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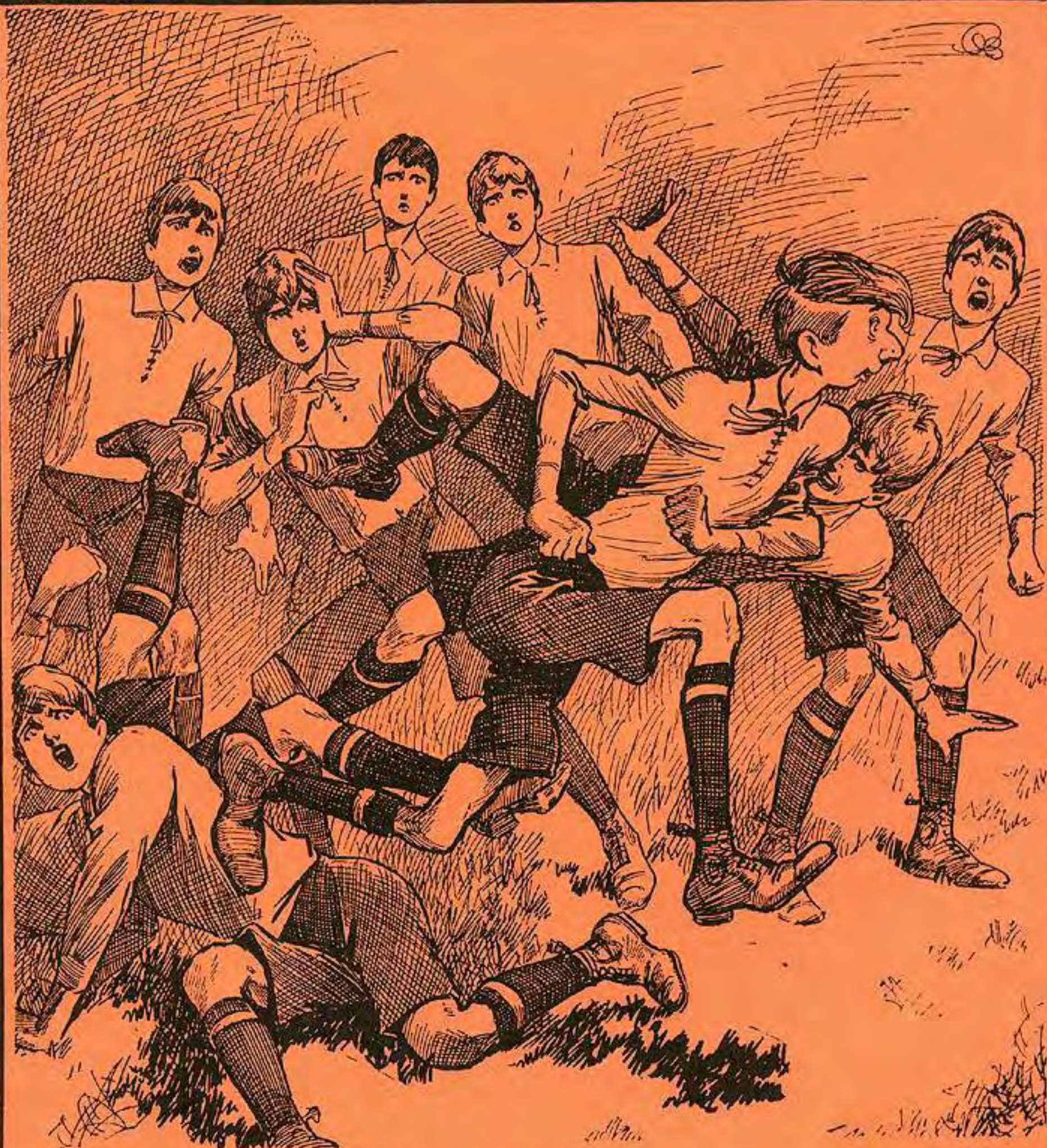
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No. 139 |

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| Vol. 5.



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Alonzo's Little Game!

A Splendid, Long, Complete
School Tale of
HARRY WHARTON & CO.
and **ALONZO TODD**
at Greyfriars.

— BY —

FRANK RICHARDS.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

An Important Matter is Left Undiscussed!

ALONZO TODD, the junior who had the distinction of being known as the Duffer of Greyfriars, came along the Remove passage and knocked at the door of No. 1 Study. Alonzo was always careful to knock at the door of a study before entering it. That, as well as many another valuable precept, he had received from his Uncle Benjamin, a gentleman he frequently mentioned in his talks with the Greyfriars fellows. Indeed, fellows had been heard to remark that they were quite fed up with Uncle Benjamin, and that they would give a week's pocket-money to hear that he was nicely and comfortably buried.

Tap!
There was no reply to Alonzo's timid knock.
He knocked again.
Still no reply.
"Dear me!" murmured Alonzo, with a puzzled expression.
"How very odd!"
He had reason to be puzzled.
For as he approached No. 1 Study, he had heard the sound of voices within, and the clink of a knife and fork, and the rattle of a teacup on a saucer.
Now the most profound silence reigned.
Harry Wharton & Co., who were the occupants of No. 1 Study in the Remove, could not have gone out, as of course Todd would have seen them step into the passage; and equally, of course, they could not have left by the window.
The probability was, therefore, that they were still in the study.

Yet a dead silence reigned after Todd's knock.
It was, as Alonzo said, very odd.
He knocked a third time.
Silence, as of the grave.
"Dear me! Yah! Yarook!"
Todd uttered that exclamation rising crescendo, as he

received a tremendous thump on the shoulder, which sent him staggering against the study door.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" said Bob Cherry cheerfully.

Alonzo gasped for breath.

"My dear Cherry——"

"Did I startle you?" asked Bob.

"Really, you know, you—you did! I—I——"

"Never mind. What were you playing a tattoo on that door for?" asked Bob.

"It is very odd!" said Alonzo, still gasping a little.

"Very odd indeed!"

Bob Cherry looked at the door.

"No, I," he said, reading out the painted number. "Yes, it's odd; but there's nothing unusual in that, is there?"

"I was not referring to the number," said Todd. "You see, I have knocked thrice at the door——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Alonzo Todd had had a very old-fashioned bringing-up, and the vocabulary he brought to Greyfriars was a constant source of amusement to the fellows there. He never said "three times" if "thrice" would do.

"I see nothing to laugh about," said Todd. "It is very curious. I have knocked thrice at the door, and have received no reply."

"Pooh! They're at home!" said Bob Cherry. "I'm just coming to tea."

"Yet I have knocked thrice——"

"Well, why didn't you open the door, after you knocked?" demanded Bob Cherry.

Todd shook his head.

"My Uncle Benjamin——"

"Oh, go easy with Uncle Benjamin!"

"My Uncle Benjamin has always impressed upon me to be punctilious in these matters," said Todd, with a shake of the head. "I am waiting for Wharton to reply ere I open the door."

"'Ere'!" said Bob Cherry. "'Ere' is good! Ha, ha, ha!"

"My dear Cherry——"

"I never had an Uncle Benjamin," said Bob Cherry regretfully. "If I had had, I suppose I shouldn't go for a door this way."

And he launched his boot at the door with a crash that made it ring again.

Todd jumped.

"Dear me!"

The crash on the door was followed by a cheery shout from inside. All the fellows in the Remove knew when Bob Cherry was near.

"Come in, Bob!"

Bob opened the door.

The interior of Harry Wharton's study looked very cosy. Four juniors were seated round the table, and a bright fire was glowing in the grate.

Harry Wharton, Hurree Singh, and Frank Nugent nodded a welcome to Bob. Billy Bunter, the fourth at the table, did not move his head. He was deeply engaged upon mutton cutlets of his own cooking, and had no time for such frivolity as politeness to a guest.

"Come in, Bob," said Harry Wharton; "tea's ready."

"And Bunter's begun," added Nugent, with a glance at the fat junior that did not express esteem or admiration.

Bunter grunted with his mouth full.

"I was hungry," he said.

"Here's your chair, Bob."

"Thanks!"

Alonzo Todd blinked into the study.

"I knocked thrice at the door just now," he said.

"Go hon!"

"Perhaps you did not hear me?"

"Yes, we heard you right enough," said Harry Wharton cheerfully. "Make the tea, Bunter."

Bunter grunted again.

"Oh, really, Wharton! Can't you see I'm busy?"

"Take his fodder away, Nugent."

"Oh! Look here——"

Frank Nugent calmly jerked away Bunter's plate.

"Make the tea," he said severely.

"Oh, really——"

"Not another bite till it's made."

Bunter grunted again, and growled as well this time, and rose from the table. The fat junior was just settling down to serious business with the cutlets, and he didn't see why somebody else couldn't make the tea.

"Kettle's boiling," said Wharton.

"I say, you fellows——"

"The boilfulness is terrific," said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, in the peculiar English which was only a shade more odd than Alonzo's.

Bunter made the tea, grunting the while.

"I came to speak to you fellows——" said Alonzo.

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"Nice weather, isn't it?" said Nugent affably.

As it was raining in the Close, and the rain-drops were splashing on the window of the study, Nugent's statement could hardly be considered correct. Todd looked surprised.

"No, I did not regard it as nice weather," he replied.

"However, it may be good for the farmers. I am happy to see you so considerate for others, Nugent. My uncle Benjamin says——"

"Nice wet rain!" remarked Wharton.

"I fail to see the drift of that remark, Wharton. I suppose you did not hear me knocking at your door just now."

"Yes, we did."

"Then why did not you speak?"

"If it keeps on raining like this, there will be a continuance of wet weather," said Frank Nugent, looking round with a solemn expression.

"What do you think, Todd?"

Todd looked more and more puzzled.

"I think that is really obvious," he remarked; "rainy and wet weather are synonymous terms."

"Made the tea, Bunter?"

"Yes," growled Billy.

"I came to speak to you fellows about a most important matter," said Todd.

"Sit down and have tea," said Harry.

"Thank you, I have had my tea; neither did I come here to be treated," said Todd; "I should be so sorry if you misconstrued my motives. I came——"

"Sugar in yours, Bob?"

"Two lumps, please."

"I came to consult you about a most important matter. I have already spoken to Bulstrode, who has received my suggestions with ribaldry."

"Have you spoken to Skinner?"

"Yes."

"To Vernon-Smith?"

"No."

"Then go and speak to him," urged Nugent. "I'm sure he'd like you to speak to him upon an—er—important matter."

"Yes, go to Smithy, Todd."

"I think I ought to speak to you as captain of the Remove, Wharton. I will proceed now to acquaint you with the whole matter——"

"Show Todd that new jū-jitsu trick of yours, Inky," said Harry Wharton, with a wink at the Nabob of Bhanipur.

The nabob grinned.

"With great pleasurefulness," he exclaimed.

Alonzo backed away a little. He was not an athlete, and did not like tricks, jū-jitsu or other.

"Excuse me, Hurree Singh——"

"Not at all, my esteemed friend."

"I should prefer——"

"This is the honourable trickfulness."

"But——"

"In this way——"

"Please let go!"

"Not at all," said Hurree Singh blandly.

He grasped Alonzo Todd by the shoulders. The next moment the Duffer of Greyfriars found himself sitting in the passage with no clear idea as to how he got there.

"Dear me!" he gasped. "How very odd!"

"You might shut the door after you, Toddy," said Frank Nugent in a tone of polite remonstrance.

"My dear Nugent——"

"Shut the door, Bunter."

"I'm busy."

Alonzo Todd jumped up and came in again. Alonzo Todd was very good-tempered and docile and unsuspecting, but he could be very determined.

"I want to consult with you chaps——"

"Show him that trick again, Inky."

"Certainly."

"I—I would rather not——" stammered Todd. "Another time I shall be most happy, but at the present moment I have a most important matter to discuss with Wharton, which will take half an hour at least——"

"Will it?" murmured Harry. "I don't think!"

"I shall be very glad to show our esteemed chum the honourable trickfulness a second timefully," said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Please do not trouble——"

"There is no troublefulness at all."

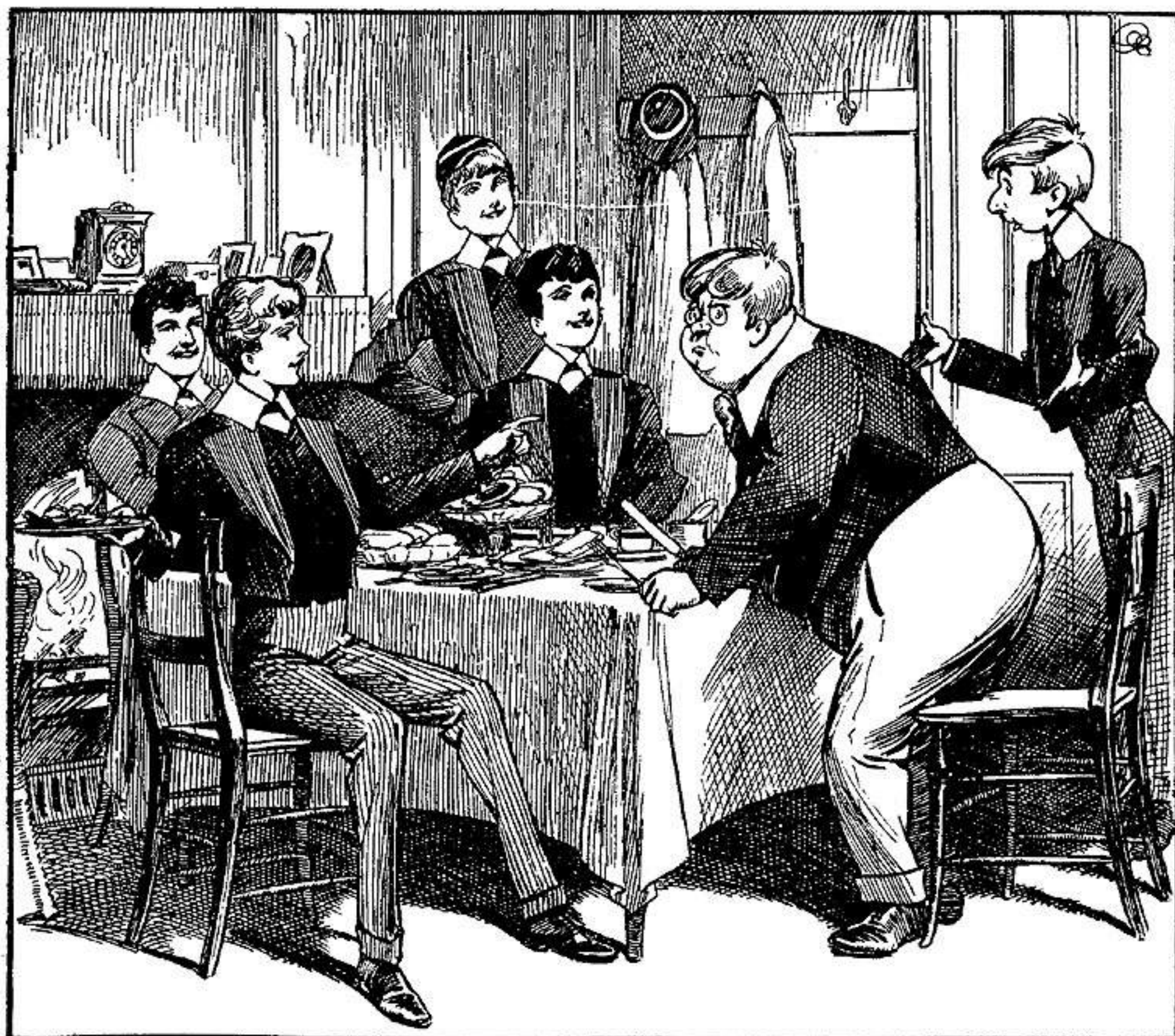
"But——"

"This is the wayfulness."

Alonzo was off his feet the next moment. What happened to him then he did not quite know. It seemed to him as if he were being turned upside down and inside out in the air. Of course, that was impossible. What was certain was that in a few seconds he was sitting in the passage again.

He sat and blinked and gasped.

THE NEXT STORY-PAPER TO BUY THIS WEEK IS "THE MARVEL."



"Not another bite until you've made the tea, Bunt!" said Frank Nugent, calmly jerking away the fat junior's plate. (See page 2.)

"Shut the door," said Wharton cheerfully.

Alonzo staggered up.

He put his head into the study again, just as Bob Cherry was slamming the door. He drew it back just in time, and the door slammed.

Todd opened it.

"If you please, Wharton, I want to discuss an important matter with you," he said. "I should be delighted to have instruction in ju-jitsu another time, Hurree Singh. At present—"

"Not at all-fully."

"I tell you—"

"My time is my worthy chum's, and the instructfulness is an esteemed and august pleasure," murmured the nabob.

"But— Oh! Ow!"

The Duffer of Greyfriars was in the grasp of the dusky-complexioned junior again. This time he did not escape from it so easily.

He was lifted clear of the floor and whirled round and round till his head was swimming and his breath came in short, quick gasps.

Then he was suddenly deposited on the floor in the passage.

He sat there, blinking.

The study door slammed.

"Dear me!" murmured the Duffer. "How odd—how very, very odd! I may say extraordinary! I have never come upon such a case of persistent misunderstanding in my life before—never!"

And the Duffer of Greyfriars picked himself up.

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NEXT
WEEK: THE CLIFF HOUSE GUEST.

He did not attempt to enter Study No. 1 again. It was pretty clear that if he did the misunderstanding would continue.

He took his way slowly and ruefully down the Remove passage, and paused at the door of Vernon-Smith's study.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Todd Causes Trouble.

VERNON-SMITH was seated by his window which was open. The evening was cool, and the open window let in splashes of rain, but the Bounder of Greyfriars did not mind that.

Vernon-Smith was smoking, and the open window was to allow the smoke to escape. Smith cultivated these little habits, which he believed gave him the tone of a man of the world, but he had learned by painful experience not to allow the prefects to find his study smelling of tobacco.

Vernon-Smith was alone. He looked at Todd with a far from pleasant expression as the Duffer came in.

"What do you want?" he growled.

"I wish to consult you upon a most important matter," said Alonzo. "I have just been to Wharton's study, but they persist in misunderstanding me. Instead of discussing the matter as I wished, they persisted in imagining that I desired instruction in ju-jitsu, and each time I spoke I was dropped with considerable violence upon the linoleum outside the study."

A Splendid School Tale of Harry Wharton & Co.,
and Alonzo Todd. By FRANK RICHARDS

Vernon-Smith grinned.

He took his cigarette out of his mouth, and used it to point to the door with. Todd followed the direction with his eyes.

"What does that mean, Smith?" he asked.

"Outside."

"Eh?"

"There's the door."

"But—"

"Clear!"

"But I came here to discuss a most important matter," said Todd. "You are certainly not the person I should have selected as a confidant, Smith, as I am not really inclined to trust you, but Wharton advised me to come here—"

"You chump!" growled Smith. "Wharton shifted you off on to me because you're a frightful bore."

"My dear Smith—"

"Outside!"

"I should like—"

Vernon-Smith, without getting up, reached out his hand, and took hold of a heavy lexicon. Todd watched him warily.

"My dear Smith—"

Whiz!

The lexicon flew through the air.

Todd dodged it.

He caught his foot in a rug as he dodged, and staggered and fell against the bookcase.

Crash!

"Oh, dear!" gasped Todd.

His elbow had crashed through the bookcase, and there was a shower of broken glass, and another shower of falling books as the bookcase went reeling.

"Oh! Oh!"

Vernon-Smith gave a yell, and leapt to his feet.

"You clumsy ass!" he shouted. "I—I—I—"

"My dear Smith—"

Dear Smith made one spring for the grate, to seize the poker, and another for Todd. The Duffer of Greyfriars was not usually quick or active, but he was both quick and active just then.

He got out of the study in record time, and the poker crashed on the doorpost behind him as he fled.

Todd went down the passage as if he were on the cinder-path. He did not stop when he reached the stairs, but went down them three at a time, puffing and blowing.

"Oh, dear," he gasped, as he reached the bottom of the stairs. "Oh dear! I never really met anyone so badly-tempered in my life before! Oh, dear!"

Todd looked back nervously up the staircase. Vernon-Smith certainly was bad-tempered, there was no doubt about that. A red and angry face appeared at the top of the stairs, and Alonzo turned to fly again. The first step he took was upon the favourite corn of Mr. Capper, the Master of the Fourth, who had just come up the passage.

"Oh!" gasped Mr. Capper.

"Oh, dear! I'm so sorry," murmured Todd.

"Oh!"

"I trust I have not hurt you," said Alonzo.

Alonzo must have been of a very trusting disposition, for Mr. Capper was hopping on one leg, and holding the damaged foot in his hands, and most unparliamentary expressions were dropping from his lips.

Vernon-Smith promptly vanished. Todd would have acted wisely to do the same, but he was too concerned about the damage he had done.

"I'm so sorry," he said. "I did not see you, sir. I really hope I have not hurt you. Have you a corn there, sir?"

"Oh!"

"If you like, sir, I'll ask my Uncle Benjamin to send you his infallible remedy for corns, sir. It is a wonderful remedy, sir. Uncle Benjamin has had corns for forty years and never uses anything else for them."

Whether this recommendation would have properly impressed Mr. Capper, we cannot say; but, perhaps he was too angry to listen to it. At all events, he did not listen. He seized Todd by the shoulders and shook him, leaving off cursing his injured foot for that purpose.

"You young villain!" he shouted.

"Oh, sir."

"You did that on purpose!"

