duty to tell me. It is a prefect's duty to report matters of the kind to the head-master, as you ought to be aware."

"He told you I was there!" shrieked Dick Nugent. "Did he tell you he was there himself—that I went with him?"

"What?"

"It was Carberry that I went with!" shouted the fag. "He has turned on me—given me away! I went there with Carberry!"

"Impossible!"

"I did—I did! He knows it! Look at him!"

Carberry controlled his features well.

"Of course, this is sheer nonsense, sir," he said. "You

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know that I should not be likely to go to such a place except to fulfil my duty as a prefect."

"You need not defend yourself, Carberry. This accusation is too utterly wild and unfounded to have the slightest weight with me."

"It's the truth—the truth!"

"Silence, Nugent minor. You should be ashamed to utter these reckless falsehoods about a prefect who has only done his duty in reporting your transgression to me."

"He took me there."

"I do not believe you for one moment."

Dick Nugent almost staggered.

He was in the toils now. The prefect's reason for betraying him he did not yet know, but he could guess easily enough that Carberry had been compelled to save himself at the expense of another, and that he had been selected as the scapegoat.

This was the result of his association with the Smart Set of Greyfriars.

To save themselves they had thrown him over—all the burden of guilt was to fall upon him, and the chief witnesses against him were the fellows who had led him into wrong—whom he had deliberately chosen as his friends instead of the brother who would have guarded him, and the friends who would have stood by him.

It was the just penalty of his folly—it was what he might have expected had he known the world better.

But he did not yet know the world—he was slowly learning it now.

Dr. Locke looked kindly at Carberry—more kindly than the prefect had ever seen him look before. The Head naturally regarded Nugent minor's outburst as the effect of spite and rancour against the prefect who had reported him, and as a desperate effort to involve an innocent person in his disgrace.

"I am sorry this absurd accusation has been made against you, Carberry," said Dr. Locke quietly. "Of course, you understand that I do not attach the slightest importance to it."

"Thank you, sir!"

"But it reveals a new side of this boy's character—it shows a depth of spite and wickedness I never suspected in him before," said the Head. "I fear that it will be impossible for him to remain at Greyfriars."

"If I am expelled he ought to be expelled too!" cried Dick Nugent.

"Silence!"

"I tell you he took me there—and deserted me like a coward when he thought that you had found him out!"

"Enough!"

"You—you won't believe me! I—I can prove it!" cried the boy.

"Nonsense!"

"Wharton knows! Wharton was there—Wharton saw them!" said Dick, with a gleam in his eyes. "Wharton came there to fetch me away, and he saw Carberry in the inn playing cards!"

The Head started, and Carberry drew a quick, deep breath.

"Of course, sir, you know the terms I am on with Wharton," he said. "If Wharton should back up Nugent minor's story, it would simply show that they had planned it between them."

"I hardly believe that Wharton is capable of such a thing, Carberry; but it is certainly very unfortunate that he should be called as a witness. However—"

The Head was interrupted by a tap at the door.

THE TWENTIETH CHAPTER.

Expelled!

HARRY WHARTON came up the passage with a crumpled postal order in his hand. Billy Bunter blinked at him, and caught sight of the postal order, and gave a gasp of relief.

"You've got it, Wharton?"

"Yes. I've promised Mrs. Mumble the money next week," said Harry. "It means all my week's pocket-money, and a tip my uncle promised me, too. Blessed if I know what I should do it for, either, for a thankless young scoundrel."

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"I'm going to give this postal order back to Carberry—"

"Wait a tick!" said Billy Bunter eagerly. "Look here, no need to give it back to Carberry. It's worth a pound, you know. Suppose we—"

He dodged away as Harry reached towards him.

"I—I say, Wharton—"

"Shut up, you young thief! Do you fellows know where

Carberry is? I looked into his study for him as I came back, and he wasn't there."

"He's just been sent for," said Mark Linley. "He passed us a few minutes ago. He's gone into the Head's study."

"Phew! Then the Head knows he was at the inn with Nugent minor, as sure as a gun. Have Loder and Carne gone in?"

"No."

"Then it means squalls for Carberry and Nugent minor. If the young ass had listened to me, and left those blackguards when I asked him—"

"Cave!" whispered Nugent.

Harry Wharton broke off.

But it was too late.

Mr. Quelch was coming round the corner of the passage, and his expression showed that he had heard what Wharton said. He was going to the Head's study; but he halted and faced the juniors, with the evident intention of knowing something more of the matter.

"What were you saying, Wharton?"

Harry turned crimson.

"N-n-nothing, sir."

"Do you know anything of this affair of the Waterside Inn?"

Wharton was silent and troubled.

"I gather from your words," said Mr. Quelch, "that Nugent minor was not alone in his wrongdoing."

"That is true, sir."

