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Courtney strode up and down the study, his brow dark with angry thought. Yes, he had made a solemn promise to the coward's sister! He had to keep his word! If Rupert had not the courage to save himself, Courtney had to save him! The prefect halted at last. He had made up his mind to receive his chum's terrible thrashing. "Very well," he said quietly—very quietly, "pull yourself together, Rupert. I'm going." Valence raised his head. "You're going to take the flogging, Arthur?" he gasped. "Yes," replied Courtney. "It's the only way."

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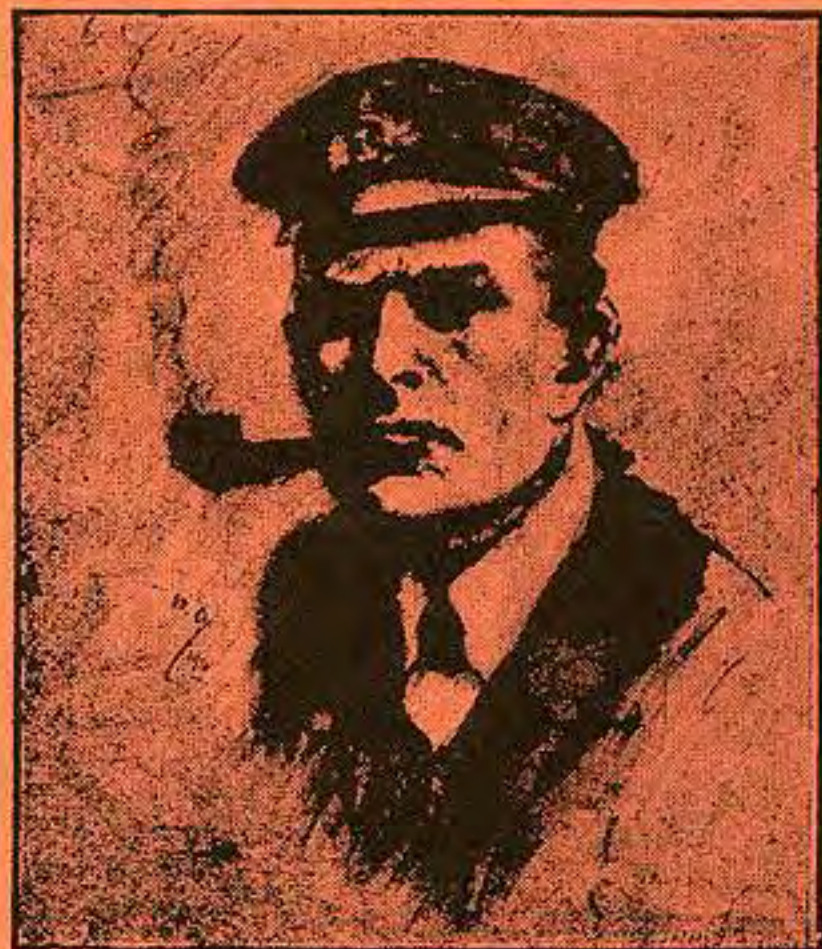
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Sir Hilton Popper pointed down the drive. "Get out," he said, "and don't let me see you again!" Courtney turned away without a word, and staggered down the drive towards the gates.

(See Chap. 16)

THE FIRST CHAPTER. In Forbidden Precincts.

"CAUGHT, by Jove!"

Bob Cherry, of the Remove Form at Greyfriars, uttered that exclamation in tones of dismay.

Bob was in the prefects' room at Greyfriars. That room was a sacred apartment—only the prefects used it, and juniors found within its walls were pretty certain to leave

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By **FRANK RICHARDS.**

it "on their necks," as Bob Cherry would have expressed it. Excepting for Bob, the room was empty. Lessons were over for the day at Greyfriars, and in the glorious summer weather everybody was out of doors. The Sixth were playing cricket, and Bob Cherry had chosen his moment well for entering the august apartment.

Not that Bob intended any harm there. He had brought a screwdriver and an assortment of screws with him, with the intention of screwing up Loder's desk. That was all. It was a little polite attention which the juniors had more than once bestowed upon Loder, of the Sixth, in return for sundry cuffs which Loder, of the Sixth, occasionally bestowed upon them. It was merely a little joke, but Loder was known to have no sense of humour at all in matters of this sort; hence Bob's alarm when he heard footsteps coming along the passage towards the door of the prefects' room.

Only one screw had been driven in so far, and Bob Cherry had expected at least a quarter of an hour without interruption. But at the sound of footsteps in the passage he suspended his labours and listened.

The footsteps—of more than one person, too—were coming towards the door of the prefects' room, and Bob guessed that they would stop there. Visions of Loder coming in and catching him in the very act floated before Bob Cherry's mind.

When he was with his chums in the Remove quarters, Bob Cherry frequently treated Loder, of the Sixth, with more dis-

respect than was agreeable to a prefect and a senior. But in the prefects' room, far from help, it was a different matter. Bob looked round for some place to conceal himself. He had no desire whatever to be cuffed by an angry prefect, and kicked out of the room; and Loder could kick very hard when he chose.

The footsteps stopped at the door, and the handle was turned. Bob Cherry left off considering all of a sudden, and made a dive behind the desk. The desk was a large one, and stood in a corner of the room. There was just space enough for Bob Cherry to crouch behind it by drawing up his long legs in a most uncomfortable attitude. He crouched there, devoutly hoping that whoever was coming into the room might not be Loder, and that he might not stay long.

The door opened. Two fellows came in, but Bob Cherry could not see them. Fortunately, they could not see him either. The door was closed again very carefully and latched. Then Bob Cherry heard a sound of someone sitting down, as a chair-leg scraped on the floor. He listened for the sound of voices. But there was no sound.

One of the two seniors who had come in was sitting down. The other was pacing to and fro in a hurried manner. But neither of them spoke.

Bob Cherry groaned inwardly. "How long are the beasts going to stay?" he murmured. "Why couldn't they stick to the cricket? I suppose it must be Loder, as he wasn't playing; but I thought the cad had gone out. If he finds me here, and his desk screwed down—"

Bob Cherry's painful reflections came to a sudden stop. The fellow, who was walking up and down, spoke in a hurried voice.

"Look here, what have you got to say, Courtney? You may as well get it over. I'm ready. But if it's another blessed sermon, I don't want to hear it."

Bob Cherry drew a quick breath. It was the voice of Valence, of the Sixth—Rupert Valence. And Valence was a very close friend of Loder's. And the other fellow was Courtney—Wingate's chum, and one of the best fellows at Greyfriars.

Bob Cherry began to feel decidedly uncomfortable. It dawned upon him that he was in the position of an eaves-dropper—a position that was very painful to a fellow of Bob's nature.

"It's not a sermon, Valence." Courtney's voice was low and very steady. "I don't take it upon me to give sermons to a fellow of my own age."

"It seems to me that you've done it often enough. You were preaching at me the other day because I was out with Loder."

"You were out after locking-up, and you know jolly well where you went," said Courtney sharply. "You went to the Green Man in Friardale."

"Well, supposing I did," said Valence defiantly. "I don't see that it need concern you."

"It naturally concerns all your friends to see you going that way, old man," said Courtney. "And I hope I'm a friend of yours."

Valence gritted his teeth.

"You won't be for long, if I get this sort of thing from you," he said. "But what is it now? It isn't Loder this time, I suppose?"

"No."

"Then what is it?" broke out Valence irritably. "Can't you speak?"

Courtney was very silent. He sat with his hands in his pockets, looking at the fellow who was pacing to and fro, hesitating to speak.

Valence stopped in his hurried walk, and looked at him. "Will you tell me what it is?" he exclaimed. "You make me tired. If you've got something up against me, why can't you tell me what it is?"

"I've got nothing up against you."

Valence came quickly towards him.

"Has my sister been speaking to you?" he exclaimed. "Is it that? Has Violet been telling you anything?"

Courtney did not reply.

"So it's that!" said Valence savagely. "You have been discussing me with her! By Jove, Courtney, if you keep on like this you and I will have a row."

"Look here," said Courtney abruptly, "I'd better speak out. I know where you are going to-night."

Valence shrugged his shoulders.

"You are going poaching," said Courtney. "I know it perfectly well. You have been out for the same reason two or three times lately."

"I dare say you have never set night-lines in preserved waters," said Valence, with a sneer. "Hang it, every chap at the school has done it!"

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"I'm not speaking of that. You have been after the game."

"Well, supposing I have? I remember you had some of the partridges when I stood a game supper in my study."

"That's not so bad. I don't hold with it, considering that the birds are private property; but poaching a partridge or two for a feed isn't so bad. But—"

"But what?"

"You've done more than that!" said Courtney sternly. "You've been poaching birds to sell. You know you have. You sold a dozen brace in Friardale."

Valence flushed red.

"If you've been spying on me—"

"I haven't," said Courtney angrily; "but you don't even take the trouble to hide what you do. And, look here, poaching a bird or two for a lark is one thing—you can call that fun. But taking birds to sell is quite another matter—it's stealing."

Valence clenched his hands.

"Stealing!"

"That's what it is," said Courtney. "You've taken money for them!"

"I was hard up."

"A man might steal your watch, and say he was hard up," said Courtney, with a curl of the lip. "You know that's no excuse."

"Besides, why shouldn't I?" said Valence angrily. "It's great fun to get at the birds, and jolly exciting dodging the keepers. And old Popper is an old cad, anyway, and always down on Greyfriars chaps. It's tit for tat."

"Yes, if it were only poaching. But doing it for money—"

"I don't see much difference."

"Well, anybody else would see a difference," said Courtney. "If there were a word of it come out, you'd be expelled from Greyfriars instantly, even if you weren't prosecuted, you know that."

"You're not thinking of telling the Head, I suppose?" said Valence, with a sneer.

"You know I'm not. But—"

"But what?"

"Stop it, Valence. It must leak out, if you keep it up," said Courtney. "Stop it, before you get into disgrace over it. It's a rotten bizney, anyway, you know that."

"I don't think so. I think it's fun."

"It's a kind of fun that has landed poor men in prison, and may land you there, too, if you're not careful. Now, look here, Valence, you must stop it!"

"Must!" exclaimed Valence fiercely.

Courtney rose to his feet.

"Yes," he said firmly, "you must! A thing of this sort can't go on. You know I'm a prefect; and if I did my duty I should report this, now I know it."

"Report it, then, and be hanged!"

"I can't—at least, I don't want to! But you've got to stop it! Can't you see how unfair it is to me?" Courtney exclaimed.

"No, I don't see it. Mind your own business," said Valence savagely. "Leave me alone, and leave my affairs alone. That's all I want you to do."

Courtney clenched his hands.

"I can't do that," he said, "because—"

"Ahem!"

It was not Valence who said that; the ejaculation came from behind Loder's desk, as Bob Cherry rose into view. The junior had been turning the matter over in his mind; and, upon reflection, he decided that it was better to show himself and take a licking, than to sit there and listen to what was not intended for his ears.

The two seniors swung round towards him with startled exclamations. Bob Cherry blinked at them, very dusty and very wary, from behind Loder's desk.

"Ahem!" he remarked.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Unpleasant for Bob.

VALENCE and Courtney stared at the dusty face of the junior as it rose over the top of Loder's desk, in the corner of the prefects' room. Courtney was looking astonished, and Valence furiously angry. It had immediately occurred to the latter that the junior must have heard all that had been said.

"Ahem!" repeated Bob Cherry.

"Cherry," exclaimed Courtney, "what have you been doing here?"

"Hiding behind the desk," said Bob cheerfully.

"Don't be a young ass! What else?"

"Getting dusty."

"He has been listening!" exclaimed Valence furiously.

"He came in here to listen and spy."



Two men came slowly by in the dim light, and stopped. Valence muttered an imprecation. They had stopped within a few feet of him. "He came this way." It was the voice of Parker, the head-keeper on Sir Hilton Popper's estate. "I'm sure of that." (See Chapter 10.)

Bob Cherry looked at him steadily. "I did nothing of the sort," he replied. "If you particularly want to know, I came in here to screw up Loder's desk, for a little joke on Loder. And as I was in the room before you came, and didn't know you were coming, you ought to know that I had no idea of spying on you."

"That's right enough," said Courtney. "He must have been in here."

Valence made an angry gesture.

"He has been spying, all the same—he has heard——"

"If I had wanted to spy, I shouldn't have shown myself," said Bob Cherry. "I could have sat tight and said nothing, if I'd liked."

"Quite true," said Courtney. "Why did you show yourself, you young rascal?"

"Because I didn't want to listen."

Valence burst into a scoffing laugh.

"You shall jolly well have a good licking for listening so far!" he exclaimed, and he ran straight at the junior.

Bob Cherry dodged out from behind the desk, and dodged round the table. The angry senior pursued him, and Bob Cherry dodged round Courtney.

"Stop him!" shouted Valence.

Courtney hesitated, and Bob was gone. He made for the door, and Valence dashed after him. Bob had his fingers on the handle of the door, when the senior overtook him and grasped him by the shoulders.

Bob Cherry was swung back into the room, and the next moment Valence had fastened a deadly grip upon him and was forcing him backwards over the table. Bob Cherry looked up in some alarm into the furious face of the Sixth-Former.

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"Let me go!" he gasped.

"Valence, what are you up to?" exclaimed Courtney, starting forward.

"I'm going to make him promise not to repeat what he has heard here," said Valence. "Now, you spying rat——"

"I'm not a spy. And you're a rat," said Bob dauntlessly. "If you weren't a cad you wouldn't suspect a chap of spying without positive proof."

Valence knocked the back of his head down on the table with a sharp and savage rap, and Bob gave a cry of pain.

"Valence!" exclaimed Courtney.

"Let me alone!" growled Valence. "Now, Cherry, promise, on your word of honour, not to repeat to anybody a word you've heard, or I'll give you such a licking you won't get over it for weeks!"

Bob looked at him defiantly.

"I won't!" he replied.

"You—you won't?"

"No! If you asked me decently I would; but as you choose to bully me instead I won't. And now you can go ahead with your licking, hang you!"

Valence gritted his teeth.

As a rule, he was not a bully; but he had a weak and passionate nature that was easily moved to fierce anger, and then he could be very cruel.

He twisted Bob backwards over the table till it seemed to the junior that the bones in his back would crack, and he cried out with pain again.

"Let me go! Let me go, you cad!"

He struggled in vain in the grip of the senior. Valence's face looked down upon him with a savage grin.

"Now will you promise, you young cad?"
 "No," gasped Bob, "I won't!"
 Valence pressed him harder, and Bob's face was white with pain. Courtney ran forward and grasped Valence by the shoulder.
 "Stop it, Rupert!"
 "Let me alone!"
 "You are hurting him!"
 "I know that. I mean to!"
 "You fool, you may injure him!" exclaimed Courtney.
 "Let him alone, I say. Valence; if you don't let him go at once I shall make you."
 "Stand back, Courtney!"
 "Let him go, then!"
 "I will not!"
 Courtney laid a powerful grasp upon the bully. Valence looked at him savagely, without releasing Bob Cherry.
 "If you lay your hands on me, Courtney, it's an end of our friendship. You understand that? That's the last straw!"
 "You sha'n't hurt that kid!"
 "Let go!"
 "Release him, then!"
 "I won't!"
 "Then I'll make you!"
 With a wrench of his powerful arms Courtney tore the senior from his grasp and whirled him away from the table. Valence staggered away as Courtney released him and crashed against the wall, and stood leaning there, gasping.
 Bob Cherry dragged himself from the table. He was lurt and aching, and his face was very white.
 Courtney pointed to the door.
 "Cut!" he said.
 "Thank you, Courtney."
 "It's all right! Cut!"
 Bob Cherry left the prefect's room. Valence was gasping for breath. He took no further notice of Bob Cherry, but stood facing Courtney, his eyes fixed upon the prefect with a stare of deadly rage and hatred.
 "I'm sorry, Valence," said Courtney awkwardly. "But you were going altogether too far, you know. You'll realise that yourself when you're calmer."
 "Hang you!" said Valence, between his teeth. "I don't ever want to speak to you again! And as for that young cad, I'll make him smart for his cheek yet, when you are not by to protect him!"
 He turned to the door, and Courtney made a hasty step towards him.
 "Rupert, old man——"
 Valence did not reply. He strode out of the room, and closed the door behind him with an echoing slam.
 Courtney was left alone, with a pale face and a worried brow. He stood in the room, his hands in his pockets, his brow lined and dark, for some time. Matters could not have gone more unpleasantly for him. His influence over Rupert Valence was gone now for good; no word of his would ever again check the black sheep of the Sixth. And it was not only that, but there was Valence's sister. Courtney thought a great deal more of her than of Valence. He knew how sorry she would be to hear that the friendship was broken.
 The door opened, and Wingate, the captain of Greyfriars, came in. He glanced at Courtney, and clapped him on the shoulder in his rough, hearty way.
 "Anything up?" he asked.
 Courtney nodded.
 "Only a row with Valence," he said.
 Wingate's brow darkened a little. Big, rugged Wingate, as honest and frank as the day, had never been able to pull well with Rupert Valence.
 "Oh, that will blow over!" he said. "You've had rows before."
 "Not this time, I think."
 "It won't be much the worse for you if it doesn't, Courtney."
 "It may be the worse for him," said Courtney. "That's what I'm thinking of. But I suppose it can't be helped."
 And he tried to dismiss the matter from his mind, without much success.

THE THIRD CHAPTER. Bob Cherry's Little Idea

"BOB!"
 "What's the matter?"
 "What's happened?"
 Bob Cherry had gone up into the Remove passage to go to his study. Most of the Lower Fourth had come in to tea, and the Remove passage was pretty well crowded. As Bob came up there were inquiries from all sides. Bob's face was white, and he walked with a curious twist, as if

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he had a pain somewhere—as, indeed, he had. The angry, passionate senior had gone very near to hurting him seriously.

"What is the matter, Bob?" asked Harry Wharton anxiously. "An accident?"

"Yes," said Bob, with a faint grin.

"What was it?"

"I was caught in the prefects' room."

"Oh! Loder?"

"No; Valence. Come into my study and I'll tell you."

"Come into mine," said Wharton. "We're just going to have tea, and we've got a good spread. Marky's gone out, so you'll be in your study alone."

"All right! Thanks!"

Bob Cherry came into Study No. 1, the apartment shared by Harry Wharton and Frank Nugent. Bob Cherry had been a tenant of that study once, and he was always a welcome guest there. John Bull and Fisher T. Fish of the Remove were also there to tea. Bob Cherry sank into a chair, with a slight gasp.

"What did they do to you, Bob?" Frank Nugent asked. "You look as if you had been through it rather bad."

Bob grunted.

"So I have," he said. "It was that beast Valence. You see, I dodged behind Loder's desk when I heard somebody come in, and they began to talk; and I thought it out, and showed myself, so as not to listen. But I had heard something, you see, and Valence started on me. He twisted me over the table and hurt my back."

Wharton's eyes gleamed with anger.

"The brute!" he exclaimed. "The fool! He might have injured you."

"He would have, I think, only Courtney stopped him. Courtney was very decent," said Bob, rubbing his aching back. "He's had a row with Valence on my account."

"I wonder he's been able to stand that chap so long," said John Bull. "It's perfectly well known that Valence goes down to the Croes Keys with Loder and Carne and Ionides, and that he goes poaching of a night. Courtney isn't that sort himself."

"There's a reason, I guess," grinned Fisher T. Fish. "I guess I know, too. Courtney is spoons on Valence's sister."

"Oh, the duffer!"

"But why should Valence be so ratty about your being there, Bob?" asked Harry Wharton. "They couldn't have had any deadly secrets to discuss, I suppose?"

"It was about the rotter poaching," said Bob Cherry. "He tried to make me promise not to tell what I had heard, and I wouldn't. I told him I would have if he had asked me decently; but I wouldn't be bullied."

"Hear, hear!"

"I'm going to make the cad sit up for giving me this twist," said Bob Cherry. "I want one of you to rub my back with Elliman's to-night. It's aching like anything. And you're going to help me make that bounder sit up?"

"Yes, rather!" said Wharton.

"Courtney was rowing him for selling game after poaching it. The unspeakable animal has been selling partridges belonging to old Hilton Popper," said Bob. "If that isn't burglary I don't know what is. I can understand a chap poaching for a bit of fun; but to snare game and sell it, that's stealing. Courtney told him so, and it got Valence's rag out awfully. He knew it was true, I suppose. He's going out to-night, poaching; and my idea is that we ought to be on the scene."

"And stop him?"

"Yes. He'll go out after lights-out, you know; and I don't see why we can't be waiting for him at the end of the

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Sixth Form passage—say, with a pail of soot-and-water. It will be rather a surprise for him in the dark."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It will also stop his poaching for a bit," said Bob Cherry, with a chuckle. "He won't dare to make a row either, in case he has to explain where he was going."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I say, you fellows——"

The study door had opened, and a fat face, adorned by a pair of very big spectacles, was looking in. The juniors all glanced round, but there were no welcoming smiles on their faces. Billy Bunter never was a welcome guest in any study.

"Get out!" said Wharton briefly.

"Oh, really, Wharton——"

Bob Cherry picked up the butter-dish.

"Where will you have it?" he asked.

Bunter blinked at him warily.

"Oh, really, Cherry! Don't be a beast, you know. I didn't come here for your rotten feed. I thought you'd like to know what's happening."

"What is it?" asked Frank Nugent suspiciously.

"Old Popper's dogcart has just driven in," chuckled Billy Bunter; "and old Popper's in it, looking as red as a turkey-cock."

"Phew!"

The juniors were on their feet at once, and tea was forgotten. Well they knew Sir Hilton Popper, one of the largest landowners in the district, and an enthusiastic preserver of game. They had had many little rubs with him themselves on such questions as picnicing on the upper reaches of the Sark; but of late they had not sinned in that particular way, and it was unlikely that Sir Hilton Popper had come to the school on their account.

"It's a row for somebody," said Nugent.

"Yes, rather."

"I guess it's for Valence," said Fisher T. Fish. "Let's go and see the guy come in. I've seen him on the war-path before, and he's comic."

"We'll see him, rather!"

And the chums of the Remove ran out of the study in haste, forgetting Billy Bunter, and forgetting the tea.