"I, sir? Oh, sir! I assure you, sir— Oh, oh, oh!"

Mr. Capper shook the Duffer till his teeth rattled.

"Groo! Oh! Really, sir—my dear Mr. Capper—"

"There!" gasped Mr. Capper, quite out of breath. "Now go away, boy, and take a hundred lines. Do you hear?"

"Oh, certainly, sir. I hear perfectly well. It is Dutton who is deaf, sir!"

"Take two hundred lines!"

"Oh, sir."

"And now go, you clumsy young wretch!"

Todd turned away. Mr. Capper tenderly caressed his foot

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once more. Alonzo Todd took a few steps, and then turned back in perplexity.

"Oh, sir; if you please—"

"Go away!"

"But I want to ask you—"

"Go!"

"I am in doubt—"

"Will you get out of my sight?" roared the Fourth-Form master.

"Oh, certainly, sir. But I want to know—"

Mr. Capper could stand no more. He made a rush at Alonzo Todd. The Duffer of Greyfriars backed away in alarm.

"Oh, sir! I—I did not mean to annoy you, sir, but you did not make it quite clear whether I— Oh!"

Alonzo Todd backed fairly into Mr. Quelch, his own Form-master, who had come out of his study to see what all the noise was about. As Todd said afterwards, he hadn't eyes in the back of his head, and how was he to see Mr. Quelch? He backed fairly into him, and with considerable force, and Mr. Quelch just saved himself from being butted over by clinging to the doorpost.

"Dear me!" gasped Mr. Quelch.

"Oh, sir!"

The Remove-master took a firm grip upon Alonzo. The Duffer of Greyfriars squirmed round and blinked at him.

"I'm so sorry, sir. I didn't see you, sir."

"What is the matter?" asked the Remove-master, tightening his grip upon the junior.

"Matter!" panted Mr. Capper. "The matter is that that boy ought to be flogged, Mr. Quelch, if not hanged, drawn, and quartered. He has trodden upon my toe, sir, and now has the astounding impertinence to stand talking to me after I have ordered him to go—actually, sir!"

"Todd, how dare you?"

"If you please, sir—"

"The boy is dangerous," snorted Mr. Capper. "He ought to be sent to a—a reformatory, or locked up in an—an asylum!"

"But I wanted to know, sir," stammered Todd. "I didn't mean to be impertinent, sir. My Uncle Benjamin always impressed upon me, sir, never to be impertinent to a master. Mr. Capper gave me a hundred lines, sir—"

"Which I have no doubt you fully deserved," said Mr. Quelch.

"Oh, sir! Then he gave me two hundred lines!"

"Indeed!"

"I didn't know whether Mr. Capper meant the two hundred to include the one hundred, sir, or whether I was to do three hundred altogether," said Todd, in an injured tone. "That is what I wanted to ask Mr. Capper, sir."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Mr. Quelch laughed involuntarily. Certainly no boy at Greyfriars but Alonzo Todd, would have wanted information on that point, and asked for it of a master who was in a towering rage.

But Mr. Quelch checked his laughter instantly.

"You are an absurd boy, Todd," he said. "After the damage you have done, I think you had better do the three hundred lines, as you are so anxious about them, and they will keep you out of mischief for a time."

And Mr. Capper fully concurred.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

A Mysterious Letter.

HARRY WHARTON & Co laughed heartily as they sat down to tea. Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh wore a sleepy smile upon his dusky face. He had persisted in showing Todd ju-jitsu tricks till the Duffer of Greyfriars was ju-jitsued out of the study, without an idea that he was being "chucked" out, in vulgar parlance. Alonzo Todd was a very good-natured fellow, and extremely obliging. But his company was liable to pall. The most exemplary maxims quoted from his Uncle Benjamin were capable of boring in the long run, and besides, Todd's efforts to oblige generally ended unhappily. He seldom had tea anywhere without upsetting the teapot, or knocking the milk-jug over, or something of that sort. And when he announced that he had an important matter to discuss, the Removites shut their ears as a matter of course. They had not yet forgotten Alonzo's scheme for raising the poorer youth of Friardale to a higher life, and his plan for pointing out to the Highcliffe fellows the errors of their ways. They did not like Alonzo's important matters.

"Good old Alonzo!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "He's good, but he's a fearful trial. Pass the cutlets!"

"I say, you fellows—"

"Shove the cutlets this way, Bunter!"

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"I was just going to—"
 "Bolt the lot!" said Nugent cheerfully, taking the dish away. "It's all right, we're not going to let you!"
 "Oh, really, Nugent—"
 "I wonder what it was Alonzo was going to say, though," said Bob Cherry, after a pause. "I suppose it wasn't anything of any consequence, of course."

"Oh, only some rot!"
 "A suggestion that we should play him in the Remove eleven, perhaps," said Harry Wharton, laughing. "He hasn't given up the idea yet that he can play footer."

"The ha-ha-ha-fulness is terrific."
 "Well, it would be fun to watch him," said Nugent. "It was funny when he tried cricket, I know that!"
 "Ha, ha, ha!"

"Speaking of footer, we're playing the Upper Fourth on Saturday," said Harry Wharton, who was junior football captain. "I think we shall lick them."

And the juniors fell to discussing football matters, and the prospects of the Upper Fourth match, while they discussed also their viands. They were finished tea long before Billy Bunter. Bunter had a way of lingering at a tea-table and finishing up everything that was left on the dishes. He sometimes annexed quite a queer collection in this way; but all was grist that came to William George Bunter's mill—and he would contentedly finish his meal with half a savoy, a fragment of bacon, a cake, a cream puff, and a plate of jam. He was still busy when the others rose, and Bob Cherry stretched himself.

As he did so, he suddenly paused, and uttered an exclamation.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Careless bounders!"
 "Eh! What's the matter?" asked Harry.
 "Leaving your letters lying about the floor," said Bob Cherry.

He picked up an open letter that lay on the carpet, and tossed it upon the table.

Wharton picked it up.
 "It's not mine," said Wharton, glancing at it. "I don't know the handwriting—Great Scott!"

He stared blankly at the letter.
 "What on earth does this mean?" he exclaimed.

"What is it?"
 "Look at that letter!"

The chums looked at it. It was not addressed to anyone, and there was no address or date at the top of the sheet. The communication started thus:

"Sir,—Unless the money is sent to me to-day without fail, I shall call at Greyfriars to-morrow, Friday, at half-past six, and shall show you up before the whole school."

"ONE WHO KNOWS YOU."

The chums stared at the letter, and then at one another.
 "My only hat!" ejaculated Nugent.

"Great Scott!"
 "The great-Scottfulness is terrific!"

"It's a joke," said Bob Cherry.

Wharton nodded, and took up the letter in his hands, and turned it over and looked at it. There was no clue to the identity of the person who had written it, or to whom it had been written.

The paper was plain cream-laid notepaper of a cheap variety, and the writing was in common ink, and sloped backwards; a circumstance that struck the juniors at once. It looked as if the writer were disguising his hand.

"What on earth can it be?" exclaimed Harry Wharton.
 "Is it possible that somebody has written this, and planted it in this study for a joke?"

"It must be so," said Frank Nugent, with wide-open eyes.
 "It can't have been written seriously, that's a dead cert!"

"The dead-certfulness is terrific!" said Hurree Singh.
 "That is the letter of a blackmailing person, if it is genuine."

"It can't be!"
 "I don't know the writing," said Harry Wharton musingly. "If it's done for a joke, I suppose it's a Remove chap who's done it. Might be one of the Upper Fourth, though."

"It's a jape, of course!"

Harry turned the letter over in his fingers. The only possible explanation, seemingly, was that it was a "jape."

Yet—

"But how did it get here?" he exclaimed.
 Bob Cherry uttered an exclamation.

"Alonzo, of course!"
 "Alonzo?"

"That's it—Alonzo! He must have dropped it here when Inky was showing him the jiu-jitsu, and we never noticed, as we had tea then."

"But what on earth could Alonzo be doing with it?" exclaimed Nugent. "I suppose he isn't being blackmailed, is he?"

"No," said Harry, laughing, "he's being japed. This is another of the practical jokes the fellows are always playing."

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EVERY TUESDAY, The "Magnet" LIBRARY. ONE PENNY.

on Alonzo, and that's what he came to talk to us about, as sure as a gun."

"My hat! Of course!"
 "My esteemed chum has smitten the correct nail exactly upon its honourable head," said Hurree Singh, with a nod.

"Let's go and look for the Duffer, and comfort him," said Bob Cherry laughing. "If he's received this letter, and taken it seriously, he may be in a blue funk about it."

The juniors left the study to look for Alonzo, with the exception of Billy Bunter. Bunter was not yet finished with the crumbs that remained on the rich man's table. As the chums of the Remove came down the stairs Mr. Quelch opened his study door. He signed to the juniors to stop.

"I have lost a letter, Wharton," he said. "Have you lads seen one lying about anywhere in the passages?"

Wharton started.

It was very curious that Mr. Quelch should have lost a letter when they had just found one in their study—a very remarkable coincidence. But, of course, they could not connect the absurd letter from "One Who Knows You" with the letter that their Form-master had lost.

"No, sir," said Harry. "We will look for it if you like, sir."

"H'm! I have asked the maids to do so, but you can keep your eyes open, and let me know if you hear anything of it."

"Certainly, sir."

The juniors went on their way. They asked several fellows for information respecting Alonzo Todd, but none was forthcoming. One of the fellows was Vernon-Smith, and he scowled when he was asked.

"I don't know where the fool is!" he growled. "I know he's busted the bookcase in my study, and he'll jolly well have to pay for it. I don't care where he is, either."

"Nice, polite chap, that Smith," Bob Cherry remarked.
 "What I like about him best, after his nice, prepossessing face, is his Chesterfield manners. He—"

But the Bounder of Greyfriars swung angrily away without waiting for the rest. Dutton was standing in the doorway, looking out into the Close, and Harry Wharton tapped him on the shoulder. Dutton was the deaf junior, and his affliction was an affliction not to himself alone.

"Seen Todd?" asked Wharton.
 "Eh?"

"Seen Todd?"
 "Oh, do I?" said Dutton aggressively. "So would you, perhaps, if you were slightly deaf, and fellows pretended you were stone deaf, and didn't speak to you."

Wharton stared.

"What's that?" he asked.
 "Rats, eh? If you say rats to me—"

"I didn't say rats. I said—"
 "I'll jolly well punch yours if you try!"

"Look here, Dutton—"

"Don't shout at me," said Dutton. "I'm not deaf. I'm just a trifle hard of hearing, but I hear perfectly well if you only speak distinctly. That's all I require—just speak distinctly."

"Have you seen Todd?" bawled Wharton.
 "That's the third time you've said that to me," said Dutton.

"If you think I'm going to be slanged just because I'm a trifle deaf you're mistaken. Take that!"

And Wharton took it—on the nose—before he knew what was coming, and he sat down suddenly on the steps.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

A Visitor for Mr. Quelch.

"HA, HA, HA!" roared Bob Cherry.

He couldn't help it. It was so absurd to see Wharton knocked down for asking a harmless and inoffensive question, that Bob Cherry couldn't have restrained that roar to save his life.

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 Wharton sat on the steps, dazed for a moment. He clasped his nose, which felt as if it had been knocked against a brick wall.

"Oh!" he gasped.
 "Ha, ha, ha!"

"You cackling asses! What did you do that for, Dutton?" shouted Wharton, springing to his feet wrathfully.

"I'll jolly well do it again if you tell me I seem odd!" said Dutton, with equal wrath. "So would you if you were deaf and fellows made it an excuse to leave you out of things."

"Seem odd?" repeated Wharton. "I never said you seemed odd."

"If you say that again—"

"You howling chump!" yelled Harry. "I asked you if you had seen Todd?"

"Eh?"

"Seen Todd?"

"Oh, I see!" said Dutton. "Seen Todd? I didn't understand. I'm sorry. But it wouldn't have happened if you had spoken distinctly. No need to shout—just speak distinctly, and I shall hear you all right."

Wharton rubbed his nose wrathfully. He was greatly inclined to give the deaf junior a licking on the spot, as he could easily have done. But he remembered that Dutton laboured under disadvantages, and held his hand.

"Well, have you seen Todd, now you understand at last?" he exclaimed.

"Passed? No, I didn't see him pass."

"Have you seen him?"

Dutton looked puzzled.

"Of course I sing hymns in church," he replied. "We weren't talking about singing hymns. You were speaking of Todd just now."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"My only hat!" gasped Wharton. "I shall deserve what I get if I ask this chap a question again. Seen Todd?"

"Oh, seen Todd? No, I haven't."

The Famous Four walked out into the Close, Wharton rubbing his nose, and the others grinning. Wharton did not gain. The humour of the matter did not strike him as yet, and was not likely to while his nose ached.

"Noble youth!" said Bulstrode, the bully of the Remove, who was lounging on the steps, with his usual sneer. "He takes a blow without returning it! Good little Georgie in the story-book will have to hide his diminished head now."

Wharton flushed crimson.

"Dutton hit me by mistake," he said. "He thought I was getting at him, and a chap who would get at a deaf fellow ought to be hit. I've seen you doing it often enough."

Bulstrode laughed.

"Why didn't you turn the other cheek?" he asked.

Wharton stopped and turned back, with a glint in his eyes.

"Look here, Bulstrode," he said quietly. "I took that punch from Dutton, but I won't take any cheek from you. You're hinting that I was afraid, and you know that's a lie, and if you care to put it to the test come into the gym. with me for a few minutes."

"Oh, rats!" said Bulstrode. And he turned away.

"No takers!" grinned Bob Cherry.

Wharton frowned as he rejoined his chums.

"Well, it was a rotten thing trying to make me fight Dutton," he said. "Dutton doesn't mean any harm, and he can't help being deaf."

"Hark!" exclaimed Nugent.

The time came chiming out from the clock-tower. It was the half-hour—half-past six.

"Half-past six!" said Bob Cherry. "What about it?"

"That's the time mentioned in the letter."

"By Jove!" said Harry. "So it is!"

"See if there's anything in it now," remarked Nugent.

"The letter says to-morrow—Friday—so it was written yesterday if it's genuine, as to-day's Friday. If there's anything in it the chap will arrive now, as it's half-past six."

Harry Wharton laughed.

"There's nothing in it," he said. "You'll see that there won't be any arrival."

"So I believe."

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Look there!"

A man in an overcoat and a bowler hat came striding in at the gates. He was a stranger to the juniors.

They looked at him, and then at one another.

"Well, my hat!" said Bob Cherry. "That's another giddy coincidence. The air seems full of coincidences to-day."

"The coincidentfulness is terrific!"

Wharton looked puzzled.

"Well, it's odd," he said. "But that doesn't prove there's anything in the letter. Chaps have come to Greyfriars before now."

"Let's see who he wants."

"Good egg!"

The stranger was coming straight towards the house up the drive. He was a stalwart man, with a pointed moustache, that gave him a somewhat foreign look, though that was the only thing about him that was foreign.

Nugent lifted his cap.

"You are looking for someone, sir?" he asked.

The man glanced at him.

"I have come to see Mr. Quelch," he said, in a sharp, abrupt voice. "Are you aware whether he is at home?"

The juniors could not help starting.

As they looked at the stranger's face they did not like it. It was commonplace enough as to features, but the eyes were very keen, and seemed hard.

"Yes, sir, he's at home," said Nugent. "Shall I show you in?"

"If you like."

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Nugent led the caller into the house, and tapped at the door of Mr. Quelch's study, leaving the stranger standing in the hall. There was really no reason why Nugent should take Trotter's duties upon himself in this way, save that he was startled and perplexed by the curious incident, and wanted to be quite sure that the blackmailing letter was not really addressed to Mr. Quelch. The Removites respected their Form-master very highly, and the mere possibility of such a thing was a shock to them.

Nugent tapped at Mr. Quelch's door.

"Come in!" called out the Form-master.

The junior entered.

Mr. Quelch glanced quickly at him, as if expecting to see someone else.

"What do you want, Nugent?" he asked rather sharply.

"I have no time to spare now; I am expecting a caller."

"Gentleman wishes to see you, sir."

"Oh, indeed! Ask him to step in."

"Certainly, sir."

Nugent returned to the hall and requested the stranger to follow him. Mr. Quelch was standing facing the open door. Nugent saw a shadow darken on his face as the new-comer entered the study.

"Come in, Croker!" he said.

Nugent retired and shut the door. His face was quite excited as he rejoined his chums in the Close.

"Well?" said Bob Cherry.

"He's gone in to see Mr. Quelch, and his name's Croker," said Frank. "What the dickens does it all mean? Quelch didn't look pleased to see him."

The juniors were silent.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Todd Thinks It His Duty.

THE silence lasted some minutes. The Remove chums did not know what to think. Harry Wharton broke it at last.

"It's impossible!" he exclaimed.

"It's very odd," said Nugent slowly. "Mr. Quelch loses a letter. We find a letter announcing that a blackmailer is going to call at half-past six. At half-past six Mr. Quelch receives a visitor, whom he doesn't like—I saw that by his expression. Now, putting all those things together—"

"You think this is the letter Quelch lost?"

"I think it looks as if it were."

"My hat!" said Bob Cherry. "It fits together, you know. It's jolly queer, to say the least of it."

Harry Wharton nodded.

"It is queer," he said. "But—but there can't be anything in it. It's not our bizney, anyhow. Mr. Quelch's private affairs are nothing to us."

"You forget—we've got the letter."

"The letter!"

"Yes," said Nugent. "If that letter's Mr. Quelch's, we've no right to keep it. It ought to be returned to him."

Wharton shook his head hastily.

"Impossible."

"But—"

"It's impossible, I tell you. This is a blackmailing letter, if it's genuine. Can't you see what an insult it is to Mr. Quelch if we assumed for a moment that it belonged to him?"

"Well, that's so, too," said Bob slowly. "But if it does belong to him—"

"I can imagine his look when we told him we thought so," said Harry drily. "Of course, we can't assume anything of the sort."

"Let's find Todd," said Nugent abruptly. "That bouncer ought to be able to explain it. I'm certain he dropped the letter in our study."

"Good! That's the best thing we can do."

And the search for Alonzo was resumed. He was discovered at last reading a book in the woodshed. He blinked at the chums of the Remove when they found him.

"What on earth are you doing here?" demanded Harry.

"Reading," said Alonzo meekly.

"I mean what are you reading here for? It's jolly cold sitting still here, I should think."

"You are quite right, Wharton. But I fear that I cannot return to the house yet without having a dispute with Vernon-Smith, and my Uncle Benjamin has always impressed upon me to avoid disputes if possible."

"Did you drop a letter in my study?" asked Harry Wharton abruptly.

Todd's hands went to his pockets at once. The action was sufficient to show that he had had the letter.

He felt through all his pockets, and looked dismayed.

"Dear me!" he exclaimed. "I must have dropped it. I meant to show it to you fellows in discussing the matter. But—but it may cause great trouble if it is found by anyone. I trust you fellows have picked up the letter."

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Alonzo Todd got out of the bully's study in record time, and the poker crashed on the door-post behind him as he fled. (See page 4.)

"We picked up this." Wharton held out the letter. Todd looked immensely relieved.

"That is it!" he exclaimed. "This is very fortunate. I had not noticed that I had dropped it. It must have slipped from my pocket when I was—when Hurree Singh was showing me those ju-jitsu tricks."

The juniors grinned. "Very likely," agreed Harry. "Now, who does this letter belong to?"

"Mr. Quelch."

"Mr. Quelch! You are sure?"

"Quite sure."

"Then how did you get hold of it?" demanded Wharton.

"That was what I was about to explain to you, and I intended to ask your counsel, when Hurree Singh interrupted THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 139.

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me by showing me those ju-jitsu tricks," said Alonzo. "Those tricks, I am sure, were very valuable, but they were a little ill-timed. I hope Hurree Singh will not think me ungrateful for saying so, after all the trouble he took."

The nabob chuckled.

"Certainly not," he said. "I shall be happy to repeatedly show those same tricks whenever the esteemed and fat-headed Todd visits the study."

"You are very kind, but—"

"Look here," said Harry Wharton abruptly. "How do you know this letter belongs to Mr. Quelch?"

"Because he dropped it."

"You are sure he dropped it?"

"Yes, quite sure. He mentioned that he had dropped a letter somewhere—in some of the passages, you know—and I went to look for it. He did not ask me to do so, but I always

A Splendid School Tale of Harry Wharton & Co., and Alonzo Todd. By FRANK RICHARDS.

try to be obliging, you know. My Uncle Benjamin has always impressed upon me to be as obliging as possible, and my Uncle Benjamin knows—"

"Never mind your Uncle Benjamin now. You are sure that this is the letter that Mr. Quelch dropped?"

"Of course I am. He said he must have dropped it somewhere between the Form-room and his study, but that he had looked along the passage without finding it. Then Skinner and I looked, and I found it."

Harry started.

"Skinner?"

"Yes, Skinner."

Wharton looked distrustful. Skinner was the practical joker of the Remove, and he never cared whether his jokes were ill-natured or not. And many and many a time Skinner had practised upon the simplicity of Alonzo Todd.

"You are sure you found it, and not Skinner?" he asked.

"Oh, certainly!"

"Did you show it to Skinner?"

"No. I had left him at the end of the passage, you see, looking in a different direction. Skinner is not the sort of fellow I should consult in a matter like this," said Todd, with a wise shake of the head. "It would hardly do, you know. He would only see the chance of making some joke out of it. I consulted Bulstrode, but he only laughed. He thought I was joking him."