"You do not, perhaps, fully understand what has happened," said Mr. Quelch. "Carberry has reported, as a prefect, that he found Nugent minor at the inn. Nugent minor will be punished for that. If he had any companions—especially if he was led into it by an older lad—that would make his punishment lighter."

The Removites stood petrified.

"Carberry reported him!" gasped Bob Cherry.

"Yes."

"But Carberry was the chap who took him there."

"Are you sure of that, Cherry?"

"We all saw him, sir. Look here, Wharton, it's time to speak out. If Carberry sneaks about Nugent minor, we ought to tell the facts—we can't shut up and let a chap be expelled because a false hound had turned on him."

"Cherry!"

"It's the truth, sir; he's a false hound," cried Bob Cherry indignantly. "It was Carberry who took Nugent minor to the inn, and made him play cards and play the silly ass generally, and we're all witnesses to prove it."

The Remove-master looked at them silently for a moment.

"Follow me!" he said abruptly.

He walked along to the Head's study, and the juniors followed him. Harry Wharton's brows were knitted. He felt that it was, as Bob Cherry had said, the time to speak out now. They could not let Nugent minor fall a helpless victim to the treachery of the false-hearted tempter.

Mr. Quelch tapped at the Head's door.

"Come in!" came Dr. Locke's deep voice.

The Head looked surprised as the Remove-master entered, followed by the juniors. He glanced at them questioningly.

"These boys can throw some further light upon the matter, I think, sir," said Mr. Quelch quietly.

"Ah! I was about to send for Wharton; but the others—what do they know about the matter?"

"They were all there, sir," said Harry.

Carberry's cheek grew paler.

In accusing Nugent minor, he had taken the only course that seemed open to him—though it was a course which any fellow with a rag of decency left would have died sooner than have taken.

He had not had time to calculate upon all the chances—he had determined to stick to the only possible story, through thick and thin, and brazen it out to the finish.

He had not calculated upon the rising up of half a dozen witnesses from the Remove; but even now he did not lose his nerve.

He was prepared to fight to the last.

"Wharton, tell me frankly all you know. Carberry reported Nugent minor to me, and declares that Loder and Carne will bear out his statements. Have you anything to say on the subject?"

"Yes, sir," exclaimed Harry, with a glance of scorn at the cad of the Sixth. "Nugent minor did go to the inn to play the fool—but he was led into it by Carberry and Loder and Carne. Nugent knew his minor was gone there, and he would have gone to fetch him away; but he was detained, and he asked me to go. I went with these fellows, and we found the rotters—I—I mean, we found Carberry and the others playing cards there. I tried to persuade Nugent minor to leave, and they threw me out."

"That's true," said Nugent minor.

"You state this on your word of honour, Wharton?" said Dr. Locke, with a harassed look.

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"Yes, sir."

"There is no possibility of a mistake?"

"None, sir. I should not have said a word if Carberry had not turned on Nugent minor in this way. It would have been sneaking. But now—"

"It's a string of lies, sir," said Carberry, with white lips.

"It's the truth," said Wharton. "We tried to think of some dodge for getting Nugent minor away from those cads, and we thought of Bunter's ventriloquism. We made him imitate your voice, sir, and it scared them away. Only it took in Nugent minor as well, and he ran away, and that's how he came to miss call-over, because he thought you had really discovered him at the inn."

The doctor's face was deeply troubled.

He could not help recognising the ring of truth in Harry Wharton's voice, but if Harry's tale was true, what kind of a fellow was Carberry, the prefect?

"Do you others bear out Wharton's statement?" he asked, almost helplessly.

"Yes, sir," said the Removites, with one voice.

"You are all sure of the facts?"

"Quite sure, sir."

"The surefulness is terrific."

"And you Carberry—"

"I deny the whole thing, sir," said Carberry grimly.

"It's a string of lies from beginning to end. All the school knows the terms these juniors are on with me, and it's a plot among them to ruin me if they can."

"I can hardly think so, but—"

"It appears to be Carberry's word against the statement of the juniors," said Mr. Quelch, in his incisive way. "But perhaps Carberry has witnesses to call."

"Ah, yes," said the Head eagerly, "Loder and Carne were there, they went with Carberry to fetch Nugent minor."

"I will go and fetch them," exclaimed Carberry, stepping towards the door.

Mr. Quelch stepped quickly in his path.

"You will do nothing of the sort," he said. "Loder and Carne can come here and tell their story without any preparation."

"Really, sir—"

"I will fetch them myself, and you can remain here," said Mr. Quelch, and he glanced at the doctor, who nodded.

"Certainly, Mr. Quelch."

Carberry bit his lip savagely, but he had to submit. He would have liked to prime his associates on the matter; to let them know exactly what had transpired. But that was impossible now, and he could only trust to fortune, hoping that they would see how matters stood as soon as they entered the study.