Billy Bunter's little round eyes gleamed behind his spectacles. He did not forget the tea, and he did not forget himself. As the juniors ran down the passage Billy Bunter closed the door softly behind them, and then took Harry Wharton's empty chair at the table. In a second more Billy Bunter was busy, and the good things the chums of the Remove had provided for their tea were disappearing at an amazing speed.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER. An Angry Visitor!

"HUH!"

The well-known grunt of Sir Hilton Popper greeted the chums of the Remove as they reached the doorway. A crowd of fellows, seniors and juniors, had already collected there. They, too, found Sir Hilton Popper comic when he was angry. And the baronet could get very angry indeed. Just now he appeared to be in a towering passion. His ruddy, fat face was perfectly crimson, his light-blue eyes seemed to glitter and scintillate from the deep red of his countenance, and his white moustache was trembling with rage. The stout and ruddy baronet seemed to be on the verge of an explosion, and that was very frequently his state of mind.

Some of the Greyfriars fellows took off their caps as the baronet alighted from his dogcart. Some didn't. Some grinned.

The baronet strode up the steps.

"Huh! Begad!"

The boys fell away on both sides to allow him room. It might have been quite dangerous to stand in the way of Sir Hilton Popper at that moment. He had a riding-crop in his hand, and he looked as if he particularly wished for an excuse to bring it down across somebody's shoulders.

Wingate was in the hall, and he met the irate baronet with a look of surprise. Sir Hilton Popper stopped, and stared at him.

"Are you the fellow?" he demanded.

Wingate stared.

"Am I the what?" he asked.

"The fellow?"

"What fellow?"

"The fellow who has been poaching on my land, and stealing my partridges!" roared the baronet, turning from crimson to purple.

"What on earth do you mean?" demanded Wingate. "If you have been drinking, you had better go home, sir."

Sir Hilton Popper seemed on the verge of a severe attack of apoplexy. The riding-crop trembled in his hand. It really looked as if Wingate would feel the weight of it, and the captain of Greyfriars clenched his hands. If Sir Hilton

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PENNY.

Popper had touched him, he would have measured his length along the floor the next moment. The little angry baronet could not have stood for a moment against the powerful captain of Greyfriars. Perhaps he knew that, and the knowledge acted as a brake upon his passion.

"One of you has been poaching on my estate!" he gasped out, at last. "My head keeper saw him—not his face, as he was running—but he recognised him as a Greyfriars boy by his clothes."

"Oh, one of the juniors, perhaps."

"No, sir!" roared Sir Hilton. "It was a big fellow—a fellow as tall as a man, my keeper declares—one of the head boys of the school."

"Impossible!"

"Impossible!" roared the baronet. "What do you mean, sir? Do you doubt my word, you young puppy, hey! Begad!"

"There is some mistake, sir," said Wingate quietly. "I don't believe a senior of this school would play such tricks. Besides——"

"Was it you?" demanded Sir Hilton Popper, as Courtney came up to join Wingate. Courtney gave him a stare of astonishment.

"I don't know what you are talking about," he said.

"Have you been poaching on my estate, you young villain?"

"Certainly not!"

"Have you?" roared Sir Hilton, turning to Valence, who was standing leaning against the wall, and regarding the scene with a smile.

Valence laughed.

"If I had I should hardly say so, I suppose," he replied. "I should recommend you to go and lie down, old gentleman."

And there was a laugh from the fellows near at hand.

The baronet gasped for breath. His little blue eyes almost disappeared into his puffed and crimson face.

"Where is the Head?" he shouted. "I demand to see the Head! Where is Dr. Locke?"

"I will show you to his study, sir," said Wingate.

"Very well! Begad, I'll make the young villain smart, whoever he was! Huh!"

And Sir Hilton Popper followed the captain of Greyfriars to the Head's study. The Greyfriars captain tapped at the door, and looked in.

"Will you see Sir Hilton Popper, sir?" he asked.

"Certainly!" said Dr. Locke. "Ask him to step in."

The baronet stepped in, or, rather stamped in. Wingate withdrew quietly and closed the door, leaving the enraged land-owner alone with the Head of Greyfriars.

Dr. Locke rose to his feet. He had received visits from the baronet before, and generally to hear some complaint. The baronet's manner was sufficient indication that it was to make another complaint that he had come, and a more serious one than usual. But the Head's manner was very urbane and courteous.

"Pray be seated, my dear sir," he said.

"Thank you, I prefer to stand," said Sir Hilton. "I have a very serious complaint to make, Dr. Locke—a very serious complaint, begad!"

"I am sorry to hear it."

"I have complained before of juniors trespassing upon my land."

"You have," assented the Head, with a slight inflection of irony in his voice. "I remember that with perfect distinctness."

"Boys," said the baronet, in a tone that clearly indicated that his opinion was that all boys were dangerous animals that ought to be kept in cages—"boys have trespassed on my land, and picnicked there, sir—lighted fires, sir, and burned my wood. Burned my wood, sir—my private property."

"Dear me!"

"But that is not what I have called upon you about, sir. That is a minor matter, a matter of no consequence, in comparison with what has lately happened—with the crime that has been committed now, Dr. Locke."

"Crime, sir."

Dr. Locke knew the irascible baronet too well to attach very much importance to what he said; but he was a little startled.

"Yes, sir!" exclaimed Sir Hilton Popper. "Crime, sir! I suppose you call poaching a crime, do you not, sir?"

"I should hardly call it a crime, though certainly it is very reprehensible," said the Head of Greyfriars. "But surely the police would be the proper quarter."

"I shall certainly invoke the aid of the police, Dr. Locke. But the matter concerns you very directly."

"In what way?"

"Your boys have been poaching in my preserves, sir—stealing my partridges! My partridges!" roared Sir Hilton. "My birds, sir."

NEXT
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"DRIVEN TO THE WALL."

By FRANK RICHARDS.
Order Early.

"Impossible!"

The baronet choked.

"Impossible! But it is true, sir."

"I am sure that even the most reckless juniors would never poach your birds, sir," said the Head.

"I am not speaking of the juniors."

"But—"

"Last night, sir, my head keeper caught one of the scoundrels at work. He was a Greyfriars boy, but he was not a junior. He was a big boy—certainly one of the boys in your Fifth or Sixth Form."

"Impossible!"

"My keeper is certain of what he saw. The fellow escaped, and the man did not see his face, but he is certain that it was a Greyfriars boy."

"I cannot believe it!"

"For some time past," roared Sir Hilton, "my partridges have been stolen. They were taken in snares, sir, and I attributed it to the village poachers. There are a great many poaching scoundrels in this district. But I know now, sir, that your boys are the delinquents. You teach them, sir, to steal the property of others—the most sacred property, sir—preserved birds, sir."

"Sir Hilton!"

"There have been dozens and dozens of the birds taken—taken at night, sir—and by your boys."

"I cannot think so."

"My head keeper is a reliable man, sir. Parker was my servant in the Army, sir, and I know him to be trustworthy. He declares that it was a Greyfriars boy whom he saw in the wood."

Dr. Locke shook his head.

"He did not speak to the boy?"

"The boy gave him no chance, sir."

"Can he identify him?"

"He did not see his face."

"Then I do not see what can be done. If any boy was in your woods last night, he must have broken bounds after locking up. I cannot think it was the case without the clearest proof, Sir Hilton."

"Huh!"

"Bring me some evidence that it is the case, someone who can identify such a boy, and certainly he shall be severely punished," said the Head, frowning. "I should expel such a boy from the school instantly."

"I tell you—"

"But I should require the clearest proof."

"Is not my word sufficient?" roared Sir Hilton.

"But it is not your word—it is the word of your keeper, who may be mistaken."

"Parker is a most reliable man."

"And you do not accuse any boy specifically. You do not expect me to expel the whole of the upper school on suspicion, I presume," said Dr. Locke, growing sarcastic.

The baronet gasped with wrath.

"Parade them, sir, and question them before me!" he exclaimed. "I will question them. I will bring the guilt home to the guilty party, sir."

"That is impossible. I cannot subject my boys to such an insult," said the Head tartly. "Really, Sir Hilton, you pass all bounds."

"You refuse?"

"Certainly."

"Then—then—then"—Sir Hilton seemed to be at a loss for words—"sir, I regard you as being responsible! I regard you as instructing the boys in your charge, sir, to pick and steal. I regard you as an unworthy schoolmaster, sir."

Dr. Locke touched the bell, and Trotter entered.

"Show this gentleman out, Trotter," said the Head.

"Yessir."

Sir Hilton Popper almost exploded.

"I will go, sir—I will go, begad!"

"This way, sir," said Trotter.

"I will appeal to the law, sir. I will have the woods watched, sir. I will have the scoundrels found and arrested. I will—I will—Huh! Begad!"

Sir Hilton Popper stamped out after Trotter. Dr. Locke sat down, and breathed hard. Sir Hilton Popper was a very trying visitor. The most dissatisfied parent was not so trying as Sir Hilton Popper.

The baronet stamped along the passage to the door, where his dogcart and groom were waiting. Half Greyfriars seemed to have collected to see him, and a general chuckle greeted the sight of his flaming face.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Chucked Out!

SIR HILTON POPPER glared round at the crowd of boys, and grasped his riding-crop a little tighter. He had come to Greyfriars in a towering rage, and his interview with the Head had given the finishing touch to it. Hot Indian suns had warmed up the baronet's temper; and in the Army he had been as a little god, and men had been in terror of his temper. In private life he was not so terrible, and that was a continual source of irritation to him. He wanted to see the whole of the public regard him as terrified Sepoys and unfortunate Tommies had regarded him; and he never could be satisfied upon that point. His keepers generally remained with him a very short time, and hated him all the time. Sir Hilton was, in fact, the best-hated man on the countryside, and he was respected as little as he was liked. The Greyfriars fellows had nothing to fear from him, and they were not likely to be scared by his Jove-like frowns.

"Huh!" gasped the baronet, glaring at the grinning faces. "Huh! Yes, you may laugh now, you young rascals; but I will lay you by the heels some time! I will teach you to poach my birds, you young scoundrels!"

"Oh, draw it mild!" exclaimed Courtney sharply. "We don't like names like that, and the less you use them, the better."

Sir Hilton fixed his eyes upon Courtney.

"I think you are very likely the young thief who was in my woods last night!" he exclaimed. "You look as if you might be. You look like a young scoundrel!"

Courtney turned red.

"Oh, cheese it!" he exclaimed angrily.

Sir Hilton choked again.

"What—what—what did you say?" he exclaimed.

"What?"

"Cheese it!" said Courtney sharply. "If you weren't a man old enough to be my father, I wouldn't allow you to speak like that. But that's enough, anyway."

"What—what?"

"You'd better go home," said Wingate.

"You impertinent young rascal!"

"Oh, shut up!"

"Yes, shut up!" exclaimed Bob Cherry indignantly. "You ought to be ashamed of yourself, sir."

The baronet exploded then. He made a rush at Bob Cherry, and caught him by the collar. His riding-crop sang through the air, and came down with a sounding thwack across the Removite's shoulders.

"Ow!" yelled Bob.

Courtney ran forward, and grasped the baronet's arm. He tore the riding-crop away, and tossed it out into the Close.

"You'd better get out," he said.

Dr. Locke hurried down the passage. The good old doctor's face was much perturbed.

"Stop! Stop!" he exclaimed. "Boys, stand back! Sir Hilton, I appeal to you! This is disgraceful!"

"Hold your tongue, sir!" roared the baronet.

"What!"

"You have encouraged your boys to poach upon my estate—"

"Sir, I have already told you that, if any boy is found to have poached upon your land, I shall expel him from Greyfriars," said Dr. Locke. "I can say no more than that. I now beg you to retire without making any further disturbance. This is not conduct becoming a gentleman, sir."

Sir Hilton Popper shook his fist in the Head's face. He was so enraged that he hardly knew what he was doing. Certainly he could not have intended to actually strike the reverend Head of Greyfriars, but that was the impression he made upon the boys, who were getting excited too. There was a yell of wrath at once.

"Hold him!"

"Chuck him out!"

The fellows made a rush. In a moment Sir Hilton Popper was grasped by a dozen pairs of hands and whirled away from the doctor.

He struggled furiously in the grasp of the Greyfriars fellows.

"Huh! Begad! Let me go! Young scoundrels—huh!"

"Chuck him out!"

"Kick him out!"

"My dear boys!" gasped the Head, "I beg of you—"

But the dear boys were not listening.

They rushed the furious man to the door, struggling vainly in their grasp. They hurled him forth, and Sir Hilton rolled down the steps.

He lay gasping at the foot of the steps till his groom picked him up, to be rewarded by a torrent of abuse.

Sir Hilton mopped his perspiring forehead with his hand.

ANSWERS

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 186.

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Courtney sprang to his feet. He could endure it no longer. Surely if he put it plainly to this poor girl's brother, if he urged him and backed him up, the wretched fellow would have the courage to face his punishment, and if not— "Vi, don't—don't! I can't bear to see you cry," said Courtney huskily. "Don't! Rupert shall be saved. I'll manage it somehow. He sha'n't be expelled from Greyfriars! Vi, I promise you that!" (See Chap. 14.)

kerchief, and glared up at the swarm of grinning faces in the doorway.

Words failed him; there was nothing in the English language to express his feelings, and he swung away to the dogcart and clambered in. The vehicle dashed away towards the school gates.

"My hat!" gasped Bob Cherry. "What a blessed fire-brand!"

"The cheek, to shake his silly fist at the Head!" exclaimed Harry Wharton indignantly. "We ought to have bumped him!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The dogcart disappeared in a cloud of dust, Sir Hilton's voice dying away in the distance as he called his groom a clumsy fool. The unfortunate groom would very likely have been glad to bump Sir Hilton, too.

"Boys!" exclaimed the Head. "My dear boys—"

"We had to chuck him out, sir," said Wingate apologetically. "We couldn't see him being disrespectful to you, sir."

"Ahem!" The Head could not help feeling that the boys had been pleased with an excuse for handling Sir Hilton Popper, but he was not ungrateful; and he was glad to be rid of his terrible visitor on any terms. "Ahem! Yes, Wingate—pre-precisely! Dear me! This unpleasant scene has upset me very much!"

And the doctor wiped his brow.

"Sir Hilton Popper came here to make a complaint, my boys," he said. "He declares that his keeper saw a Greyfriars boy in the wood last night taking the partridges. I need not say how serious an offence that would be, and I hope sincerely that there was a mistake; in fact, I am sure of it. But I must say that, if it should turn out to be true, and the culprit should be discovered, I should have no resource but to expel him from Greyfriars. Please bear that in mind."

And the Head retired to his study.

The boys, discussing the matter excitedly, dispersed. The general impression was that Sir Hilton Popper was on the wrong track. But there were some fellows who knew better.

Bob Cherry & Co. guessed whom the culprit had been, and that the keeper was not mistaken; although that, of course, was no excuse for the baronet's outrageous conduct.

And Courtney knew.

Valence strolled away with his hands in his pockets. In the Sixth Form passage, Courtney tapped him on the shoulder. Valence turned round with a very unpleasant expression upon his face.

"What do you want?" he exclaimed.

"You heard all that?" said Courtney.

"Certainly!"

"It was you in Popper's wood last night?"

Valence shrugged his shoulders.

"Was it you, Rupert?"

"Mind your own business," said Valence coolly. "I've told you I don't want you meddling in my affairs any further."

Courtney bit his lip.

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By FRANK RICHARDS.
Order Early.

"I don't want to meddle," he said. "But you heard what the Head was saying—he's going to expel the chap if he's found."

"Then the chap will have to be careful."

"The keepers will be on the watch more than ever now, Valence. Won't you stop this silly game? It's no good, and it may lead to awful trouble for you and your people."

"Have you finished?" asked Valence.

"Not quite. If you are determined to make a fool of yourself, you might think of your sister—think how cut up Violet would be if anything happened—"

"Oh, leave my sister alone!" said Valence angrily. "You jolly well won't see her any more, anyway. And I don't thank you for your advice—I've had too much of it. I don't want your meddling, and I don't want your friendship. Is that plain enough?"

Courtney set his teeth.

"Yes, that's plain enough," he said. "You won't be troubled with either in the future."

And he walked away without another word. Valence shrugged his shoulders.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Bob Cherry on the Warpath.

"LIGHTS out!" said Wingate.

The Remove had gone to their dormitory. When Wingate looked in all the juniors were in bed, and looked as if they were comfortably settled for the night. The captain of Greyfriars glanced up and down the dormitory.

"Good-night!" he said.

"Good-night, Wingate!"

The light was extinguished, and Wingate retired. Then Bob Cherry sat up in bed.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" he said cheerfully. "Who's going to stay awake and keep me company?"

"Got anything to eat?" asked Billy Bunter.

"Ha, ha! No."

The Owl of the Remove grunted.

"Then I'm jolly well going to sleep, for one," he said.

"Do!" said Bob Cherry. "Anything's better than hearing you talk, Bunt."

"Oh, really—"

"I'm going to stay awake," said Harry Wharton, sitting up. "So is Frank. We three will be enough to give Valence his dose, I think."

"Yes, rather!"

"Better get out of bed, or we shall nod off," said Bob Cherry, slipping out of his bedclothes. "We've got a good time to wait, but I haven't got the stuff ready yet."

Bob lighted a candle-end, and it glimmered dimly in the long, lofty room. He did not wish to turn on the electric light; it would have been seen from the Close, if any belated senior or master had happened to be out of doors.

Wharton and Nugent turned out, too. The other fellows watched them with interest. Bob Cherry drew a bucket from under his bed, and half filled it with water from the jug.

"What on earth's that for?" asked Bulstrode.

"Valence."

"Eh?"

"He's going out poaching to-night," explained Bob Cherry.

"How do you know?"

"Oh, I happen to know!" said Bob. "We're going to try and save him from his wicked ways. Not that he deserves saving; he's an utter rotter. But he's got a nice sister, and she's a friend of Miss Rosie's, so I think we're bound to do something."

Bulstrode chuckled.

"Are you going to save him from his wicked ways by pouring water on him?" he asked. "Blessed if I ever heard of reforming a sinner in that way before."

"That's the idea! We're going to wait for him at the end of the Sixth-Form passage, you see, and mop it on him as he comes out. Of course, he's not going to have pure water. It's too good for him; and ink is cheap. So is soot."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bob Cherry had made his preparations during the evening. He produced a large square packet, and opened it at one end, and a stream of soot shot into the pail. There was a chuckle from the Removites.

"My hat! He will repent of his wicked ways if he gets that little lot on his napper," chuckled Tom Brown.

"I guess so!"

"Oh, that's not the lot yet!"

Bob Cherry emptied two bottles into the pail—one of red ink, and the other of black. Then he began to stir the terrible concoction with a cricket-stump.

"Are you really going to slop that horrid stuff over a

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senior?" exclaimed Vernon-Smith. "There will be an awful row."

"Yes; I expect Valence will make a row when he gets it."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But I don't see how he can complain, without explaining what he was up in the middle of the night for," said Bob Cherry coolly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bob Cherry stirred away industriously. It was some time before the mixture was finished to his satisfaction.

Ten o'clock had rung out from the clock-tower.

"We shall have to wait an hour yet," said Nugent, with a yawn. "The seniors won't all be in bed before eleven, and Valence won't try to bunk until they've turned in. It would mean trouble for him if Wingate or North caught him."

"I guess it would," said Fisher T. Fish. "I shouldn't wonder if Courtney keeps an eye on him, too."

"Of course, Valence will wait till they're all in bed," said Bob. "You fellows may as well have a snooze. I'll stay awake."

"You'll go to sleep, you mean, and forget all about it till morning," said Wharton, laughing. "Better leave it to me."

"I'll borrow Carlton's alarm clock."

Carlton, the Slacker of the Remove, grinned.

"You can have the alarm clock, and welcome," he said.

"I'm not using it. No more early rising for me now the exam's over."

Bob Cherry wound the alarm, and tied the clock round his neck with a piece of twine. Then he blew out the candle, and laid down on his bed dressed.

He was asleep in two minutes, in spite of the ticking of the clock close to his ears. Bob Cherry was a healthy sleeper.

The chatter in the dormitory died away, and all was quiet and still. Bob Cherry had timed the alarm for eleven, and as the hour boomed out, echoing from the clock-tower, the alarm clock started operations.

The sleeping junior gave a wild jump as the buzz of the alarm sounded close to his ear. He started up on the bed. He had slept soundly, and forgotten all about the alarm.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Why, what the—"

He grasped the alarm, and turned it off. It had awakened half the dormitory by the time he stopped it. There were growling voices on all sides.

"Shut up that blessed row!" exclaimed Bolsover. "What the dickens do you mean by waking me up in the middle of the night?"

"I wasn't waking you up, my son," said Bob Cherry, slipping off his bed. "I was waking myself up. You are a pure accident; and it doesn't matter, anyway. Are you awake, Franky?"

Nugent grunted.

"Blessed if I see how a dormouse could sleep with that row going on!" he said. "Mind it doesn't start again! I'm ready!"

"So am I!" said Wharton.

"Then come on!"

Bob Cherry groped for the pail of mysterious mixture, and picked it up. The three juniors stumbled towards the door in the darkness.

"Mind, don't make a row!" whispered Bob.

"Who's making a row?"

"Rats! Quiet!"

"Don't biff against me with that pail," said Wharton. "What was that knocked on my chest?"

"The pail."

"Ow! I can feel something wet trickling over me!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Quiet!" grinned Nugent.

"Oh, you ass!" breathed Wharton. "You've spilled it over my trousers!"

"Sorry! But never mind, there's plenty left."

"Plenty left!" howled Wharton. "I'm not thinking whether there's plenty left, you chump! I'm thinking of my bags."

"Oh, rats! This isn't a time to think of bags," said Bob Cherry severely. "A chap ought to be ready to make small sacrifices to save a sinner from the road to ruin; good little boys in story-books always do."

"Well, I'm not a good little boy in a story-book," growled Wharton. "Besides, Eric never had soot and ink spilled over his bags."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You'll wake the blessed house!" said Nugent. "I think Bob had better go back to bed, and leave this to us."

"Rats!" said Bob Cherry.