"Look here, Todd, if you thought that letter was Mr. Quelch's, why didn't you take it to him?"

"Well, you see, I had to look at it to see," explained Todd. "So I had to read it—just as you've done, I suppose. There's no name on it. Well, I know it's Quelch's letter, but it's not a pleasant thing taking a letter of that sort to a Form-master. He'll know I've read it, and that I know he's being blackmailed."

"I suppose so."

"Of course, I don't want to keep it. I came to your study to consult you about it, and then Hurrec Singh—"

"Yes, yes. Look here, it must be a lot of spoof, and Skinner's at the bottom of it," said Harry Wharton, wrinkling his brows. "It's utterly impossible to imagine that anybody is trying to blackmail Mr. Quelch."

"Yet it's odd, that chap coming at just the time mentioned in the letter."

"True."

"And Mr. Quelch having lost a letter just before this was found," Nugent went on thoughtfully. "If there's another letter, that hasn't been found, has it?"

"N-n-no. It's odd."

"It's very odd," said Alonzo. "My idea was that we should put our heads together and rescue Mr. Quelch somehow from the clutches of the blackmailer, you know."

"Ass!"

"My dear Wharton—"

"Look here, you chaps, we've no right to assume that this ridiculous letter is Quelch's, and I don't care to take it to him, for one," said Harry. "Better let the matter drop. That's what I think."

"But what shall I do with the letter?" asked Alonzo.

"Oh, eat it!"

"That would be an absurd proceeding," said Alonzo, who never saw a joke. "I am not hungry, and it would not be at all nutritious. Upon the whole, Wharton, I think it is my duty to look into the matter. My Uncle Benjamin—"

"Hang Benjamin!"

"My Uncle Benjamin," pursued Todd, unheeding, "has always impressed upon me to help others, and to be useful and obliging in every possible way. I think it is my duty to take up this matter, and save Mr. Quelch somehow from the clutches of the blackmailer."

"You ass! Better let it alone."

"My sense of duty—"

"Rats!"

The chums of the Remove walked away, very much disturbed. Alonzo Todd stared after them, apparently very much surprised.

"Dear me!" he murmured. "I must say I think Wharton somewhat undutiful in this matter. But he has never had the great advantage of being trained up in the way he should go by Uncle Benjamin."

Harry Wharton & Co. entered the house. They were disturbed and troubled in their minds. They had a great liking and respect for their Form-master, and if he was really in trouble they would feel it seriously. It seemed impossible that the letter could be genuine, and yet—

"My hat!" exclaimed Bob Cherry, in a suppressed voice.

Without the slightest intention of watching, the chums of the Remove were witnesses of a curious incident as they went towards the stairs.

Mr. Quelch's study door was open, and he was standing there, taking leave of the stranger who had visited him. There was a deep cloud upon Mr. Quelch's face. He looked

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more worried and troubled than the juniors had ever seen him before.

"Then I will call to-morrow with the papers," said the sallow gentleman with the pointed moustache, whose name was Croker.

"Very well," said Mr. Quelch.

"The papers will make all clear."

"Very well."

"Good-evening, sir."

"Good evening."

The man hesitated a moment.

"I'm sorry for this," he said. "But all in the way of business, you know. Well, well, to-morrow, then."

And he put on his hat and left. Mr. Quelch went back into his study without seeing the juniors, and closed the door.

Harry Wharton & Co. went on up the stairs with serious and almost scared faces. What did all that mean, unless it was that the letter was genuine, and that Mr. Quelch, their Form-master was in the hands of a blackmailer?

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

A Lesson for Smith.

"YOU—you clumsy rotter! I've found you, then!"

It was Vernon-Smith who uttered the words. He had suddenly come upon the Duffer of Greyfriars as the latter came down the passage towards the junior common-room. Alonzo Todd had stayed out of the Bouncer's way a long time, to give him ample time for his anger to cool, but he could not remain out of doors for ever. But Vernon-Smith's anger had not cooled.

His heavy grasp fell upon Alonzo's shoulder, and brought him to a stop. Alonzo looked at him in a deprecating manner.

"My dear Smith—" he began.

"You clumsy ass! You smashed my bookcase!"

"I'm so sorry—"

"You'll pay for it," said Vernon-Smith, "and you'll take a licking, too. It will cost ten shillings to repair it."

"I'm so sorry—"

"Ten shillings, please."

"I should be very glad, indeed, to pay the money," said Todd, "only, you see, I haven't any. I have expended my whole week's pocket-money, and I owe Wharton a shilling, and Cherry sixpence, and Linley threepence. So, you see—"

"Are you going to pay for that bookcase?"

"I should be very pleased to do so, but, as I am explaining, I—"

"Yes, or no?"

"My dear Smith—"

Vernon-Smith's grasp closed tighter upon Alonzo, and he dragged him into a window recess. Then he showed that he carried a malacca cane in his right hand. Todd looked at the cane in alarm.

He did not understand the spiteful nature of the Bouncer, and he could not realise that Smith really meant to hurt him.

"My dear Smith—" he began feebly.

"Take that, you rotter!"

"Ow!"

"And that!"

"Yow!"

Alonzo Todd was not an athlete, but he was not a coward either. Although he could not put up much of a fight, he was not to be bullied with impunity.

He grasped the Bouncer in his turn, and they struggled.

But Vernon-Smith was the stronger. He forced Todd back upon the window seat, and then the cane rose and fell on Todd's shoulders as if the Bouncer were beating a carpet.

"Oh!" gasped Todd. "Yow! Beast!"

Thwack, thwack, thwack!

The Bouncer was in a savage temper, and he laid the cane on savagely. Todd, in his struggles, had kicked his shins, and Vernon-Smith did not like pain.

"What—what is this?"

It was a sudden, stern voice in the passage.

Vernon-Smith dropped his hand, and swung round in alarm, to find the stern eyes of Mr. Quelch fastened upon him.

The Remove-master gazed at him in angry amazement. He knew that there was sometimes bullying among the juniors, and Bulstrode was the worst offender in that respect. But he had never seen Bulstrode guilty of brutality like this.

"Smith! How dare you?" he almost gasped.

The Bouncer looked sullen.

"He broke my bookcase!" he muttered.

"That is no reason why you should treat him in this brutal manner," said Mr. Quelch. "You have been a disgrace to

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the school ever since you entered it, Smith. Follow me to my study, sir, and you will experience a little of the pain you are so willing to inflict upon others. It will be a much-needed lesson."

"I—"

"Not a word. Follow me."

The Bounder gave the gasping Todd a furious glance, and followed Mr. Quelch. Alonzo remained gasping in the window recess.

Mr. Quelch entered his study, and Vernon-Smith followed him in. The Remove-master selected a strong cane, the Bounder eyeing him sullenly.

"Smith," said Mr. Quelch, fixing his eyes upon the sullen-faced junior, "you have acted in a brutal manner. You have not had the grace to make even a pretence of feeling sorry for it. I shall appeal to your feelings in the only way possible."

The Bounder did not reply.

"Hold out your hand, Smith."

The Bounder obeyed.

The cane descended with a powerful swish, and the Bounder was almost doubled up with pain.

"The other hand, Smith."

The other hand came out, and was swished. Then the first hand again, and then the second once more. Smith was very white by this time. He could not bear pain, and Mr. Quelch was laying on the strokes hard. And he was not finished yet.

"Again, Smith."

Vernon-Smith backed away.

"I—I won't!" he muttered.

"What!"

"I'll complain to the Head."

Mr. Quelch set his lips.

"Hold out your hand, Smith," he said, in a low and very distinct voice.

The Bounder of Greyfriars put his hands behind him.

Mr. Quelch did not speak again.

He grasped Vernon-Smith by the collar, and swung him round, and made play with the cane upon his back.

The Bounder struggled, and kicked, and yelled, but the iron grasp did not relax, and the cane rose and fell till his struggles ceased, and his yells died away in blind gasps.

"Now," said Mr. Quelch quietly, "you will beg my pardon, Smith, for your words just now!"

Vernon-Smith gritted his teeth.

"I won't!"

"Very well."

Swish, swish, swish!

The cane rose and fell, hard and harder. The Bounder writhed under the keen infliction. He had seldom experienced anything like this before.

"Oh!" he gasped at last. "Stop! Oh! I—I beg your pardon, sir!"

Mr. Quelch released him.

"Very well," he said, "you can go, Smith. But, mind, you had better learn not to show impertinence to your Form-master again. And if I discover you bullying Todd again, Smith, I shall repeat this lesson! Go!"

And the Bounder slunk from the study.

He went down the passage, groaning, aching in every limb, his face white and savage, his eyes gleaming. In the dusk at the end he paused, clenching his aching hands, and breathing thick and fast.

"Wait till my chance comes, that's all," he muttered. "I'll get even with you!"

And he ground his teeth over the threat.

Alonzo Todd came along the passage. Todd was of a very forgiving nature, and he was pained by the knowledge that the Bounder was to be punished, partly through him. He blinked at the writhing junior in the dusk, with great sympathy.

"I'm so sorry, Smith," he said. "Of course, it was your own fault for being such a beast; but I'm so sorry. I—"

"Get away!"

"But I want to say—"

"Let me alone, hang you!" said the Bounder savagely.

"Get away, or—"

He looked so savage that Alonzo thought it better to get away, and his sympathy remained unuttered. The Bounder went slowly up to his study. He was aching with pain, but more than even his sufferings the thought of revenge was in his mind—revenge upon the master who had justly punished him.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Alonzo Plays Football.

"FINE morning!" said Bob Cherry, the first out of bed in the Remove dormitory the next day, as he looked from the window.

Harry Wharton sat up in bed.

"Good!" he said. "I was afraid it was going to rain last night."

"It hasn't! Fine afternoon for the footer match, and we'll

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wipe up the ground with the Upper Fourth," said Bob Cherry gleefully.

"Faith, and we will," said Micky Desmond, and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh volunteered the opinion that the wipefulness of the esteemed ground would be terrific.

The juniors tumbled out of bed cheerfully enough, with the exception of Vernon-Smith. The Bounder of Greyfriars was still sore and aching from his thrashing of the previous evening. Mr. Quelch had done that thrashing well, and Smith was likely to feel the effects of it for some time to come.

"Let's have a punt about on the ground before brekker," Frank Nugent suggested. "Good egg!"

Todd looked round as he was lacing his boots.

"You are going to have some football practice?" he asked.

"Yes, Toddy."

"Good! I'll come."

"You can come and look on if you like."

"I don't mean that," said Todd. "You see, I am going to take up football seriously. Now that it has fallen through about my playing for the Courtfield Rovers, owing to Bunter's absurd conduct—"

"Oh, really, Todd—"

"I am going to play here. I think you ought to give me a chance for the eleven, Wharton. I have heard fellows say that you put your own personal friends in the Form team—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" interrupted Bulstrode.

Wharton turned red.

"Who have you heard say that, Todd?" he asked.

"I will not mention names, Wharton, but I have certainly heard it said."

"I should like the chap who said it to repeat it to me where I can answer him," said Harry Wharton, with a curl of the lip.

No one accepted the invitation.

"You see," said Todd, "I don't believe it really, you know—"

"I don't care a rap whether you do or not."

"You ought to care," said Todd, with a solemn shake of the head. "My Uncle Benjamin says—"

"Oh, confound your Uncle Benjamin!"

"My Uncle Benjamin says that we should all care for the opinions of others, and cultivate a good reputation," said Todd. "However, that is not the point. You have been suspected of keeping places in the eleven for your own friends, you know, and I think it would be a good thing for you to give me a chance. I have a feeling that I could play football remarkably well if I had a chance."

Harry Wharton laughed.

"About as well as you played cricket," he remarked. "But you can come down to the ground if you like, and I'll give you ten minutes."

"Thanks so much."

And Alonzo Todd put on his football things, as Harry Wharton & Co. had done, and donned a coat, and accompanied the chums of the Remove down to the footer ground. And the greater part of the Remove followed, anticipating fun.

Many of the Upper Fourth fellows were already out, and Temple, Dabney & Co. were punting a ball about on the junior ground. They grinned at the sight of the Removites with Alonzo.

When Alonzo removed his coat, he displayed limbs that could not, by any stretch of exaggeration, be called athletic.

His calves were of remarkable slimness, in fact, and there was not much flesh, and less muscle, on any of his limbs.

"Where did you pick that up, Wharton?" asked Temple, coming over towards the Removites. "In a raffle?"

"Oh, rather!" said Dabney.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Going to play him against us this afternoon?" pursued Temple humorously. "You ought to give us a chance, you know."

And the Fourth-Formers yelled again.

"No," said Harry Wharton, laughing, too. "Todd's not in the eleven yet. He thinks it's the proper place for him, but he can't get the rest of us to agree."

"I am not above receiving some instruction, Wharton," said Todd, blinking round. "My Uncle Benjamin says that one should always be ready to receive instruction. You have a peculiar usage which I believe is called wobbling."

"Eh?"

"Will you show me how to wobble?"

"Wobble?"

"Yes," said Todd, "I believe it is an important branch. I should like you to instruct me how to wobble."

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

"I expect you'll wobble enough when you start playing," said Wharton. "You won't want instructing in that, Toddy."

"My dear Wharton—"

"In fact, you will be the most wobbly footballer ever seen at Greyfriars," said Bob Cherry. "You're all right on that score."

"Perhaps I have not got the term correctly," said Todd reflectively. "Perhaps I should have said wibble."

"Wibble."

"Is not that the correct expression? Perhaps I should have said dibble?"

"Dibble."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Bob Cherry. "He means dribble."

"Dribble! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yes, that is the term," said Todd, beaming round. "I knew it was something or other, you know. I was quite sure about that. I believe dribbling is a rather important branch, and I should like to be instructed in it."

"Oh, let's see him dribble!" murmured Ogilvy joyfully.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Wharton laughed. Todd was about as fit to play footer as to steer an aeroplane, but if he wanted instruction, there was no reason why he shouldn't have it.

"Watch me a minute," said Harry. "That's better than yards of talking."

"Oh, certainly!"

Harry dribbled the ball a distance, then came round, and dribbled it back towards Todd, in his usual neat manner. The Duffer of Greyfriars watched him carefully.

"Dear me!" he said. "Is that dribbling—I mean, dribbling? It seems to me very easy. I think the difficulty of playing this game well has been greatly overrated."

"Go ahead, Todd!"

"Let's see him dribble."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Wharton placed the ball for Alonzo, and Alonzo began to dribble it as he had seen Wharton do.

Somehow or other, however, the ball did not seem to obey his feet as it obeyed Wharton's.

The juniors yelled as he started.

Todd's right leg somehow became entangled with his left, or else his left with his right, it was not quite clear which. Be that as it may, they became entangled together, and Todd sat down.

Bump!

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Todd blinked round him breathlessly.

"Dear me! I have fallen down!"

The juniors shrieked again.

Harry Wharton and Frank dragged the Duffer to his feet. Todd was looking very dazed and gaspy.

"Better chuck it!" said Harry, laughing.

Todd shook his head.

"Certainly not, Wharton. If at first you don't succeed, you know, try again, as my Uncle Benjamin has always impressed upon me. I think, however, I will leave the dribbling to another time. I will practice kicking now."

"But—"

"Please let me have a try at goal."

"Oh, let him!" said Bob Cherry. "This is better than practice. He's worth a whole bushel of comic papers."

"My dear Cherry—"

"Kick away, Toddy."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Wharton laughed, and placed the ball directly in front of goal for the Duffer to take his kick. It was a kick that the veriest novice ought to have been successful with; but good fortune did not attend the Duffer of Greyfriars.

He made a careful calculation, and launched out his foot. That foot ought to have caught the football fair and square, and launched it through the goal. But it didn't. It missed by inches, and the impetus of the kick carried it high into the air, and Alonzo Todd came down upon his back with a terrific bump.

"Ow!" gasped Alonzo.

And the juniors yelled, those of them who were not lying on the grass and kicking up their feet in helpless merriment.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

The Bounder Learns Something.

ALONZO was picked up, decidedly bumped and breathless. He leaned upon Wharton's shoulder, and gasped and gasped for breath, as if he would never cease. The juniors were yelling.

"Oh, dear!" gasped Alonzo. "I—I feel quite shaken up."

"You've made a dent in the ground," said Skinner solemnly. "We shall have to get the gardener to look after it."

"Oh, dear! I'm so sorry."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

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"I do not think I shall do any more practice this morning," said Todd. "I feel a little knocked up."

"Knocked down, I should think. Ha, ha, ha!"

"Upon the whole, I will retire," said Todd.

"Oh, stick to it!" grinned Skinner. "You remember what your Uncle Benjamin says, if at first you don't succeed, play a trump, or something of that sort."

"Not exactly, Skinner. He says—"

"Well, never mind what he says. Go ahead."

"No, enough is as good as a feast, as my Uncle Benjamin has impressed upon me many times."

"My hat! Your Uncle Benjamin seems a great authority upon both sides of a question!" exclaimed Hazeldene.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Alonzo Todd retired from the ground. Enough was certainly as good as a feast, and he had sufficient aches in his bones to last him for some time.

When the juniors came in to change their clothes before breakfast, they found Alonzo Todd in the dormitory, with a considerable smell of embrocation to keep him company.

"Feeling all right?" asked Wharton.

"Not quite all right," said Todd cautiously. "I am suffering from a considerable amount of aching and pain, but I trust I shall bear it with fortitude."

"Did Uncle Ben teach you those words?" inquired Bob Cherry.

"My dear Cherry—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Upon the whole, I shall leave football alone for a little," said Todd reflectively. "I have the other matter to attend to concerning Mr. Quelch."

"Shut up, you ass!" said Wharton.

"Hallo, what's that?" asked Bulstrode.

"Nothing."

"I have already told Bulstrode," said Todd. "I asked his advice. He treated the whole matter in a spirit of levity."

"Oh, that!" said Bulstrode, laughing.

"It is not a laughing matter, Bulstrode."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors went down to breakfast. Alonzo Todd wore a very thoughtful look, but whether he was thinking of the supposed trouble that hung over Mr. Quelch, or whether it was his damage on the football field that troubled him, one cannot say. He was very silent and very thoughtful, and he was just the same in class during the morning.

Harry Wharton & Co. were a little thoughtful on the subject of the mysterious letter, too. Circumstances seemed to have combined to make it appear as if the letter were genuine, and as if it belonged to Mr. Quelch. If that were the case, the Form-master was in trouble; but they could not help him. The question was, whether they ought to assume that the letter was his, and give it to him. If it was not his, giving it to him would be an insult he would not be likely to forgive. When the class was dismissed for the morning recess at eleven, Harry Wharton paused in passing the master's desk, ere quitting the Form-room.

"May I ask if you have found the letter, sir?" he asked.

"The one you mentioned yesterday you had lost, sir?"

Mr. Quelch shook his head.

"I have not found it, Wharton. You have heard nothing of it, I suppose. You may keep your eyes open, but I think it has probably been destroyed in some way."

"Yes, sir."

And Harry left the Form-room. The letter had not been found. Was it the same letter that was now in Alonzo Todd's possession? How could he find out?

He joined his chums in the Close, and they retired to a quiet corner in the Cloisters to talk the matter over. There was little to be said, but Harry wanted to arrive at some decision and dismiss the matter from his mind.

"Quelch hasn't found his letter," he said. "Whether it's the one Todd's got, I'm blessed if I know. But I shouldn't care to show such a letter to Quelch, or say I thought it belonged to him."

"The whole thing fits together so well," said Nugent thoughtfully. "The letter says the chap will be here at half-past six, Friday—well, a chap came. If the letter were spoof, and a practical joke, say, of Skinner's, how could Skinner know that a chap was coming to visit Mr. Quelch in advance?"

"Blessed if I know."

"Then there was what Mr. Quelch said to that man Croker as he was leaving, and what Croker said. Croker said he'd come to-day with the papers, and Quelch looked as down in the mouth as if he'd just lost a fiver and found a threepenny bit. You all noticed it."