Mr. Quelch returned in a few minutes. Loder came into the study with him, and Carne remained outside.

"I think it would be advisable to hear the evidence separately, sir," said the Remove-master. "That will remove any suspicion of comparing notes. Of course, if they tell the exact truth, the stories will exactly agree."

"Certainly," said the Head.

He turned towards Loder. Loder was looking pale and scared, and he cast a frightened look towards Carberry. But Mr. Quelch placed his portly form so that Loder could not catch the eye of the Greyfriars cad.

"Pray tell me all you know about this matter, Loder," said the Head, turning his fixed gaze upon the senior.

"Wh-what matter, sir?"

"This affair of Nugent minor at the Waterside Inn. Tell me exactly what happened from the beginning—why, and how you went to the inn, and what occurred there."

Loder licked his dry lips.

How was he to furnish such details? If he had been dealing in facts, of course they would all have been fresh in his mind. But now he did not know what Carberry might have said—he did not know what Carne might say when he was called into the study and questioned. All he knew for certain was, that if he told a lie to the Head, and was found to have told a lie, he would be expelled.

And under the circumstances, it was only natural that Loder weakened.

"I—I—I—"

He stammered, hesitated and stopped.

"Go on, Loder!"

"I—I—I—"

"Speak out!"

"Tell the Head—" began Carberry, but Mr. Quelch whipped round on him like a flash.

"Silence, Carberry!"

The prefect gnawed his lip.

Loder looked helplessly from Carberry to Mr. Quelch, and from Mr. Quelch to the Head. Dr. Locke's face was growing harder. This hesitation could only mean one thing, and Dr. Locke was beginning to see clearer now.

(Continued on page 26.)

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"Speak, Loder—at once!"

"If you please, sir—"

"You hear me?"

"Wh-what has Carberry said, sir?"

"Never mind what Carberry has said. Tell me your version of the matter."

"I—I—"

"I order you to speak at once."

"I—I can't help it, Carberry," almost groaned Loder;

"I—I don't know what to say. I—I—I'm sorry I went to the inn, sir, I—I never meant any harm. It was just a little game of nap—no harm in it."

"Oh, you cur!" burst out Carberry bitterly.

"I—I can't help it. I don't know what to say. It's all up now."

"Call in Carne," said the Head sternly.

Carne was called in. He looked round quickly, and noted Carberry's furious face, and Loder's look of hang-dog misery. He, too, was equally at a loss what to say.

"Tell me your version of the story, Carne," said Dr. Locke. "Before you commit yourself to any statement, however, I warn you that Loder has confessed to going to the Waterside Inn to play cards there."

Carne turned pale.

"I suppose it's all up now, sir," he stammered. "I—I—I'm sorry! It sha'n't happen again, sir. I—I was a fool, I suppose. I hope you'll overlook it this time."

"Then you confess?"

"Ye-es, sir!"

"What have you to say now, Carberry?"

"It's all—it's all a plot, sir," said the prefect thickly. "I don't know why these chaps have turned on me. It's a plot. As for those juniors, they all hate me, and one of them is a thief, too."

"What do you mean?"

"Bunter—he has stolen a postal-order from my study—"

"Oh, really, sir—"

"That is another lie of Carberry's," said Harry Wharton quietly. "He gave Bunter a postal-order, and induced him to fill it in and cash it, so as to get him in his power, because he thought Bunter might betray him about being at the inn. Here is the postal-order—I have just got it back from Mrs. Mimble, to give it to Carberry."

"After what has happened, Carberry, you cannot expect me to take your word upon any matter," said the Head sternly.

"You can take it upon this, at all events," said Carberry

recklessly. "Bunter blackmailed me, because he knew I had been at the inn. I can see that the game is up now. I suppose I shall be expelled. I don't care. I gave Bunter the postal-order under threats; it was blackmail, the same as fellows are sent to prison for."

"Oh, really, sir!" stammered Bunter. "That's not quite true, sir. I told Carberry that I had a postal-order coming to-morrow, sir, and he offered to cash it in advance."

"I cannot believe that, Bunter."

"I—I also said that one good turn deserved another, sir, but—but, of course, I didn't want Carberry to lend me any money unless he felt inclined, sir."

"I think I see how the facts are, Bunter. If I did not think that you are too stupid to realise the wickedness of your conduct, I should expel you from Greyfriars," said the Head sternly. "As it is, I shall flog you soundly—"

"Oh, really, sir?"

"And expel Carberry. You may go!"

The juniors left the study quietly. Billy Bunter was groaning to himself. Carberry went out with a hard, set face. The juniors would not look at him. Bitter enemy as Carberry had been to them, they would not appear to triumph over him now that his punishment had failed—and so terrible a punishment.

The next morning Billy Bunter was duly flogged, and he received very little sympathy. All who knew anything of the facts agreed that he fully deserved it, as undoubtedly he did.