He opened the dormitory door. There was a glimmer of light in the passage, and Bob carried the pail very carefully. Harry Wharton and Frank followed him, taking care not to get too close to the pail again.

"Quiet!" said Bob Cherry, in a stage whisper that could

have been heard at the end of the passage, if there had been anybody there to hear it.

"Oh, shut up, Bob!"

"Well, be quiet, then."

"We're not making a row, ass!"

"Well, you might. We've got to be cautious."

"Oh, cheese it, and get on!"

They crept cautiously towards the Sixth Form passage, making little or no noise in their stockinged feet. They reached the end of the passage, and found it totally in darkness.

There was no light from under a single door, showing that the Sixth were all gone to bed.

The Sixth Form at Greyfriars did not sleep in a dormitory like the juniors, but had bed-rooms to themselves, the studies being also bed-rooms. If Valence came out that night, he had to come along the passage to get downstairs, and he had to pass the corner where the three juniors had posted themselves. At that hour, of course, nobody had any business to be coming along the passage—at all events, without a light. There was little possibility of making a mistake.

"Here we are," whispered Bob Cherry.

He set the pail down.

"Quiet!" grinned Nugent.

"Oh, shut up!"

"We may have to wait some time," Wharton muttered.

"The masters are not all in bed yet, and Valence may wait till all is safe."

"Or he mayn't go out to-night after all, since Sir Hilton Popper came," Frank Nugent suggested.

"Well, you are a pair of blessed Job's comforters, I must say!" growled Bob Cherry. "Shut up, for goodness' sake! I sha'n't wait here long. If Valence doesn't come out, I shall take this stuff into his room, and mop it over him in bed. I'm not going to get ready to reform a chap, and then not do it simply because he leaves his sins over for another night."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Quiet!"

The juniors waited. In the distance they heard a sound of a closing door, as some master went to bed. Then all was quiet again. There was no sound in the Sixth Form passage. The half-hour rang out in muffled tones from the clock-tower.

The juniors began to feel angry and uneasy. Suppose Valence had already gone—suppose he was not going at all? It would be decidedly exasperating to have all their trouble for nothing. These thoughts were in the minds of Harry Wharton & Co., when they heard a sound in the passage.

It was the sound of a door opening quietly.

Bob Cherry gasped.

"He's coming!"

"Quiet!"

Footsteps!

Faint and cautious, but unmistakable in the deep silence of the night, the footsteps came towards the corner where the juniors waited.

Closer and closer! Bob Cherry, with his hands shaking with excitement, raised the pail and stood ready. The moment had come!

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

A Slight Mistake.

CLOSER and closer!

The footsteps were slow and cautious, but more and more distinct as they came down the Sixth Form passage. The juniors could hear, too, a sound of low breathing. The unseen senior was almost upon them.

A shiver of excitement ran through Bob Cherry's frame. The pail shook, and a portion of its contents slopped over Bob's waistcoat. But he hardly noticed it in his excitement.

It was dark in the passage; the juniors could barely see one another. Down the passage a dim form came—dim and shadowy.

Bob Cherry made a quick movement. His victim had arrived!

The pail swept into the air.

Swish!

As the pail whirled over, the contents shot out in a flooding stream, right upon the head of the dim figure.

Swish! Swosh! Sloosh!

"My hat, he's got it!" gasped Nugent.

"Yarool!"

It was a wild and muffled yell.

The drenched figure staggered in the passage, yelling and gasping wildly.

"Run for it!" gasped Bob.

And the juniors ran. Bob Cherry stumbled, and the pail slipped from his hand, and rolled clanging and rattling on the floor.

There was no time to look for it. Doors were opening on all sides, and lights flashing.

The victim of the jape was gasping and spluttering. The Removites ran on, and gained the staircase, and there, in the darkness, they paused breathlessly to look over the banisters.

"Ow! Help! Yarool! Groo! Ow! Ow!"

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NEXT
TUESDAY:

"DRIVEN TO THE WALL."

By FRANK RICHARDS.
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ONE
PENNY.

"He doesn't like the flavour!" murmured Bob Cherry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Quiet!"

Follows were coming out of the Sixth Form studies in their nightshirts and pyjamas, some of them lighting matches, some carrying candles. Half the Sixth Form seemed to have turned out at the sudden alarm.

The lights showed up the fellow who had received the drenching. He was dressed, and that was about all that could be seen about him. He was covered with the inky, sooty mixture, and he was utterly unrecognisable.

The juniors chuckled as they watched from their distant coign of vantage. Bob Cherry's dose had been thoroughly administered; there was no mistake upon that point. The Sixth-Formers crowded round the unfortunate victim in astonishment.

"My only hat!" exclaimed Wingate. "What is it? Who are you? What's happened?"

"Groo!"

"How did you get into that state?"

"Yowp!"

"What are you doing at this time, anyway?"

"Gerooh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But who is it?" demanded North. "Blessed if I can make out his chivvy! Who are you?"

"Groo-oh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"My hat, it's Courtney!" Wingate exclaimed, in amazement, peering close to the face of the drenched and blackened senior.

Bob Cherry turned quite faint and clung to the banisters as the words came to his ears from the Sixth Form passage.

"Courtney!" murmured Wharton.

"Courtney! Great Scott!"

"Oh, my hat!" murmured Bob Cherry. "How was I to know it was Courtney? How was I to know in the dark? What was he mooching about for in the middle of the night, anyway? Hang it, I don't believe it was Courtney at all! It can't be Courtney! It's all rot!"

Wharton chuckled softly.

"Rot or not, it is Courtney," he said. "Look there! There's Valence, without a speck on him."

Bob Cherry groaned.

"My hat, you're right! What rotten luck!"

There, sure enough, was Rupert Valence. He was fully dressed, unlike the other seniors, who were all in their night-clothes. There was no speck on Rupert Valence; he had evidently been still in his study when the mixture was hurled. But how had it come about that Courtney had come out into the passage in the middle of the night with such cautious footsteps that the juniors had mistaken him for Valence? There was no reason why he should have walked so quietly, or why he should not have carried a light, so far as they could discover.

Valence was grinning as he looked at the drenched and blackened senior. Courtney knuckled the horrid mixture out of his eyes and mouth, and gasped and sputtered. He found his voice at last.

"I don't know how it happened," he gasped. "I was coming along the passage, and all of a sudden this stuff was flung over me without the least warning."

"Some junior trick," said Walker, of the Sixth.

"I suppose so; but I don't know why the juniors should play me such a trick," said Courtney. "If it had been Loder or Carne—"

Loder and Carne laughed together. They were very unpopular with the juniors, and Courtney was very popular; but it was Courtney who had suffered this time. It struck the two cads of the Sixth as very comic.

"We'll jolly well find out who did it!" said Wingate, frowning. "A thing like this can't be allowed to pass. We sha'n't be able to keep any order in the Lower School soon. You had better go and clean yourself, Courtney. We'll look for the young rascals. You might get some canes, Loder and Walker, and come with me."

"Certainly!" replied the two seniors promptly.

Courtney went into his room again. It was in darkness. He turned on the gas and lighted it. As the light flared on he saw that Rupert Valence had followed him into his study. Valence grinned as Courtney bent over the wash-stand in the corner.

"I must say you've had a pleasant dose," he remarked.

"Groo!"

Splash!

"The kids seemed to have selected you for special treatment," said Valence. "But what on earth were you doing out of your room at this time of night, Courtney; and fully dressed too! Were you going out?"

"Gerooh!"

"Or were you watching for someone?" asked Valence unpleasantly. "Have you been playing the spy for somebody?"

Courtney turned towards him a face dripping with inky water.

"I waited up to stop you if you went out," he said. "As a prefect, I can't allow you to play any such blackguardly tricks. I heard a sound in the passage, and thought it was you, and went out to speak to you. I went quietly, because I didn't want to make a row and show you up before everybody—unless you refused to come back."

"Then you'd have done it?"

"I should have stopped you, anyway."

"Thank you," said Valence, with a sneer.

"You intended to go out," said Courtney. "You are dressed. You haven't been in bed."

Valence nodded.

"Quite true," he said; "I was going out. It's impossible now, after all this fracas; and I'm glad you've got it in the neck. Serve you jolly well right!"

And he quitted the study.

Courtney went on with his washing in a decidedly ruffled temper. Why he had been drenched he did not know, unless he had been mistaken for one of the bullies of the Sixth. Mistake or not, it was decidedly unpleasant, and he sincerely hoped that Wingate would succeed in discovering the culprit and making things warm for him.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

Thwack!

"LOOK here!" exclaimed Loder.

He stopped, and held down his candle as he caught sight of the inky pail that Bob Cherry had dropped in his flight. The pail lay on its side, and inky fluid was still oozing out of it over the linoleum in the passage.

"That had the stuff in it," said Walker, with a grin.

"So they came this way," said Wingate. "They went upstairs, of course. It must have been the juniors—some of the Remove, most likely. Might have been Fourth Form, though. We must be careful; no good dropping on the wrong kids."

"Oh, they were Remove, of course, and I think I could tell you their names," said Loder. "But we'll see soon. Look here, they've left a trail."

"By Jove, they have!"

There were smears of inky blackness on the stairs. The concoction that had been spilt on Harry Wharton's clothes in the Remove dormitory had run down, unseen in the darkness, and dripped off him, and some had gone upon his socks, causing them to leave inky footprints wherever he moved.

Wingate grinned as he followed the inky trail up the stairs.

He came into the junior dormitory passage, and found the marks thicker on the linoleum leading up to the door of the Remove dormitory.

Loder held up the candle.

"This is where the young rascals came back to, and where they came from," he said. "There must have been two or three. The marks don't go on past this door, so they didn't come from the Fourth Form dormitory."

"No, they came from the Remove."

Wingate opened the door.

There was a sound of steady breathing from the dormitory. Wingate grinned. He had been quite prepared for all the signs and sounds of slumber.

He switched on the electric light, and the room was flooded with illumination at once, and the three seniors entered.

The tell-tale marks crossed the dormitory to Harry Wharton's bed. There were others near Bob Cherry's bed, and others near Nugent's. All three of the juniors had got some of the stuff on their socks.

The three of them lay in bed in peaceful slumber—to all appearances. Harry Wharton's eyes were closed, and there was an expression of blissful innocence upon his face, and Nugent had an arm thrown over his face so that it could not be seen, but he was breathing regularly. Bob Cherry was snoring slightly to add to the effect, forgetful of the fact that as he was not in the habit of snoring it was rather likely to arouse suspicion than to lull it.

Wingate surveyed them with a grim smile.

"Fast asleep, of course!" said Loder, with a sneer.

"Of course! Apparently they didn't know they had any of the stuff on their socks," said the captain of Greyfriars, laughing.

Wharton gave a start. The three seniors grinned; and Wharton, realising that he had betrayed himself, opened his eyes, and looked rather sheepishly at Wingate.

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 186.

READ the special new story of the "THE RALLY OF THE RIVAL CO.'S." in this week's "GEM" Library. Chums of St. Jim's, entitled: Now on Sale. Price One Penny.

"Have you been out of the dormitory this evening, Wharton?" the Greyfriars captain asked.

"Catch him telling you the truth!" sneered Loder.

"I am sure Wharton will speak the truth, or nothing at all," said the Greyfriars captain quietly. "Shut up, Loder!"

"I have been out of the dormitory, Wingate."

"Did you throw that stuff over Courtney?"

"I had a hand in it."

"And a foot in it, too, I should say," chuckled Walker.

"I suppose we may as well own up," said Bob Cherry, sitting up in bed. "I meant to explain to old Courtney to-morrow somehow. We were jolly sorry it went over him. Honour bright, Wingate."

"So you didn't intend it for him?" asked Wingate.

"No."

"For me, I suppose," sneered Loder, "because I gave you lines for screwing up my desk, you young sweep?"

"No, it wasn't you this time, either, Loder."

"Then who was it?" asked Wingate.

"Valence."

"You thought it was Valence when you pitched the stuff over Courtney?"

"Yes."

"You must have been lying in wait for him, then, and pitched it over him as he came along, expecting it would be Valence?" said Wingate slowly.

"That's it," said Bob Cherry, with a nod.

"And why," demanded Wingate—"why did you expect Valence to come along the Sixth Form passage at eleven o'clock at night, when the Sixth are always in bed? What reason had you to suppose he would be stirring?"

The three juniors looked at one another awkwardly. Much as they disliked Rupert Valence, and little consideration as he deserved at their hands, they were not inclined to betray him to the captain of the school. Wingate's position as captain was one of great responsibility, and he could not possibly have looked over such a thing as Valence had intended. Bob Cherry had told his chums what he had learned by chance in the prefects' room that afternoon, but he did not intend to tell anyone outside the Remove.

They were silent. Bob Cherry coloured under Wingate's searching glance, but he did not speak.

"I'm waiting for your answer, Cherry," said Wingate ominously.

"I haven't anything to say, Wingate."

"You mean you don't choose to say anything?"

Bob Cherry hesitated.

"Well, I put it to you," he said. "If we knew anything by chance about a fellow, should we be justified in sneaking about him?"

Wingate wrinkled his brows.

"Perhaps not," he said, "and perhaps I can guess as much as you could have told me, anyway. I shall not ask you any more questions."

"Thanks, Wingate; you're a good chap!" said Bob Cherry, in great relief.

Wingate smiled grimly.

"I hope it won't injure my reputation as a good chap, but I am going to give you a good hiding for playing such a trick," he said. "Whatever the Sixth may do, my boy, you can't be allowed to drench them with inky water. There is such a thing as discipline, and it has to be maintained. See?"

"Yes!" groaned Bob. "Lay it on lightly!"

"They needn't get up," said Wingate. "Take one each, you fellows, and give them half a dozen. I think that will meet the case."

There was a sound of thwacking in the Remove dormitory. Wharton, Cherry, and Nugent took the caning through their bedclothes, which deadened it a little. But it was very painful, all the same, though they set their teeth and endured it without a cry.

As a matter of fact, they knew perfectly well that they deserved it. Bob Cherry's jape had been funny enough, but Bob himself admitted that it wouldn't do. The juniors fully expected to be licked if their japes came to light in this manner, and they were prepared to take their punishment with fortitude.

Thwack, thwack, thwack!

The rest of the Remove sat up in bed, looking on with a deep and painful interest. The six strokes each administered, Wingate and Walker stopped, but Loder was going on. Loder was never satisfied with enough. But Wingate stopped him promptly.

"That's enough, Loder!" he exclaimed. "I hope that will be a lesson to you fellows not to jape the Sixth."

"Ow!" groaned Bob Cherry.

"You can keep sooty water and ink for your little jokes on the Fourth, where it won't do much harm," grinned the Greyfriars captain. "Good-night!"



Figgins opened the door. Clifton Dane and Lumley-Lumley were standing there with demure smiles on their faces. "Bang, bong!" said Figgins. To which Lumley-Lumley replied in the same tongue: "Figgy wiggy merry perry Blakey Chakey shakey Gussy wussy." "Monty Manny Diggy Herry Fatty Wynny," added Clifton Dane, and then the crickers knew that they had been found out. (An amusing incident from "The Rally of the Rival Co's," the grand, long, complete school tale of Tom Merry & Co., Blake & Co., and Figgins & Co., contained in this week's number of the "Gem" Library. Out on Thursday. Price One Penny.)

"Good-night, Wingate!"

And the avengers retired, leaving the dormitory in darkness and three practical jokers wriggling in pain in their beds.

"Ow!" grunted Nugent. "Ow! I feel hurt!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The beasts!" growled Bob Cherry. "They don't understand a joke! The Sixth have no sense of humour at all."

"Ow! You've got too much blessed sense of humour, I think!" said Nugent. "If you ever suggest going for the Sixth again—"

"Ow!"

"I say, you fellows, shut up!" said Billy Bunter. "You're keeping me awake, you know. I want to get to sleep. You might shut up."

"You fat bounder—"

"I sha'n't be able to get up in the morning now!" said Bunter peevishly. "I shall expect you fellows to explain to Mr. Quelch."

THE MAGNET LIBRARY—No. 186.

NEXT
TUESDAY:

"DRIVEN TO THE WALL."

"Oh, ring off!"

"I'm not going to ring off. Why can't you take a licking quietly, as—as I should? If I had ever such a licking, I should keep a stiff upper lip. You won't hear me yowling out when I'm hurt," said Billy Bunter contemptuously.

"We'll jolly soon see about that!" exclaimed Bob Cherry.

He jumped out of bed, and ran to Billy Bunter's bed. There was a gasp from the fat junior as he felt a powerful grasp upon him.

"Ow, ow, ow!"

Spank, spank, spank!

Bob Cherry's heavy hand—rather a large size in hands—descended upon the fat person of the Owl of the Remove. The spanks rang out like pistol-shots. There was a wild yell from Billy Bunter, followed by a succession of piercing shrieks.

"Ow! Yah! Help! Murder! Fire! Oh!"

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

"Yaroooh! Help! Oh!"

By FRANK RICHARDS
Order Early.

"Hurt?" asked Bob Cherry, pausing breathlessly.

"Ow! Yes! Yow! Yaroop! Oh!"

"You weren't going to yowl if you were hurt," Bob Cherry remarked. "Do you call this yowling, or don't you call this yowling?"

"Ow! Yow! Yes! Beast! Oh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bob Cherry went back to bed, feeling more comfortable and satisfied. There came a succession of painful groans from Billy Bunter's bed. Bolsover, the bully of the Remove, sat up, with a wrathful snort.

"Is that you making that row, Bunter?"

"Ow! Yes! I'm hurt! Oh!"

"If you make another sound," said Bolsover, "I'll get up and take a cricket-stump to you! You hear me?"

There was not another sound from Billy Bunter.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

Gone

COURTNEY washed and washed. There was ink on his ears, and ink on his hair, and ink down his neck—red and black mixed; and there was slimy, wet soot all over him. He had discarded his clothes. It was doubtful if he would be able to wear them again. He was standing in his pants, laving himself in the washstand basin, when Wingate came in. Courtney blinked round at him through flowing water.

Wingate could not help grinning.

"Well, you have been through it," he remarked. "Do you think you will ever get that stuff out of your hair?"

Courtney grunted.

"I don't know," he said. "I don't think so. For goodness' sake get me some more water out of your room, Wingate, and some soap. All mine's as black as ink."

"Right you are."

Wingate brought in a fresh jug of water, and sat on the bed, watching the Sixth-Former while he laved his inky and sooty hair. Courtney's hair was naturally fair and curly, but it did not look very fair now. He rubbed soap into it, and washed it, till he was pink with exertion.

"That's about as good as using an exerciser, anyway," Wingate observed, by way of comfort.

Courtney grunted.

"We found the young rascals who did it," said Wingate. "It was Wharton, Cherry, and Nugent, of the Remove."

"You caned them, I hope?"

"Yes. I expect they're still wriggling."

"Serve the little beasts right!"

"It seems to have been a mistake, Courtney. Bob Cherry owned up to it, but he said he had intended it for Valence."

Courtney plunged his face into the water.

Wingate waited quietly until he raised it again.

"Did you hear what I said, Courtney?"

"Ye-es," muttered the senior.

"They thought it was Valence. For some reason they expected to find Valence coming out of his room in the middle of the night."

"Did they explain why?"

"No."

Courtney drew a breath of relief.

"I think perhaps you know why," said Wingate.

"I!" exclaimed Courtney.

"Yes. You see, you went out about the time they expected Valence. What did you go out for, old man?"

Courtney did not reply.

"I think I can guess," said Wingate. "I know you haven't been on such good terms with Valence lately. You knew he was going to break bounds, and you went out to stop him. He was fully dressed, I remember, when he showed up in the passage."

"I'd rather not say anything about it, Wingate."

The Greyfriars captain nodded.

"Very well," he said. "Only remember you are a prefect, Courtney, and you've got your duty to do. But I suppose I needn't remind you of that."

Courtney flushed.

"I'm doing it as well as I can," he said. "It's a difficult position for me. But I'm doing my best."

"Valence was going out?"

"I believe so," said Courtney reluctantly.

"Do you know where?"

"I suspect."

"To the Cross Keys?"

"Oh, no; I think not."

"Then he is the poacher?" said Wingate quietly.

Courtney did not answer.

"Come," said Wingate, "I know perfectly well that when Sir Hilton Popper's keeper said he saw a Greyfriars fellow, he was speaking the truth. I know that. The only question is, who was it? Was it Valence?"

"I shouldn't wonder."

"And you knew this—you, a prefect!" said Wingate sternly. "I'm awfully surprised at you, Courtney. You ought to have interfered."

"I—I did."

"And if your remonstrance was no good, you ought to have reported the matter at once to the Head. What do you think he made you a prefect for?"

"I—I know I ought," groaned Courtney. "But—but it was Valence, you see. He's made an ass of himself; but he was my friend, and—and there—there's Vi."

"His sister, do you mean?"

"Yes. She—she asked me once if I'd keep an eye on him, because he'd got among bad companions," said Courtney, in a low voice. "I said I would. It would be rotten rough on her if anything happened to him."

"Better let him get a ragging from the Head than go on until he is caught by a keeper, and perhaps arrested."

"Ye-es, I suppose so."

"And he's going out to-night?" exclaimed Wingate.

"I believe he was. Of course, he won't have the nerve to do it after what has just happened, with half the Form awake."

"I don't know. He hasn't much nerve, but he is ass enough for anything, I think," said Wingate abruptly. "I shall look into his room before I go to bed."

Courtney was towelling his head.

"Well, I'm going to turn in now," he said. "We'll look in on Valence, if you like, but I know you'll find him in bed all serene."

"We'll see."

Wingate left the study, followed by Courtney. He opened Valence's door and called in the darkness.

"Are you there, Valence?"

There was no reply, and there was no sound of breathing in the stillness of the room.

Wingate struck a match, stepped into the room, and lighted the gas.

Courtney cast a hurried look towards the bed. It was empty. Valence was not in the room.

He was gone!

Wingate turned to his startled companion with a grim smile. Valence's bed had not been lain in. He had evidently not gone to bed at all.

"Well?" said Wingate.

"He's gone!" Courtney muttered.

"Yes, he's gone out."

"I suppose so."