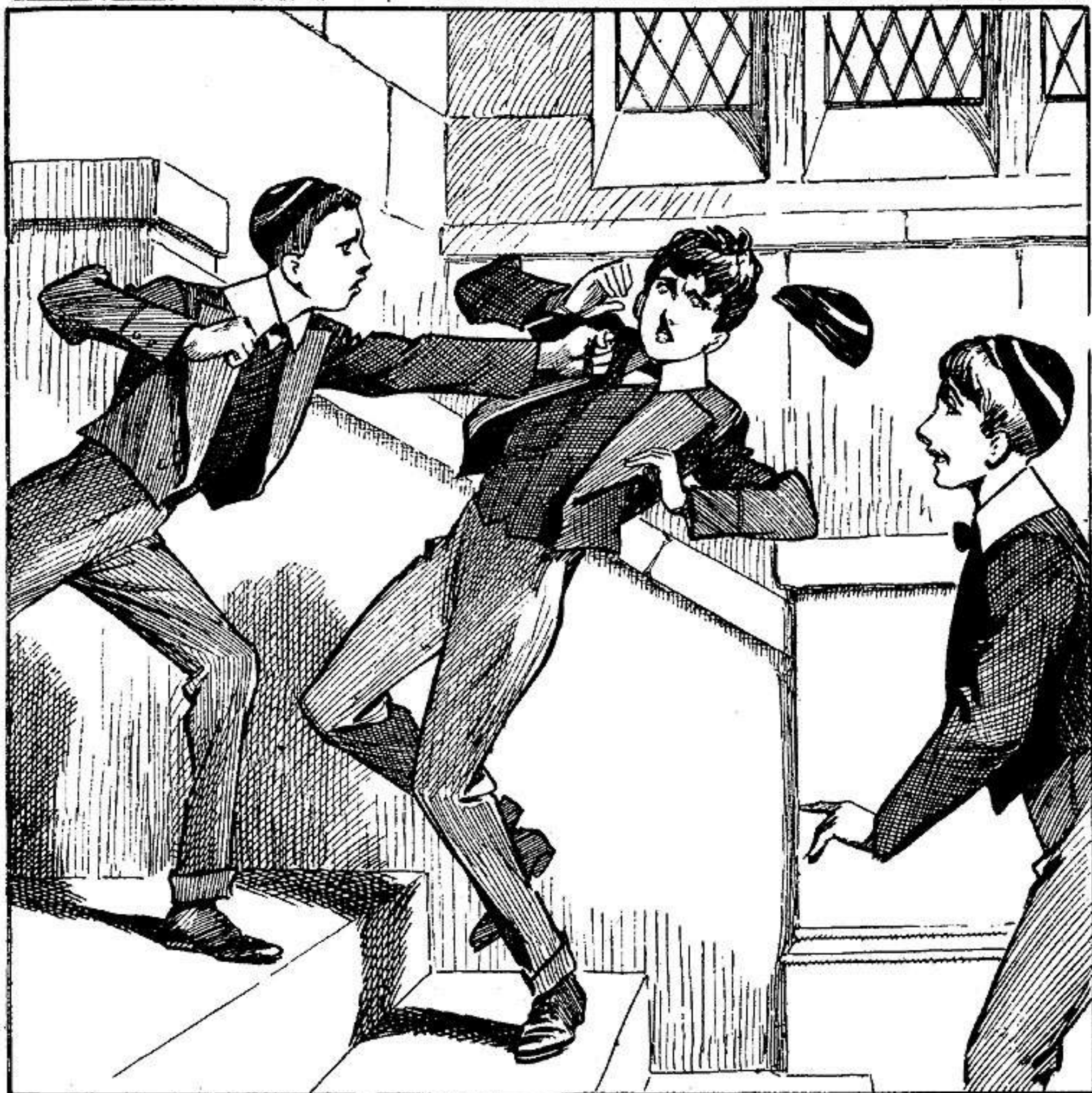
"The noticefulness was terrific."

"Well, then—"

"Hang it all!" said Bob Cherry. "It looks—but, then, look here, a chap can't be blackmailed unless he's done something against the law, can he?"

"I suppose not."

THE NEXT STORY-PAPER TO BUY THIS WEEK IS "THE MARVEL."



"TAKE THAT!" said Dutton. And Harry Wharton took it—on the nose—before he knew what was coming, and he sat down suddenly on the steps. (See page 5.)

"Well, we know jolly well that Quelch is as straight as a string."

"Of course, but—"

"There's no but in the case, my dear chap."

"No, but he may have fallen into some trap or other—such things do happen. I believe, too, that blackmailers generally screw money out of innocent people who've got into suspicious circumstances somehow."

"H'm! That's possible, of course."

"I'm blessed if I know what to make of it!" exclaimed Harry Wharton. "I wish we hadn't heard a word of the matter. Look here, let's go and see Skinner."

"Well, that's a good idea."

The chums of the Remove left the Cloisters. As their footsteps died away, there was a slight sound among the old stone arches, and a youth came cautiously out into view. It was the Bounder of Greyfriars.

Vernon-Smith, unknown to the juniors, had been in the Cloisters the whole time, and he had heard every word of the discussion.

And the glitter in the Bounder's eyes showed that he was already thinking of some use he could put his knowledge to—

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NEXT
WEEK: **THE CLIFF HOUSE GUEST.**

some harmful use, of course. The Bounder was not likely to take the same view as Harry Wharton & Co.

Quite unconscious of the fact that the Bounder now shared the secret, Harry Wharton and his chums went to look for Skinner. Skinner was not to be seen out of doors, and they looked in the studies, and found him with Bulstrode. Bulstrode and Skinner were laughing together, as if over some good joke.

Harry Wharton tapped at the door and opened it. The two juniors within were still laughing. Skinner hastily thrust a letter into his pocket as he saw Wharton.

"Hallo!" said Bulstrode.

"Hallo!" replied Harry. "What's the joke?"

"Oh, nothing!"

"I think I can guess what it is," said Wharton.

"Then you needn't ask."

"I believe Skinner has somehow been playing a rotten joke on Todd," said Harry, taking no notice of the rudeness in Bulstrode's manner.

Skinner looked surprised.

"I!" he exclaimed.

"Yes, you," said Harry warmly. "I don't know exactly

A Splendid School Tale of Harry Wharton & Co.,
and Alonzo Todd. By FRANK RICHARDS.

how you've worked it, but I believe you've planted a silly letter on Todd, and made him believe it belongs to somebody else, so as to make a fool of him."

"My dear chap—"

"Look here, did you write that letter?"

"What letter?"

"The one Todd found in the passage."

"Did Todd find a letter?"

"Weren't you with him at the time?"

Skinner seemed to make an effort to remember.

"Oh, you mean Quelch's letter? Yes, I believe Todd found it, and he wouldn't show it to me, for some reason of his own."

Harry looked at him steadily. Skinner's face was quite composed, and it was impossible for Wharton to be sure whether he was telling the truth or not.

"I believe you've been taking Todd in, and that you're trying to take me in," said Harry finally.

"I'd rather put you out than take you in," said Skinner affably.

"I don't see that you've got any right to come and slang a fellow in my study, Wharton," said Bulstrode. "There's the door."

"I believe Skinner's rotting Todd again."

"Well, it's not your bizney if he is."

"No, but this is a trick that may get Todd into real trouble. Why can't you tell the truth, Skinner, and let me explain to Todd. If it's a joke, it's gone far enough."

"If what's a joke?"

"You know what I mean."

"Blessed if I do!" yawned Skinner. "You're talking in riddles. Hasn't Todd given Mr. Quelch his letter?"

"You know he hasn't!"

"How should I know?"

"Why can't you tell the truth? You fellows have got some joke up between you," said Harry impatiently. "What was that paper you had in your hand when I came in?"

"Paper!" said Skinner vacantly.

"Yes, you shoved it in your pocket, quickly, too."

"How jolly observant you are," grinned Skinner. "It's a bill from a chap in Friardale for cycle repairs, if you particularly want to know."

"Rats!"

"You can see the bill," said Skinner, putting his hand into his pocket.

"That's not the pocket," said Harry sharply.

Skinner coloured a little, but he did not offer to put his hand into the right pocket. He laughed instead.

"You're jolly curious about my affairs," he remarked.

"I'm not curious; but I know you're rotting Todd in some way, and I don't want to see him fall foul of Mr. Quelch," said Harry, frowning. "A joke's a joke, but getting a chap into serious trouble with his Form-master is more than a joke."

"I suppose he's wound up," said Bulstrode, addressing space. "He won't leave off till he's run down."

"Ha, ha, ha!" cackled Skinner.

Wharton made an angry gesture. He was greatly inclined to go for the pair of them on the spot; but, after all, Skinner might be speaking the truth, and nothing would be improved by quarrelling, at all events. The chums of the Remove quitted the study. They left Bulstrode and Skinner chuckling.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

Vernon-Smith Is Misunderstood.

"TODD!"

Herbert Vernon-Smith spoke in his gentlest tone; and Vernon-Smith, Bounder as he certainly was, could be agreeable when he chose. But after the late happenings between them, Todd could not be expected to take Smith's sudden politeness at its face value.

Like the wise gentleman of old, who feared the Greeks when they brought gifts, Alonzo Todd was alarmed by the Bounder's unexpected cordiality. He retreated a pace or two, and brought into view a cricket-stump, which he had been carrying under his arm. He grasped it by one end in a businesslike manner.

"Pray keep your distance," he said, blinking at the Bounder. "I shall not allow you to approach me."

"But—"

"I am no match for you in personal encounter," said Todd. "If it were otherwise, you would not have attacked me, I am sure of that. You never attack Wharton, or Bulstrode, or any of the fellows who can stand up to you."

"I say—"

"I am not going to be bullied. My Uncle Benjamin—"

"You ass!"

"My Uncle Benjamin has always impressed upon me to be

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as peaceful and obliging as possible, but on the other hand—"

"I tell you—"

"On the other hand, never to submit to bullying," said Todd, unheeding. "I warn you, Smith, that if you do not let me alone, I shall strike you with this stump."

"But—"

"Pray go away!"

The Bounder controlled his temper with difficulty.

"I want to speak to you," he said.

"I do not desire the company of such a ruffianly person. My Uncle Benjamin has warned me to avoid bad associates."

"Bad associates!" roared the Bounder.

"Yes. I'm so sorry, but I cannot help regarding you as a bad associate for anybody. Look at the harm you have done Hazeldene since you have been here. You are making him as great a blackguard as yourself, you know. I trust you do not mind my speaking frankly."

To judge by the Bounder's expression at that moment, he did mind very much. But that he had a particular reason for being friendly to the Duffer of Greyfriars just then, he would have hurled himself at the cheerful Alonzo, in spite of the cricket-stump.

"Look here—" he began.

"Good-bye!" said Todd.

"But—"

"I desire to hold no communication with you whatever."

And the Duffer turned away, and walked off with his nose high in the air. Vernon-Smith stood staring after him for a few moments in speechless anger.

Then he ran after the Duffer of Greyfriars, and caught him by the shoulder.

"I say, Todd, you dummy—"

"Hands off!"

"But I say—"

"Very well, if you compel me, here it is," said Todd, and he swung round the cricket-stump, and brought it down upon Smith's back with a resounding thwack.

Vernon-Smith gave a furious yell.

"You utter idiot!"

"Let go, then!"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" exclaimed Bob Cherry, coming up with other fellows at the sound of Vernon-Smith's yell.

"Hallo! What's the trouble?"

"This confounded fool—"

"Phew! Better language, Smithy!"

"I'll use what language I like!" exclaimed Vernon-Smith savagely. "This dummy won't understand—"

"He is trying to bully me again," said Todd. "I warned him that I should strike him with the stump if he laid hands on me."

"And serve him jolly well right, look you," said Morgan.

"Give him another!"

"You fool—"

"Are you calling me a fool?" demanded Morgan, turning on the Bounder with a look that made him retreat a step or two.

"I mean, you're mistaken; I only wanted to speak to Todd in a friendly way," said Vernon-Smith, not looking very friendly as he spoke.

"Rats!" said Morgan.

"And many of 'em," said Bob Cherry. "Of course, you're friendly when the chap's got a cricket-stump in his hand."

"I tell you—"

"Lies, I expect," said Bob, with his usual frankness.

Vernon-Smith's face was black with passion.

"You—you dummies!" he panted.

"Oh, draw it mild!"

"I do not believe your statement, Smith," said Todd, in his long-winded way. "I believe you are speaking untruthfully, as your habit is. You came up to bully me, and if you try it, I shall chastise you with this stump."

"Hear, hear!"

"Go it, Toddy!"

"Pile it on!"

"I intend to submit to no bullying," said Todd. "I may not physically be equal to Smith, but I do not intend to be bullied. Let him let me alone."

"Quite right!"

"Hear, hear!"

"You hear that, Smithy," said Bob Cherry; "and as another thing for you to put in your pipe and smoke, I may as well tell you that if you touch old Toddy again, I'll have you in the gym. and give you the licking of your life. Todd is a howling duffer, we all know that, but he's not going to be ill-treated."

"Thank you so much, Cherry! I suppose it is not Vernon-Smith's fault that he was born a cad and a beast, but he cannot expect us to stand it."

Vernon-Smith gritted his teeth.

THE NEXT STORY-PAPER TO BUY THIS WEEK IS "THE MARVEL."

"I tell you, I was only going to speak to Todd," he hissed. "I had something to say to him!"

"Well, what was it?" said Bob Cherry. "You can go ahead; we're not stopping you."

The Bouncer hesitated.

He wanted to question Todd about the letter, and ascertain all that Todd could tell him of the mysterious affair of Mr. Quelch, but he could not explain that before Bob Cherry. He did not want to reveal to the chums of the Remove the fact that he had overheard their talk in the Cloisters.

"I want to speak to Todd, not to you," he said sullenly.

"Oh, a giddy secret—eh?" said Ogilvy.

"No, but—"

"You can speak here," said Todd. "If you are telling the truth, out with it! There is nothing private between us that I know of."

"Go ahead!" said Bob Cherry.

The Bouncer bit his lips, and was silent.

Bob laughed contemptuously.

"It's only a lie, of course!" he exclaimed. "You must spin them better than that, Smithy, if you want to be believed. Let Todd alone."

"Yes, pray let me alone," said Alonzo. "I simply want to have nothing to say to you, Smith. If my Uncle Benjamin were to see you, I am sure that he would warn me against having anything to do with you, I am really."

Vernon-Smith ground his teeth as he turned away. He left the juniors all laughing, excepting Alonzo, who was quite serious.

The bell rang for the resumption of morning lessons, and the Removites went in, and Vernon-Smith had no chance of seeing Todd again then.

The Bouncer was very thoughtful, and somewhat inattentive, during the lessons. Mr. Quelch looked at him once or twice, but thinking that he might still be feeling the effect of yesterday's thrashing, passed him over unrebuked. Smith certainly was still feeling those effects; but that was not what was occupying his mind now.

He was thinking of what he had overheard in the Cloisters, and of its connection with the master of the Remove. It seemed to the spiteful, revengeful junior that it meant a chance for him to avenge his supposed wrongs upon the Form-master; and Vernon-Smith was not likely to be scrupulous in the methods he used.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

The Bouncer Means Business.

AFTER lessons were over that Saturday, Alonzo Todd carefully avoided Vernon-Smith till dinner. At the dinner-table the Bouncer of Greyfriars sat opposite him, and Todd expected to see him scowling savagely. But Smith had adopted a pleasant smile, and he bestowed the benefit of it upon Todd. The Duffer, however, was not to be taken in. It was easy for anybody to pull the wool over Alonzo's eyes, as a rule; but he did not trust Vernon-Smith an inch. He returned the Bouncer's agreeable grin with a frown of rebuke.

The Bouncer waited till after dinner, and then joined Todd as the juniors poured out.

Harry Wharton & Co. had the coming footer match with the Upper Fourth to think about. Vernon-Smith slipped his arm through Todd's.

The Duffer looked alarmed.

"Let me go, Smithy," he said, "I'll—"

"You ass—"

"Leggo! I—"

"I want to speak to you," said Vernon-Smith, in a low, hurried voice. "It's a very important matter, Toddy. I—I'm sorry I went for you the other day. You smashed up my bookcase, you know, and I was wild."

"It is wrong to lose one's temper under any circumstances. My Uncle Benjamin—"

"Well, I'm sorry. Look here, you came into my study that time to ask me to discuss some matter with you—"

"Yes, but under the circumstances, I have changed my mind."

"Look here, that's just what I want to discuss. Was it about finding a letter?"

Todd looked astonished.

"Yes. How did you know?"

"Well, I do know. Come over here and have a jaw."

Alonzo Todd followed Vernon-Smith rather dubiously across the Close. He did not yet trust the Bouncer.

"I'm sorry I didn't listen to you, then," said Vernon-Smith, sincerely enough. "I thought it was some more of your rot, you know—ahem!—I mean that I didn't really pay much attention to the matter at all."

EVERY
TUESDAY,

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ONE
PENNY.

"It is all right. But—"

"I'd like to discuss it with you, and help you if possible," said Vernon-Smith. "I'm in earnest; I mean it."

Todd looked at him in a perplexed way.

"This is a great change, Smithy," he said. "I don't know whether I ought to tell you. Upon the whole, I don't and cannot trust you."

"But I know about it already."

"Has Wharton told you?"

"Of course. How could I know otherwise?" said Vernon-Smith coolly.

"Oh, very well! Wharton warned me not to say anything about the matter to anyone, but if he has told you himself, I suppose it is all right."

"Of course it is."

"I really don't know what to do," said Alonzo. "It's a very difficult matter. Of course, it's impossible that Mr. Quelch has done anything wrong."

Vernon-Smith's eyes gleamed.

"Of course it is," he agreed, thinking and hoping in his heart that it was far from impossible.

"But then, some rascal may have him under his thumb in some way, without his having done anything wrong," said Alonzo.

"Certainly."

"Otherwise the letter—"

"Show me the letter."

"Oh, certainly!"

Alonzo Todd produced the letter. The Bouncer of Greyfriars took it eagerly, as if afraid that Todd might change his mind, and read it through in a moment.

Then his eyes blazed.

"My only hat!" he muttered.

Alonzo looked at him dubiously.

"What do you think of it?" he asked.

"It's a blackmailing letter."

"Yes, but Wharton thinks it may be a jape—"

Vernon-Smith shook his head.

"No. If it were, how about the visitor coming just at the time mentioned here, and then, how about his coming to-day with the papers, and—"

"I did not know—"

"No, of course you didn't; I forgot. Look here, Todd, may I keep this letter for a bit?" asked Vernon-Smith eagerly.

"I don't know—"

"You shall have it back to-morrow, or when you ask for it. I think I may be able to get at the truth of the matter," said Vernon-Smith eagerly.

"Oh, very well! You will be careful not to lose it?"

The Bouncer grinned.

"Oh, very careful!" he said.

And he put the letter in his pocket-book and walked away. Alonzo Todd remained in a very doubtful frame of mind, but the Duffer of Greyfriars never did anything without being doubtful afterwards whether he had done right or wrong, so that was nothing new.

Vernon-Smith's heart was beating fast as he walked away.

He had none of the doubts that Harry Wharton had felt.

He was only too eager to believe anything against the Form-master he hated, and only too willing to use anything against him.

A scheme had already formed in his mind.

The Bouncer had ideas that were certainly not elevated on any subject. That a man like Mr. Quelch should have some dark secret in his past was not at all surprising to him, though it would have astounded Harry Wharton. Vernon-Smith was only too willing to believe that an outward appearance of decency and respectability was a sham, assumed for the purpose of hiding the true character. Vernon-Smith was quite ready to believe that about anybody, and this readiness to believe evil he called knowledge of the world. There was not a single doubt in his mind.

The only question he asked himself was, how was he to turn the discovery to the disadvantage of Mr. Quelch.

It was useless to speak if he could prove nothing. How was he to get proof?

The papers!

The papers Croker was to bring to the school that day—they were the proof he required—if he could get hold of them.

And then—

To expose the truth and crush the Form-master, and drive him from Greyfriars in disgrace; that was a revenge of which the prospect delighted Vernon-Smith.

And why not?

Even if something went wrong, if accidents happened and he failed, he could not be expelled from Greyfriars. His

ANSWERS

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father's influence over the Head was too strong for that. He had a flogging to fear—and he feared it, but he could stand it. But he would not fail. He was convinced that Mr. Quelch was guilty—of what he as yet did not know, but certainly guilty—he had only to play his cards well to show him up.

The Bounder's eyes glittered as he thought of it.

It happened that a few minutes after leaving Todd he met the Form-master. Mr. Quelch was coming out of the house. He intended to watch the junior football match for a while. He glanced at Smith, and then at Todd, whom the Bounder had left under the trees, and he frowned.

"I trust you have not forgotten what I said to you yesterday, Smith," he exclaimed.

Vernon-Smith looked sullen.

It was hard to assume a respectful manner to the master whom he hated, and whom he believed he had in his power.

"I don't remember, sir."

"Ah! You do not remember."

"No."

Vernon-Smith did not say "sir" this time, and there was an indescribable impertinence in his manner.

Mr. Quelch looked at him steadily.

"You forgot yourself, I think, Smith," he said.

"Oh!"

"You are scarcely respectful."

Vernon-Smith was silent.

"Have you been bullying Todd again?"

"No."

"It is customary to say 'sir' in addressing a master," said Mr. Quelch, his eyes beginning to gleam.

"Sir, then."

"Smith! I do not understand this. What is the matter with you?"

"Nothing."

"Whatever is the cause of this impertinence?" said Mr. Quelch. "It shall not pass unpunished, you may be assured of that, Smith. Follow me into my study."

Vernon-Smith stood still.

"You hear me, Smith?"

"Yes."

"Obey me, then."

Mr. Quelch turned back towards the house. Vernon-Smith did not stir. The Form-master glanced back and saw him standing motionless.

He frowned darkly, and strode back and grasped the Bounder by the collar.

"Come," he said.

Mr. Quelch's grasp was like iron. Vernon-Smith did not venture to struggle.

"Let me go," he said sullenly.

The Form-master did not reply. He marched Smith into the house, under the grinning gaze of a score of fags, and straight to his study. There the cane was brought into requisition.

"I do not understand this new phase of your conduct in the least, Smith," said Mr. Quelch, in a low, distinct voice; "but it will not last long, I think."

"You'd better let me alone."

"What!"

"You may be sorry if you don't," said Vernon-Smith.

Mr. Quelch's lips set hard.

"That sounds to me like a threat, Smith. Unless you are taking leave of your senses I cannot make you out to-day. But—"

He said no more but grasped the Bounder. Vernon-Smith left the study five minutes later, writhing and aching from the cane. It was a severer thrashing than he had received the previous evening, and he was very white as he tramped down the passage. There was rage and hatred unchecked in his heaving breast. At any risk now—at every risk—he would be revenged upon the master of the Remove. That was the thought that beat and beat in his throbbing brain.

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THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

Sticking to It.