Carberry was expelled. There was no public expulsion; he was spared that. He left Greyfriars quietly by the early morning train; and his shadow never darkened the doors of the old school again. And though some felt sorry for him, it could not be denied that he had been wholly an influence for evil in the school, and that Greyfriars was well rid of him.

And Nugent minor?

Even upon his obstinacy the lesson had not been lost. He had learned the value of such friends as he had chosen for himself, and he had been sobered by his own narrow escape. From that day Frank Nugent found a change in his younger brother—a change that promised to be permanent now that he was no longer under the influence of the cad of Greyfriars.

THE END.

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Stanley Dare's Struggle.

Suddenly the Greek's manner changed. His fear gave place to the very madness of passion. With a quick movement he snatched a revolver from his pocket.

"Hang you!" he hissed. "Living or dead, spirit or no spirit, I will see what effect a bullet will have upon you!"

But Stanley Dare, cool and resourceful as ever, was not unprepared for this outburst. Before the Greek could press the trigger of the revolver—which, by the way, he held in his left hand—the young detective was upon him, and had seized him by the wrist.

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INTRODUCTION.

Stanley Dare, the boy detective, on his way back to England from India goes ashore at Port Said, and is met on the quay by the British Consul. "Just the man of all men I most want to see!" exclaims Matthews (the Consul). "A King's messenger, carrying important despatches, disappeared mysteriously only a few hours ago. He was on board a liner which had lain-to in a gale a little way up the Suez Canal. He appears to have completely disappeared!" The young detective immediately takes up the case, and proceeds to the spot where the boat had stopped. A search is made, and in dragging the canal in the vicinity, the body of the King's messenger is brought to view. Strangely enough there are no marks of violence; but an iron hand firmly clutches the unfortunate man's wrist. Dare follows up a clue, and visits a rich Greek, whom he suspects of having caused the death of the King's messenger. To achieve his object Dare disguises himself as the King's messenger.

A terrible struggle ensued. Dare felt his throat held in a vice-like grip, but there was the cold feeling of metal in the touch of those uncanny fingers. It was literally a grip of iron—the grip of the iron hand.

In a flash much that had been a mystery was revealed to him now. It was the iron hand which clutched him, and unless he could loosen the clasp of those awful fingers, his life would not be of many minutes duration.

Fortunately, while the iron hand was in his possession he had made himself thoroughly acquainted with the delicate mechanism by which it was worked. He knew where to

find the spring, and he pressed it hard. There was a soft click, and the iron fingers flew open. At the same instant there was a sharp report, followed by a cry that sounded like the snarl of a wounded animal.

In the struggle the revolver had been fired. Kalatides's finger had accidentally pressed the trigger at the moment when the muzzle of the weapon was pointed towards his own body. He dropped heavily to the floor, and lay there motionless in a huddled-up heap. His glossy shirt-front was dabbled with wet blood.

The lower door of the house was flung open with a crash, footsteps sounded in the stone-paved hall. Uncertain whether these new-comers were friends or foes, Dare lifted up the limp, inanimate form—whether the Greek was dead or only wounded he could not tell—and carried it to an inner chamber which opened out from the dining-room. Placing him on a couch, he came out again. Shutting and locking the door, he left him there alone. His own revolver was ready in his hand now. He faced the new-comers as they dashed into the room. They were the two Soudanese ruffians from whom he had rescued the dervish and the beautiful Egyptian girl.

With savage gestures they flung some remarks or questions at him in their own guttural language, which Dare did not understand. Possibly they were asking what had become of their master.

They were armed, but, then, so was he, and he stood there ready to continue the fight with these powerful ruffians, cool and undaunted as ever.

He did not remain long in doubt as to their intentions. They had evidently heard the pistol-shot and the cry when they were out in the street, and as there was a stranger in their master's house, armed and alert, and the Greek was not to be seen, they concluded, not without reason, that he had suffered in the encounter.

They had not, of course, recognised Dare in his weird disguise, and their momentary hesitation before attacking him was due to the fact that they at first regarded him with considerable astonishment.

But they had not the same reason as the Greek for supposing him to be a spirit; and indeed the revolver in his hand and the "very much alive" look in the manner which he faced them would soon have put such an idea to flight. With a shout of vengeful rage they hurled themselves upon him. His revolver flashed, and one of them fell back with a howl of pain.

"Come along, Nouredin, we're just in time!"

It was the welcome voice of Egerton Matthews that sounded in the doorway. He and the Arab servant took part in the fray, and in three minutes it was all over. The unwounded Soudanese, finding the odds too great for his taste, bolted for the street and escaped. The other was held in Nouredin's sinewy grasp, and for him escape was impossible.

"I'm sorry I made so much noise," observed Dare coolly, "as I have no desire to attract the attention of the police; but I had to fire, or they would have killed me."