The Captain of Greyfriars knitted his brows. He was very angry indeed. Valence had gone out, knowing that Wingate was awake—and after the scene in the afternoon with Sir Hilton.

The folly and the impudence of it were about equal. Wingate sat down, and Courtney turned an anxious and inquiring look upon him.

"What are you going to do?" he asked.

"I'm going to wait for Valence."

"And when he comes—"

"Take him straight to the Head, if Dr. Locke is still up. If it's too late for that I shall report him in the morning."

Courtney changed colour.

"I—I suppose you must do it, Wingate," he said; "but—but couldn't you go lightly just this time?"

"What do you mean? Do you want me to let the rotter off, when he's doing his best to disgrace the school?" demanded Wingate.

"N-n-no; but—"

"You know that Sir Hilton's keepers will be more on the watch than ever to-night," said Wingate, "and he will run heaps of risk of being caught. It would serve him right; but it would mean police-court proceedings, perhaps, and the Head would have to go down about it. Think of the disgrace! He would be expelled instantly, but it would bring the name of Greyfriars into all the papers, and do the school a lot of harm. The fellow seems to have no sense at all. My hat, I'll give him some plain English when he does come in!"

"You're right, Wingate; but—"

"But you want me to let the fool off for his sister's sake," said Wingate abruptly. "It can't be done! Besides, he'd be at it again next week."

"Give him one more chance," said Courtney, in a low voice. "Let me wait up for him instead of you, Wingate—just this once! I—I'll talk to him, and if he doesn't promise, honour bright, to drop it for good and all, I'll leave him to you."

"Would he keep his promise?"

"He's not so rotten as all that. He'd keep his word."

Wingate hesitated.

"I don't want to be hard on any chap, and—and his

sister's a nice girl, and I shouldn't like her to be hurt," he said; "but it's asking a lot, Courtney."

"I know it is. But you'll do it, Wingate?"

The Greyfriars captain gave an impatient shrug of the shoulders.

"Yes, I'll do it," he grunted, "and I hope it will lead to good; but I haven't the slightest expectation of anything of the sort. Good-night, Courtney!"

"Good-night, Wingate!"

The captain of Greyfriars went to his room. Courtney remained in Rupert Valence's room, waiting, with knitted brows and anxious thoughts, for the scapegrace of the Sixth to come in.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

Caught Red-Handed.

RUPERT VALENCE laughed softly to himself as he plunged into the dark shadows of the wood. He had left Greyfriars quietly, after the fellows had returned to bed. It did not cross his mind that Wingate might look into his study before retiring again; but perhaps in any case he would have risked it. He smiled to himself many times as he followed the dark road to Sir Hilton Popper's estate. He guessed that the drenching of Courtney had been in mistake for himself, and it amused him very much. It was very funny that his self-appointed guide, philosopher, and friend should be the one to receive the ducking instead of him. There was no gratitude in Valence's heart towards the fellow who had tried to save him from his own folly. Angry dislike had taken the place of whatever friendship he had ever felt for Courtney. Though it was very probable that, in case of need, the weak-natured fellow would turn to his old friend for help, conveniently forgetting the differences when that served his turn.

It was very dark and still in the woods. The moon was rising over the Black Pike, but in the deep woods there penetrated few of the silvery rays. But Valence knew his way well; he had roamed the woods many a time at night, sometimes in company with some poaching vagabond whose acquaintance he had picked up at the Cross Keys, and sometimes alone. The cunning of the poacher seemed to be a gift with Valence, and he had had wonderful luck in avoiding keepers and discovery. He had begun his nocturnal pursuits for amusement, chiefly because such things were forbidden; but he had found a way of turning his poaching to profit. Rascally dealers, who had business with the poachers of Friardale, had come into contact with Valence during one of his evenings at the Cross Keys, and he had found it possible to do business with them. Valence's way of life made him always hard up. He was not likely to win much money in his little games with Mr. Cobb & Co. at the Cross Keys, but he lost considerable sums. He was very glad of a new way of making money, and from that time he followed his old pursuits with new zest. As for the honesty or otherwise of what he did, he never troubled his head to think about that at all.

For an hour or more, Valence was very busy in the coverts belonging to Sir Hilton Popper. The irascible baronet would certainly have had an attack of apoplexy if he had seen him. Valence listened keenly for keepers as he worked; but his long success had made him contemptuous of them, and he did not fear discovery. And the keepers certainly were not wary. Perhaps Sir Hilton's methods of treating them did not make them very keen in his service. Excepting for his head-keeper, old Parker, his old soldier servant who had been with him in India, Sir Hilton was pretty thoroughly hated by every man in his employ. He even suspected some of his keepers of acting in collusion with poachers; and perhaps he was right.

A sudden sound made Valence start. In the dark distance he heard something crackle under a foot. In a second he was on the alert. Without pausing a moment, he turned and ran quietly and swiftly.

He had done enough—his bag, and his pockets, were stuffed with plunder. He had made a successful raid upon Sir Hilton's coverts, and he did not need to linger. He plunged into the deep shadows of the wood again, making his way with quick footsteps towards the lane that led into the Friardale road.

The moon was rising higher—she was clear of the summit of the Black Pike now and there was a faint light in the wood. Valence had almost reached the border of the lane when he heard an exclamation behind him.

"Stop him!"

The Greyfriars fellow's heart almost stood still.

He had been seen, then!

He swung round, staring through the dim twilight of the wood, and caught sight of the leggings of a keeper in the underwoods, and a hat over the bushes. He bounded away, two or three partridges dropping from his hold as he did so.

There was a shout.

"That's him!"

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 186.

NEXT
TUESDAY:

"DRIVEN TO THE WALL."

EVERY
TUESDAY.

The "Magnet"
LIBRARY.

ONE
PENNY.

"Stop, you young scoundrel, or I'll shoot!"

Valence ran on. Such a threat might have frightened a village lad into surrender, but the Sixth-Former of Greyfriars was not so simple. He knew that the keeper dared not shoot at him.

Bang!

The report of the gun echoed through the wood, deafening in the deep silence of the night. But Valence ran on undisturbed. He knew that the gun had been fired into the branches overhead to scare him.

He dodged among the underwoods, and paused at last, panting for breath.

His heart was thumping.

He had been compelled to leave the direction he had been following, and to plunge deeper into the wood, away from the lane, to avoid the keepers.

But he knew where he was, and that he could find his way back quite easily if he were once sure that the coast was clear.

But was it? He listened with intent ears, crouching in the shadows of a mass of bushes. Had the keepers lost the scent, and missed him in the darkness of the wood? Had they given up the search, or were they still hunting for him?

His heart rapped and rapped as he listened. If he were found, the consequences rushed upon his mind more plainly than he had ever understood them before. Disgrace—perhaps arrest—certainly expulsion from Greyfriars—utter ruin to his future career! He cursed his folly as he lay palpitating under the bushes. Courtney had been right. Why hadn't he taken his advice? Fool that he had been! Not that he felt any kindness towards Courtney even at that moment. He felt only a savage anger towards everything and everybody.

A footstep in the thickets!

Valence trembled.

The keepers had not lost the scent, then—they were still following him—and they were close at hand.

He did not move. Any movement now would be fatal. They would hear the rustling of the bushes if he tried to creep away.

A sound now would bring them upon him. The poacher crouched in the shadows and listened. Would they pass?

Two men came slowly by in the dim light, and stopped. Valence muttered an imprecation. They had stopped within a few feet of him.

"He came this way." It was the voice of Parker, the head-keeper on Sir Hilton Popper's estate. "I'm sure of that."

"More likely towards the lane, sir."

"No; I headed him off from the lane."

Parker peered round into the thickets, his gun in the hollow of his arm. He was evidently in a very bad temper.

"It was a schoolboy, plain enough, Hopkins," he said. "I saw him clearly from behind. It was one of the Greyfriars boys."

"I'd swear to that, sir."

"I didn't see his face."

"Neither did I, sir. But if we find him——"

"Well, we shall know him then," said Parker, "and he must still be in the wood. I will wait here and watch, Hopkins, while you beat the thickets for him. I don't think he can get away from the two of us."

"Very good, sir."

The boy hidden within a few feet of them shivered. Hopkins moved off into the bushes, passing almost within reach of Valence. Parker took out his pipe and lighted it. The red glow from the bowl struck Valence's eyes in the darkness. The keeper was keenly on the watch, even while he was lighting his pipe.

Valence lay and shivered.

There was little chance now. He could not creep away without some rustle of the thickets and that would bring Parker upon him with a bound. What was he to do? If he got away, and was seen, it would be as fatal as having been captured. If the keepers could identify him at Greyfriars, he was ruined. After what had already happened, Dr. Locke would not have the slightest hesitation in acting. He would expel the exposed poacher from the school instantly.

Oh, what a fool he had been!

But he had not quite lost his nerve yet. He felt cautiously in his pocket, and drew out a lump of charcoal. He had learned that trick from the poachers of Friardale, to black his face in case of necessity to prevent recognition. If he had a narrow escape, it might be possible to defy identification afterwards, if the keepers could not swear to his face. With a hasty, trembling hand he rubbed the charcoal over his face, in a few moments blotting out the white skin. In the dim light of the wood, no one could possibly have recognised him now.

He waited, trembling.

There was a sudden exclamation. A footstep—a crashing of the bushes, and Valence leaped to his feet as the keeper rushed upon him.

"I've got him, sir."

Valence dodged desperately, and bounded away, and ran straight into the arms of the head-keeper. Parker grasped him tightly.

The Greyfriars fellow struggled, and the powerful grasp closed upon him like the clutch of a vice.

"Give in, you young fool!" said the head-keeper.

"Let me go!" shrieked Valence. "Let me go!"

Parker laughed grimly.

"Yes, that's likely," he said. "Take one of his arms, Hopkins."

"I've got him, sir."

"Turn out his pockets."

The two keepers stared at the sight of Valence's plunder. The Sixth-Former of Greyfriars was not struggling now. He was trembling in every limb.

"My word!" said Parker, with a whistle. "You've done a good night's work, I think, but it will turn out a bad night's work for you, I think. You belong to Greyfriars, eh?"

"Yes," stammered Valence.

"Face blacked, eh?" said Parker, peering at him. "Good old poacher game—you're not new to this, my fine fellow, I see—and the magistrates will know it, too."

"The—the magistrates!"

"Yes. You'll go before the magistrates to-morrow," said Parker. "You'll spend the rest of to-night locked up in a room, my son. How do you like the idea? You'd better have stayed in bed at the school, don't you think?"

Valence gave a cry of terror.

"I—I must go back! Let me go! I—I'll give you a sovereign!"

Parker chuckled.

"It's worth a ten-pound-note to me to catch the poacher, besides dooty," he replied. "You come along o' me. I'll soon get that washed off your face, and see your chivvy. What's your name, you young blackguard?"

Valence did not reply. He was so overcome with terror at the prospect before him, that he could not speak, even to tell a lie.

Parker shook him roughly by the shoulder.

"What's your name?" he repeated.

"I—I—"

"Tell me your name, you young rascal!"

"C-Courtney," stammered Valence—"Arthur Courtney."

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

A Dash for Liberty.

VALENCE had given the first name that came into his mind. His only object, at the moment, was to prevent his own name from becoming known. He had not been recognised; he could not be recognised until the black was washed off his face. If he could only escape before the keepers could get him to the house, it would be all right yet. If he could only escape!

He must escape! To be locked up in a room or a stable all night, taken before a magistrate in the morning—perhaps sent to a reformatory—at all events certainly expelled from Greyfriars—as he thought of it, he almost fainted.

Anything rather than that!

Force, of course, was useless against the keepers—either of them could have handled him like a child. But Valence had the cunning of a weak nature—and he knew that only cunning could serve him now.

He faltered in his walk, and leaned heavily upon Parker's arm. The head-keeper looked down at him contemptuously.

"Buck up!" he said.

"I—I feel faint," moaned Valence. "I—I think I'm fainting! Oh!"

He reeled, and hung on Parker's grasp. The keeper, with a snort of contempt, lowered him into the grass. Hopkins looked down on him.

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"He ain't got the nerve for this game," he remarked. "He's gone right off, sir."

"Get some water in your cap, Hopkins. I'm not going to carry the young brute to the house—more'n half a mile."

Hopkins disappeared in the thickets, towards the stream that flowed in the wood. The head-keeper bent over Valence and loosened his tie and collar. Valence's eyes were closed, his face set, his lips rigid. The head-keeper never dreamed of treachery. But as he loosened Valence's collar, all of a sudden the boy's eyes opened, and his two fists came up, clenched and hard, crashing into the keeper's face.

It was a terrific blow, with both fists, with all the force Valence could throw into it. Parker gave a gasping cry, and fell back, and rolled on the grass.

Valence leaped to his feet, and ran.

Parker staggered up, holding his hands to his face, and shouting furiously.

"Stop! Hopkins! After him! Oh, the young villain!"

He dashed in pursuit. But his head was singing and reeling from the blow, and he stumbled over a root, and crashed to the ground. Hopkins dashed up with his cap full of water, and amazement in his face.

"Wot's happened, sir?"

The head-keeper groaned.

"He's got away! He was only shamming! Oh the young scoundrel! Oh! He's made my head spin!"

The two keepers ran in the direction of the lane. Valence was clear away by this time, but they still hoped to cut him off from Greyfriars. But the Sixth-Former was not likely to risk that.

Valence was making a detour of a mile or more to get out into Friardale wood by the river, careless of how long it took him, so long as he ran no risk of recapture. The keepers searched for him, up and down, for an hour or more, and then, tired and savage, gave up the chase.

"But we've got his name," said Parker savagely; "and Sir Hilton will see that he's brought to book, that's one comfort."

Valence, at the same moment, was tramping away in the direction of Greyfriars. He was tired to death, soaked with dew, and feeling utterly spent and rotten. In the chase he had lost the game he had risked so much to poach, and he was returning almost empty-handed to the school, with only a couple of birds in his pockets. It had been a wild night for him, and his terror had taught him a lesson which all Courtney's words of warning had failed to teach. As he tramped wearily back along the dark road, he swore inwardly that if he got clear of that adventure it should be his last night as a poacher.

He reached the school at last.

He was almost too fatigued to climb the wall, but he managed to clamber over it, and crossed the Close, and climbed in at the window he had left open.

There he paused to listen. The hour was very late—or, rather, early. Three o'clock had struck as he crossed the Close.

There was no sound in the house, but Valence's experience that night had put all his nerves in a twitter.

He stole away on tiptoe to the Sixth-Form passage.

He reached the end of the passage. His heart was thumping hard. The silence and darkness should have reassured him, but his nerves were in rags, and now he saw a face in every shadow, and heard footsteps in every echo of his own stealthy movements.

He came quietly up the Sixth-Form passage, dreading to disturb one of the sleepers in the rooms he passed.

Suddenly he stopped.

Across the corridor, from under one of the doors, came a gleam of light.

One of the rooms was lighted yet.

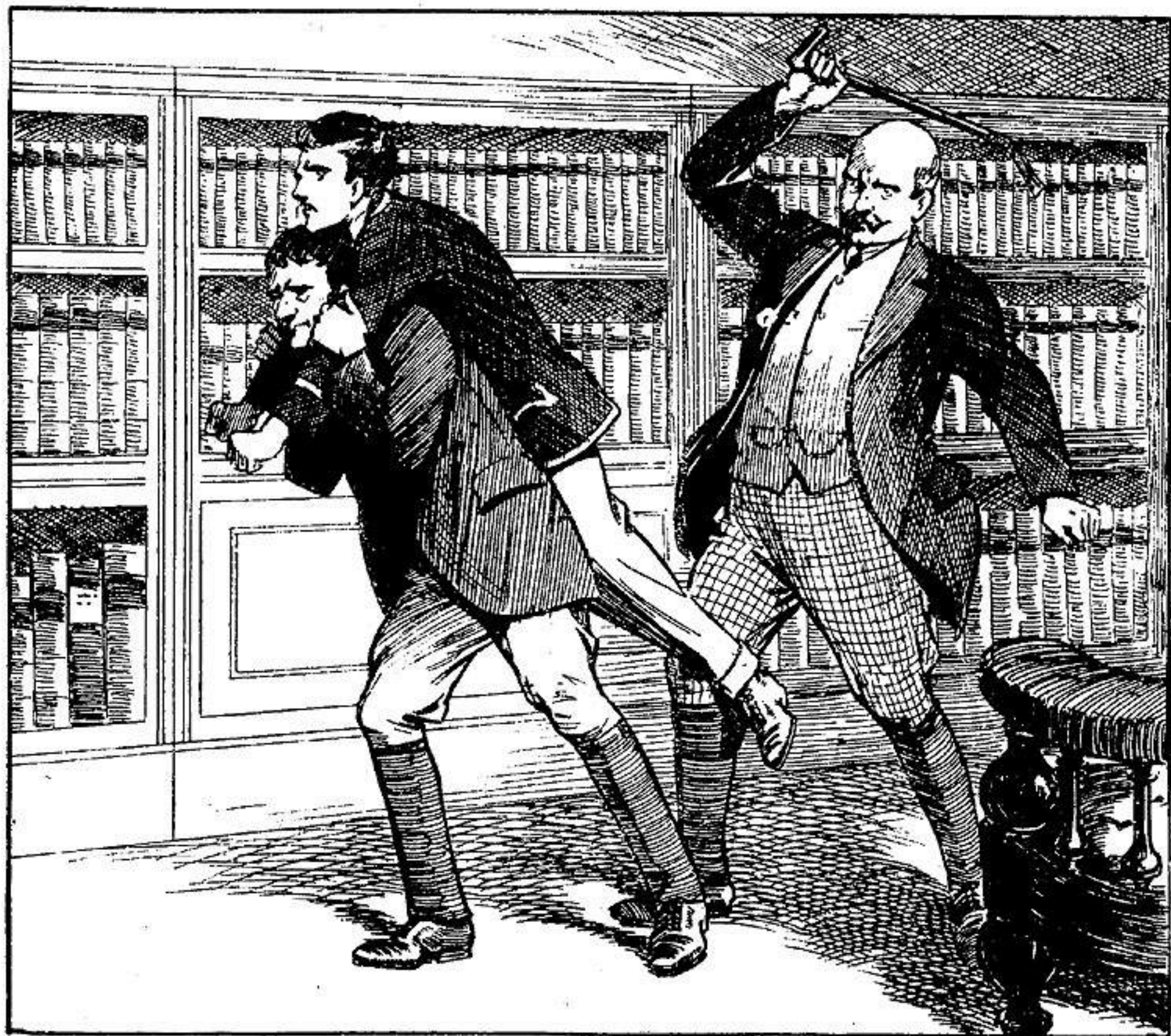
Valence stood with his heart beating like a hammer. Even the most studious of the Sixth could never have sat up burning the midnight oil till three in the morning. And—as he realised with a thrill of terror—it was from under his own door that the light was shining.

Next Tuesday's Splendid, Long, Complete School Tale of Harry Wharton & Co. at Greyfriars, is entitled:

**"DRIVEN
TO THE
WALL"**

By FRANK RICHARDS.

Please do not fail to place an early order for next week's "MAGNET" LIBRARY.



Lash! lash! lash! Courtney's face was white as death. The baronet seemed to be lashing harder since the remonstrance from his keeper. Lash! lash! lash! But even Sir Hilton desisted at last. There was a savage look upon his face; he had not extracted one cry from the victim of his cruelty. (See Chapter 16.)

His own study!

He had left the room in darkness—he knew that—but there was a light there now. What did it mean? What had happened in his absence?

A thousand possibilities flashed through his uneasy and terrified mind.

Perhaps a master had been specially detailed to watch for any breaking of bounds that night, and all was known.

Someone was waiting in the study for him, that was clear. He crept stealthily up to the door and listened. He could hear breathing inside the room, and faint sounds that told of the impatient movements of one who was weary from a long vigil.

Who was it?

The Head, or Mr. Quelch, or Mr. Prout? If it was a master, the game was up. If it was Wingate, the matter was not much better. And whom else could it be?

Who else would sit up and wait for him to return till that hour?

Valence stood in the passage, trembling. After his narrow escape in the woods it had come to this—to be discovered and caught in his own study. Again he cursed the mad folly that had led him on that night.

What a fool—what a treble fool—he had been!

He dared not enter the study, but it was futile to linger in the passage. He could not pass the whole night out of his room, and if he did his absence would tell more against

him than his late return. He screwed up his courage, and opened the door of the study.

The watcher within started to his feet.

"So you've come back!"

Valence, blinking in the sudden light, stared at him blankly.

"Courtney!" he exclaimed.

Courtney looked at him hard. The dew-drenched clothes, the blackened face, the air of fatigue and haunting fear—he noted them all at once.

"Come in and shut the door," he said.

"Courtney!"

"Quiet! Do you want to wake the whole Form?"

"My hat! No!"

Valence was recovering his nerve. It was only Courtney, after all. Courtney he could depend upon not to betray him. At all events, he could wheedle him round—he could get his sister to intervene for him if necessary. There were few shifts and dodges that Valence would not have descended to to save himself from the just punishment of his own folly and rascality.

Valence closed the door. He turned to his washstand and sponged his face. Courtney looked at him sourly.

"What does that mean?" he asked. "Have you been disguising yourself?"

Valence chuckled breathlessly.

"Yes; it's an old dodge, you know, and it saved my bacon. They didn't recognise me, and they can't identify me."

"Then you've been seen?"
 "I've been caught."
 "Caught?" exclaimed the other, with a quick breath.
 "Oh, I got away, or I shouldn't be here," said Valence, with a chuckle. "It's all serene! What are you waiting up in my room for?"
 "For you."
 "Well, I've come back, you see."

"Wingate found that you were gone out, Valence, and he was going to wait up for you. I persuaded him to let me wait instead. I've told him that you will promise me, on your word of honour, to drop this game, and never to break bounds again at night," said Courtney sternly. "You'll make me that promise, Valence, and you'll keep it."

Valence bit his lip.
 "And what if I don't?" he asked.
 "If you refuse I leave the matter in Wingate's hands."
 "And what will he do?"
 "Report your conduct to the Head the first thing in the morning."