"READY to be licked?" asked Temple pleasantly, as he met Harry Wharton on the footer ground.

Wharton laughed.

"Ready for all the lickings you can give us," he remarked. "They don't amount to very many, so far, do they?"

"Oh, rats!" said Temple, a little irritated.

"Many rats!" said Fry.

"Oh, rather!" chimed in Dabney.

Wharton looked rather surprised. Although there was generally war between the Upper Fourth and the Remove, Temple, Dabney & Co. were good-humoured about it as a rule. But now they certainly seemed to be a little edgewise.

The fact was, that Temple & Co. had seen the Remove at football practice the last few days, and the conviction was borne in upon them that the Remove eleven were in better form than the Upper Fourth.

It wasn't a pleasant conviction, as the Remove was the Lower Form; but Temple knew enough about footer to see it.

And he didn't like it.

Temple, Dabney & Co. assumed a high and mighty air towards the Remove, whom they affected to regard as "kids."

In fact, before Harry Wharton came to Greyfriars, the Remove had no separate eleven of its own, but contented itself with being allowed to furnish a few recruits to the Upper Fourth team.

Things had moved since then.

The Remove had their own team, and it had licked the Upper Fourth oftener than the Upper Fourth had licked them.

And the match this Saturday afternoon looked like adding to the Remove's list of successes, Temple thought.

Hence his irritation, and a little extra swank in his manner. If the Upper Fourth were to be licked, they would carry it off with a high hand, anyway.

"Yes, rats!" said Temple. "Of course, we haven't—er—haven't exerted ourselves in these little matches with junior forms."

"Rot!"

"What!"

"You've jolly well tried your hardest," said Harry Wharton serenely; "and if you've been licked, it's because we were the better team."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You can cackle as much as you like, but you can't cackle the facts away," said Harry warmly.

"My dear kid—"

"Draw it mild, my precocious infant," said Fry.

"Oh, rather!" chimed in Dabney.

"As a matter of fact, you fellows can't play footer for toffee," said Harry.

"You swank about too much, instead of sticking to practice, and you're too jolly dandified in the way you play. You're afraid of getting shoved. Rats! Why, an eleven picked out of the worst duffers in the Remove would lick your team."

"Hear, hear!" said Bob Cherry.

"Yes, by Jove!" went on Harry, growing warm. "I'd undertake to leave out my best man, and put in the rottenest player in the Remove in his place, and wipe up the field with you. So put that in your pipe and smoke it."

"Swanker."

"Rats!"

"Well, if it's not swank, we'll keep you to your word," said Temple, with a wink at his friends. "Leave out your best player, and play a rotter, and we'll see."

"So I will, if you like."

"Done!"

"Play Todd," said Fry, with a grin. "He's certainly the rottenest player in the Remove."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

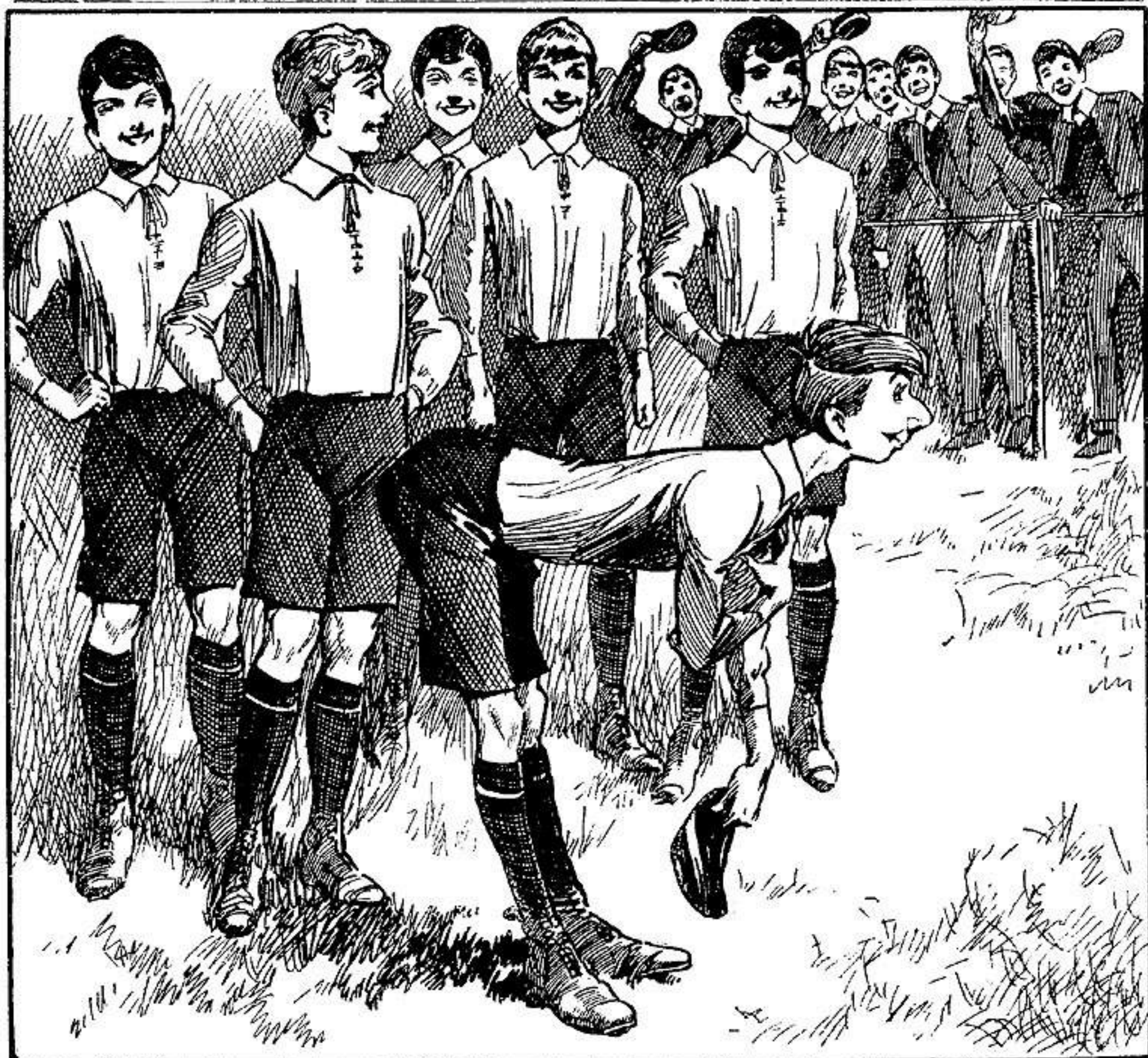
➡ NEXT WEEK! ⚡

The Cliff House Guest

By FRANK RICHARDS.



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"Hadn't I better bow?" whispered Alonzo Todd, as the cheering died down. Frank Nugent chuckled. "Of course!" he said. "Take off your cap and bow to the ground. The deeper the bow the better they'll like it!" And Alonzo obeyed. (See Page 17.)

Wharton hesitated.

He had spoken hastily, in the heat of the moment, and had quite forgotten the existence of Alonzo Todd for the time being. Everybody in the Remove played footer more or less, though of course fellows like Bunter and Snoop were fearfully poor players. But Todd!

Bunter at his worst was nothing like Todd. Wharton's idea had been that with a "rotter" in the team he would practically be playing a man short. But Todd was not likely to remain inactive.

The Upper Fourth fellows burst into a mocking laugh.

"Of course, I knew you were only braggin'," said Temple.

"Take it back!"

"Bragging or not, I stick to what I said," he replied.

"Stuff! You don't mean it."

"I do."

"What-ho!" said Bob Cherry emphatically.

"Faith, and I suppose you'll be after leaving me out," said Micky Desmond lugubriously.

"You, Micky! Why?"

"Sure, you've agreed to leave out your best player!"

The Remove captain laughed.

"That's not you, Micky. It's between Bob and Nugent and Linley."

"Oh, Linley!" said Bob. "You're a better player than I am, Marky. So are you, Frank. And so is Tom Brown."

"Rot!" said Tom Brown. "I'm just second-rate."

"Same here," said Nugent promptly.

"And I, too," said Mark Linley, laughing. "I think we shall all be very modest if the best player is to be left out of the match."

There was no doubt about that. The juniors all had their own opinion about their footer, of course. But if the best player was to be left out, nobody wanted to be distinguished in that way.

Wharton looked perplexed.

"I suppose it will have to be you, Frank," he said. "I believe you're about the best all-round chap in the team."

Nugent laughed.

"Thank you. After that, I suppose I ought to retire gracefully."

"Where's Todd?"

"Blessed if I know."

"Look for Todd, some of you."

Temple and his comrades exchanged glances. If Todd played for the Remove, Temple had no doubt that he would be able to avoid a defeat. But on reflection, he felt that even a victory purchased that way would not be very valuable.

"Hang it all," he exclaimed, "I don't hold you to what you said, Wharton! It's all right. Play your team."

Wharton shook his head.

"I stick to what I said," he replied.

"You'll get licked."

"Well, you were promising us that anyway," said Harry, laughing.

"I mean, you won't have the ghost of an earthly, with that duffer in your team. Better chuck the idea."

"I'm sticking to it."

Temple shrugged his shoulders.

"Oh, all right! We'll wipe up the ground with you."

"That would have happened anyway, wouldn't it?" Bob Cherry asked sarcastically. To which Temple's only reply was "Rats!"

Frank Nugent stood out of the team with a good grace, but there were grave faces among the others. They felt that they were taking a big risk. But it was too late to think of that now.

When the news spread, there was a general grin among the fellows at the idea of Alonzo Todd playing for his Form.

"My only hat!" said Bulstrode. "This will be worth seeing."

"What-ho!" was the general reply.

And fellows came in crowds to see the Duffer of Greyfriars play for the Remove.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

Todd Plays.

"TODD!"

"Alonzo!"

"Where's Alonzo?"

"Puzzle—find Alonzo!"

"Ha, ha, ha! Todd, Todd, Todd!"

"Toddy! Toddy!"

Fellows were inquiring for Alonzo Todd on all sides. As a rule, Todd was only too much in evidence. And when a Form match was played, Todd was generally there to look on, if not to offer his services. Todd had a persuasion that he could play footer, a persuasion that was not shared by anybody else.

But this afternoon—because he was wanted, Bob Cherry said—Todd was not to be found.

He was not on the footer field; he was not in his study; he was not in the Form-room. He was not in the school library, an apartment to which he sometimes retired to read long and fearsome-looking volumes on unpronounceable subjects.

"Anybody seen Todd?"

"Where's Todd?"

"Todd, Todd, Todd!"

"Smith, have you been doing anything with Todd?"

Vernon-Smith scowled at the question. It was Ogilvy who asked it, and he asked it as if he really thought that the Bounder might have massacred Todd, and buried him in some quiet corner of Greyfriars.

"No, I haven't!" he snapped.

"Have you seen him?"

"Lots of times!"

"I mean since dinner."

"No."

"I wonder whether he's lying," remarked Ogilvy, quite careless of what Vernon-Smith thought of his remark.

There was a laugh. Vernon-Smith walked on, scowling fiercely. He had his hat on, and was going down to the gates.

The juniors continued looking for Todd.

"He's hiding somewhere, because that rotter's looking for a chance to bully him," said Bob Cherry. "Look here, we'll make Smithy help us find him."

"Good egg!"

"Smith! Smithy!"

The Bounder had nearly reached the gates. He looked round in some alarm as the juniors ran towards him, and seemed inclined to make a bolt for it. But he knew that he was no match in that line for Bob Cherry or Tom Brown. He stood still, biting his lips.

"What do you want?" he exclaimed, as they came up.

"Todd."

"That's it; we want Todd."

"Do you think I've got him in my waistcoat pocket?" said the Bounder angrily. "I tell you I don't know where he is."

"Yes, you say so."

"It's the truth."

"How do we know?" said Ogilvy. "Of course, you may tell the truth sometimes, but we haven't any way of distinguishing those times from the other times."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I tell you—"

"Look here, we want Todd, and we think you've been bullying him, and he's gone off somewhere," said Bob Cherry bluntly. "Help us look for him."

"I don't know where he is."

"You can find out then."

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"I've got to get down to the station and meet a train."

"Find Todd first."

"I won't!"

"Yes, you will," said Bob Cherry, linking his arm in one of Smith's, while Nugent took the other. "You will, my son."

The Bounder began to struggle.

"Look here, I've told you—"

"Lies, most likely. Anyway, you're jolly well not going till we've found Todd," said Bob. "So you can make up your mind to it, and help us find him."

"He has seen him since dinner, too," said Tom Brown. "I remember now I saw them go out of the house together."

"Faith, and so do I!"

The Bounder gritted his teeth. He was finding out some of the inconveniences of habitual falsehood now.

As a matter of fact, he did not know where Todd was, and did not care; and had not been bullying him as the juniors suspected. But they were not to know that; and they were naturally disinclined to take his word upon the subject.

"Come on," said Bob Cherry.

"Haven't you found Todd?" asked Harry Wharton, coming up.

"Not yet!"

"Well, if he doesn't turn up we can't play him," said Wharton. "Temple's just said that they can't wait all the afternoon."

"I say, you fellows—"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo, Bunter! Have you seen Todd?"

"No, but—"

"Then buzz off!"

"I say, you know, you're looking for a player for the Form Eleven, I hear—"

"We're looking for Todd!"

"Well, I'm willing to play. I think Wharton ought to give me a chance. I should like to play, too!"

Bob Cherry burst into a laugh.

"What about Bunter?" he asked. "He's the next worst player to Todd—in fact, there isn't much to choose between them."

Harry Wharton laughed, too.

"Well, if we can't find Todd—"

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

There was a shout from the direction of the Cloisters.

"Here he is!"

"Here's Todd!"

The juniors hurried into the Cloisters. There, truly, was Todd. He was sitting upon one of the old oaken benches, with an expression of deep thought on his face, and was apparently unaware of the fact that the juniors were surrounding him and staring at him. He did not look up.

"Let me go!" muttered Vernon-Smith.

The juniors released him.

"Cut off!" said Bob Cherry, briefly.

And the Bounder hurried away to the gates, and disappeared. Harry Wharton shook the Duffer of Greyfriars by the shoulder.

"Todd! We want you!"

"Please don't bother me now," said Alonzo, somewhat peevishly. "I am thinking out a most important matter."

"We want—"

"I have decided that it is my duty to look into that affair of Mr. Quelch, and rescue him from the clutches—"

"Shut up, you ass!"

"What is he babbling about?" asked Ogilvy.

"Oh, I forgot," said Todd. "Quite right, I won't mention it. But really—"

"We want you to play, Todd!"

"Eh?"

"You can have your cap for the Form Eleven this afternoon."

Todd started.

"Please don't jest now, Wharton. As I said, I am thinking out a most important matter, and—"

"I'm not joking. We want you to play," said Harry, laughing.

"You are serious?"

"Quite!"

"Ah! You have woke up at last, I suppose, to the fact that I can play footer," said the Duffer of Greyfriars, with a satisfied smile.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"My dear fellows—"

"It's because of the way you play football that we want you," said Harry Wharton diplomatically. "Get into your things quick!"

"Under the circumstances—"

"Buck up!"

"I was going to say—"

"Never mind what you were going to say. Come on, and get into your football things!"

THE NEXT STORY-PAPER TO BUY THIS WEEK IS "THE MARVEL."

"If you will let me finish——"

"My dear chap, life's too short. We've only got three score years and ten, you know," said Bob Cherry. "Yank him along!"

And the laughing juniors yanked Alonzo Todd along.

He was hurried off to the house so quickly that he hardly knew whether he was travelling on his head or his heels, and half a dozen pairs of hands helped him to change. Then he was rushed down to the football ground at equal speed.

He arrived there in a somewhat dazed and bewildered state. A loud cheer in ironical tones greeted his appearance in football shorts, which showed off the exceeding slimness of his limbs to great advantage.

"Here he is!"

"Hurray!"

"Bravo, Todd!"

Alonzo beamed round in the most gratified way. He felt that his merits were being recognised at last; but he was a little surprised by the warmth of his reception. It was clear to him that he was a great player for whose appearance the crowd had been waiting.

"Hadn't I better bow?" he whispered to Nugent.

Frank chuckled.

"Of course," he said. "Take off your cap, and bow to the ground. The deeper the bow, the better they'll like it!" Alonzo obeyed.

He removed his cap, and bowed so deeply to the crowd that he really seemed to be trying to fold himself up like a pocket-knife.

There was a roar of laughter.

"Dear me!" said Todd. "Really——"

"Oh, come on," said Wharton, laughing. "The team's waiting."

And Alonzo Todd took his place in the ranks of the Remove Eleven.

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

A Goal for Todd!

THE whistle went, and the Upper Fourth kicked off. Temple, Dabney & Co. were in high good-humour, and their looks showed that they hadn't much doubt about the result of that Form match.

With Todd on their side, it would be very remarkable if the Remove won.

That was not the way Todd looked at it, certainly; but Temple thought so, and so, in fact, did most of the Remove. The general impression was that Harry Wharton had thrown a victory away by rashly sticking to his hastily-uttered words.

Wharton had misgivings himself. But he was determined to pull off a victory if he could, and he was far from giving up hope. He was in splendid form himself, and his men were in far better form generally than the Fourth-Formers—with the one exception, of course, of Alonzo Todd.

"Go for 'em!" said Temple, cheerily, as his men lined up. "And push 'em hardest on the left wing, where that howling duffer is. It will be surprising if he can stop anybody or anything."

And so the Fourth-Formers specially favoured Alonzo Todd with their attentions.

In the first rush of the Fourth-Formers Alonzo Todd was bowled over, and he remained sitting on the ground and gasping for some time, with a bewildered impression that the earth had risen and hit him, and was now swimming round him.

The Remove played without a left half.

With such a weakness in their defence, it was no wonder that the determined attack of the Upper Fourth looked like succeeding.

The Fourth-Formers brought the ball right up to goal, and in spite of the efforts of the Removites, they could not clear.

Hazeldene was in goal; and Hazeldene had been a very good goalkeeper. But he was not up to his best form now, for reasons that Wharton suspected only too well—but he had been loth to take the drastic step of excluding the junior from the team. Hazeldene did his best, but he was playing slackly, and the attack found him wanting.

Temple put the ball into the net, amid loud cheers from the Fourth-Formers gathered about the ground.

It was first blood to the Upper Fourth.

"Hurray!" roared the Fourth-Formers.

Temple grinned as they went back to the middle of the field.

"Looks like winning, eh?" he chuckled.

And Dabney said:

"Oh, rather!"

"We shall wipe up the ground with them!" Fry remarked. "Even without Todd to bother them, I don't think they'd have stood up against us, really!"

"Well, I don't know about that," said Temple. "But one thing's jolly certain; they can't stand up against us now."

"Oh, rather!"

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NEXT WEEK: **THE CLIFF HOUSE GUEST.**

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ONE
PENNY.

Harry Wharton was looking a little grim.

Todd tapped him on the arm as they came back to line up for the restart. The Duffer of Greyfriars already had bellows to mend with a vengeance. He was puffing like a grampus.

"Where shall I stand?" he gasped.

"Anywhere you like," said Harry, shortly. "Only keep out of the way as much as possible, there's a good fellow."

"My dear Wharton——"

"Nuff said! Look out!"

Harry Wharton kicked off. The game was quickly going again, hot and strong. The Remove attacked now, fiercely. They were stronger in attack than in defence, especially with the Duffer of Greyfriars in the second line.

But Alonzo was not the fellow to be left out of it.

He was determined to be useful, as his Uncle Benjamin had always instructed him. He could have helped his side most by slacking, but Alonzo Todd was not a slacker, whatever he was.

He played up!

Although his breath was short, and he had to stop every now and then, and stand gasping with a noise like escaping steam, he could not be idle.

He rushed into the combat.

He charged on his own side blindly, and brought Bob Cherry to grass, and butted into Harry Wharton and sent him flying.

There was a roar from the spectators. Even Removites, anxious for their team to win, could not help laughing.

As for the others, they simply shrieked. The news of Todd and his play was all over Greyfriars by this time, and fellows came from far and near to watch. Wingate, of the Sixth, the captain of Greyfriars, was looking on, with tears of laughter running down his cheeks.

"Keep off, you ass!" shouted Tom Brown, as Todd rushed at him to capture the ball, which Tom was dribbling towards the enemy's goal.

"My dear Brown——"

"Buzz off!"

"Nonsense! I——"

He collided with Tom the next moment, and both of them went rolling over. Fry rushed up and captured the ball.

Fry took it away towards the Remove goal like lightning. He slammed it in before Hazeldene knew what was coming.

Two up for Temple & Co.

"My hat!" said Bob Cherry.

"We'll win yet," said Harry Wharton, between his teeth.

"Keep that howling Duffer out of the way, that's all!"

"He won't be kept," said Tom Brown, ruefully.

"He'll be fagged out soon," Ogilvy remarked. "He hasn't many runs left in him, thank goodness."

Todd was, in fact, very quiet for some little time after that. The collision with Brown had knocked most of the breath out of him, and it was a long time coming back. As he ran aimlessly to and fro, gasping and panting, he was unceremoniously pushed out of the way by the other players, and was not very harmful to his side for some time.

The Remove were attacking now, and the Upper Fourth found the forwards very hard to stop. Wharton and Mark Linley scored in turn, and the score was level, much to the satisfaction of the Remove.

"Stick to the Duffer," said Temple, as they lined up after the first goal taken by the Lancashire lad.