"I don't think you need fear the police interference," replied Matthews, who could not help laughing at the young detective's nonchalance. "Nouredin and I were hanging about outside for the better part of an hour, and never saw a police officer during that time. This is a lonely quarter of Cairo, and it is left pretty much alone by them."

"That's all right!" said Dare. "The case is not ripe enough for police interference yet."

"Your life was attempted," replied the Consul.

"Oh, that is all a part of the usual risks which a detective has to run in the exercise of his profession," Dare rejoined. "When I undertake a case I am prepared to face these risks, exactly as a Revenue officer of the olden days had to risk his life when hunting down smugglers or wreckers."

"Well, you certainly can't complain of want of excitement," said Matthews. "Now, the next question is, what is to be done with this fellow?"

He pointed to the Soudanese, who was seated on the floor nursing his wound, and apparently not interested in the question of what was to be done with him. According to his faith his destiny was preordained. He was captured. It was Kismet—fate!

"We must release him," answered Dare. "It is quite certain that we can't be troubled with the care of a prisoner; and, as I said before, matters are not ripe for the police yet. He is only a subordinate ruffian, who is made use of by the Greek because, for the sake of a decent monthly wage, he will do anything that his master orders him to do, even to the committal of murder. We have little to fear from him. Do you speak his language?"

"Yes."

"You might give him a warning before you go. Tell him if he is not out of Cairo in twelve hours, we'll have him hung for his crimes."

Matthews harangued the fellow for several minutes, although as far as the outward demeanour of their prisoner was concerned he might as well have been talking to a post. Not a muscle of his face moved; and when the Consul at

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NEXT WEEK: "WINGATE'S SECRET."

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length told him to go, he rose to his feet and stalked from the room without uttering a word.

"I don't like that fellow," said Matthews. "Your clemency is wasted. If he gets half a chance he will knife one of us. His fanatical hatred of a white man and a Christian is proof against kindness."

"So it would seem," answered Dare. "But we have our other prisoner to attend to now—his master. He was evidently badly wounded. It is difficult to know what course to pursue with him; but one thing is certain, he mustn't slip through our fingers now, although as yet the legal proof of his guilt is wanting."

"Where is he?"

"I carried him into an adjoining room," said Dare. "Through that door?"

Matthews opened the door and stepped into the chamber; then he half turned and glanced with a puzzled look at the young detective.

"Sure it was this room?" he asked.

"Quite," replied Dare. "In fact, there is no other opening out of the dining-room. Why do you ask?"

"Because there is no one here now. The room is empty."

Dare sprang forward, and, with a swift glance, searched the whole apartment. The Greek had vanished. The room was barely furnished, and there was no place in it where a man could hide himself. The sole means of ingress and egress was by way of the door, for the solitary window was barred, and could not be seriously taken into consideration. In addition, it had evidently not been opened for months, perhaps for years, as the catch was rusted, and there was a thick layer of dust on the ledges which was quite undisturbed.

"This is very queer," said Matthews. "What can have become of him? He could not have come out by way of the door, or we must have seen him. Besides, if he was badly wounded—"

He paused abruptly, for he noticed that Dare, unheeding what he said, was staring curiously at a picture on the wall. It is a rare thing to see a picture in a Mohammedan dwelling, but it was scarcely this fact which excited the young detective's interest.

The picture was a large-sized oil-painting of a man's head and shoulders, a weird production, the work of some long-forgotten European artist. Dare took a step towards the wall on which the picture hung; then, all at once, with a cry to Matthews to "jump to cover," he flung himself flat down on the floor.

As he did so, a tiny jet of flame darted from the lips of the pictured head, and a small, shining globule struck the opposite wall, burst, and vanished in a little puff of blue vapour.

"Had that thing struck me," said Dare, as he rose to his feet, "I should be writhing now in death agonies almost too horrible to contemplate."

Outwitted—The Moneylender's Quarter—Link by Link—Up the Nile.

It was an exasperating position in which they found themselves—outwitted by the Greek, who, although certainly wounded, could not have been wounded badly. Hearing the footsteps on the stairs, and not recognising them as belonging to his own men, he had adopted this stratagem in order to escape his enemies.

"I am not a coward," said Dare, after a pause, "but any person may well be excused for running to cover when a man with murder in his heart, and occupying a position from which he cannot be dislodged, is firing missiles from a devilish instrument which was invented three thousand years ago by a priest of Osiris to use in the torture-chamber of the god he served."

"Invented three thousand years ago!" exclaimed the Consul, "and in the possession of this villainous Greek? Surely you are mistaken?"

"Not in the least degree," replied Dare, a little impatiently. "The secrets held by the priests of ancient Egypt are not lost. A few men living have a knowledge of them—"

"And I am one of those men."