"And then I shall be expelled?"
 "Yes, and serve you right!" said Courtney, frowning.
 "Thank you!" said Valence, with a sneer. "But as it happens I had already made up my mind to drop this game for good and all. It's a jolly deal too risky. I had such a twist to-night when they caught me that I could have kicked myself for being such an ass. No more poaching for me! If only this rotten night ends safely there won't be another like it. I'm quite willing to make that promise, and to keep it, if only I get clear of this."

Courtney nodded.
 "It's a promise?" he asked. "Word of honour?"
 "Yes."

"Good, then! Good-night!"
 Valence did not reply, and Courtney left the study without speaking again. Valence went to bed, but, weary as he was, it was long before he slept. Fear of what might come of his night's adventure kept him awake, pondering and quaking, and it was not till dawn was creeping in at his window that he closed his eyes.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

Returned to the Owner.

BOB CHERRY came out into the fresh, sunny Close with a cheery whistle. The rising-bell had not ceased to clang, but Bob Cherry was an early riser, and he was frequently down before the bell rang at all. Bob Cherry's whistle, as we have said, was cheery, but it was not tuneful. Bob had never been known to get into tune. Fellows had yelled to him to stop as he came downstairs, but Bob Cherry had gone on his way whistling cheerfully, regardless of remonstrances. His whistle rang out unmusically as he strolled out into the Close, startling the birds that were twittering in the old elms.

Bob Cherry was always cheerful in the morning, especially when it was sunny. Mere existence was a joy to him.

He was first down of the Lower School that morning, and he had the Close to himself. He strolled round the house with his hands in his pockets, but as he passed the side-window in the Form-room passage he halted suddenly, and his whistle died away in a quaver of amazement.

On the ground below the window lay a dead bird. Bob Cherry picked it up. He knew a partridge when he saw it, and he knew that the bird must have been dropped by someone who had climbed in at the window overnight.

Bob Cherry stared at the bird in his hand, and whistled softly.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" he murmured. "So that rotter did go out after all last night, and he's been poaching again."

Bob was a little puzzled what to do with the bird. He certainly could not keep it—he had no taste for stolen property. Suddenly a gleam darted into his eyes. He turned round, and returned to the School House door, carrying the bird in his hand.

He entered the house, and made his way to the Sixth Form passage. Harry Wharton met him as he went, and stared at the dead partridge.

"What on earth have you got there, Bob?" he exclaimed. "You haven't taken to early morning poaching, I suppose?"

Bob Cherry chuckled.
 "No; I found this."
 "Where?"
 "Under the passage window."

"Phew!"
 "That rotter Valence must have dropped it getting in last night," said Bob. "It was enough to give him away if anybody found it."

"My hat! I should say so! Keep it dark!" said Wharton hastily. "The fellow's a rank rotter, but we can't round on him, you know."

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"I know! I'm going to take it to him! Come on!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The two juniors reached Valence's study. Bob Cherry kicked at the door, and opened it. Valence was in bed, and the sun was streaming in at the window. The Sixth-Former was asleep, and his white, worn face showed only too plainly signs of what he had been through the previous night. His boots, clogged with mud, lay beside his bed, and his collar, blackened from the charcoal he had put on his face, lay on the table in full view.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" shouted Bob Cherry.

Valence started up from slumber.

He sat up in bed, looking wildly at the two juniors. He had been deep in a dream in which he was again in the hands of the keepers, and struggling vainly to escape.

"What—who—what do you want?" he panted.

"Oh, we've come to call you," said Bob Cherry. "You look as if you'd been having a wild night, old son."

Valence scowled.

"Get out of my room!" he exclaimed.

"Did you lose anything while you were out last night?" queried Bob Cherry.

"What do you mean? I was not out!"

"Not out?"

"Of course not, you young fool! If you begin spreading any yarns of that sort in the school I'll lick you within an inch of your life!" exclaimed Valence savagely.

"Not out, eh?" said Bob Cherry. "Must have made your boots in that state walking round your room, I suppose, meditating on your studies?"

Valence glanced at his boots, and flushed.

"Mind your own business!" he snapped. "Get out! If I get out of bed I'll make it warm for you, you cheeky young cad!"

"I only wanted to know if you'd lost anything," said Bob Cherry, keeping the hand holding the partridge behind him.

"Lost anything? What do you mean?"

"You might have dropped something as you came in."

"Look here——"

Valence glanced hastily round his study.

"This your property?" asked Bob Cherry, grinning, as he held up the partridge.

Valence gasped for breath.

"Where did you find that, Cherry?"

"In the Close, under a window."

"Oh!"

"You ought to be more careful, Valence," said Harry Wharton. "I dare say you've got some more birds here to match, and if a master had found it——"

"It's not mine, you young hound!" exclaimed Valence furiously. "How dare you insinuate that I dropped it?"

"Then you didn't?" asked Bob Cherry.

"Certainly not!"

"It does not belong to you?"

"No."

"Oh, in that case, I'll take it away again!" said Bob airily. "I thought I'd help you keep your rotten tricks dark, Valence; but, as you choose to tell lies about it, I suppose it's your own bizney?"

"You young hound——"

"All serene! If the bird isn't yours, I'll take it to Mr. Quelch. I suppose he's the proper person to take it——"

Valence changed colour.

"Hold on a minute!" he exclaimed.

"What for?" said Bob. "If the bird isn't yours, and you don't know anything about it, I suppose I'd better take it to the proper quarter?"

Valence gritted his teeth. He knew that if the bird were seen by anyone in authority at Greyfriars the strictest investigation would follow. He dared not run the risk, though it went against the grain to make terms with a junior, especially with Bob Cherry, whose cool, scornful manner had a peculiarly irritating effect upon the rascally senior.

"You'd better leave that bird here!" he said.

"Why?"

"I—I—I think I'll keep it!"

"That you won't!" said Bob Cherry coolly. "Not unless it's yours. If you dropped it when you were getting in last night, I'll leave it with you; but if it's not yours, you're not going to have it!"

Valence bit his lip hard.

"Well, I did drop it!" he said.

"Oh! You own up, do you?" said Bob, with cheerful contempt. "I knew it all the time, of course! It's rotten to tell lies, Valence!"

"Give me that bird!" shouted Valence furiously.

"Certainly! Here it is!"

Whiz!

The partridge whizzed through the air, and caught the Sixth-Former under the chin, and Valence fell back upon his pillow with a yell, the fat partridge falling upon his face.

The senior scrambled up, and leaped out of bed furiously, but the juniors were gone. Bob Cherry slammed the door, and they ran.

Valence tore the door open. Bob Cherry and Wharton were already at the end of the passage. The senior shook his fist furiously after them, and Bob kissed his hand cheerfully in return. Valence turned back into his study with a scowling brow, gritting his teeth.

"Oh, I'll make that young hound sit up for this!" he muttered savagely. "I'll—I'll— But I can't—I can't touch him! He knows too much! If he were to tell—" Valence broke off. "Oh, what a fool I've been—what a fool! If I get out of this horrible scrape I'll be more careful—but—but shall I get out of it? Hang it! Hang it!"

And with those cheery and comforting reflections the scapegrace of the Sixth began to dress himself.

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

The Alternative.

"MASTER COURTNEY, please?"

Morning school was over at Greyfriars, and most of the fellows were in the Close when Parker, Sir Hilton Popper's head-keeper, came up to the School House. Many of the Greyfriars fellows knew him by sight, and some of them gathered round in the hall to see what he wanted.

Parker's face was very glum and ill-tempered, perhaps because he had a black eye. The blow Valence had given him the previous night had had that effect, and the keeper, who was never handsome, looked decidedly worse for his discoloured eye. Trotter grinned as he came up to see what he wanted. Parker asked for Courtney.

"I'll take in a message," said Trotter.

"I've got a letter for the young gentleman," said Parker grimly. "And Sir Hilton's orders was that I was to deliver it into his own hands!"

"Werry well," said the page; "I'll find him!"

"I'll wait 'ere till you do!" said Parker.

The grim-looking keeper, in his gaiters, with his cap in his hand, attracted many curious glances as he stood waiting in the hall. Bob Cherry guessed that he had come on account of what had happened the previous night, but he could not guess why he asked for Courtney instead of Valence. It was certainly Valence who had been after the partridges.

Courtney came in a few minutes. He was looking perplexed.

"You asked to see me?" he inquired.

The keeper looked at him scrutinisingly.

"You are Master Courtney?"

"That is my name!"

"I reckon you're the same fellow!" said Parker. "You give me this black hove last night, young gentleman!"

Courtney stared at him in amazement.

"I gave you that black eye?" he repeated.

"Yes, you did!"

"You must be dreaming!" said Courtney, in wonder. "I didn't stir out of the school last night, and I don't remember ever seeing you before. Who are you?"

The keeper grinned sourly.

"Name of Parker," he said. "I'm 'ead-keeper to Sir Hilton Popper. I've brought a note to you from Sir Hilton."

"To me?"

"That's wot I said!"

"Look here, I don't want any of your impertinence!" said Courtney. "I suppose there's a mistake of some sort; but if you don't keep a civil tongue in your head you'll go out of here on your neck! That's a warning!"

"I reckon there ain't no mistake," said Parker, "and if you lay 'ands on me, young gent, you'll find me 'arder to tackle than I was last night! You took me in then!"

"I haven't the faintest idea what you are talking about!" said Courtney impatiently. "If you have a letter from Sir Hilton, you'd better give it to me!"

"That's wot I've come for!" said the keeper surlily. "'Ere's the letter!"

He fumbled in his pocket, and drew the letter out and handed it to the Greyfriars prefect. Courtney took it, and the keeper replaced his cap and departed, without waiting for anything further.

Courtney turned the letter over in his hands in wonder. Why Sir Hilton Popper should write to him he had not the faintest idea. Valence came in, and glanced at him. Valence was very pale.

"Was that Sir Hilton Popper's keeper?" he exclaimed.

"Yes," said Bob Cherry, as Courtney did not speak.

"What did he want?"

"Letter for Courtney."

"Oh!" said Valence.

Courtney went into his study with the letter. He was amazed, but he did not care to open the letter in public. He felt that it had some connection with Valence's escapade of the previous night, though he could not imagine why Sir Hilton Popper should write to him on the subject.

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NEXT TUESDAY: "DRIVEN TO THE WALL."

By FRANK RICHARDS.
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EVERY TUESDAY, The "Magnet" LIBRARY. ONE PENNY.

He closed his door, and opened the letter. He uttered an exclamation of utter amazement as he read it.

For this is how it ran:

"Master Courtney,—My head-keeper reports to me that he caught you in the woods last night, with your pockets and a bag full of my birds. I knew that the poacher who has done so much damage to my preserves lately was a Greyfriars boy. Now, I give you your choice. You can either come to my house at six o'clock to-day, and take a thorough thrashing for your conduct—a sound flogging, as hard as I can lay on—or I will place the matter in the hands of the police. You can take your choice, but if you are not here at six o'clock precisely I shall leave the matter to the law."

"HILTON POPPER."

Courtney dropped the letter in blank astonishment.

What did it mean?

"The man's mad," muttered Courtney—"stark, staring mad! What on earth has put the idea into his head that I was in his coverts last night?"

It was a complete puzzle.

There was a tap at the door, and Valence came in. The senior was looking very pale and harassed. Courtney looked at him.

Valence's glance fell upon the letter on the floor.

"Is that the letter from old Popper?" he asked.

"Yes."

"May I read it?"

"Yes; if you like."

Valence picked up the letter, and read it. Then he sank into a chair, with a hoarse cry. Courtney fixed his eyes upon him.

"What is the matter with you, Valence?"

"Oh! Can't you see?"

"No, I can't!" said Courtney tartly. "It was you who were in his coverts last night, stealing his game—you whom his keepers caught? You are safe enough; he seems to imagine that it was me."

"Oh!"

"That explains why that fool of a keeper said I gave him a black eye!" said Courtney. "They seem to have some impression, among them, that it was I poaching last night. How they could have got the idea into their heads I can't imagine."

Valence groaned.

"I shall send Sir Hilton a message explaining," said Courtney.

"What?"

"Oh, I sha'n't mention your name!" said Courtney scornfully. "I shall merely say that I was not on his ground last night. Fortunately, Wingate can bear me witness; he was sitting up with me all the time I was cleaning off the stuff those juniors threw over me. If Sir Hilton Popper refuses to take my word, and comes to the Head, Wingate will bear me out, and it will be all right. What I can't understand is—how they got hold of my name."

"But—but if you do this, Popper will come here—"

"Well, I shall be cleared—"

"But I—I—"

"You!" said Courtney. "I don't see that you've got anything to be afraid of. You can keep out of sight, and you say you had your face blacked, too, and the keeper can't recognise you. It's all right for you."

"But—but—" stammered Valence. "Don't you see that it's quite clear that there was a Greyfriars senior there—the two keepers will swear to that, and that he owned up to, belonging to Greyfriars, and gave the name of a Greyfriars fellow."

"You gave your name?"

"Not my own name!"

Courtney started.

"You—you unspeakable rotter!" he shouted. "You don't mean to say that you gave my name?"

The cad of the Sixth winced.

"I—I did it in the hurry of the moment!" he faltered.

"You gave my name?"

"Yes. I—I had to give them a name, and—and I blurted out the first one I thought of—not my own! Do you see? I—I never thought at the time of—of this!"

"You cad!"

"I—I only thought of keeping my own name dark, and—and I thought you'd get clear all right if there was an inquiry!"

"You mean you thought you could depend on me to be fool enough not to give you away!" exclaimed Courtney angrily.

Valence cowered.

"For goodness' sake, Courtney, stand by me!" he whimpered. "I'm ruined if you don't! I promised you last night to give it up for good—I meant it! Don't let me be ruined and sacked from the school just when I'm starting fresh!"

"Do you want me to take the blame for what you've done?" exclaimed Courtney, in angry astonishment. "If somebody doesn't go to Sir Hilton Popper to take that flogging he'll come up here!"

"I—I know he will!"

"And the Head will expel the chap who's found to be the poacher. You know that! I shall have to say that I'm not the fellow! You don't expect me to get expelled from the school on your account, do you?"

"No! No, but—"

"If you did, you'd be disappointed," said Courtney savagely. "If I were fool enough, I should have my people to think of. Do you think I could go home and tell my pater I'd been expelled from the school—to save a rotten black-guard who couldn't behave himself decently after a dozen warnings?"

"Oh, pile it on!" said Valence bitterly. "It's manly to hit a chap when he's down."

Courtney's face softened.

"I don't mean to do that," he said. "I'm sorry I—I said that! But you see it's impossible for me to let the matter stay where it is. I must clear myself."

"If you prove it wasn't you—"

"I can easily do that—and I must."

"If you do, I'm ruined!" groaned Valence. "The Head will know that at all events there was a senior of Greyfriars poaching on Sir Hilton's estate last night—"

"He won't know it was you."

"He will soon know. He will tell Wingate to inquire into it, and report to him—and Wingate knows already. You told me so yourself last night."

Courtney started. He had not thought of that.

"Wingate will have the report all ready for him," said Valence, in a tremulous voice. "He will give me away at once. And one of the juniors knows—two of them, rather. Cherry and Wharton picked up a partridge I dropped in getting in last night, and brought it to my study. They know, and if there is an inquiry, and every fellow in the school is questioned, they'll talk."

Courtney clenched his hands.

"Oh, you fool—you fool!" he exclaimed. "You've done it now! I warned you yesterday; and you only insulted me in return. You've done it now."

"You can save me."

"I—I would save you if I could, for—for somebody else's sake; but I can't be sacked from the school in your place."

"It needn't come as far as that."

Courtney brightened up.

"Of course not!" he exclaimed. "The old fellow gives you a chance—and it's very decent of him, too, and shows that he's not so black as he's been painted. If you go up to his house and take the flogging, it's all serene."

Valence gave a cry.

"I—I can't!"

"Why can't you?"

"I can't! I couldn't bear it. I'd rather be expelled!" groaned the miserable fellow. "You see what he says—you know what a brute he is. You remember his being summoned for assault, for horse-whipping a boy who trespassed in his woods, and he had to pay a lot of money to the kid's parents to keep the case from going any farther. I don't believe he's given this chance out of decency—but just because he'd rather flog a fellow with his own hands than leave him to any other punishment. He'd rather cut the skin off my back with a riding-whip than have me expelled from Greyfriars. You know the kind of brute he is."

Courtney nodded slowly.

"I dare say you're right," he said.

Valence groaned miserably.

"I couldn't bear it," he said. "I couldn't face it! I—I believe it would kill me. I'd rather be expelled a hundred times."

"Think of your people," said Courtney sharply. "Keep a stiff upper lip, and take the flogging; it will save you from the sack, anyway."

Valence shuddered.

"I can't!"

"You must!"

"I can't—and I won't!" gasped Valence. "I'd rather be sacked. I tell you—a hundred times. I can't go through with it. It's impossible! If you don't choose to help me, I shall be expelled. And Violet will be cut up over it, you know that!"

Courtney smiled bitterly.

"I know she will; and it's for her sake I'd save you if I could. But you can save yourself by taking the flogging from Sir Hilton."

"I can't—I can't! You—"

"How can I help you? You don't want me to be sacked. I suppose, to save you from a flogging?" demanded Courtney

scornfully. "You couldn't be idiot enough to ask a thing like that!"

"No, no! But—"

"But what?"

"They think it was you," faltered Valence. "If—if you go there, and don't say anything, they will still think it was you. And—and—"

Courtney drew a deep breath.

"Is it possible that you're asking me to go and take the flogging for you?" he asked, with such a world of contempt and bitter scorn in his voice that it stung even Valence to the quick.

The coward groaned aloud.

"Well, let them do as they like," he muttered. "It will mean the sack for me. I don't care. Better that than to be cut to pieces by that cruel hoard's riding-whip! I sha'n't go to his house; that's settled. Let them do as they like."

And he staggered from the study.

Courtney remained alone, with very unpleasant thoughts in his mind. The cad and coward deserved his punishment—all and more than he was to receive; but—but there was another to be considered. A sweet, kind face was before Courtney's mind—the face of Valence's sister, who had asked him to help her brother; and one word from Violet Valence meant very much to Arthur Courtney. He knew that Valence would be expelled rather than take the savage flogging the baronet intended for the culprit; and he knew what a terrible blow that would be for the wretched fellow's people, and especially for his sister, whose pride in her handsome brother was great, and who never could or would understand how utterly unworthy he was of her kind affection. If he could only have saved the miserable wretch, for Violet's sake! But it was impossible. If Valence had not the courage to save himself, he was ruined!

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.

For His Sister's Sake!

VALENCE glanced at Courtney as the Sixth went into the class-room that afternoon, and the prefect avoided his glance. He would hold out no false hopes to the fellow. What Valence had asked of him was preposterous, outrageous, unheard-of, impossible. That any fellow could have the colossal nerve to hint at such a thing was amazing. And only the day before, too, Valence had thrown back Courtney's friendship in his face. The measure of Courtney's contempt for him was full. Valence saw that the prefect would not even look at him, and he turned a shade paler. He had not really expected even the generous and patient Courtney to make such a sacrifice for him; but he had hoped it, as a drowning man clings to a straw. But there was no hope left now.

Valence went through his work that afternoon with a pale face and preoccupied mind. The Head, who was taking the Sixth, glanced at him very curiously several times, but he saw that the senior was not himself, and was not hard on him.

When the Form came out Valence joined Courtney, although the latter had turned to walk quickly away.

"You're going to turn your back on me, then?" Valence asked, in a low voice.

Courtney looked him full in the eyes.

"What do you want me to do?" he asked.

Valence was silent. Even he could not formulate such a demand in plain words.

"I can do nothing for you," said Courtney coldly. "You can save yourself—by going up to the hall at six o'clock."

"I can't!"

"Then you must take the consequences!"

And Courtney walked away. He had spoken firmly and decidedly to Valence, but he was far from feeling firm and decided in his mind. He left the school, and went for a stroll in Friardale Wood to think the matter over. What was there he could do? How could he save Valence except by yielding to the preposterous demand the culprit had made?

"It's impossible!" Courtney muttered again and again.

He strode along with his hands in his pockets and his brows wrinkled with a deep frown.

The hour of five rang out from the village church.

One hour more, and Sir Hilton Popper would be expecting the schoolboy poacher at the hall.

Would he go?

Courtney knew that Valence would not go. He had no courage and no nerve for such an ordeal. He was reckless enough to get into any scrape, but he had no courage to extricate himself. If others could not, or would not, help him, he must go under. And the sooner he went under the better, Courtney said to himself angrily; if it were not—if it were not for one other whose happiness would be darkened by his fate.

"Arthur!"

It was a soft, sweet voice. Arthur Courtney started and looked up, and the frown faded away from his brow. The face looking at him was the face that had been in his mind—a sweet, kind face, circled by clustering, brown hair.

"Violet!" he exclaimed.

The girl smiled.

"Rupert told me I should see you here," she said. "I want to speak to you."

"Rupert told you?"

"Yes. He has just cycled over," Violet explained. "He is in some trouble, Arthur. I could see that at once."

Courtney smiled grimly.

"Yes; I dare say anybody could see it," he said.

"Then you know about it?"

"Yes, I know about it, Vi. Has he told you what it is?"

"No; only that he is in trouble, and that you could help him if you liked," said Violet softly. "He says he had some words with you yesterday."

"So he did."

"But—but you wouldn't allow that to make any difference, Arthur, would you? Rupert is always hasty, but he never means what he says. I told him you would never allow anything of that sort to make any difference, if you could help him."

"Of course I wouldn't, Vi!"

The girl drew a breath of relief.

"I was sure of it, Arthur. But—but why won't you help him, then?"

"I can't."

"He says you could."

Courtney crushed back the words that rose to his lips. He could hardly restrain them. His contempt for the fellow who would drag his sister into the matter like this knew no bounds. Valence had not told Violet the facts; he had simply told her that he was in trouble, and that Courtney refused to help him. And Courtney could not tell her how the matter stood. How could he explain to the girl the utter baseness and want of principle of the brother she loved and trusted?

Courtney's mind was in conflict. He sat down upon a fallen tree, and the girl sat by his side, her eyes turned anxiously upon his troubled face.

"How much do you know, Vi?" he asked at last.