And the Fourth-Formers never left Todd unattended. He was a weak spot in the line, and they attacked there with extra energy. Morgan and Brown, the other two halves, did all the work of three, and would have done it much more effectively if Todd had not striven to help them.

But Todd was not a slacker.

As soon as he had some wind to expend, Alonzo threw himself heartily into the game again.

It was getting on towards the interval, and both sides wished to score again before the whistle went, and Todd was filled with the laudable ambition of seeing the Remove ahead.

Mark Linley had captured the ball in midfield, and was passing it to Bob Cherry when Todd rushed in and intercepted it.

It did not seem to occur to Todd that there was anything to do besides capture the ball and get away with it.

He got away with it.

His attack took his own side by surprise, and he succeeded in capturing the ball. He could never have got through the Upper Fourth towards Temple's goal, but he did not try. The rushing to and fro, and the excitement of the game had so confused Todd that he had lost all sense of direction, and he dashed away towards his own goal, kicking the ball clumsily before him.

The movement was so unexpected that he was at the goal before anybody on the Remove side could think of stopping him.

Hazeldene, in goal, seemed petrified. He was naturally astonished at seeing his citadel attacked by one of his own side.

A yell arose from the crowd as Todd's object was discerned.

"Go it, Todd!"

"Hurrah! Hurrah!"

"Goal!"

"Save, you fathead!" roared Nugent to Hazeldene, but the astounded goalkeeper made only a feeble clutch at the ball as Todd kicked it in.

The footer lodged in the net.

The crowd shrieked.

"Goal! Goal! Hurrah!"

"Goal! Ha, ha, ha!"

Some of the fellows threw themselves on the ground, and kicked up their heels in an ecstasy of mirth. Todd turned back from his success, and beamed at his comrades.

The whistle went; the first half was over.

"The odd goal for us!" gasped Todd victoriously.

"You ass!"

"You fathead!"

"What!"

"You chump!"

"Eh?"

"You fearful idiot!"

"What! Eh?"

"That's our goal you've kicked it through!" yelled Bob Cherry, seizing the Duffer of Greyfriars by the shoulder, and shaking him.

"Oh!"

"Our goal, you ass! Our goal!"

"Ah!"

"You—you fathead! You duffer! You frabjous chump!"

"Oh! Does it make any difference?" asked Alonzo innocently.

Bob Cherry gasped.

"Oh, kill him, somebody!" he said.

"My dear Cherry——"

"You've scored a goal against us, you ass!" shouted Harry Wharton. "Do you understand now?"

"Oh!"

"Never mind," said Tom Brown. "We'll make it up in the second half. Hazeldene ought to have stopped him, too."

"How was I to know the dangerous ass was going to get a goal against me?" demanded Hazeldene indignantly.

"It's Wharton's fault for playing a lunatic."

"My dear Hazeldene——"

"Well, it can't be helped now," said Harry Wharton, pacifically. "In the second half, mind that Todd never gets near the ball. Whenever he comes near any of you, charge him over!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"My dear Wharton——"

But Alonzo Todd was not listened to. Wharton's instructions were drastic, but it was evidently the only thing to be done.

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.

The Winning Goal.

ALONZO TODD looked very blown and fagged when the teams lined up for the second half of that remarkable football match. But he was as determined as ever. He meant to do his very best for his side, at any cost. And the side meant to do their very best for him—and their best consisted in shoving him out of the way whenever he came in it—which was often.

Todd rushed for the ball at once, determined to get another goal, and to score it at the right end of the field this time. But Bob Cherry charged him over, and he went sprawling on the ground.

"Dear me!" he gasped, as he went down.

He sat up, blinking and bewildered.

The game went on without him for some time, but as he gradually recovered his breath, Todd slowly rose to his feet.

There was a press of players in the Fourth-Form half, and suddenly from the midst of it the ball came out like a pip squeezed out of an orange.

It dropped fairly at Alonzo's feet.

The Duffer of Greyfriars was not likely to lose a chance like that.

The tussle had taken place in the Fourth-Form half, and the Remove players were all well up to midfield, so that nobody was between Todd and his own goal—only Hazeldene between the sticks, and Hazel, not thinking that he would be wanted, was exchanging remarks with some fellows behind the net.

Todd's eyes gleamed with triumph.

Here was a goal for him, and he was at the right end of the field this time. Todd was quite ignorant of the fact that the

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teams had changed ends for the second half. He knew about as much of football as he did of Sanskrit, as a matter of fact. He did not even notice that it was Hazeldene in the goal he was attacking.

He rushed the ball up and slammed it in.

The delighted crowd shrieked.

"Goal!"

"Hurrah!"

Hazeldene turned round too late.

The ball was in the net, and Alonzo Todd was beaming with satisfaction. He beamed at Wharton as the latter ran up.

"I've done it this time!" he remarked.

"You have!" gasped Wharton. "You dummy!"

"What!"

"Do you mean to say you're idiot enough to do that twice?" shrieked the skipper of the Remove.

"But this is all right," said Todd, in astonishment. "This isn't the same goal."

"Oh, you chump!"

"Hang it all," said Todd warmly, "if it was our goal last time, it must be Temple's goal this time!"

"You frabjous ass!" yelled Wharton. "Don't you know that we change ends in the second half?"

"Well, why didn't you tell me?" said Todd, in an injured tone.

"You—you—you——"

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

Hazeldene threw out the ball, with a shamefaced expression.

"I'm sorry," he said. "I never expected it. I'll keep an eye on the idiot after this."

"My dear Hazeldene——"

"Oh, get away!"

"I'm so sorry!" said Todd. "I am certainly somewhat unfortunate. But the next goal I score will be all right."

"You ass! If you get near either goal again, I'll squash you!" growled Bob Cherry.

"My dear Cherry——"

"Oh, scat!"

The teams lined up again. The Upper Fourth were now two ahead—four goals to two—and they were serenely anticipating a walk-over.

But the Remove were not beaten yet.

Harry's instructions regarding Todd were ruthlessly carried out, and the Duffer of Greyfriars came in for some very hard knocks.

Whenever he appeared near enough, he was shoved or charged over by his own side, and a persistent course of this treatment had the effect of relieving the Remove eleven of his valuable assistance.

He was soon solely occupied in gasping for breath, doing most of his gasping in a sitting or a horizontal posture.

The Remove played without him, and then their chances looked up.

Harry Wharton put the ball into the Upper Fourth goal with a masterly kick, and a few minutes later Tom Brown scored.

Again the score was level.

There were five minutes more to play.

By this time Todd had had a pretty good rest, and he was feeling fit to join in the play again. He came rushing into the thick of it, and Wharton made Bob Cherry a sign. Bob Cherry was the heaviest of the Remove players, and so the most suitable to deal with Todd.

He charged Todd over, and sent him sprawling, and this time the Duffer of Greyfriars did not recover.

He sat down on the touchline, and gasped and gasped, and remained gasping there harmlessly till the game was over.

But the last five minutes were very hot.

Twice in that brief time the Remove charged up to the enemy's goal, and were driven back. Then came a third attack, almost on the stroke of time. The ball went in, and the Fourth-Form goalie caught it, and incautiously advanced beyond the goal-line to throw it far.

Like arrow from bow, Mark Linley leaped forward, and hurled himself upon the Fourth-Former, and charged him into the net, ball and all.

There was a roar.

"Goal!"

Then the whistle went.

Mark Linley had scored the winning goal, and the Remove had won the match on the very stroke of time. The juniors cheered loudly. Harry Wharton picked up Todd, who was still gasping.

"Who's won?" puffed Todd.

"We have."

"Good! I told you you would win if I played in the team," said Todd.

Wharton stared for a moment, and then laughed.

"So you did," he said, "and you were right! Ha, ha, ha!"

THE NEXT STORY-PAPER TO BUY THIS WEEK IS "THE MARVEL."

THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER.

Alonzo Todd is Very Useful.

VERNON-SMITH stood on the platform at the railway-station in Friardale, waiting. He had been waiting there for nearly two hours, patiently—with the patience of a cat watching a mouse-hole. Vernon-Smith was there on business. Twice a train had come in and gone, but it had not delivered at Friardale any passenger for Greyfriars. The Bounder had made sure of that. Now the London train was due again—or rather the local that brought on the London passengers from the junction. It was half-past four, and Vernon-Smith felt that his vigil must be drawing to an end. If the visitor for Mr. Quelch was coming that day at all, surely he must be coming by that train.

The train sped steaming into the station.

Standing by an automatic machine, half-hidden by it, Vernon-Smith watched. He had not seen the visitor who had come to Mr. Quelch the previous day, but he was pretty certain that he would succeed in "spotting" him. There were not many visitors for Greyfriars at a time, as a rule.

The train stopped, and several passengers descended from it. Three or four country people, and a man with a sallow complexion and a pointed moustache, who Vernon-Smith knew must be his man, if he was there at all.

The man wore a bowler hat and an overcoat, and carried a small bag of a legal aspect in his hand.

Did that bag contain the papers—the mysterious papers—that were being taken to Mr. Quelch at Greyfriars?

It remained to be seen whether this man was going to the school, and if he was, that would settle it.

He left the station, and Vernon-Smith, with an assumed carelessness of manner, followed him out.

The stranger set out towards Greyfriars.

Vernon-Smith followed him down the lane.

There could be no further doubt. This was the man, and the papers were in the bag.

Vernon-Smith followed him some distance, and then quickened his pace and overtook him.

He lifted his cap to the stranger, and the latter stared at him.

"Excuse me, sir," said the Bounder, "you are going to Greyfriars?"

The man looked surprised.

"Yes, my lad," he said.

"I belong to Greyfriars, sir," said Smith respectfully. "May I carry your bag, sir?"

If that bag had once got safely into Vernon-Smith's hands, he would easily have found some opportunity of bolting with it. But it was not to be.

The stranger had no knowledge, of course, of the secret intentions of the scheming junior, but he was not careless with his property.

"Thank you," he said. "It is not heavy, and I can carry it myself."

Vernon-Smith bit his lip.

"I should like to help you, sir," he said.

"You are very obliging," said Mr. Croker, with a stare of surprise. "I prefer to look after my property myself." And he walked on.

"You are going to see Mr. Quelch, sir?" pursued the Bounder.

Mr. Croker started.

"How did you know that?" he asked hastily.

The Bounder grinned.

"Mr. Quelch told me he expected a visitor," he said coolly.

"You are Mr. Croker, are you not?"

"That is my name." The man looked at the boy steadily.

"It is very singular that Mr. Quelch should have mentioned the matter to a boy," he said.

"I am a favourite of his, sir," said Vernon-Smith. "I often run errands for him, and that sort of thing. I should be very glad to carry your bag, if you would let me."

"I will carry it myself."

The stranger quickened his pace a little, as if to rid himself of the boy's company. Vernon-Smith allowed him to do so.

As the man turned the next corner in the lane, Vernon-Smith glided through a gap in the hedge, and, taking a short cut hidden by trees from the road, set off towards the school at top-speed.

He reached Greyfriars ten minutes ahead of the stranger, who was following the usual road.

Vernon-Smith's heart was beating fast with excitement. Why would not the man allow him to carry the bag? What further proof did he require that it contained the incriminating documents whose existence he was so certain of?

"It's all right," Vernon-Smith muttered to himself. "The papers are in the bag, and they're enough to ruin Quelch. If I can only get hold of them—and I will!"

But how?

That was the question. Once they were in his hands, he could defy the master of the Remove.

But how to obtain possession of them?

"Dear me, is that you, Smith?" said Alonzo Todd, meeting the Bounder as he came in breathlessly. Todd was a little

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breathless himself, having not yet quite recovered from the football match.

The Bounder paused. His game was to obtain possession of the stranger's black bag, but alone he could hardly do it. Assistance in such an enterprise would be hard to find among the Greyfriars fellows—unless he could get it from Todd. It immediately occurred to him that Todd was duffer enough for anything.

"Good! I wanted to see you, Todd!" he said.

"And I wanted to see you," said Todd. "I have been thinking over that matter, you know, and I feel that I ought to do something for Mr. Quelch."

Vernon-Smith nodded.

"Of course you ought," he agreed.

"Wharton does not think so," pursued Todd. "He thinks I ought to leave the matter alone—mind my own business, he says. But my Uncle Benjamin always impressed upon me to help others whenever I possibly could."

"Good!"

"If that man has some papers incriminating Mr. Quelch in some way," pursued Todd—"that is what I have gathered from what Wharton has let drop—though he does not think so—if he has, I was thinking—"

"Yes!" said the Bounder eagerly.

"Suppose they could be taken away from him?" said Todd, looking at the Bounder. "That is the idea that occurred to me."

"Right!"

"You think it's a good idea?"

"Ripping! Look here, that man Croker is coming to Greyfriars now—I've just spoken to him in the lane," said Smith eagerly.

"Is he really?"

"He's got papers proving something against Mr. Quelch—something he's going to blackmail him over—in a bag."

"Oh, really—"

"Suppose we got hold of the bag," said the Bounder. "We could—could destroy the papers, and then Mr. Quelch would have nothing to be afraid of."

Alonzo beamed.

"Splendid!" he exclaimed.

"You'll help me—I—I mean, I'll help you," said Vernon-Smith. "It's your idea, of course. I'll do anything I can to help you."

"I'm glad to hear you say so, Smith. I do not think so badly of you as I did," said Todd. "My Uncle Benjamin warned me never to trust anybody who had deceived me, or acted in a false or rotten manner, but—"

"Look here—"

"But I am willing to believe that you have repented, Smith. It is really very noble of you, as Mr. Quelch has cased you lately."

"Of course, I forgive him," said Vernon-Smith, between his teeth.

"I am so glad to hear you say so. It shows a noble nature. Will the man be here soon, do you think?"

"In a few minutes, I expect."

"Good! Suppose I ask Wharton and the others to help us—"

"No, no," said the Bounder hastily. He knew what Harry Wharton & Co. would think of the scheme.

"But I am sure they would help," said Todd anxiously.

"Wharton is under some obligation to me, too—I have just played for the Form eleven, and helped them to beat the Upper Fourth."

"Oh, don't talk rot!" said Vernon-Smith.

"My dear Smith—"

"I—I mean Wharton would be up against the idea," said Vernon-Smith hurriedly. "No good saying anything to him till—till afterwards, you know. When we've—we've rescued Mr. Quelch from the clutches of the blackmailer, you know, we'll tell Wharton, and then he'll—he'll have a better opinion of me."

"I am sure he will, Smith. I shall tell my Uncle Benjamin about you. He will be so pleased to hear that such a rotten and caddish fellow can repent and become quite decent. My Uncle Benjamin—"

"We haven't much time to lose," said Smith, between his teeth, restraining a desire to plant his knuckles upon Alonzo's innocent mouth.

"Oh, certainly! What shall we do?"

"We must get hold of the bag somehow."

"Oh, certainly!"

"Look here, I've got an idea," said Vernon-Smith. "It's risky, but that can't be helped. Suppose you run the chap down on a bike in the road, and I'll collar his bag?"

"Phew!"

"You can do it without giving yourself away, really—you know what a fool you are on a bike."

"My dear Smith—"

"I—I mean, you know you always have accidents when you're practising," said Vernon-Smith. "Get out your bike."

"But I haven't one."

"I'll lend you mine. Get it out quick, and—"

"Suppose I hurt the man?"

"What the dickens does that matter?" said Smith impatiently.

"I should not like to hurt him. My Uncle Benjamin says—"

"Hang your uncle! Look here—"

"My dear—"

"Look here, buck up, Todd, there's a good fellow," said Vernon-Smith, changing his tone. "It's for the sake of Mr. Quelch, you know, whom we all admire and respect, and—and like so much."

"Yes, yes, you are right," said Todd. "I am sure that my Uncle Benjamin would approve of the plan if he knew about it."

"Of course he would," agreed Vernon-Smith. "Let's get the bike out."

"Oh, certainly!"

And the two juniors quickly had the bicycle out into the road. Vernon-Smith looked anxiously in the direction of the village. The stranger was not in sight yet, but he might appear at any moment.

"Mind, you know what to do?" said Vernon-Smith. "You can be practising riding. As soon as you see him you ride past him, and suddenly turn the machine right at him and run him down. Don't give him a chance."

"Oh, certainly!"

"I'll be in the hedge, and I'll nip out and collar the bag."

"Very good. But I may hurt—"

"It doesn't matter if you hurt him."

"I was just thinking of myself. I might hurt myself in falling off the machine," said Todd anxiously. "It has only just occurred to me, but I remember the last time I fell off a bike I was very much hurt."

"Never mind; it's in a good cause."

"Oh, certainly. But—"

"Here he is!" exclaimed Vernon-Smith hurriedly, as a bowler hat came in sight. "That's the man! Now, go it, Todd!"

"Oh, all right!"

The Bouncer disappeared into the hedge. Todd mounted the bicycle, and rode towards the stranger.

He took the middle of the road, and the gentleman from London stepped aside to let him pass, with a not agreeable expression upon his face.

Todd, however, did not pass.

He obeyed Vernon-Smith's instructions to the letter.

Just as he reached the stranger, going at a good rate, he turned the machine towards him, and rode straight at him.

The man was taken utterly by surprise.

Before he fairly knew what was happening the bicycle was into him, the front tyre striking against his leg, and Todd bumping over him. The Duffer of Greyfriars threw his arms round the man's neck to save himself.

Both came to the ground with a bump, and the bicycle crashed down, clanking, a few feet away. The black bag rolled into the ditch—fortunately dry. Vernon-Smith leaped from the hedge, picked up the bag in a twinkling, and darted back into the field, and was off at top speed in a twinkling.

The stranger sat up dazedly. The bewildered Duffer of Greyfriars was still clinging round his neck, and Mr. Croker pushed him off roughly.

"You utter fool!" he said wrathfully.

The Duffer of Greyfriars blinked at him in response, and gasped for breath.

THE SIXTEENTH CHAPTER.

Alonzo Takes Cover.

"O H, dear!" gasped Alonzo.

"You fool!"

"Oh! I'm so sorry!"

"You utter imbecile!"

"I—I—"

Mr. Croker staggered to his feet. He was hurt and very much shaken, and smothered with dust, but he was no worse off than the unfortunate Duffer of Greyfriars himself. Todd was hurt, too.

Mr. Croker picked up his walking-stick, and seemed inclined to lay it about the shoulders of Alonzo Todd. But he contented himself with explaining to Todd, in very plain English, what he thought of him.

Todd rose and dusted himself down, and picked up the machine.

Mr. Croker looked round for the black bag.

He had had a confused idea as he rolled in the dust with Todd of someone jumping through the hedge, but had

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attached no importance to it. It did not occur to him that the bag had been taken.

He looked in the road for it, but it was not there. He looked in the ditch, but it was not there. He turned to question Todd, but the Duffer of Greyfriars was not duffer enough to remain to be questioned. He was on the machine now, and riding away in the direction of the school.

"Stop, boy!" shouted Mr. Croker.

Todd did not stop.

The stranger made a motion as if to pursue him, but halted. He could see that Todd, at all events, did not have the bag.

Where was it?

He searched the road and searched the ditch in vain.

In a faint hope that it might have been tossed over the hedge in his fall, and that it might be there still, Mr. Croker plunged through the thicket and searched. But there was no sign of the black bag.

He returned into the road, and stood dusting his clothes, very much perplexed and annoyed. He remembered now that fleeting glimpse of a figure leaping from the hedge as he fell. He remembered something else, too.

"By Jingo! It was the same lad!" exclaimed Mr. Croker aloud. "The same lad who spoke to me in the lane, and wanted to carry the bag! This is a trick to get the bag! What on earth could he want with it?"

He strode on to the school.

Alonzo Todd had taken the bicycle back to the shed. He saw the stranger come in at the gates, and took care to keep out of sight. Harry Wharton and Bob Cherry, who were chatting under the elms, saw the Duffer of Greyfriars flatten himself behind one of the trees, and stared at him in amazement.

"What on earth is Todd up to?" exclaimed Harry.

Bob Cherry grinned.

"Getting practice in taking cover it looks like," he said.

"I suppose he's going to join the Boy Scouts."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bob Cherry slapped Todd upon the shoulder. It was a rather unfortunate moment to choose for that salutation, as Todd was jamming himself behind the tree for cover, and Bob Cherry's slap sent his nose jamming against the bark more closely than Todd intended, and Todd gave a roar.

"Ow! Yow!"

"Why, what's the matter?" exclaimed Bob Cherry, in surprise.

"Yow! My nose!"

"Hurt it?"

"Yow! Yes! Yuh!"

"Well, if you will bung your nose on a tree you must expect to hurt it!" said Bob Cherry. "What's the little game?"

"Eh? Game?"

"Yes. What are you up to?"

"Up to?"

"What are you sticking yourself behind that tree for?"

"Tree?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Harry Wharton. "He's parroting again!"

It was Todd's way to repeat what was said to him when he was confused. Between the pain in his nose and his intense desire to keep out of Mr. Croker's sight Todd hardly knew what he was doing.

Bob Cherry shook him.

"Look here, you ass—" he began.

"Don't! Don't make me get out of cover."

"What are you hiding for?"

"That's Mr. Croker coming in—you know, the blackmailing chap who is coming to see Mr. Quelch," muttered Todd.

Harry and Bob glanced at the stranger, who was crossing towards the house with a frowning face and a rapid stride. They recognised him at once.

"It's the chap who was here yesterday," said Bob. "He has come back, you see."

"It's all right, though," said Todd, peering at the stranger round the tree. As a matter of fact, Alonzo was showing an arm, a leg, a shoulder, and half his head if Mr. Croker had glanced in that direction.