It was the voice of Kalatides; but the words seemed to come from the lips of the head in the picture.

"You fools!" continued the voice. "Do you think to get the better of me? But a few minutes ago I heard you warn the Soudanese, my servant, to quit Cairo within twelve hours if he valued his life. Let me repeat that warning to you. Give up this quest which you are engaged upon, and you will have nothing further to fear. Persist in it, and I swear by the gods of Egypt that the hour shall come when you will cringe to me for mercy, begging even for death to relieve you of the agony which I shall make you suffer."

"Nothing further to fear!"

Dare laughed scornfully as he repeated the words.

"We have not begun to fear yet. Nor are you the man who will ever cause a single tremor of fear to chill our hearts."

Dare had risen to his feet, and, slipping across the floor, stood with his back against the wall immediately under the picture. While he was speaking he was examining the part of the floor on which he was standing, and then the wall—panelled with cedar wood—on his right and left hand.

"The time will come, and soon, when you will learn the real meaning of terror if you never knew it in your life before," went on the unseen Greek. "And now, since I am master of the situation—for as you rightly observed a while ago, matters are not yet ripe for the interference of the police—I will give you three minutes in which to quit this house."

"And if we do not quit?"

There was no reply. Dare was now crouching down in an eager, listening attitude; Nouredin was staring up at the picture, as though he believed it was possessed of life; Matthews was fingering his revolver, and wondering whether if he sent a shot through that weird-looking, painted head it would reach the man who was hidden somewhere behind it.

Then all at once an expression of utter amazement broke from his lips, echoed by Nouredin Ali with a cry of fear.

"It is magic!" he cried. "We are in the house of a magician, and shall presently be carried away by demons. Where is the young effendi?"

Stanley Dare had disappeared.

A moment before he had been crouching down within a few feet of them. Now the spot was vacant. He had vanished as noiselessly as a puff of vapour dissolves in the air.

Little wonder that the Arab was scared, for his mind was crammed with stories of djinns, genii, fairies, and magicians, which are still as implicitly believed in by the uneducated Arabs and Egyptians as they were in the days of the "Arabian Nights."

Even the matter-of-fact British Consul, who believed in nothing but the power and might of Britain, began to ask himself whether there might not be some things in Nature which even the all-powerful Foreign Office had no knowledge of.

What had become of Stanley Dare?

The question was answered in a reassuring manner by the sound of the young detective's voice, followed by the sharp crack of his revolver.

Then came the scuffle of footsteps in an echoing passage, another revolver shot, a burst of mocking laughter, and silence.

There was a pause

"They know how to do these things in Cairo. I have never known a secret door work so smoothly and noiselessly before."

Stanley Dare was in the room again. He had reappeared as noiselessly as he had vanished.

"Look here, Dare," exclaimed Matthews. "I was nearly a convert to a belief in magic just now, and your vanishing tricks have scared Nouredin out of his senses! How did you do it?"

Dare stepped across the room to the wall where he had been standing when last they saw him, and pressed against the panelling. Instantly an opening about three feet square appeared. The secret panel slipped back and closed again without the slightest sound.

"I knew that there must be a secret door of some sort in this room," said Dare, "for putting aside the magic which Nouredin seems to have such faith in, the Greek could not have got out of the chamber without the aid of some such contrivance. When Kalatides spoke from behind the picture, I immediately inferred that the secret exit was somewhere near it. I looked about for finger-prints, found them, and—found the secret panel at the same time."

"What has become of the Greek?"

"He has given us the slip," Dare admitted. "There is a recess beyond

that opening, and a sort of trapdoor behind the picture, which has cunningly contrived slits at the eyes and mouth, enabling a man to take a survey of the greater part of this room. Beyond the recess again there is a passage, terminating in a flight of stairs. We exchanged shots in the passage, but missed each other. Then he bolted down the stairs, closed a door at the bottom, and—there was an end of the matter."

"For the time being," said Matthews.

"Why, yes, for the time being. And now it seems to me that the wisest course we can pursue is to get out of this house as soon as possible."

This was good advice, and they lost no time in following it. For the next three days, however, they kept a close watch on the place, but nothing more was seen of Kalatides. He had either quitted Cairo or else he had disguised himself and was in hiding in the native quarter.

On the evening of the third day Matthews received a note from Stanley Dare. It ran as follows:

"I am going to 'obliterate' myself for a few days. Don't become anxious at my absence, and don't make any inquiries about me. If anybody asks, tell him or her that I have gone to Alexandria. I am not going there—indeed, I can't say definitely where I am going yet. Into queer places, I have no doubt. Destroy this letter when you have read it, as I have reason to believe that Kalatides has a good many spies about."

Five days passed, and nothing further was heard by Matthews of the young detective. Inquiry had been made once by an old dervish as to his whereabouts—it was the dervish whom Stanley Dare had saved from the Soudanese—and he seemed very much surprised when Matthews informed him that he was at Alexandria.