"Only that Rupert is in trouble. He has done something reckless, and says he will be expelled from Greyfriars, unless—"

"Unless what?"

"Unless you save him, Arthur."

"Did he say I could save him?"

"Yes."

"But how?"

"He did not say that, or what he had done. I don't know what it was, Arthur, but it cannot have been very bad. Rupert is very reckless and foolish, I know," said Violet, with a troubled look, "but he is not wicked. I suppose it is because you are a prefect in the school that you can save him—by using your authority in some way."

"It's not exactly that, Vi."

"I don't want to ask anything about it," said Violet.

"But—but you'll help him if you can, Arthur, won't you?"

"I've been trying to think out some way of helping him, Vi," groaned Courtney—"not for his own sake—for yours; but I can't."

The girl drew a sharp breath.

"You cannot help him?"

"No. There's only one way, and that's impossible."

"Then—then he will be expelled?"

"I fear so."

Violet bowed her head. Her hands were clasped together, and although her face was turned away from Courtney he knew that she was crying.

Courtney bit his lip till it bled. That Violet should be crying over this blackguard, this cowardly fool who had not sense enough to keep out of a scrape, and not the courage enough to face the consequences—it maddened him. But what could he do?

"Vi, Vi! Don't!" he said huskily. "You know I'd do anything to help him out of this, but it can't be done."

"Is there no way, Arthur?"

"None."

"But—but you said—"

"Yes, there's one way—the only way; but that's impossible," said Courtney hoarsely. "If you knew what it was, Vi, you wouldn't dream of asking it."

"If you would have to do anything dishonourable, of course it is impossible," said the girl quietly. "Is it that?"

"N-n-no; not exactly that."

"Would it be a great trouble to you?"

"That's nothing."

"You mean, then, that you would suffer in some way if you helped my brother," said the girl, slowly.

"Well, yes."

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"DRIVEN TO THE WALL."

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ONE
PENNY.

"And that is why you won't do it?"

Courtney groaned.

"You don't understand."

"Cannot you explain to me?"

"Not without telling you the whole story," said Courtney miserably, "and I don't want to do that. It's better not."

"Poor Rupert! The tears were running down the girl's cheeks now. "I believe what you say, Arthur. If you tell me you cannot help him, I suppose you cannot. But—"

She broke off with a sob.

Courtney sprang to his feet. He could endure it no longer. And—and surely if he put it plainly to Rupert, if he urged him and backed him up, the wretched fellow would have the courage to face his punishment, and if not—"

"Vi, don't—don't! I can't bear to see you cry," said Courtney huskily. "Don't! He shall be saved. I'll manage it somehow. He sha'n't be expelled from Greyfriars! Vi, I promise you that!"

The girl's face brightened through her tears.

"But can you do it, Arthur?"

"It shall be done."

"Oh, thanks—thanks!" murmured Violet. She rose to her feet. "Arthur, I don't know how to thank you!"

"It's all right!" muttered Courtney. "Let me see you to your gate, and I shall have to cut back to the school. There isn't much time to lose. At six o'clock it will be too late."

"Then go at once, Arthur—never mind me!" exclaimed Violet eagerly. "Save my brother, that is all! Save him!"

"I will save him!"

A minute more, and Arthur Courtney was striding back towards the school with long, swift strides. He had promised to save Valence. But how?

THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER.

The Only Way.

"COME into my study, Rupert, will you?"

"Have you seen Vi?"

"Yes."

Rupert followed Courtney into his study. His face was pale with anxiety. He had never suffered so much in his life as he had suffered in that last hour. He had called in the aid of his sister as a last resource. There was no shift or trick too mean for him, if it would save him. Violet's influence over Courtney he knew to be strong; but if she had known the facts, she would never have asked of Courtney what Valence had asked of him. Nothing would have induced her to make such a demand, and so, if Courtney had acquainted her with the facts, all was over in that direction. But Valence knew Courtney well; he felt that the prefect had not told Violet more than he could help. Courtney closed the door of the study, and then turned and faced Valence.

"I've seen your sister," he said.

"Well?"

"You've told her that you're in danger of being expelled, and that I can save you if I choose; but that's all."

"Have you told her anything more?"

"No."

Valence drew a deep breath of relief.

"It's just as well," he muttered. "Vi has queer ideas—all sorts of romantic and overstrained notions, and—and—"

"And if she knew the truth she wouldn't want me to do what you want me to do," said Courtney scornfully.

"But you haven't told her."

"I wouldn't insult her by telling her what a thorough rotter and blackguard her precious brother is."

Valence winced.

"Oh, pile it on!" he said.

"Look here, I told her you shouldn't be expelled," said Courtney abruptly.

Valence's face lightened.

"You mean that, Courtney?"

"I've come back to talk to you," said Courtney. "Valence, you've simply got to play the man this time. Don't be a coward."

"Look here—"

"Other fellows have been flogged, and stood it. Why can't you? I dare say Sir Hilton will lay it on, but after all, it's only licking. You can stand it."

"I—I can't."

"You can, and must—for Violet's sake!"

"Then you—you won't—"

"Don't ask me—it's impossible!"

Valence sank into a chair, and covered his face with his hands. He groaned aloud in his misery and terror.

"Then I shall be expelled."

"There's no need for that. Take the flogging, and Sir Hilton will say no more about the matter. Pull yourself together, for goodness' sake; have a little pluck. There are kids in the Remove who'd take it without a word."

Valence shuddered.

"I tell you I can't! Even if I went up to the house, I shouldn't go in—I should bolt. I tell you I can't face it!"

"Are you a coward?"

Valence gave him a haggard look.

"Perhaps I am," he said. "I don't care. I can't face it, and I won't. Oh! It makes me shudder all over to think of it! I can't—I won't! And I won't be expelled either! I'll run away! I won't go home! I'll go to sea!"

He threw his arms out upon the table, and his face sank upon them. He was crying!

Courtney looked at him in wonder and contempt.

"My hat!" he said savagely. "I believe you're right. I think it would kill you if you had to face a flogging. You cur!"

"You can call me what you like!" groaned Valence. "I don't care. I know what I'm going to do."

"What are you going to do?"

"I'm going to run away!" muttered Valence, without raising his head. "I can't face being expelled, either. I'm going off at once. I'll go to sea."

Courtney laughed, a laugh of angry contempt.

"Yes, you would do well at sea—when you haven't the pluck to take a single licking," he said. "Don't be a fool! If you run away from school, you'll go sneaking home, and hide behind your mother if your pater cuts up rusty."

"Oh, pile it on!"

"Rupert, be a man! If I were to take this on for you, you'd despise yourself as long as you lived afterwards," said Courtney.

"I can't do it."

"You must."

"I won't!"

Courtney paced up and down the study.

What was he to do? There was only one way to save the wretched coward—only one way. Could he take that—the only way?

"Rupert," he broke out, at last, "I've promised Vi that you sha'n't be expelled."

"Keep your word, then."

"Do you refuse to go and take the flogging?"

"Yes, I tell you."

"You'd rather I went."

"You can stand it better than I can!" muttered Valence. "And you say yourself there's little in it. If I could stand it, you could."

"It's not that; it's the disgrace—the horrible humiliation!" muttered Courtney, with flushing cheeks. "To stand and be lashed by that old brute. You wouldn't feel the humiliation; you'd only feel the pain. That's the least part of it to me. And then—to be supposed to be a rotten poacher!"

"You've promised Vi."

"I know I have," said Courtney between his teeth. "If you won't save yourself, I must save you. But for the last time, won't you play the game?"

"You've promised Vi!"

"Rupert, you'll be sick of yourself afterwards, if you let me do this—you will despise yourself. Can't you see that?"

"You've promised Vi."

Valence had nothing else to say. He could face obloquy and contempt; he could face scornful looks; he could face his own conscience. But he could not face a flogging.

Courtney strode up and down the study again, his brow dark with angry thought.

Yes, he had promised Vi! He had to keep his word! If Rupert had not the courage to save himself, Courtney had to save him!

The prefect halted at last. He had made up his mind.

"Very well," he said quietly—very quietly, "pull yourself together, Rupert. I'm going."

Valence raised his head.

"You're going to take the flogging, Arthur?"

"Yes. It's the only way."

"God bless you! I—I—"

"Oh, shut up!" said Courtney irritably. "I don't want your thanks. I'm sick to death of you. I'm doing this for Vi's sake, not for yours. Pull yourself together, and don't let anybody see your face like that."

And he swung angrily towards the door.

Valence rose to his feet. His face was brighter now, as his heart was lighter. He was saved, and he cared little how.

"You are going up to the hall?" he asked.

"Yes."

The quarter to six rang out from the clock-tower of Greyfriars. Valence gave a nervous start.

"You'll be late!" he exclaimed.

"You needn't be afraid of that," said Courtney. "I shall go on my bike. I shall get there in time."

He left the study, closing the door angrily with a slam. Valence went to the window, and looked out. From the study

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window he could see the school gates. In a couple of minutes Courtney came in sight, wheeling his bicycle down to the gates.

Valence caught his breath. Courtney was going. Yet it seemed really too good to be true.

He watched the prefect as he mounted in the gateway, and disappeared down the road.

"He's gone!"

Valence left the study with slow and faltering steps. Courtney was gone—gone to take the cruel punishment that should justly have been his. He was saved, but he was saved in a way that would have brought bitter shame and remorse to most hearts. And even Rupert Valence felt something of remorse; but his remorse was not so great as his relief.

He was saved!

Courtney had saved him, by the only way; and, after all, what did it matter how, so long as he was saved? Valence's heart was lighter every moment now.

Six o'clock chimed out from the clock-tower, and Valence started. Six o'clock! Where was Arthur Courtney now?

THE SIXTEENTH CHAPTER.

Taking the Punishment.

HUH!"

Sir Hilton Popper was standing in his doorway, looking down the drive through the park. He had a riding-whip in his right hand, and his watch in his left. He was looking at the watch. The hands indicated five minutes to six.

"Huh!" grunted the baronet.

He was feeling disappointed. He had given the schoolboy poacher until six o'clock to come up to the hall and take a flogging, and if the culprit did not come Sir Hilton intended to let the law take its course.

The flogging, certainly, was the less serious punishment of the two; but it was the one that Sir Hilton would have preferred to inflict, if it were possible. He wanted to feel his riding-whip lashing on the back of the boy who had dared to poach in his preserves—he wanted to hear the howls of the schoolboy-poacher.

After such a thrashing as he would bestow upon his victim, the baronet felt that there was little likelihood of the offence being repeated. And Sir Hilton would much rather have thrashed the culprit with his own hand than even have had him sent to a reformatory, and he was not at all sure that he could contrive so much as that. If the boy had any sense he would come, but it was five minutes—four minutes to six—and he had not appeared yet.

Sir Hilton Popper grunted discontentedly, and looked with knitted brows at his head-keeper, who was waiting, too, at a respectful distance. Sir Hilton's look seemed to indicate that he somehow regarded it as Parker's fault that the schoolboy-poacher had not come.

There was the ring of a bicycle-bell on the road, and Sir Hilton Popper turned his head and looked down the drive.

A couple of minutes later, and an athletic form came striding up the drive towards the baronet.

Sir Hilton glared at the new-comer, and then turned an inquiring glance upon his head-keeper.

"Is that the lad?"

"Yes, Sir Hilton."

"Good!"

Courtney came straight on, and stopped before the baronet. It wanted one minute to six.

"So you have come?" said the baronet grimly.

"Yes, sir."

"You have decided to take the flogging you deserve, instead of allowing the matter to go to the police. I presume?"

"I have decided to take the flogging."

"Huh! Follow me!"

Sir Hilton Popper strode into the house, and led the way to his library. Courtney followed him, and the keeper followed Courtney. Parker was grinning quietly. He passed a hand over his discoloured eye. He had not the slightest doubt that this was the same boy who had tricked him the night before, and struck him that heavy blow. And Parker felt a keen satisfaction at the idea of hoisting Courtney for the flogging.

The baronet's grasp was tight upon his riding-whip. There was no doubt that he intended to make the thrashing a severe one. If the schoolboy-poacher were spared the legal consequences of his misdeeds he would not otherwise be spared.

Sir Hilton Popper paused in the library—a large, quiet room, and signed to Parker to close the door. Then he fixed his round eyes upon Courtney.

"Mind," he said, "you have come here to take the thrashing of your own free will. You are at liberty to go, if you please."

Courtney's lip curled. He knew that the baronet was thinking of the case that had made a great deal of talk on the countryside—the boy who had been thrashed savagely for trespassing, and the summons for assault that had followed.

Sir Hilton wanted very much to flog the schoolboy-poacher, but he did not want a case of that kind to follow. Even the fiery-tempered, high-handed landowner had had to learn that there was a law in the country to which it was necessary to bow his head.

"I understand all that, sir," Courtney said quietly.

"Very well. You have poached upon my land many a time, and done a great deal of damage in my preserves," said Sir Hilton. "You ought to be sent to prison, and you know it very well, only I'm afraid it would be impossible with a boy of your age. I think I could get you sent to a reformatory if I tried. But if you prefer to take the flogging, I think that is a more suitable punishment."

"Please get it over."

"Huh!"

The baronet signed to Parker to come forward.

"Take him on your shoulders," he said.

"Yes, Sir Hilton."

Courtney said no word. He allowed the burly keeper to take his hands and raise him on his back, hoisting him for the flogging, as boys were hoisted on the rare occasions when Dr. Locke administered the punishment at Greyfriars.

Courtney's chest rested upon the keeper's broad shoulders, and his arms were passed over the shoulders, Parker holding his wrists. Then the man bent down, and Courtney's feet were lifted from the floor.

Sir Hilton Popper took a tighter grip upon his whip.

His ruddy face was full of a cruel satisfaction now. He raised his hand, and measured the stroke, and brought the riding-whip down with the full force of his arm.

Lash!

Courtney winced.

But he set his teeth hard, and no sound escaped him. Whatever he suffered, he would not gratify the baronet by uttering a single cry. Upon that he was determined.

But as the punishment proceeded he was almost forced from his resolution.

Sir Hilton handled the riding-whip as if he were accustomed to administering that kind of punishment. Perhaps he was!

The blows fell steadily and incessantly, and with terrible force.

Courtney's face was very pale now, his eyes hard and fixed, his teeth set together like a vice.

He would make no sound.

His silence seemed to disappoint the baronet. He lashed harder and harder, as if determined to draw a cry from his victim's lips.

He did not succeed.

No cry came—only at last a hard, sharp breath of pain, as if the infliction were almost more than the boy could bear.

Twenty savage strokes had fallen, and still the hard-hearted man did not desist.

Parker looked round at his master uneasily.

"Don't you think, sir—" he began hesitatingly.

The baronet stared at him.

"What are you saying, Parker?"

"Ain't 'o had enough, sir?" stammered the keeper.

"Huh!"

"He's only a boy, sir—"

"Hold your tongue, Parker!"

"Yes, sir. But—"

"Hold your tongue!" roared the baronet.

"Ye-es, Sir Hilton."

Lash! lash! lash!

Courtney's face was white as death. The baronet seemed to be lashing harder since the remonstrance from his keeper.

Lash! lash! lash!

But even Sir Hilton desisted at last. There was a savage look upon his face; he had not extracted one cry from the victim of his cruelty.

"You can put him down, Parker," he said, at length.

The keeper obeyed.

Courtney slid down to the floor, and stood unsteadily, gasping for breath. Parker caught him as he reeled.

"He's fainting!" muttered the keeper.

Sir Hilton laughed scoffingly.

"He is only shamming, Parker!"

"He ain't, sir—"

"Hold your tongue, Parker!"

Parker bit his lip. At that moment he would have been very glad to take the riding-whip from Sir Hilton's hand and use it forcibly upon the stout person of the baronet. But he had to choke down all expression of his feelings. He had a good place with Sir Hilton, and was not inclined to risk it.

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NEXT
TUESDAY:

"DRIVEN TO THE WALL."

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ONE
PENNY.

Courtney leaned heavily upon the keeper. The punishment he had received had been a terrible one, and he was almost fainting. He tried to control himself, and succeeded, but only with a terrible effort. Even at that moment he was thinking of what would have happened if Valence had had the courage to come there and take his punishment.

The wretched fellow would have been shrieking in hysterics long before he had received half so much punishment. Courtney, certainly, was better fitted to endure it.

Courtney straightened up. His lips were trembling, in spite of himself. The baronet gave him a savage look.

"That will do," he said. "You can go!"

Courtney did not speak. He turned blindly towards the door. The man, more humane than the master, helped him out of the room and led him to the door on the drive. Courtney staggered out into the summer sunlight.

Sir Hilton followed him to the door.

"Parker!" he thundered.

"Ye-es, sir."

"Leave that boy alone. Go about your duties, sir!"

"Yes, sir."

The keeper tramped away surlily. Courtney stood unsteadily in the bright sunshine, looking dully at the baronet.

Sir Hilton pointed down the drive.

"Get out," he said, "and don't let me see you again!"

Courtney turned away without a word, and staggered down the drive towards the gates.

THE SEVENTEENTH CHAPTER.

Valence's Thanks!

ARTHUR COURTNEY'S bicycle was leaning against the park palings outside the gates. He drew the machine towards him and wheeled it down the road. He knew that he was not in a condition to mount. He wheeled

the machine slowly away, pausing every few minutes to lean upon it and rest. He had expected a savage punishment from the baronet, but he had not quite expected this. The man had been as cruel as a tiger. Courtney knew that his back was terribly scored, and he felt bitter pain in every nerve of his body. His head was swimming with the intensity of the pain he suffered, and the trees and the blue summer sky seemed to be moving strangely about him. A fear of fainting in the road took possession of him, and he set his teeth hard, and tramped on towards Greyfriars.

But it was no use!

He realised that he could not get to the school. He drew the machine to the side of the road, and let it fall upon a grassy bank. Then he sat down beside it, and fell in the grass, and darkness

came over his vision.

There was a whirr of a cycle on the road, the ring of a bell, and a sharp exclamation.

Courtney did not hear it.

Two cyclists came whizzing along the dusty road, and they stopped simultaneously at the sight of Courtney lying on the grassy bank.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Something wrong there?" Bob Cherry exclaimed.

"It's Courtney!" said Harry Wharton, in amazement.

"Courtney! My hat!"

Leaving their machines, the two juniors ran towards Courtney. The senior's face was white and set.

"Good heavens! He's fainted!"

"Riding in the sun, I suppose," said Bob Cherry. "I saw him leave Greyfriars, and he was scorching for all he was worth. Dangerous in a sun like this. Courtney, old man!"

He raised the prefect's head upon his knee.

"Get some water, quick!" he muttered.

There was a flowing ditch on the other side of the road. Wharton ran to it and filled his cap with water and ran back. The cool fluid was dashed in Courtney's face.

Arthur Courtney drew a long, shivering breath and opened his eyes. He gazed about him wildly.

"Oh, you brute!" he muttered. "You utter brute!"

Wharton stared at him.

"Courtney!" he exclaimed.

The prefect recognised him.

"Oh, you here," he said, "Wharton? Why, what has happened?"

"Oh, you weren't calling me that, then?" said Harry.

"You? Oh, no! Sir Hilton—ah!" Courtney checked himself. He did not intend the juniors to know what had happened. "It's all right! Was I asleep?"

"You'd fainted."

"Oh!"

Courtney sat up, passing his hand over his eyes. He was racked with pain still, but he was more himself now.

"I'm all right," he said shortly.

"You're not," replied Wharton decidedly. "Did you fall off your machine?"

"No."

"Then what's the matter?"

"Nothing," said the Sixth-Former abruptly. "I—I sat down here to rest. Never mind. I tell you I'm all right."

"You don't look all right," said Bob Cherry.

Courtney pulled himself together.

"You fellows going back to Greyfriars?" he asked.

"Yes."

"You might take my jigger, will you? I shall walk."

"Look here, Courtney, you don't look fit to walk," said Harry Wharton anxiously. "Let me cut off to the village and send a trap—"

The prefect shook his head.

"No, no! If you take my machine I shall be all right. I'll have a bit of a rest, and walk home. And don't jaw this all over Greyfriars."

"Oh, all right!"

"Buzz off!" said Courtney.

It was evident that he wished them to go, and, anxious as they were, the juniors did as he wished.

They mounted their machines, and Wharton took Courtney's bicycle by the handlebars, and they rode away in the direction of Greyfriars.

The senior sat in the grass, watching them go. They were out of sight down the long dusty road before he staggered to his feet.

"My hat," he muttered, "I wonder when I shall get over this? The brute laid it on hard! How would Valence have stood it?"

He laughed grimly at the idea of it. Valence could never have stood it.

Courtney tramped slowly and heavily down the road.

Long, long afterwards that tramp through the sunshine remained imprinted upon his memory. It was a long torture. But Greyfriars came in sight at last, and the prefect walked unsteadily in at the gates.

Gosling, the porter, caught sight of him and came quickly towards him. Gosling was not a tender-hearted man, as a rule, but the boy's white, strained face alarmed him.

"You ain't well, Master Courtney!" he exclaimed. "Will you sit down in my lodge for a minute?"

Courtney shook his head.

"I'm all right, Gosling."

"Wot I says is this 'ere—you don't look it, Master Courtney. You'd better—"

But Courtney was tramping on.

He entered the School House, and more than one curious glance was cast towards him.

Wingate stopped him in the Sixth Form passage.

"Courtney, what on earth's the matter?" he exclaimed.

"Nothing."

"You look ill—"

"I'm not ill. Help me into my study, old man," muttered Courtney. "It's all right—only give me a hand."

His strength was failing. The Greyfriars captain took him by the arm and led him into his room.

Courtney sank down on a sofa. He tried to keep himself in hand, but, in spite of his courage, a groan escaped his lips.

Wingate looked at him in great anxiety.

"What is it, Courtney? What has happened?"

"Don't ask me."

"But—"

"It's all right," muttered Courtney. "I shall soon get over it. Only—only don't ask me what it's about, there's a good fellow."

"Can I help you in any way?"

"No. Thanks, no! Better leave me alone."

"But I don't understand."

Courtney looked anxiously at the door. He was expecting Valence to come in every minute, and he was afraid that some incautious word might enlighten Wingate. He did not want the captain of Greyfriars to know anything about it; he would not expose the cad of the Sixth to general scorn.