"How is it all right, chump?"

"We've got the papers."

"What?"

"Mr. Quelch is safe now," said Todd, still watching the stranger, and breathing a sigh of relief when he disappeared into the house.

"What on earth do you mean?" asked Harry impatiently.

"I upset that chap in the lane—"

"Upset him?"

"Yes—ran him down on Smith's bike," said Alonzo, with an air of great satisfaction. "It was a pretty clever trick, wasn't it? I was rather hurt, but I don't mind that in a good cause. Smith collared the bag and bolted."

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"Smith?" roared Harry and Bob together.
 "Oh, certainly!"
 "Smith minor, do you mean, or—the Bounder?" demanded Harry.
 "Vernon-Smith."
 "Vernon-Smith—the Bounder! He's got the papers?"
 "Yes. Mr. Quelch is safe now."
 "You—you dummy!" said Harry, between his teeth. "Can't you see? Do you think Vernon-Smith means to help Mr. Quelch? He hates him like poison!"
 "My dear Wharton—"
 "If there's anything in those papers harmful to Mr. Quelch Smith will be on it at once. You ass! He wants to injure Mr. Quelch, not to help him!" exclaimed Harry.
 "Oh, dear!"
 "You chump!"
 "Really—"
 "It's all right," said Bob Cherry, somewhat uncomfortably. "We had already decided that there was nothing in the blackmailing story, you know, and that that letter was only a jape. There can't be anything in the bag to hurt Mr. Quelch."
 "I'm not so sure."
 "But we had decided—"
 "The Bounder doesn't think so. You utter ass, Todd! Why did you tell Smith a word about it?"
 "I didn't! You did!"
 "I?"
 "Yes, you!" said Todd warmly. "I never told him anything till he told me you had told him, and—"
 "A lie, as usual!" said Harry bitterly. "Even you ought to know Vernon-Smith by this time, Todd."
 "Oh, dear!"
 "You've made a jolly mess of things, I must say!" growled Bob Cherry.
 "How very odd! I did not think of this, you know. I'm sure that I only wanted to be useful and obliging."
 "Oh, rats! What are you going to do, Harry?"
 "Find that cad!" said Harry, with a frowning brow.
 "But—"
 "And get the bag back before he's opened it, if possible. If not, I'll make him take it straight to Mr. Quelch, or wring his neck. Where did you part from him, Todd?"
 Todd explained. Harry and Bob ran off towards the gates at once. They had not much hope of finding Smith before he opened the bag, but, at all events, they could take it away from him, and see that he made no use of the papers, whatever they were.

THE SEVENTEENTH CHAPTER. The Truth at Last.

"HALLO! Skinner—Skinner!"
 Skinner stopped with a guilty flush. He was hurrying along the passage when Frank Nugent entered it from the other end and called after him. Skinner seemed inclined to hurry on without taking any notice, but Nugent shouted, and he had to stop.
 "What do you want?" he called back.
 "Nothing. You've dropped a letter, that's all."
 "No, I haven't."
 "Yes, you have," said Frank Nugent, pointing to a letter that lay on the floor. "I saw you drop it just as I came into the passage."
 "I didn't," said Skinner.
 Frank looked at him in astonishment.
 "You ass!" he replied. "I tell you I saw you. But if you don't want your own letter you can leave it there, for all I care."
 "It's not mine," said Skinner. And he walked on.
 Frank glanced after him, and then glanced at the letter that lay on the floor. He had distinctly seen Skinner drop it, and he was amazed that the junior should not want to reclaim his own property.
 "Looks to me as if it was somebody else's letter he's been looking at, and he jolly well wants to get rid of it!" muttered Frank.
 And he picked up the letter.
 A glance at it showed that the proper owner was not Skinner, and that Frank's surmise respecting the junior's conduct was correct.
 The letter was a brief one, and Frank read it at a glance. He had to read it to discover who the owner was, convinced now that it was not Skinner. That Skinner had read the letter, and wanted to leave it where somebody else could find it, so as to be able to disclaim any connection with the matter, was clear.
 The letter ran as follows:
 "Dear Sir,—Your letter received to-day. I shall call at Greyfriars on Friday at half-past six, as you request, in order to discuss the matter, and I trust that we shall come to a satisfactory settlement.—Yours faithfully,

"H. CROKER."

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"Croker!" muttered Nugent.
 He understood now.
 This was the letter that Mr. Quelch had lost. As Mr. Quelch's visitor was named Croker, and as he had called at half-past six on Friday, there was not much doubt that this was the letter Mr. Quelch had been inquiring for.
 And it had been in Skinner's possession all the time.
 What did it mean? Why had Skinner kept it, and what did that other letter mean—that other letter which was evidently not the one Mr. Quelch had lost.
 Frank Nugent's lips set grimly. With the letter grasped in his hand, he went to Skinner's study, into which the humorist of the Remove had gone.
 Skinner looked startled as he came in.
 Frank entered and closed the door. Bulstrode was with Skinner, and he looked a little threatening, but Frank took no notice of him.
 He held the letter up.
 "I saw you drop this in the passage a minute ago, Skinner," he said.
 "You didn't!" said Skinner.
 "I saw you! It's Mr. Quelch's letter—the one he's been inquiring after," said Frank. "You've had it all the time."
 "I haven't."
 "Don't come here with your ragging!" said Bulstrode, in his most bullying tone. "Get out of the study, Nugent, do you hear!"
 Frank did not even look at him.
 "I want an explanation of this matter, Skinner," he said.
 "I've no explanation to give you," said Skinner, looking a little scared now. "What's it got to do with you, anyway?"
 "Do you want me to go to Mr. Quelch?"
 "You can do as you like."
 "Very well," said Frank quietly. "I will. You have been playing a caddish trick, and when I tell Mr. Quelch that I saw you drop this letter—"
 Skinner looked alarmed.
 "You won't tell him!" he exclaimed.
 "Sneak!" said Bulstrode.
 "I shall tell him, unless you make a full explanation to me now," said Frank. "I'm not sure I sha'n't tell him, in any case."
 Skinner burst into a forced laugh.
 "It was only a jape," he said. "I've been pulling Todd's leg, that was all. He's such a duffer."
 "What have you done?"
 "Well, I found that letter yesterday," admitted Skinner. "I don't mind telling you. It was all only a joke, of course. I found that letter, and then knew that a chap was calling on Quelch at half-past six Friday, see? Then I thought of playing a jape on Todd. You know, he's always trying to oblige people, and so on, and always up to some game. I thought I'd give him something to interest him, so I wrote a rotten, silly letter, and dropped it for him to pick up."
 "I've seen the letter. Wharton guessed at once that you had written it," said Frank. "You meant to make Todd believe that Mr. Quelch was being blackmailed, didn't you, and make him make a fool of himself?"
 Skinner grinned.
 "Well, I knew Quelch would inquire for his missing letter," he explained. "Then, of course, Todd would jump to the conclusion that he had found it. Of course, that's just the conclusion he did come to."
 "And you thought he'd take the letter to Mr. Quelch, and get a licking for his cheek?" said Frank sternly.
 Skinner shifted uneasily.
 "Well, I thought there would be some fun in it, you know," he said. "Todd's ass enough for anything. He might have sent the letter to Scotland Yard, and had a detective down here, or he might have shown it to the whole form, and made a big story out of it, or marched up to Quelch with it in the role of protector—"
 "Ha, ha, ha!" roared Bulstrode.
 "It was a jolly good jape!" said Skinner, with a grin.
 "Yes, I suppose so, to a chap who doesn't care whether his japes get another chap a licking," said Frank.
 "Well, Todd shouldn't be such a duffer."
 "You've no right to take advantage of it in this way. If he had sprung that rotten letter on Mr. Quelch, he might have been flogged."
 "Serve him right," said Bulstrode.
 "I'm not talking to you," said Nugent. "You're as big a cad as Skinner is—a precious pair, I think. You were in this with Skinner."
 Bulstrode jumped up.
 "Do you want to be chucked out of this study?" he demanded.
 "Oh, I'm going out!" said Frank. "You're not the kind of chaps I care to remain with. I'll ask you to take this letter back to Mr. Quelch, Skinner."

"What!"

"It's his property, and it's got to be returned to him."

"But—"

"Here it is."

"I jolly well wish I had burned it!" growled Skinner.

Frank gave a contemptuous laugh.

"It would have been safer," he said, "but you dared not. You know you would be expelled for a thing like that if it came out, as it jolly well might with Bulstrode knowing about it, the next time you quarrelled with him."

"Look here—" began Bulstrode blusteringly.

"Oh, shut up! I'm talking to Skinner. You've got to take this letter to Mr. Quelch, Skinner."

"Why can't you take it?"

"Because he might ask awkward questions as to why it hadn't been returned before," said Frank.

"Well, he might ask me, as well as you."

"I dare say he will, and you can answer. You've kept back the letter, not I, and you can stand the row."

"Look here, I'm jolly well not going to take that letter back to Quelch!" growled Skinner. "I dropped it in the passage for somebody to find and take to him. You can go and chuck it where I left it."

"I shall do nothing of the sort."

"Then take it to Quelch yourself."

"Not at all. If I take it to him, and he asks me why it was not returned to him before, I shall say it was because Skinner had it all the time."

"Sneak!" said Bulstrode.

Frank did not look at him.

"So you can take your choice, Skinner," he said.

"Hang you!"

"As much as you like. But are you going to take the letter back?"

"I suppose so, confound you!" growled Skinner, holding out his hand for the letter. "Give it me!"

"Mind, it's too late to burn it now," said Frank pleasantly.

"If you did, I should be under the necessity of explaining the whole matter to Mr. Quelch."

Skinner growled.

"I'm not going to burn it."

"I'll see you take it in to Mr. Quelch, if you don't mind."

"Look here—"

"In fact, I'll come with you, and see you actually hand it to him," said Frank.

There was no help for it. Skinner exchanged a glance with Bulstrode, but Bulstrode could not help him. Bullying was useless, in this case, and the bully of the Remove could do nothing else.

"Well, are you coming?" asked Frank, opening the door of the study, and waiting for Skinner.

"Yes!" growled that bright youth.

And he followed Frank Nugent out of the study. Frank led him to Mr. Quelch's room, and knocked at the door for him. Mr. Quelch's voice bade him enter, and then the juniors perceived that there was a visitor in the study, and Frank recognised Mr. Croker.

"What is it?" said Mr. Quelch testily. "I am engaged now, Skinner."

"Please, sir, I've found a letter," said Skinner. "As you have been inquiring for one, I thought—"

"Oh, thank you, Skinner," said Mr. Quelch, taking the letter, "this is mine! Thank you very much for bringing it to me."

And the junior left the study.

"You've got off jolly cheaply," said Frank. "If there hadn't been anybody there, Quelch would have asked questions."

Skinner shrugged his shoulders and went down the passage. He had indeed got off cheaply, and he hoped he had heard the last of the matter. It had been a first-rate jape, in his opinion, but it looked like causing trouble.

THE EIGHTEENTH CHAPTER.

In the Hour of Triumph.

"THERE'S Smith!"

Harry Wharton uttered the exclamation suddenly, as the juniors plunged through the thicket. Fortune had befriended them.

Knowing the ground very well, and the spot where the bag had been taken from Mr. Croker, the juniors had some idea where to look for Vernon-Smith. He was certain to make for some cover where he could examine his prize in security.

And Harry Wharton had headed at once for a plantation near the road, in the shades of which he fully expected to find Vernon-Smith.

He was right.

As they plunged into the thickets, they caught sight of a

cap, and the next moment they were in sight of Vernon-Smith.

The Bounder of Greyfriars was sitting on a log, and he had the black bag on the ground before him.

The bag was open, and Vernon-Smith had some of the contents in his hands, and was sorting over the papers.

He was so deeply intent upon his occupation that he did not at first observe the approach of the chums of the Remove.

But the rustling of the thicket warned him, and he glanced up hastily. His face went white as he saw Harry and Bob bearing down upon him.

He clutched the papers tightly in his hands.

"So we've found you," said Harry.

Vernon-Smith rose to his feet.

His lips set hard; his teeth were gritting together.

"Well, what do you want with me?" he asked savagely.

"That bag."

"It is mine."

Harry Wharton's lip curled.

"It's no good telling us lies, Smith. We have heard from Todd how you took it from Mr. Croker."

The Bounder ground his teeth.

"Todd! So he has been talking."

"Give me that bag."

"Hold on! What do you want it for?"

"To take to the gentleman it belongs to, of course."

"You fool!" said Vernon-Smith. "You know what's in it—and I know. I haven't had time to look through all the papers yet."

"You've read some of them, I suppose, you cad?"

"Yes. That chap Croker seems to be a solicitor's clerk or something," said Vernon-Smith. "The papers are all legal ones—agreements, and mortgage deeds, and things like that. I haven't come upon Quelch's yet."

Harry Wharton made a sudden gesture.

"Take your hand out of your pocket."

The hand came out, empty.

"Now take out the paper," said Wharton grimly.

"There was no paper—"

"Lie again! I saw you slip a paper into your pocket."

Vernon-Smith gave a snarl.

"Look here, Wharton—" he began.

"I suppose you had just come to the paper belonging to Quelch's affair?" said Harry, guessing the truth.

"Yes," said the Bounder sullenly.

"But you haven't had time to read it yet?"

"No."

"Then you won't have the chance. Put it back in the bag."

"I won't."

"Then I'll take it from you."

"Hold on," said Vernon-Smith hurriedly, as Harry Wharton advanced a pace—"hold on, Wharton! Let me speak before you make a fool of yourself."

"What do you want to say?"

"This paper had something to do with Quelch. There's his secret in it, whatever the secret is," said Vernon-Smith eagerly.

"I shouldn't wonder."

"Well, don't you see what a hold it will give us over him, if we read it?" said the Bounder. "He will be at our mercy."

"How so?"

"Why, that chap is a blackmailer, and if the secret gives him any power over old Quelch, it will be the same with us."

Wharton laughed contemptuously.

"I don't believe it. I can't believe it; that letter that Todd found was a jape of somebody's—Skinner's, I imagine."

"Nothing of the sort. I'm certain—"

"But if your view of the matter was correct, Smith, do you think I'd look at the paper?" said Harry scornfully; "or let you look at it, either, for that matter? The only difference it would make is, that I'd hand it to Mr. Quelch instead of to this man Croker."

"Fool!"

"Thanks! Now give me the bag."

"Look here—"

"I'm not going to argue with you, Smith. You could talk for a month without making either of us as big a rascal as yourself."

"What-ho!" said Bob Cherry emphatically.

Vernon-Smith scowled fiercely.

"Look here, what right have you got to meddle with me?" he exclaimed. "Leave me alone; that's all I ask."

"It's a little too much to ask, under the circumstances. Any decent chap ought to interfere to prevent a mean cad from sneaking into other people's private affairs," said Harry. "Now, for the last time, will you give me that paper?"

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"I suppose I must."

"Quite right, and buck up."

The Bounder bent down, as if to slip the paper into the bag. He lifted the bag in one hand, holding the paper in the other.

But instead of putting the folded paper in the bag, he suddenly straightened up, and with all his force flung the bag at Harry Wharton's face.

Harry's hands went up instinctively to shield his face, and he caught the bag in time, and it fell to the earth, scattering its contents on all sides.

At the same instant Vernon-Smith dashed away.

"Pick up the papers, Bob," exclaimed Harry, and he dashed in pursuit of the Bounder.

"Right you are!"

Bob Cherry stayed behind to pick up the papers and pack them into the bag again, while Harry Wharton sped on the track of Vernon-Smith.

Wharton was the best runner in the lower school, and as for fisticuffs, he would not need Bob's assistance when he came up with the Bounder. He could easily have dealt with two like Vernon-Smith.

The Bounder was running hard.

He had a slight start, but he knew that Harry Wharton would gain upon him, and he did not depend upon running to save himself. He made for a stream on the other side of the field that was crossed by a single plank.

He ran quickly across the plank, dragged it from its place, and hurled it into the water.

The next moment Harry Wharton drew up on the opposite side of the water.

Vernon-Smith gave him a jeering yell.

"Done!" he shouted.

Harry did not reply. He ran back from the stream. Vernon-Smith saw at once that he meant to gain a good run, and then leap the stream, wide as it was.

The Bounder did not lose a second.

He dashed off at top speed, and gained the road. Down the road he went at a racing pace for the school.

Once there, he could take measures to defend his prize from Wharton, or conceal it in a safe place. Locked up in his study in the Remove passage, he could bid defiance to Harry Wharton and everybody else. And once having mastered the secret of the paper, he could defy Mr. Quelch as well.

Harry Wharton made a desperate bound and cleared the stream. But he had lost time, and the Bounder of Greyfriars had a long start now.

Well ahead of his pursuer, Vernon-Smith dashed in at the gates of Greyfriars. He nearly ran into Frank Nugent.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Frank. "What's the hurry?"

The Bounder did not reply.

He dashed on, towards the house. The next moment Harry Wharton came panting in at the gate.

"What's the row?" asked Nugent, in amazement.

"That rotter's got a paper from Croker's bag," gasped Harry, without slackening his pace. "A paper about Quelch, you know. He's going to read it."

Nugent laughed.

"I don't see that it matters," he said. "That's all moonshine about the blackmailing, Harry."

"How do you know?"

"I've found it out. I say——"

"Later!" gasped Harry.

He ran into the house after Vernon-Smith. A door was heard to slam in the Remove passage, and a key turned in the lock.

Frank Nugent hurried upstairs to find Harry hammering at the door of Vernon-Smith's study. Bob Cherry was only a minute after him. Bob had lost no time in getting back to Greyfriars, and he had the famous black bag in his hand.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" exclaimed Bob. "Have you got him?"

"Not yet."

"Got the paper?"

"No. He's locked himself up in his study with it," exclaimed Wharton, hammering at the door. "I'll have it, if I have to break the door in. Smith!"

"Oh, get away!" came the Bounder's voice from within the study.

"Give me that paper."

"Rats!"

"Don't you dare to read it! You mean hound! If you so much as open it, I'll let Mr. Quelch know what you've done."

"I mean to tell him myself."

"Open the door!"

"Rats!"

"By Jove!"

"It's all right," said Frank Nugent. "You needn't smash the door in, Harry. I tell you it's all moonshine. I suppose Vernon-Smith's got the story from Todd, and thinks as Todd does about it?"

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ONE
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"Yes, and——"

"Ha, ha, ha! It was a jape on Todd. I know all about it now; I've had it from Skinner, and Mr. Quelch's real letter has been found."

"What?"

Nugent explained.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Bob Cherry, as he concluded. "I knew it was a jape all along."

"The japefulness was terrific," remarked Hurree Janset Ram Singh, who had come out of No. 1 Study in time to hear Nugent's explanation. "The suspectfulness on my honourable part was also great."

"Well, I suppose we all knew it was rot," said Harry Wharton slowly; "but I did feel a bit uneasy at one time. Still, I must say I suspected Skinner from the first. As for Todd, he's too big a duffer for anything. Smith was only too willing to believe anything against Mr. Quelch, I suppose, or he wouldn't have been taken in like this. I suppose that chap Croker is simply a solicitor's clerk, who's come down to see Mr. Quelch on ordinary business."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Cherry!"

It was Mr. Quelch's stern voice.

The juniors turned round at once. Mr. Quelch had come upstairs, with a darker look on his face than the juniors had ever seen there before, and Mr. Croker was at his heels, looking somewhat excited.

"Yes, sir," said Bob.

"This gentleman," said Mr. Quelch, indicating his visitor with a wave of the hand, "had a bag taken from him as he came to the school this afternoon, only a short time ago, and he thinks it was taken by a boy belonging to this school. He tells me that he saw the bag in your hand as you entered the school just now. I saw you also, and you were certainly carrying a bag. Is it possible that you, Cherry, are the boy who committed this outrage?"

"No, sir."

"There is the bag," said Mr. Croker, pointing to the black bag, which Bob Cherry had laid on the floor.

"That is your bag, Mr. Croker?"

"Certainly," said Mr. Croker, picking it up.

"That is the bag you brought into the school a few minutes ago, Cherry," said Mr. Quelch, with his darkest frown.

"Yes, sir; but I didn't take it from Mr. Croker, I took it from the chap who boned it from him," explained Bob.

"Wharton and I heard about it, and we went to look for the rotter—I mean the chap, sir, and we got the bag back."

"Then why did you not bring it to me at once?"

"Because the chap has taken a paper from it, sir," said Harry Wharton, seeing that it must all come out now; for Mr. Croker was examining the contents of the bag to ascertain if anything was missing.

"Oh, I understand! I heard you knocking at this door." Mr. Quelch rapped sharply at the Bounder's door. "Open this door at once, Smith!"

Vernon-Smith opened the door. It would have taken a bolder spirit than the Bounder's to disobey the stern voice of the Form-master. But there was sullen defiance in his face as he confronted the Form-master. Mr. Quelch fixed his eyes sternly on the cad of the Remove.

"You took this gentleman's bag, Smith?"

"Yes, I did."

"You removed a paper from it?"

"Yes, I did."

"You have the paper?"

"Yes, and I'll jolly well show it to the Head if you aren't careful," said Vernon-Smith, with utter insolence. "I know that that chap has come here to blackmail you, and he's got this paper to prove something against you, and——"

"Bless my soul!" exclaimed Mr. Croker. "The boy is mad."

Mr. Quelch seemed petrified.