But Dare had not left Cairo. There are men of many nations who gain a livelihood by some means or other, not always honestly, in that city where East and West meet. And the young detective had chosen to disguise himself as a Maltese vendor of lace and silver filagree work. He could speak the Maltese language, but he was not yet at all firm on Arabic.

He lived in the native quarter, and for the time being became one of the strange mixed community who inhabited that part of old Cairo. For he was thorough in all that he undertook, and in that to a great extent lay the secret of his success.

It was on the evening of the fourth day of his absence that Stanley Dare—as the Maltese lace-seller—was passing through the crowded bazaars which are at the end of the old thoroughfare known as the Mouski, when he paused near the "shop" of a Greek moneylender, or banker as he chose to call himself.

The scene here was, and is still, a purely Oriental one. The merchant, seated on his carpet in front of his own small shop, no bigger than a sentry-box, buys and sells as his predecessors did a thousand years ago. Each dark alley of the quarter winds in and out, crossing and recrossing in a bewildering maze, in which a stranger could very easily lose himself.

Nearly everything is to be found in the bazaars, and the noise made by the itinerant vendors of goods shouting out the quality of their wares adds to the confusion which reigns on every side amid the babel of many tongues.

In the course of judicious and patient inquiries, Stanley Dare had learnt two very important facts. One was that Kalatides occasionally visited the shop of the moneylender, his countryman; and the other was that the moneylender, whose name was Michalis, was one of the most unscrupulous men in his business, which was saying a good deal.

"The probability is," mused Dare, "that Michalis and Kalatides are in some sort of criminal partnership, and it is more than likely that they will be in constant communication with each other. I must find out. If I can discover where Kalatides is in hiding, I shall be well repaid for any risk I may have to run."

(To be continued next week.)