"Leave me alone, Wingate," he said faintly. "I'm all right."

"If you'd rather be alone—"

"I would. Excuse me, old fellow."

"Oh, all right!"

Wingate left the study. Courtney was alone. He took his jacket and waistcoat off, and removed his shirt carefully. The slightest touch sent bitter, throbbing pains through all his nerves. There were red stains on the shirt; the baronet's cruel blows had drawn blood!

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 186.

READ the special new story of the "Chums of St. Jim's," entitled: **"THE RALLY OF THE RIVAL CO.'S."** In this week's "GEM" Library. Now on Sale. Price One Penny.

Courtney put an old loose blazer on, and laid down on his side on his sofa under the window. The cool breeze blowing in from the Close revived him somewhat. He waited; he expected Rupert Valence to come in, and did not want him to come. But he need not have been anxious upon that point—Valence did not come.

Was he ashamed to face the fellow who had suffered so much for him? That was doubtless the explanation. Or had he dismissed the matter from his mind when he was once assured that he himself was safe? It was only too likely.

Voices floated in from the Close. Courtney gave a start as he recognised the voice of Rupert Valence. Valence was talking to Loder of the Sixth.

"Are you coming out?" Loder asked. "We can get over to Courtfield, and get back quite easily by dark. There are some jolly fellows there—a better set than those bounders at the Cross Keys. I can promise you a good time."

"Right-ho!" exclaimed Valence. "I'll come with pleasure. I want bucking up; I've had a rotten time the last day or two."

"I've noticed you've been looking down in the mouth," Loder said. "I suppose, as a matter of fact, you've been getting into trouble. Some of us know jolly well who it was that old Popper was complaining about."

"Oh, let's get off!" said Valence.

"By the way, what about Courtney?" asked Loder, with a satirical note in his voice. "Will your father-confessor allow you to come? He seems to have taken you under his grandfatherly wing."

Valence uttered an impatient exclamation.

"Oh, hang Courtney!"

The voices passed on out of hearing. Courtney, lying on the sofa under the window, had heard every word.

Hang Courtney!

The fellow he had suffered so much for had gone off on an excursion of pleasure, and that was his valediction—Hang Courtney!

THE EIGHTEENTH CHAPTER.

Violet Knows.

BOB CHERRY came into the junior Common-room with a frown upon his usually sunny face. Bob was worried in his mind about Courtney. Arthur was one of the most popular fellows at Greyfriars, and he had always been very kind to Bob, who had fagged for him. And Bob knew that there must be something very wrong with Courtney, though he could not guess what it was.

There was a crowd in the Common-room gathered round Billy Bunter. The fat junior was blinking through his big spectacles in a most important way. He had a letter in his hand, which he had been reading aloud. Bob Cherry caught Courtney's name as he came in, and he joined the group.

"What's that about Courtney?" he asked.

"He's the poacher!" chuckled Skinner.

"What?"

"Courtney's the chap who was robbing Sir Hilton Popper's preserves."

"Rot!" said Bob Cherry emphatically.

"That's all you know!" said Snoop. "Bunter's got it in a letter—a letter in Sir Hilton's own handwriting."

"Rats! What should Sir Hilton Popper write to Bunter for?"

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"He's lying, of course!" said Bob Cherry. "Besides, I happen to know that the poacher wasn't, and couldn't possibly have been, old Courtney."

"I say, you fellows, I think the letter makes it pretty clear," said Billy Bunter. "Sir Hilton says plainly here that he knows it was Courtney, and he gives him the choice of going up to his house to take a flogging, or of being left to the police. It couldn't be plainer than that. He had to get there at six this evening and take the licking, or else it would be worse for him. And Courtney went out just before six, and he cycled in the direction of Sir Hilton's house. I think that makes it plain enough."

Bob Cherry gave a violent start.

It flashed upon his mind instantly; he knew now how it had happened that he and Wharton had found Courtney fainting by the roadside near Sir Hilton's house.

"That letter must be to Courtney, then!" he exclaimed.

"So it is."

"Then how did you come by it? And how dare you read it?" demanded Bob Cherry, seizing the Paul Pry of Greyfriars by the collar and shaking him savagely.

"Oh! Ow! Oh, really, Cherry—"

"Where did you get that letter?" roared Bob.

"Ow! I—I found it—"

"Where?"

"I—I happened to go into Courtney's study, to see if there was anything in his cupboard—I—I mean, to borrow a Latin dictionary—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And I—I saw the letter on the desk. I—I didn't look at it—I hope I'm above looking at another fellow's letters—but—but I happened to see part of it, you see, entirely by accident. Ow! Don't shake me like that, you beast! You—you might make my glasses fall off; and if they get broken you'll have to pay for them—ow!"

"So you stole the letter—"

"Ow! Under the circumstances, I—I considered it my duty to bring the letter away, and—and show him up," stammered Bunter. "You see, I—I thought that as he was a rotten poacher— Wow! Ow! Groo! Yah!"

"You fat cad!" said Bob savagely. "Give me that letter!"

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"Give me that letter!" thundered Bob.

"Here it is! You can have it, and welcome! Ow!"

"I'm going to take this letter back to Courtney, whom it belongs to," said Bob Cherry, with a wrathful glare at the juniors. "Bunter was a rotten cad to take it, and you're not much better to let him read it out to you—"

"Oh, draw it mild!" said Snoop.

"Shut up, you cad, or I'll shut you up—and sharp!" said Bob Cherry angrily. "This is a private letter, and you've no right to know what's in it. I'm going to take it back to Courtney. As for you, Bunter, if you were worth the trouble, I'd thrash you till you couldn't squirm."

"Oh, really— Yaroo!"

Bob Cherry gave the fat junior a twist that sent him whirling across the room. Billy Bunter sat down with a bump that seemed to shake the floor, and yelled. Bob Cherry did not give him a second glance. He strode from the room, with the letter in his hand.

"Ow!" groaned Bunter. "I'm dead—I—I mean, I'm fearfully injured. Ow! Cherry, you beast—"

But Bob Cherry was gone.

He strode away to the Sixth-Form passage, and knocked at Arthur Courtney's door.

"Come in!"

Bob Cherry entered. Courtney had dressed himself, and was looking something like his old self, though his face was still very white, and there were lines of pain about his mouth. It would be many days before Courtney quite recovered from the terrible castigation he had received. Whenever he moved, a kind of spasm passed over his face, showing how the savage cuts upon his back still hurt him.

"What do you want, Cherry?" he asked.

Bob Cherry held out the letter, and Courtney uttered an exclamation as he saw it. He took it hastily.

"How did you get hold of this?" he demanded. "You haven't read it, surely?"

Bob Cherry flushed.

"No, I haven't, Courtney. But I know what's in it—a cad was reading it out and jawing it over in the common-room. I've brought it back to you. And look here, Courtney that letter's made them think you were the rotter that poached on Sir Hilton's land."

"Never mind that—"

"But I do mind!" exclaimed Bob Cherry hotly. "They're not going to think so, when I know the facts. You will have to let them know."

Courtney frowned.

"You haven't said anything so far, Cherry?"

"Not yet, but—"

"Then you must not! Let the matter rest."

"But—"

"Do as I tell you, Cherry. If you know anything about the matter, you learned it by accident—through being where you had no right to be—and you have no right to say anything. You know that."

"But look here, you'll get the disgrace of being what Valence is really—and—"

There was a soft football in the passage, but Bob Cherry, in his excitement, did not hear it. Courtney interrupted him.

"It will soon be forgotten," he said.

"But it's not fair!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "Now, I know what's in that letter; I know what's happened to you to-day. Sir Hilton Pepper thought you were the poacher—that awful cad Valence must have made the keepers think so, somehow—and you went up to the house to-day and took the licking for that coward. You know you did—that's why we found you fainting on the road."

"My dear kid—"

"Why, you're as white as a sheet from it now," said Bob; "and that awful worm let you do it—let you take the licking in his place! Blessed if I've ever heard of such a rotter! He ought to be kicked out of the school! He ought to be sent to Coventry! Why—"

"If you want to do me a favour, kid, you'll say nothing about the matter at all," said Courtney quietly. "You

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NEXT
TUESDAY:

"DRIVEN TO THE WALL."

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ONE
PENNY.

oughtn't to have known; and I rely upon you to keep your mouth shut!"

Bob Cherry grunted.

"Oh, all right!" he said. "I'll do as you wish, of course, but—"

Tap!

It was a knock at the half-open door. Bob Cherry swung round, and Courtney uttered a cry.

"Vi!"

It was Valence's sister who stood at the door. Her face was as white as Courtney's; the prefect did not need telling that she had heard Bob Cherry's excited voice as she came up the passage.

"My hat!" muttered Bob Cherry, in dismay. "It's Valence's sister! I've done it now!" And he bolted from the study.

Violet stood in the doorway, her eyes fixed upon Courtney. The prefect ran towards her.

"Vi!" he exclaimed. "Did you—did you—"

"I could not help hearing what the boy said as I came up the passage," said Violet. "I came to see my brother—to see if all was well with him."

"He's—he's gone out!"

"Is it true, Arthur?"

"Is—is what true?"

"What that junior was saying."

Courtney hesitated.

"Well, you see—" he stammered.

"May I see that letter—Sir Hilton's letter?"

He passed it to her without a word. It was useless to attempt to keep the secret now. Violet read the letter, and then fixed her eyes upon Courtney again.

"Rupert must have given your name?" she said.

"Ye-es—in the hurry of the moment, you know—"

"But how did they not see the difference when you—"

"Valence had his face blacked when the keepers saw him—"

"Oh, I understand! And this was the way you could save him—the only way—by allowing that man to beat you instead of—of the one who deserved it."

"Rupert couldn't have stood it!" muttered Courtney.

"He's not built that way. He'd rather have been expelled. I—I stood it all right. And—and I was willing to take it on, you know."

Violet handed him back the letter. Courtney slowly tore it into fragments. The girl's face was very pale.

"I think I know my brother now," she said. "I never suspected he could be so base. But—but you, Arthur—when I was asking you to save him—I—I was asking you to do this—to suffer so much—"

"It's nothing, Vi!"

"Oh, Arthur! It was noble, noble of you—but how can you forgive me? But I did not know—if I had known, I could never have asked—"

Courtney smiled as he pressed her hands.

"It's all right," he said. "It was the only way!"

And a little later, when Bob Cherry saw Courtney and Valence's sister walking under the old elms in the Close, deep in conversation and read the expression upon Violet's sweet face, it struck him that Arthur Courtney had not done so unwisely for himself after all.

THE END.

Next Tuesday's Splendid, Long, Complete School Tale of Harry Wharton & Co. at Greyfriars is entitled:

"DRIVEN TO THE WALL"

By FRANK RICHARDS.

Please do not fail to place an early order for next week's "MAGNET" LIBRARY.



Man and beast rose not a fathom apart! Brushing aside the dogs, the walrus rushed upon its human foe. Gan-Waga tried to dive, but he was helpless, and entangled in the line. Death and he were close together when Ching-Lung levelled his rifle. (See page 25.)

THE OPENING CHAPTERS.

Ferrers Lord, the famous multi-millionaire and inventor, startles the world by entering the lists against Professor Hugley, the celebrated American scientist, who is about to start in search of the North Pole in his wonderful airship the Cloud King. Lord announces his intention of starting for the Pole at the same time in his mysterious submarine the Lord of the Deep, and makes a match of it with the professor for the gigantic sum of a million pounds! The preliminaries are settled, and two judges are appointed—one to travel on board each of the two strange competing craft. Ferrers Lord is accompanied by all his old friends on the Lord of the Deep, including Ching-Lung and Rupert Thurston; while Professor Hugley has a Cuban named Paraira with him, and Esteban Gacchio, a negro. The two scoundrels murder Professor Hugley, and two of the crew on the voyage assume command of the Cloud King, and plot against the life of Ferrers Lord.

Meanwhile, Ching-Lung livens things up on the Lord of the Deep. Maddock is standing by the state-room door waiting to report the night's voyage to Ferrers Lord, when, without warning, the contents of a tray, carried by a lascar servant who has been startled by a yell from Thurston, shoots into his face, leaving him speechless for the moment. (Now go on with the story.)

Beside the Floes—Fun in "kayaks"—Prout Interviews the First Polar Bear.

Then Maddock found his tongue, and it was in fine working order.

"You copper-coloured haythin landlubber!" he yelled. "Look at me! Look what you've done to a gentleman and a sailor! What d'ye mean, you rascally mummy, to sling your rotten cookery over an officer? Look at me 'air-sticky with the disgustin' stuff! Ow! I'll skin the ugly hide off yer, and make it inter dusters! See that? That's what you're going to taste!"

He shook both fists into the trembling lascar's face.

"No mean it, sah—no mean it! I slip over de mat! Oh, no mean it—no mean it!"

There was a bang as Maddock brought the tray down on the lascar's head. If he had hit the waiter with a sledgehammer he might have hurt the man, but the average lascar has a skull as thick as a granite wall. The blow buckled the tray, but did no damage.

"Thunder!" gasped Maddock. "That's only damagin' the furniture. Here, get out!"

"Pick up pieces fust," whined the waiter, "or get into row!"

"Get out!"

"Orful row, sah!" moaned the waiter.

"Get out!"

Maddock rushed at the author of his woes with upraised foot, slipped on a rasher of bacon, and sat down with a sudden shock that made the vessel quiver. A smile stole over the waiter's face.

"Please, sah!" he murmured, "shall I pick up de pieces and you, sah?"

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READ the special new story of the "THE RALLY OF THE RIVAL CO.'S." in this week's "GEM" Library. Chums of St. Jim's, entitled: Now on Sale. Price One Penny.

Beyond the Eternal Ice.

By SIDNEY DREW.

A Story dealing with the Amazing Adventures of Ferrers Lord, Millionaire; Ching-Lung, Rupert Thurston, and Gan-Waga, while participating in a fierce race on board the famous Lord of the Deep versus the Pirate Air Ship.

The enraged bo'sun scooped up a handful of eggs and hurled them with might and main. A few hit the lascar, who howled and fled, and the others sailed gracefully towards a mirror, spattering it with sticky yellow, and began to slide slowly downwards, leaving a beautiful wide smear in their wake.

Maddock limped to the deck, groaning, and wailed out the story to Ching-Lung. The prince was most pathetic, and gave away ten minutes of his time to scraping some of the substance off with a piece of wood. Then Maddock squatted under the nozzle of a sea pump, and two grinning sailors worked the handle. A couple of men were sent to clean up the state-room with all speed. It may be remarked that Gan-Waga devoured all the relics of the accident with great gusto.

At last the Lord of the Deep lay on the verge of the eternal ice. What lay beyond that terrible white barrier? What wonders and mysteries did it hide? The sun shone bright upon its rifts and hummocks. Narrow channels of blue water intersected it like the veins in marble. Wild fowl in swarms dived and chattered among the floating masses, and more than one whale spouted to seaward. A few seals were seen showing their black, round heads.

Gan-Waga sniffed the air joyously, and the kennelled dogs barked with delight as they scented their beloved ice. Officers and crew alike thrilled with excitement. The Eskimo had lost all his sluggishness.

After breakfast the store-room was opened, and half a dozen flimsy canoes were brought on deck.

They were about twenty feet long, and wonderfully light, being built of sealskin tightly stretched over the framework of hickory wood. The paddles were enormously long, and broad in the blades. The canoes were built for one person each, and a waterproof coat worn by the paddler could be pegged down over the well, making the craft thoroughly waterproof in any sea.

"These are strange canoes, I guess," said Van Witter. "Kayaks, don't you call them?"

"That is the Eskimo name," answered Ferrers Lord.

"They look flimsy enough, but the Eskimos make them act as if they were alive. When the apron is down man and boat are one. Only an Eskimo learns how to handle them. They capsize at a touch, and yet these ice-dwellers can right them at a touch of the paddle in the roughest sea. I'll call Gan-Waga."

The Eskimo came hurrying up, and the millionaire uttered a few words in a guttural tongue.

Gan-Waga donned his waterproof coat, and the canoe was soon launched. Officers and crew lined the decks to watch him. He sped over the placid sea, plying the paddle with easy, regular strokes. There was a shout from Maddock:

"Walrus—walrus!"

A great black head with shaggy mane and glistening tusks showed against the edge of the ice. Gan-Waga had seen it. He unpegged the coat and thrust his hand into the well; then he paddled furiously towards the ice. The canoe came to a standstill, as if dragged back by an anchor. The paddle was strapped to Gan-Waga's wrist, in his right hand he brandished a harpoon.

"By hokey!" gasped Prout. "He ain't going to tackle Mr. Whiskers-and-Tusks in that eggshell?"

"We'll have a funeral if he does," said Maddock.

The walrus rose, showing his gleaming shoulders. The harpoon flashed through the air. A bellow of pain came from the great red throat as the blade sank below the barbs into the flesh. He dived, appeared again, and rushed, open-

mouthed, at the flimsy canoe. His gleaming tusks flashed in the sunlight. Down came the paddle on the broad skull, and the boat was six fathoms away and the harpoon-line was almost taut.

Gan-Waga turned and bellowed something in his native tongue.

"Let loose the dogs!" said Ferrers Lord.

Ching-Lung darted below and threw the kennels open. Barking frantically, the dogs bounded on deck, and sprang into the water at Gan-Waga's pealing whistle. The walrus was making fierce rushes, which the wily Eskimo avoided with a skill that gained cheer after cheer. Swimming lustily, the dogs made after their quarry. Van Witter, a sportsman to the core, shouted himself hoarse.

"Silence!" said Ferrers Lord. And a hush came.

He knew that if the cheering continued the Eskimo would take too many risks. But for once Ferrers Lord had done the wrong thing. The sudden cessation of cheering made the Eskimo imagine that he was not pleasing his audience.

One luckless dog was already dead; the others were snarling round the walrus. Gan-Waga propelled the canoe forward, almost grazing the brute's side, and struck out with his paddle. Round he came to the other side, striking the walrus again. It was a triumph of seamanship, pluck, and skill, but there was no applause. Ferrers Lord called to him to be careful, but the baying of the dogs drowned his warning cry.

Gan-Waga struck again at the walrus's head. Quick as lightning the goaded monster turned, and the paddle hissed into its open jaws. It snapped like a rotten twig. Then the great tusks ripped through the flimsy sealskin, and the stern of the canoe shot into the air.

"He's gone!" gasped Van Witter.

"A rifle—a rifle!" cried Ferrers Lord.

Man and beast rose not a fathom apart. Brushing aside the dogs, the walrus rushed at its human foe. Every heart stood still. Gan-Waga tried to dive, but he was helpless, and entangled in the line. Death and he were close together.

Crack—crack!

Ching-Lung was kneeling, his levelled rifle resting on the rail. Guessing that it might be needed, he had brought the weapon with him after freeing the dogs. A mad, wild cheer answered the double report. The dogs were ripping and tearing at their lifeless prey, and the blue, agitated water began to crimson with blood.

"Well done, Ching!" said Ferrers Lord.

"Bravo—bravo!" shouted Thurston and Van Witter in one breath.

His Highness did not wait for any congratulations, but opening his knife, he plunged overboard.

But no more help was needed. Gan-Waga had already freed the line, and half a dozen of his dogs, holding it in their teeth, were dragging the dead giant towards the ship.

Ching-Lung and the Eskimo met and shook hands in the water.

"Hunk!" gurgled Gan-Waga. "Bad 'nough den, but butterful now. Nearly gone to what's-un-name—Jamiko—den!"

"Jericho, you mean, roly-poly!" said Ching-Lung.

"All same—bad 'nough. Place you turn up your toes. Got dat butterful squeak-squeak?"

"Yes."

"Den squeak."

The "squeak-squeak" was Ching-Lung's penny whistle, and Ching-Lung fished it out of his pocket and cleared it of water. Then Gan-Waga turned over on his back, still clutching the line. Towed by the dogs, men and walrus soon neared the vessel. Ching-Lung squatted on Gan-Waga's chest, playing "Then up I came with my little lot." The laughter was deafening, and the crew took up the chorus of that once popular song.

"Waal, sir," drawled Van Witter, "I just about guess that a Chinaman, an Eskimo, a walrus, and two score and a half of dogs make up the queerest lot I've ever struck since I opened my eyes in this vale of tears. And I guess, too, Mr. Lord, that the Eskimo and that pigtailed Chinese have enough pluck and nerve in them to load a waggon."

"So it seems," said Ferrers Lord quietly. "No man without grit ever stayed on board this ship long."

The walrus was skinned and cut up for the dogs, who devoured the coarse flesh eagerly. Up to lunch-time, with the launch cruising round in case of accidents, Ching-Lung, Thurston, Prout, Maddock, and Ferrers Lord tried how they could handle the kayaks. The millionaire, expert in everything, managed his to perfection, and Ching-Lung took second honours. Thurston, Prout, and the bo'sun were quite at sea in more senses than one.

There were scores of spills, but as they paddled without the waterproof coverings, which would have fastened them into the canoes, there was no danger. They came up time after time, red-faced, choking, but always good-tempered, and gallantly tried again.

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NEXT
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"DRIVEN TO THE WALL."

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ONE
PENNY.

Then came a change of clothes and lunch.

"It may interest you, gentlemen," said Ferrers Lord, as he sipped his wine, "to know that since midnight until seven this morning we have travelled over three hundred knots. Mr. Van Witter, of course, knows it, as he has taken the reckonings."

"Great Scott!" said Thurston. "I thought we had only done twenty at the most. Why, we sighted the ice yesterday!"

"Only a drifting floe of great size, Rupert. We have had long twilights, but we have been steadily climbing uphill. That seven hours' run has brought us far into the land of the midnight sun. You needn't purse your lips and think of cheap trips from London or Hull to Norway, where, for a few guineas, you can view this wonder. Perhaps you will wish you were viewing it from the deck of a pleasure-steamer before long."

"It would be a jolly lot warmer," remarked Van Witter.

"I suppose you shoot?" asked the millionaire.

"Well, I guess I can handle a gun. I know which end you stick against your shoulder."