"You—you utterly foolish and wicked boy!" he exclaimed. "What do you mean? That paper is a mortgage-deed, concerning some property of mine. Mr. Croker represents a firm of solicitors who have the matter in hand for the other party. What could have put such a monstrous, such an absurd and wicked idea into your head?"

Vernon-Smith's jaw dropped.

"In order to disabuse your mind of any such idea, before I punish you, I will let you see the paper," said Mr. Quelch. "You are welcome to read it."

But the Bounder did not care to read it now. The paper fluttered from his hand to the floor, and Harry Wharton picked it up and handed it to Mr. Croker, who restored it to the black bag.

"I have never in all my career encountered a boy with tendencies so evil," said Mr. Quelch. "I shall not deal with

you myself, Smith. I shall insist upon your being flogged. Mr. Croker, we will now finish our business together, as you have recovered your papers."

And Mr. Quelch went downstairs with his visitor. Vernon-Smith sank helplessly into a chair. All his schemes had burst upon his head, and he looked so utterly defeated and dismayed that even Harry Wharton pitied him. The chums of the Remove left him without a word.

Mr. Quelch's business with Mr. Croker was never known to the juniors. They guessed that some payment on a mortgage had become overdue, which was what caused Mr. Quelch some anxiety in the matter. They did not care to know more, it was no business of theirs. It was no business of Vernon-Smith's, either, and he suffered for having made

it his. Mr. Quelch relented about the flogging, and caned the Bounder instead; but it was a caning that Vernon-Smith remembered for many a long day. But he did not think of revenging himself again. Revenge is said to be sweet, but the Bounder of Greyfriars had found it bitter, and he had had enough of it. In fact, he had not spirit enough left to "go for" Alonzo Todd, though the Duffer of Greyfriars was the cause of his troubles. As for Alonzo Todd, he went on his way cheerfully—and he is likely to go on, as obliging as ever, and with the same desire to make himself useful.

THE END.

(Another splendid, long, Complete Tale of the Juniors of Greyfriars next Tuesday, entitled: "The Cliff House Guest," by Frank Richards. Order your "Magnet" Library in advance. Price One Penny.)

★-----★

STANLEY DARE

The Boy Detective



INTRODUCTION.

Stanley Dare, the Boy Detective, is engaged by Miss Ruth Palgrave to investigate a strange case. Miss Palgrave's fiancé—Geoffrey Winfield—has quarrelled with his guardian, Jasper Marlowe. In the heat of anger Winfield had left home, but some weeks later had received a letter purporting to come from Jasper Marlowe, begging the young man return and make peace. On his return he enters his guardian's room to find the old man lying dead on the floor. When Winfield gives the alarm his story is disbelieved and he is arrested for murder. Miss Palgrave at once goes to Stanley Dare's office and explains the case in detail. "There is an element of mystery about this crime that has aroused my interest," said Stanley Dare, turning to Ruth Palgrave. "If Mr. Winfield is innocent, he is the victim of as villainous a scheme as ever mortal man was entangled in—concocted, too, by masters of the darkest branches of crime."

(Now go on with the Story.)

Stanley Dare Visits Winfield and Professor MacAndrew—The Phil.

A quarter of an hour later Stanley Dare and his fair client were seated in a hansom on their way to London Bridge terminus. On arrival at Saintbury, Ruth Palgrave drove in a fly to her home, while the young detective went straight to the police-station to interview Geoffrey Winfield.

The details of the interview need not be given here, for it would be merely a recapitulation of the points already dwelt on. But Dare formed a very favourable opinion of Winfield during the time he was with him, and his calm, fearless, straightforward manner convinced him that he was innocent of the crime of which he was accused.

"By the way," said the young detective, when he was on the point of quitting the cell, "you say you received a letter from your late guardian, in which he asked you to come down here and talk over matters again with him. Have you the letter still in your possession?"

"Oh, yes!" replied Winfield. "I put it in my pocket, and there it has been ever since."

He handed an envelope over to Dare, and the young detective extracted the sheet of notepaper from it. But on opening it, he turned it this way and that with a puzzled look.

"You have made a mistake," he said. "With the exception of some figures written in pencil, this paper is blank."

"Blank!"

Winfield snatched it from him, and stared at it in the most utter bewilderment. Then he looked at the envelope. The address was on that plainly enough, but there was nothing but the pencilled figures on the notepaper.

"I might have thought, Mr. Dare," he said, "that I had inadvertently destroyed the letter, and placed a blank sheet of paper in the envelope by mistake, but for one thing. This row of figures is the number of the postal-order which was enclosed. I wrote them down on the top of the letter—of that I am absolutely certain as I ever was of anything which has happened in my life. But the writing has vanished. What is the meaning of this fresh mystery?"

"It means that we have to deal with men who lay their plots with unsurpassed cunning," replied Dare gravely—"men who have omitted no single detail to cover up their trail, and to render the evidence against you as far as possible flawless. That letter was written in what is called invisible ink—a chemical preparation which fades away after a certain time. It is different to the ordinary invisible ink, which is really first invisible, but is brought out by the application of heat."

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"Then one of the most important items in my defence is now taken from me," cried Winfield, in despair. "But my guardian would never have written a letter with invisible ink—"

"Your guardian did not write the letter," interposed Dare. "It was a clever forgery, and all part of the scheme of which you are the victim. I must keep this sheet of paper."

"If you wish to," said Winfield. "But to me it appears to be valueless."

"On the contrary; it is of the utmost value. It has already furnished me with a clue—a very slight one, I admit."

"A clue! What is it?" cried Winfield eagerly.

"On that point," replied Dare, "you will forgive me if I am silent at present. And now I must say good-bye. Keep a good heart. The future looks dark and threatening now, but you must never lose hope, for there may be bright days in store for you."

With these cheering words, which served to raise the drooping spirits of the prisoner a little, Stanley Dare quitted the cell, and made his way to the inspector's office. From him, however, he learnt but little more than he already knew, for the police were not in possession of any more facts than the young detective's fair client.

"It's a clear case, I'm afraid, against young Winfield," said the inspector, "and your labour will be in vain, Mr. Dare; though, of course, it's only right that everything should be done by the young fellow to clear himself. So, under the circumstances, there's nothing like engaging the services of a detective, professional or otherwise."

"Exactly," replied Dare. "And since my interview with Mr. Winfield I am convinced of his innocence, and if it is possible to prove it, and confound his enemies, I will do it."

The inspector shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, you'll get your fees, I suppose, anyway," he said; "and, after all, that is the principal item."

"Not with me," returned Dare. "And in this case I shall not accept any fees unless I succeed."

"Then I'm afraid you will be very much out of pocket," the inspector rejoined.

"That remains to be proved," said Dare. "In the meantime, the actual cause of Jasper Marlowe's death remains a mystery, don't forget that."

"It will be found out at the post-mortem," replied the inspector.

"That remains to be proved," returned Dare again. "And now I want to ask you a favour."

"What is it?" queried the inspector, with the air of a man

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who seems to say "I knew you couldn't do without the regular police, after all!"

"You found an ebony idol in the library," pursued Dare. "May I be allowed to examine it?"

"You will have to ask the servants at the Grange for that permission," said the inspector. "We did not attach any importance to the find, and we left it in the library."

"It was on the floor near the window, I believe?" observed Dare.

"Yes."

"And it was not Mr. Marlowe's property," the young detective continued; "nor had it ever been seen by any of the servants before?"

"So they said," replied the inspector; "but we have no proof that it was not Mr. Marlowe's property. And, after all, it is only a wooden image."

"As you say, that is all," returned Dare drily. "I am glad that you left it, for I fancy I may find something interesting about this image which has escaped your observation."

With this parting shot he took his departure. The inspector looked after him doubtfully, and then, turning to a subordinate, remarked:

"That young fellow thinks himself mighty clever because he has been lucky with one or two cases that he has taken up. When he has had my experience he won't, perhaps, give himself quite so many airs."

"Perhaps not," replied the constable, who secretly had no great opinion of his superior's skill.

It was now nine o'clock, but Stanley Dare meant to visit the Grange that night, for he did not believe in letting the grass grow under his feet when once he had started on a case. The night was fine, though somewhat cloudy and dark, and the distance between the Saintbury police-station and Elmwood Grange was about two miles. He decided to walk.

The lodge gates were open, for the gardener had been obliged to go into the town, and there was no one whom he could leave in charge. Dare passed through and up the drive, with its bordering of giant elms. He had his eyes fixed most of the time on the library window, and did not see a shadowy figure that was lurking among the trees and watching him.

"It would be quite possible for anyone to climb up to or down from the library window by means of that rain-pipe which goes from the ground to the roof," he muttered; "and a man so doing would leave but little trace behind him, for the ground is hard beneath the window."

Baxter, the manservant, who was partly valet and partly butler, admitted him into the house, and very willingly showed him over the library and adjoining rooms.

"Mr. Marlowe has left no will, I believe?" observed Dare.

"None has been found, sir," replied Baxter.

"Then the property will be thrown into Chancery?" said Dare.

"Well, no, sir," returned Baxter. "It appears there's a nephew—"

"A nephew?" exclaimed Dare. "Why, Geoffrey Winfield told me that the nephew died in Australia some years ago."

"So we all thought," replied Baxter. "But it appears that we were mistaken, for a letter came from a London solicitor this morning stating that Mr. James Cooper—that's the name of the nephew—was now in London, and in due course would put in a formal claim to the property."

Stanley Dare whistled softly.

"I hardly expected that," he said to himself. "It is a bold move, and will complicate matters considerably."

He turned to the manservant.

"You were a long time in Mr. Marlowe's service?" he said.

"Yes, sir—twelve years."

"Did you ever see this nephew?"

"Never, sir. He left England about a year before I came to the Grange."

"Then there is not anybody in the neighbourhood who would be likely to remember him?"

"I think not, sir. As far as I've heard, he never lived at the Grange, but only came here on an occasional visit. I don't think that he and Mr. Marlowe got on very well together."

"Thank you!" said Dare. "I will have a look at the ebony idol. I may, indeed, want to take it away with me."

"I shall be glad if you do take it, sir," replied Baxter. "It never belonged to Mr. Marlowe, and I don't like the thing. It has an uncanny look about it, I think."

It was the figure of a Hindu god, not more than six inches in height, and exquisitely carved in black ebony. It was hideously ugly, and had eyes made of mica, which seemed to have a mocking leer in them, as though defying its possessor to discover the secret which it held, for that the idol did hold a secret Stanley Dare was quite certain. It was not mere chance which had brought it into the library on the night of the crime.

"I will not detain you any longer to-night," said Dare to the servant. "But let me know where I can communicate with you other than at this house."

Baxter gave him an address, and the young detective took his leave.

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WEEK.

THE CLIFF HOUSE GUEST.

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The man who had lurked amid the trees was still there, and crept stealthily after him. It was easy for him to remain unseen, as the night was so dark. He drew nearer and nearer to the unsuspecting young detective, who was absorbed in his own thoughts. It was a lonely road between the Grange and the village, and except those two, the shadower and the shadowed, there was not another person visible.

Suddenly Dare came to an abrupt halt, for his quick ear had just caught the sound of a stealthy footstep. He swung round, and raised his arm in time to ward off the blow of a short and heavy life-preserver.

"You have started early, my friend," exclaimed Dare, "but not quite early enough. What is your game?"

His assailant wore a crapo mask, which Stanley Dare promptly tore off, revealing a pale, evil-looking face, with light-coloured, unpleasant eyes and a sandy moustache. The fellow muttered something under his breath, and hit out furiously, at the same time making a grab at Dare's coat-pocket which contained the idol. The young detective laughed grimly.

"You have shown your hand now," he exclaimed. "I thought the idol was worth something."

A right-hander straight from the shoulder caught the fellow on the chest and sent him staggering backwards. He stumbled and fell, but before Dare could seize hold of him he had leaped to his feet again and taken to his heels.

Rushing across the road, he plunged into a fir plantation, in the dark recesses of which he quickly disappeared. It was useless to follow him, so Dare continued his way into the village, where he had secured a bed for the night at a quiet village inn of the old-fashioned type.

The next morning he returned to London, and the first thing he did on arriving in the metropolis was to call upon an acquaintance of his who had given him some invaluable assistance in many of his chief cases. This was an eccentric old scientist named MacAndrew, who lived in a queer old house in Chelsea.

Professor Seth MacAndrew was at home and in his study. He greeted Dare in his usual laconic style as he entered.

"Well, laddie, what do you want with me?"

There were no words wasted between these two men. Each admired the other's talents, but they did not find it necessary to be effusive in their friendship on that account. Dare produced the idol and handed it to the professor.

"It is an image of the god Hahnuman, the monkey god of the Hindus," said the professor, as soon as he saw it. "The original is in the Hindu temple at Ramapur. How did you obtain possession of it?"

In as few words as possible Stanley Dare related the salient points in the case on which he was engaged.

"An attempt was made to take it from me last night," he said, in conclusion, "so that gives me an additional reason for supposing that this idol forms an important link in the chain of evidence."

"Ye may well say that, laddie," replied the professor. "Look here!"

He had pressed a hidden spring, and the head of the idol flew back on an invisible hinge. The image was hollow, and a small, steel phial was inside. The professor lifted it out and removed the stopper. A faint, sickly odour immediately became perceptible. MacAndrew corked the phial again:

"This phial contains a drug," he continued, "fairly common in the East but little known in Europe. If inhaled it produces instant insensibility, but the effect passes off in about an hour. You say that young Winfield states that he felt something hard pressed against his nostrils just before he lost consciousness?"

"Yes."

"It was this phial, without a doubt, if his story is a true one," said the professor. "This case interests me, Dare; there is something in it very much out of the common. I should like to join you in the investigations."

"Nothing could give me greater pleasure," exclaimed Dare.

"We may regard that as a compact, then?"

"Ay, laddie, a compact. And now for lunch. A hungry man has no stomach for work, you know."

In Possession—The Borgia Ring—A Missing Will and a Death Certificate—In a Trap.

Three weeks had passed. Geoffrey Winfield had been committed for trial, and removed to the county gaol, and Jasper Marlowe's nephew, James Cooper, had installed himself at Elmwood Grange, at the same time giving all his late uncle's servants notice to quit.

Stanley Dare had unfortunately made very little progress towards the elucidation of the mystery, for although the ebony idol formed a sort of clue to work from, he had not been able to discover who had been the possessors of it.

The actual cause of Jasper Marlowe's death was still a profound mystery, for the post-mortem examination had revealed but little. There was a small incised wound at the back of the neck, which looked like the prick of a needle, and the flesh around it was slightly discoloured.

Professor MacAndrew had been present, but not in an official capacity, so his opinion was neither sought nor given. But had it been asked, he could have given the coroner and his court some information at the inquest that would have surprised them.

As it was, he confided it only to Dare, with the remark:

"It will be better, I think, to keep our knowledge to ourselves until the right time comes to disclose it. It would handicap us if it were published in the papers, and our first duty is to our client."

"Have you had an opportunity of examining that curiously carved gold ring that was found on the library floor?" asked Dare. "It belongs to Winfield, although he states that he left it behind at the Grange when he quitted the place after the quarrel, and never saw anything more of it until the night of the murder, when it was in the hands of the police."

"Ay, laddie, I saw it, and examined it very closely. It is a real Borgia."

"I thought so. Winfield told me that he only wore it once, and then one of the edges, which had worn thin, caused a sore on his finger that took weeks to heal."

"Is that so, laddie?" exclaimed the professor excitedly. "Ay, but that's important. Ye'll not find that pure gold would have such an effect."

"I know it," replied Dare. "That's why I made a note of the fact, for future reference."

He glanced significantly at MacAndrew, who nodded his head with an exclamation of satisfaction.

"Good!" he murmured. "We are working slowly but surely, laddie."

"We shall be going quicker soon," said Dare. "By the way, I am going to pay a visit to Elmwood Grange to-night, unknown to the present occupier. I believe the late Jasper Marlowe did leave a will, and I have an idea where it may possibly be found, if the nephew has not already discovered and destroyed it. Anyhow, I mean to look for it."

"It'll be a risky business," said the professor.

"I know," replied Dare. "So I think I'll take that steel phial that is kept in the Hindu god with me. It may prove useful."

"Very likely," said the professor drily.

It was certainly a hazardous venture which the young detective was about to undertake, but he believed always in bold measures and in daring experiments, quite out of the beaten track that the Scotland Yard detectives had perforce to follow.

The various entrances and exits by doors or windows at Elmwood Grange were familiar to him, as he had noted them very particularly when he first examined the house, so he found no difficulty, with the aid of skeleton-keys, a file, and a thin, flat piece of steel about the size of a knife-blade, in effecting an entrance.

A chiming clock in the hall struck one as he passed at the foot of the wide staircase. The house was dark and silent, for the inmates had long since retired to rest. The room which Dare wished to reach was situated on the same floor as the library, but at the back of the house. It had been but seldom used, and contained only a few articles of furniture, one of them being a carved oak bureau and book-case. It was in one of the secret drawers of this bureau that Dare believed he might find the will.

Ascending the softly carpeted stairs as noiselessly as a phantom, the young detective came to the room door. It was locked, but it soon opened to the persuasion of a skeleton-key. Once inside, he got to work without loss of time.

Secret drawers and receptacles of the ordinary kind are not difficult to discover by one who knows how to go about it. In a very short space of time Stanley Dare had examined all but one, with only a negative result. This last one baffled him. He knew it was there by the simple expedient of taking measurements, but he could not open it. At last, in desperation, he cut away a small portion of the side wood-work with his pocket-knife, and so got at the interior of the drawer. There were some documents inside, contained in two long envelopes. With almost feverish haste he withdrew them, and examined them by the light of his portable electric-lamp.

One was endorsed, "Last Will and Testament of Jasper Marlowe, of Elmwood Grange." And the other "Death Certificate of James Cooper."

The death certificate of a man who was alive and well! An ordinary person might have considered that a curious document, but not of much value.

Stanley Dare, however, seemed to consider it to be a document of the greatest possible value.

"This is an unlooked-for piece of luck," he muttered.

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"I think now we are getting within sight of the solution of the mystery. The man who has taken possession of Elmwood Grange, and calls himself James Cooper—"

"Is here!"

The voice came from behind him. Dare swung round, to find himself confronted by a dark-bearded man who stood in the doorway.

"You seem to be making yourself at home here, Mr. Stanley Dare," proceeded the man, in cold, sneering tones. "I have always heard that you posed as a detective, but it seems that in your spare time you try your hand at burglary. A useful combination. Set a thief to catch a thief—eh? You know the old saying."

"I think I shall be able to justify my intrusion here," replied Dare, who faced the awkward situation coolly; "not to you, perhaps, but to a magistrate. And as for catching a thief—well, I believe I have done more than that—I have caught a murderer!"

James Cooper started and turned white to the very lips. Then, with a snarl like a savage beast, he sprang at Dare, and dealt him a heavy blow on the head with the butt of his revolver.

The young detective reeled backwards and lurched against the window, smashing out a large pane of glass. He felt that his senses were leaving him. The envelopes containing the documents were still in his hand, and, with a sort of instinct of preventing the man who called himself James Cooper from obtaining possession of them, he flung them out through the broken window with all his strength. Then everything became a blank, and he pitched headlong to the floor, insensible.

The nephew, or pretended nephew, of the late Jasper Marlowe ran back to the door of the room as he heard footsteps coming along the corridor, for the noise of the breaking glass had aroused others in the house.

"Who's there?" he demanded.

"It's me—Sam Fennimore!" came the reply. "Is that you, Jim? What's the row?"

"I'll tell you presently," said Cooper. "Have any of the servants roused up?"

"I heard some of them moving," answered Fennimore. "There was row enough to wake 'em, anyway."

"We don't want them down here," pursued the other quickly. "Cut upstairs and tell them it's all right—that I was walking in my sleep and smashed a window."

"Do you think they will swallow that?" said Fennimore, with a grin.

"It doesn't matter whether they do or not, so long as they go back to bed again."

Fennimore departed, fulfilled his mission, and presently returned. As he entered the room he stared with astonishment at the inanimate form of the young detective.

"It's young Dare!" he exclaimed. "What's the game?"

"His game seemed to be to get hold of some papers that were secreted in this bureau," was the reply. "I don't know how he found out about them, unless Winfield put him up to it; but he had them in his hand when I came in and caught him. I downed him at once with the butt of my revolver."

"Where are the papers?"

"He tossed them through the smashed window just before he dropped, but we can easily get them again."

"What are they? Do you know?"

"I believe one is a will—Jasper Marlowe's; but don't know what the other is."

"Jasper Marlowe's will!" said Fennimore slowly. "You had better get hold of that as soon as you can. I reckon it isn't the sort of document that it will pay you to leave lying about."

"I know," replied Cooper. "But we must get Stanley Dare out of the way first. He is working for young Winfield, and he seems to have found out something that may endanger us. He said that he could put his hand on a murderer, or words to that effect."

"What!" It was now Fennimore's turn to go white. He glanced about him nervously. "Don't speak so loud, you fool; one of the servants might be hanging about listening."

Cooper strode to the door, and looked up and down the corridor.

"It's all right," he said. "Help me with young Dare. There's no time to waste."

"What are you going to do with him?"

"There's an old well at the back with six or seven feet of water in it," was the reply. "It is never used now. We must drop him into it."

"No, no!" exclaimed Fennimore. "Isn't there any other way?"

"We'll hand him over to the police, if you like, on a charge of attempted burglary," sneered Cooper, "and give him a chance of telling all he knows. Come, don't waste any more time."

(Continued on page 28.)

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