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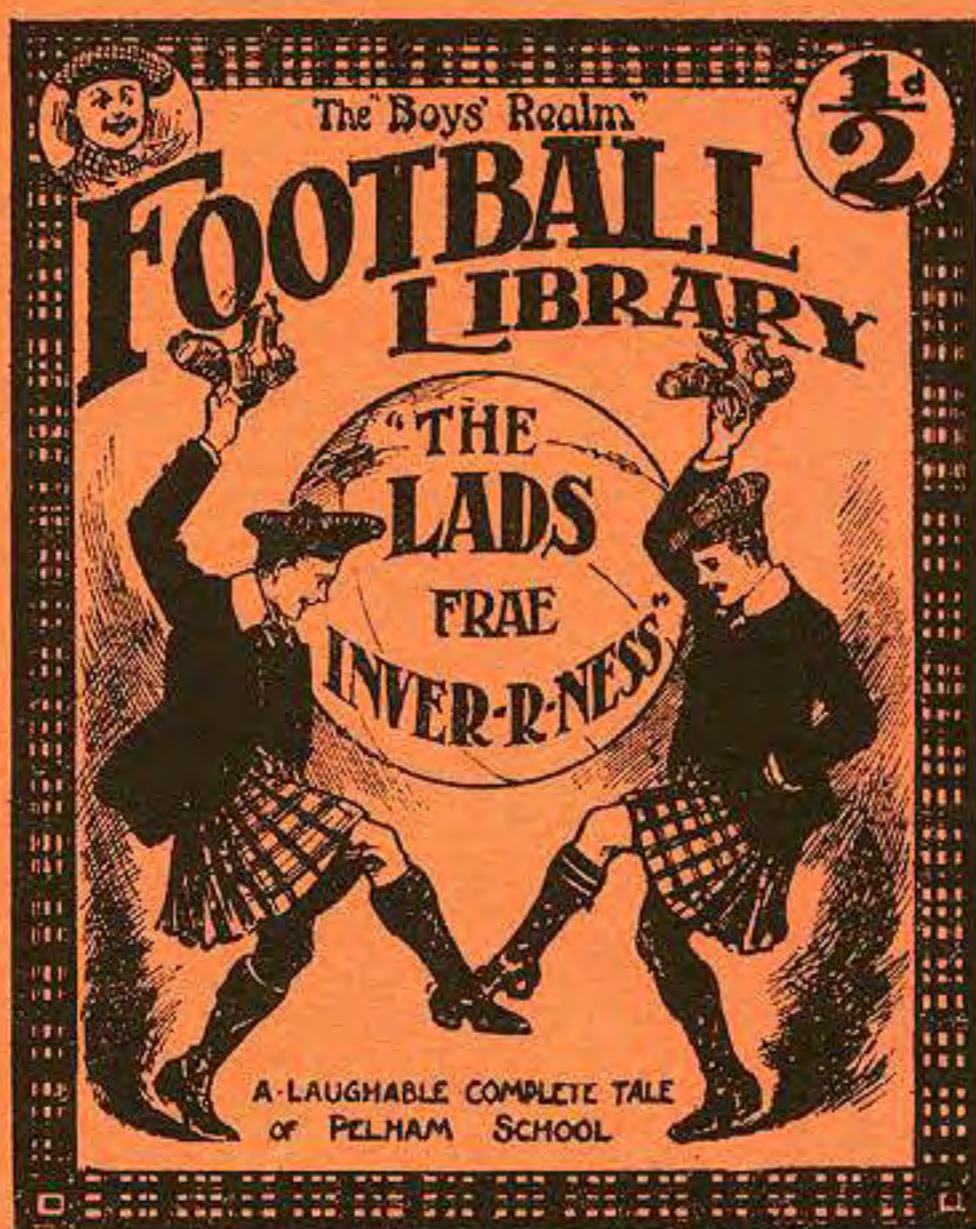
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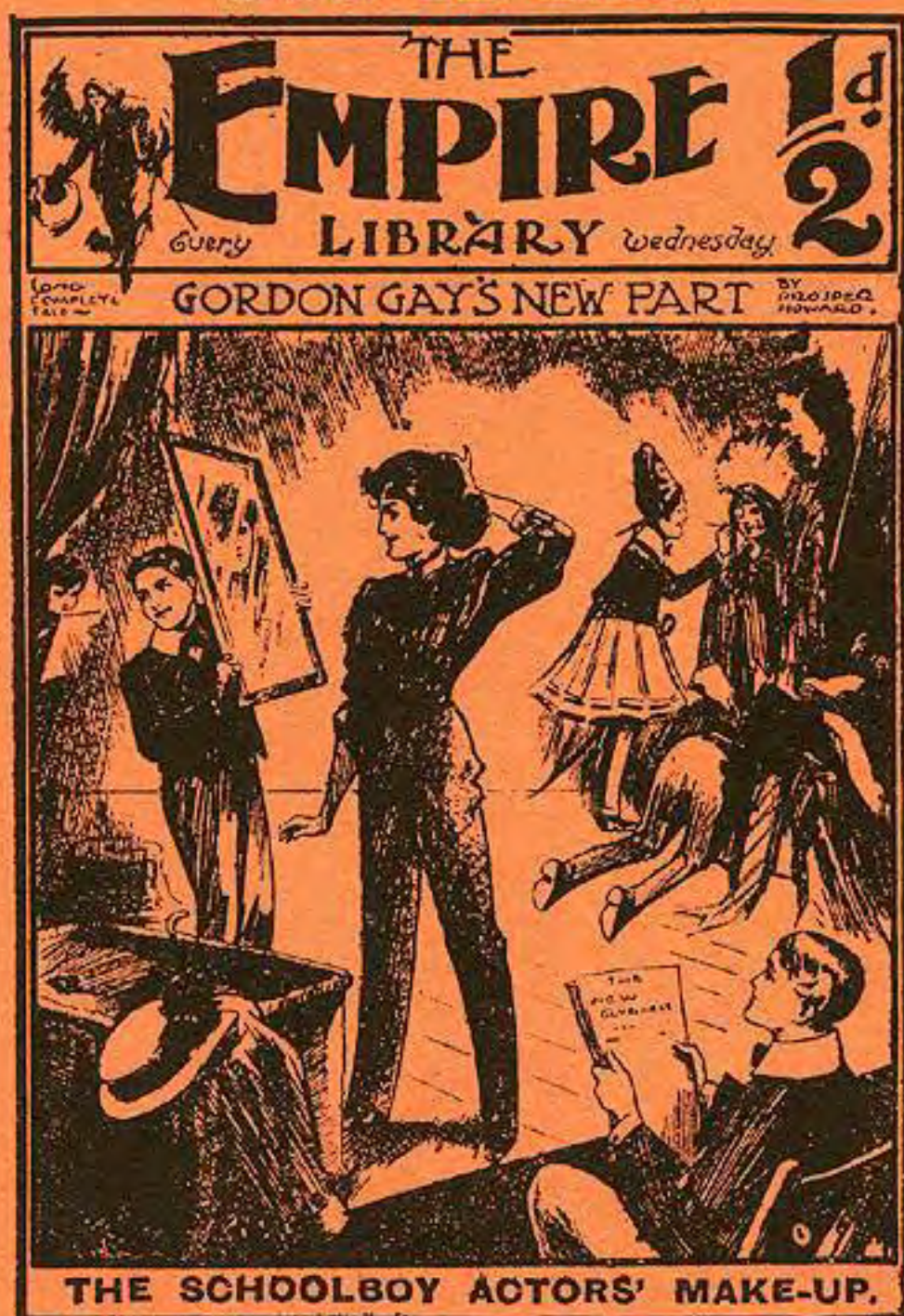
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