"Then we'll go ashore to-night and see if we can run against a bear. You must get into your furs. There is not a particle of heat in the sun after midday. We'll not dine before half-past eight. I shall expect you to be ready at eleven. You might tell Prout and Maddock, your Highness. Forgive me if I leave you now. I'm busy."

There was more laughter when dinner was over, when, dressed in their furs, the hunters met in the state-room. With a sallow complexion and a snub nose, Van Witter might have passed for Gan-Waga's twin brother. Instead of bringing the skin hood over their head, as the Eskimo did, they wore woollen caps. In the daytime furs were unnecessary as yet, but at night-time the cold was intense.

The midnight sun hung low over the ice-pack, its beams pale and without warmth. Thurston remarked that it looked tired on account of sitting up late, and rather washed out. Faint lights flickered in the northern sky—the mysterious Aurora Borealis, about which scientific men differ so much.

But it was night, not day, and freezing hard. The deathly silence told that. The seabirds slept as they rocked on the water like toy boats. Ice gleamed white on the Lord of the Deep's deck, and the hoar-frost dimmed the glass of the wheelhouse. The launch was soon afloat, and steering for one of the open channels, with the millionaire at the helm.

"What's the programme?" asked Thurston, lighting his pipe.

"We shall divide," answered the millionaire, "and make a wide circle round that hummock you see over there. I reckon it's about four miles away. It may be more, for the air is so clear that it is very difficult to judge the distance correctly. Prout and Maddock will make for it from here. I shall drop you and Ching-Lung a couple of miles further on, and Gan-Waga higher up the channel. If the channel goes round the hummock, as I expect, Mr. Van Witter and myself will close the circle. Then woe betide Sir Bruin if he happens to be at home! Let him go which way he will, some of us will have a shot at him."

Gan-Waga was sucking his dirty black pipe. He muttered something in a language that sounded to the civilised ear more like the bleating of a sick goat than human speech. Ferrers Lord nodded.

"Gan-Waga thinks," he explained, "that we may find a she bear with cubs, so look out for squalls. He is anxious to catch a cub alive, so do not shoot them. There is something wanting in a ship without a pet. Now, my men, jump!"

Seizing their rifles, Prout and Maddock sprang upon the ice, and the boat churned away up the channel. Two miles above, Ching-Lung and Thurston landed. The launch was lost to sight behind the hummock.

In spite of boots thickly studded with ice-nails, it was bad walking, and Prout and his beloved Benjamin found it so.

"Tom," growled the bo'sun, "if I lived in these 'ere parts, I'm hanged if I'd pay my rates an' taxes until they mended the roads!"

"Well, it ain't quite as easy and comfortable as the Thames Embankment," said Prout, "and we could shoot a bear easier by taking the tuppenny tube to the Zoo, and payin' our tanner. It's a rummy place altogether, and I don't think much of the sun. I thought afore he was rather a sensible old man, but I don't now."

"And why not, old man?"

"Because," answered the steersman, "if he warn't a double-barrel idiot, and he wanted to stay up all night, why don't he choose a place where he'd do some good, instead of this show? Just fancy him shining all day and night in England. Think of the gas-bills he'd save a poor man. That sun's barmy, Ben—right down barmy!"

Their progress was slow, but no living thing specked the white surface of the ice-field except a couple of arctic foxes. It was tiring work to legs cramped so long by the narrow confines of the Lord of the Deep. Prout gave in first.

"I'm going to sit down," he said, "and take a mild refresher. There's a sinking feeling under my fur coat which says to me, 'Thomas, you're 'ungry and thirsty,' and so I am. You're welcome to share."

From his cartridge-bag Prout produced a black bottle, two biscuits, a tin of tongue, a mug, and a piece of cheese. Maddock, who had had supper, declined to join in the feast.

"I'll go on a bit," he said, "and see if I can spot anything. Holler when you've finished."

"Ay, ay, my sportsman," answered Prout; "but take one wee drapie afore you go."

Fortified by a dram of rum from the black bottle, Maddock shouldered his gun and walked away. Prout backed open the tin with his knife, and cut an inch-thick slice of tongue. It was delicious, and so was the cheese. Then came a luxurious pipe of tobacco, and, with his back against a slab of ice, Tom was at peace—so he thought—with all the world.

The report of a rifle startled him. It sounded close at hand. He clambered to the top of the nearest hummock, and looked over the ice. Nothing was to be seen. He sat down again.

"Shootin' bears," he thought, "might be good sport for those as has legs built for the ice, but it ain't no sport to me. If one of the warmints likes to come to me an' say, 'How d'ye do?' I'll return its greeting w' a bullet."

He was sitting on his cartridge-bag, his rifle leaning against the ice. A grinning yellow face rose above the top of the hummock, and instantly vanished. Then a gloved hand stole down, and the gun was silently removed.

"Sniff, sniff, sniff, sniff!"

It was the sound a terrier makes when nosing at a rabbit-hole. It electrified the steersman. He bounded to his feet.

"Gr-r-owl!"

Prout's blood turned almost as cold as the ice around him. Above him, staring down horribly, was the head of a bear. For a second he was too dazed and fascinated to move.

"Gr-r-owl!"

Prout made a clutch for his rifle. It was not there. The head vanished, and then reappeared round the hummock less than a yard away.

"Gr-r-owl!"

Prout suddenly ceased to remember that his legs were stiff and aching. He spat out one yell of terror, and got across the ice as fast as a horse, not daring to look behind him.

Bursting with laughter, Ching-Lung and Gan-Waga watched his retreat. The Eskimo was carrying a freshly-severed head of a bear in his hand.

"That's a lovely growl of yours," giggled the prince.

"Try it again."

"Gr-r-owl!"

Prout heard it, but did not look back. If he had even looked forward properly he would have saved himself a lot of unpleasantness, but he did not. A chasm gaped at his feet, and he had no time to save himself. He tripped, and dived headlong into a bank of snow.

His sudden disappearance startled Ching-Lung. There must be water there.

"Good 'nough snow," grunted Gan-Waga. "I go, not you. You bang-bang in two-tree minute. You make him tink kill bear, see? Good 'nough. Go back to bear body and bang. Ho, hoo! Good 'nough joke, hunk! No wait before shoot. I come."

Ching-Lung grinned and winked. It was wonderful with what ease and speed the Eskimo travelled over the ice-floes. And the surface, though here and there were smooth places, resembled the sea, whose waves had suddenly been congealed into glistening adamant.

Gan-Waga dropped on all fours as he approached the miniature ravine. Prout's nailed boots, protruding from below, were kicking frantically, and faint, smothered groans rose from the depths. The Eskimo placed a bear's head on the edge of the crevice.

The snow began to heave and toss, and a broad back and shoulders came into view. Then came the steersman's red and angry face. He looked up, and met the stony glare of his enemy the bear.

"Gr-r-owl!"

Prout dived into the snow again as an eel dives into the mud. He was out of sight in two brief seconds. And Gan-Waga, his oily countenance aglow with unholy joy, danced a wild jig on the ice, and waved his arms. Then he fled back, and tossed the bear's head down beside the carcass on which Ching-Lung was sitting, smoking a cigarette.

"Bang now, see?" chuckled Gan-Waga. "Ho, ho, hoo! Good 'nough, butterful! Made him 'fraid, hunk! No like

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bears, but like snow. Get under jolly quick. Hoo, hoo! Butterful, butterful 'nough!"

Ching-Lung giggled and discharged his rifle. Two distant reports followed.

"More sport, Gan?" said the prince. "Never mind until we chaff Tommy."

The boot-soles of Thomas Prout were just visible, and the heart of Thomas was as full of dismay as his ears were of snow. Weaponless, he could not face an angry bear, and so he "lay low and said nuffin'." But he thought a lot.

The grins of Gan-Waga and Ching-Lung were long and huge as they gazed at the boots.

"Bit of all right!" gurgled the Eskimo. "Good 'nough, hunk? Good 'nough, better jolly quick. I going down."

Silently he swung himself into the crevice, and, lying at full length in the snow, he clutched at Prout's ankle. Prout imagined that the bear had got him at last. A roar came from the depths.

"Why, it's alive!" shouted Ching-Lung. "Can it be someone who has fallen out of the Cloud King?"

"It's alive and kicking!" giggled Gan-Waga.

The snow heaved again, and out shot the steersman's head.

"What on earth," gasped the prince—"who on earth—how—when—why— Dash it all, it's Prout!"

Gan-Waga sat down and stared in stony amaze. It was good acting.

"In the name of Julius Cæsar's one-eyed guinea-pig, man," panted Ching-Lung, "what are you doing in there?"

"Eh?" murmured the steersman. "Yes: I'm nicely thankee. Same to you, an' many on 'em!"

"Thomas Prout," said Ching-Lung sternly, "answer me. What are you doing in there?"

Prout rubbed his hair.

"Well, sir," he answered, "I wor lookin' for a sixpence I dropped; but I'll give up the search unless that confounded bear comes along agen. Bears an' me ain't pals. We don't hit it together, somehow. By hokey, sir, I thought it wor a funeral job! I lost my gun, and then the gent took a mean advantage. It struck me that it worn't no use arguin', so I left at once, and took lodgin's here. I wonder now if that bear wor narsty enough to drink all that rum?"

"Why, that must be the bear I shot!"

Prout brightened up considerably.

"Then peace to his ashes," he growled, "and may his parents, brothers, sisters, mother-in-law, aunts, cousins, and next-door neighbours all have their funerals the same day. Blubberbiter, you giggling varmint, if you don't stop larfin' at a varmint what's had a severe shock, I'll take the liberty o' knocking yer football shape of a head slap through the front winder of the biggest public-house in Jericho! Now I'll proceed to terry firmy, which is Latin for ice."

To his fervent joy, Prout discovered that the bear was a teetotaler, and that the rum was intact. A cry rang faintly over the ice-field.

"Bear! Bear!"

"That's Thurston!" said Ching-Lung. "Christopher Columbus, there's the bear!"

It was a female, the mate to the one he had just shot. She travelled slowly, for a cub was waddling at her side. Gan-Waga's eyes sparkled. Crouching under the hummock, he unwrapped a stout cord from his waist. To the cord was fastened a stout leather collar.

"No shoot yet! No breathe, no stir! Cub 'bout month old, or two month. Good 'nough! Get tame quick."

From the ambush Ching-Lung watched the bear. More than once he raised his rifle, only to lower it again. The devotion of the fierce, shaggy beast to its offspring touched him. It lifted it over the hummocks, and urged it to a greater speed with a soft cooing sound. The cub was like a round ball of fur, and Ching-Lung, who passionately loved pets, longed to secure it. To do that he must kill the mother.

"Shoot! Shoot!" whispered Gan-Waga.

"I can't!" said Ching-Lung. "It's like murder. You do it, Tom."

Prout asked nothing better. His recent adventure had roused a bitter hatred in his heart against the whole tribe of Bruin. The cub was lagging behind, the mother encouraging it with the same soft call. The huge head turned, and the trigger fell.

"Good 'nough!" shouted the delighted Eskimo. "Butterful shot! Not so quick! Bear sly chap."

But there was no need for caution, for Prout had not bungled in his work. The beast lay stone dead, its skull shattered.

"Steady on, Gan," said Ching-Lung, "or you'll frighten the cub!"

"Too young. He not frighten; he come to me."

The cub was rolling over its mother in play. It was too young to understand death. Gan-Waga blew out his cheeks, and began to purr softly. Up went the cub's ears, and it looked towards the hummock.

"Ole man bear noise," explained Gan-Waga. "Purr-r, purr-r!"

The cub waddled forward. Even at the sight of human beings it evinced no alarm. Gan-Waga fastened the collar round its neck.

"The little beauty!" said Ching-Lung. "The little ball of fluff! He's a daisy if you like. Why, look at him licking my hand! What shall we call him?"

"Hunk?" inquired Gan-Waga. "Call him? No understand."

"No understand, you rogue?" laughed Ching-Lung. "Why, you've got it in once. Hunk is a ripping name for a bear, and I christen him Hunk on the spot. Get him away from his mother, and don't let him see her. Here they come! Hi, hi!"

Hearing the shout, Ferrers Lord, Van Witter, and Thurston hurried up. Only Thurston of the three had sighted the bear, and he had missed through his rifle hanging fire.* Two bears and a cub was not a bad bag in so short a time. The launch had been sent round in charge of a sailor.

Owing to the frost, which would have frozen the bodies as hard as stone, it was necessary to skin the bears at once. Gan-Waga speedily got his hunting-knife to work, and, aided by Prout and Maddock, the first relics of the northern voyage were secured. Ching-Lung carried Hunk in his arms until he was tired, and then transferred him to Rupert.

The crew welcomed the new pet with cries of delight. Before he slept, Maddock had rigged up a den for him outside the fore-castle, and an old teapot formed an excellent feeding-bottle. Even the purser—a stingy man by nature—opened his heart, and promised a liberal supply of condensed milk for the baby bear. One of the engineers, who was skilful at metal-work, made a gorgeous brass collar with a silver plate, engraved:

"Hunk, the property of H.R.H. Prince Ching-Lung, of Kwai-Hal."

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PENNY.

Ching-Lung only smiled. Chaff rolled off him as easily as water rolls off a duck's back.

"That remark would have been high treason in Kwai-Hal," said Ferrers Lord, "and Thurston would be wondering where his head had got to. Well, Van Witter, would you care to ride behind a team of fiery and untamed Eskimo dogs?"

"Waal, I guess I'm always ready for a new sensation," drawled the Yankee. "I'm with you, sir, you may depend."

Bjorlan Island had been the theatre of one grim tragedy—the tragedy of that ill-fated American expedition of 1886. On its barren, ice-bound shores the Wild Duck, a sailing vessel, was caught and frozen up. One by one the men died from frost-bite and scurvy in that pitiless land of darkness, cold, and misery. Not one lived to tell the dread story, and when the thaw came the vessel itself, battered and crushed, sank for ever.

It was near midnight when the Lord of the Deep came to rest beside the island. A sledge and a team of picked dogs were sent ashore. The surface of the snow was already crisp and hard, and as flat as a billiard-table. But it was not hard enough as yet to sustain a man's weight. They sank knee deep as soon as they landed.

"You and Thurston had better use the sledge," said Ferrers Lord to Van Witter, "and Gan-Waga will give you a lesson in the noble art of dog-driving. Now, Ching, let me see what you can do with a pair of these snow-shoes."

Ching-Lung looked at the strange boat-shaped apparatus doubtfully.

"Have I got to flounder about on those?"

Do not miss reading the wonderful New Serial Story—

"DEEP SEA GOLD,"

By REGINALD WRAY,

In our Companion Paper, "THE GEM." Out on Thursday. Price One Penny.

A Trip After Musk-Oxen—Ching-Lung Shoots Something That is Not Game—A Grim Message from the Skies.

To the universal surprise, the morning found the Lord of the Deep in the same position. Without sinking, she began to move along, skirting the edge of the ice. The temperature had risen, and the sky was dark with clouds. Before midday a strange grey haze began to come down over sea and ice. Gan-Waga knew it well. It was a snow mist, the herald of a heavy fall.

The fall began about four o'clock, and lasted five hours. The flakes came steadily, and so thickly that it was impossible to see two fathoms ahead. At ten the sky cleared, and the night sun gleamed down white and dazzling. The thermometer dropped to eighteen below zero, to twenty, twenty-four, and at last thirty. With such a temperature thin ice began to form on the sea. The Lord of the Deep moved farther out, and great flocks of birds were seen flying South.

"We're in for a hard spell, I fancy," said Ferrers Lord, looking at the chart. "If you are still taking any interest in hunting, we shall be abreast of Bjorlan Island in a couple of hours."

"More bears?" asked Thurston.

"Possibly; but more musk-oxen. We shall be able to track them in the snow."

"Here's one man ready!" said Ching-Lung.

"Oh, it calls itself a man, does it?" laughed Thurston. "Look at it, gentlemen! Gaze upon the man who is ready! Why, you little pigtailed image, I could make a better man out of snow!"

* Hanging fire is when the cartridge does not explode exactly as the trigger falls, owing, as a rule, to a bad cap. It is fatal when firing at moving game, for the shot or ball always passes behind the object aimed at, unless it is going away from the marksman in a direct line.—Ed.

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NEXT
TUESDAY;

"DRIVEN TO THE WALL."

By FRANK RICHARDS.
Order Early.

"Yes, prince. You will find them a bit awkward at first, and they will make your ankles ache."

The dogs were harnessed, and Gan-Waga made the terrible whip crack like a pistol-shot. Barking, the dogs rushed away, dragging the sledge away at a furious rate.

"Ready?" asked Ferrers Lord.

"Quite," answered Ching-Lung with a grin. "I say, old chap, what size do you call these boots? Ninety-nines, or what? Am I supposed to skate, walk, jump, or run? Am I—"

The rest was lost. Ching-Lung was standing on his head, unable to rise.

The millionaire got him on to his feet again, and he floundered and slipped after the sledge. But he was quick to learn. He watched the easy swing of the millionaire's feet, and imitated it. In ten minutes, though his ankles ached, he was getting on so well that Ferrers Lord complimented him.

"It took me much longer to get the knack," he said. "I learned in the great North-west of Canada years ago. You are doing very well, Ching. In a day or two I shall introduce you to the grandest sport on earth—the ski."

"What the dickens is that?"

"Wait and see," said Ferrers Lord. "Steady—steady! You almost fell. You must be more careful. You ought to have had a pole with you; but you are doing famously. They've found some tracks. Listen!"

"Tar-ra-ra-tarr-tara!"

The clear notes of Thurston's silver bugle floated over the snow. It was a prearranged signal, and signified that the party in the sledge had come across some tracks of game. Ferrers Lord increased his speed.

"I suppose those beasts go in droves?" said Ching-Lung.

"As a rule. They are just like the vanished American bison for that. Sometimes a bull gets turned out of a herd,

and that makes him as cantankerous and savage as a 'rogue' elephant. They are timid beasts, though, and hard to approach."

"Then that bugle will frighten them?"

"Certainly. But Gan-Waga knows his business. He will make a wide detour, and do his best to drive them this way. What breeze there is blows towards us, so they cannot scent us. We must only shoot one if they come this way. Pick out the bull with the best head, just as a trophy. We are sportsmen, prince, not murderers. Kill bears and other animals of prey if you will, for we can do without them; but let the rest alone."

"We can shake hands there, old chap!" said Ching-Lung.

"Then stay where you are. Here are the tracks."

They crouched down in the snow. The winding trail of musk-oxen showed clearly in the snow before them. Ferrers Lord's trained eye picked out the number of the herd at once. He scraped out a hollow.

"There they are!"

He pointed ahead. The herd came lumbering into sight. It halted, and a splendid bull sniffed the air and bellowed distrustfully. He smelt danger somewhere, and the cows huddled together. One of them had a calf beside her.

"By Jove," whispered Ching-Lung, "that big fellow is a beauty! Your shot, old chap!"

"No, yours!" said Ferrers Lord. "You see that grey patch on his chest? Put your bullet there and save the skull. Now, before it moves! It's six hundred yards to a foot!"

Carefully Ching-Lung placed his register of the back sight to six hundred yards. He steadied the rifle.

"Why don't you shoot?"

A black shadow moved across the snow. Ching-Lung looked up, and then sprang to his feet. He had forgotten the very existence of the musk-oxen. Bellowing with terror, the herd lumbered away.

"A balloon!" gasped Ferrers Lord.

This was what had cast the shadows. It was only a toy, and it moved above them slowly in the breeze. The millionaire's rifle cracked.

"Missed!"

Then Ching-Lung fired. The flying globe slowly collapsed, and began to descend. But the descent was very gradual, and a sudden gust of wind drove it towards the sea. Ferrers Lord hurried in pursuit. Lower and lower it fell, travelling quickly. Ching-Lung's bullet had struck it low down, piercing the goldbeater's skin, of which it was composed, and the gas only escaped very slowly.

The millionaire swiftly outdistanced his companion. He bent down on one knee and fired again at the flying mark. This time he struck it full and true. It turned over and fluttered down like a wounded bird.

Something white was tied to it—a piece of paper.

"What is it?" gasped Ching-Lung.

Ferrers Lord read the ghastly message.

"On board the Cloud King, Thursday night. I am committing this frail messenger to the winds, with a fervent prayer to Providence that it may reach the hands of Ferrers Lord. This is a ship of death and horror. Hugley and two of the crew are already gone. I fear for my own life, for I am convinced that the three have been murdered. Paraira and Gacchio are human demons, and I am watched and spied on. For the sake of Heaven, try and help me before it is too late.—CLEMENT MORWITH."

The Ice Cavern.

Ching-Lung looked at the millionaire with a long, searching gaze. He was beginning to understand that there was some terrible mystery wrapped round the voyage of the Cloud King. So the professor was dead, the main-

spring of the race, the challenger. That meant that Paraira commanded the vessel. The message spoke of three deaths. Could it be that the Cuban, in his lust for gold, after getting rid of the professor, was murdering the dead man's friends one by one?

"What does it mean?" he asked.

"It means," drawled the millionaire, "that poor Morwith will not enjoy his trip to the Pole. But he is quite safe. Few people are silly enough to kill the goose that lays the golden eggs. Morwith's signature is necessary before Gomez Paraira, Gacchio & Company can handle the stakes. I'm sorry for the baronet."

"But what does it mean? I do not grasp it!"

"A million is a great deal of money," said Ferrers Lord lazily. "In Suez I have known them cut a fellow's throat for two shillings. What won't men do for money? Bah! Poor Morwith must put up with the unpleasantness. Keep your tongue quiet about all this. If Van Witter got a hint of this there would be a sudden end to the race."

Ching-Lung was not satisfied.

"A word more, Lord," he said very gravely. "I'm seeing the light. The poisoned wine, the poisoned foils—they mean the same thing. This blackguardly Paraira thought that by getting you out of the way we should throw up the sponge."

"Something like that."

Ching-Lung's eyes were blazing with indignation and loathing.

"Then there is more behind it?" he said.

"A trifle, my dear prince. Paraira and his beloved Gacchio are hatching a nice little plot. I stand rather in their way, you see. Bah! Let us talk of something pleasant. I'm afraid we have scared the musk-oxen completely. Hallo! There's Thurston's gun."

A hill rose before them with a broad, rounded summit. It was heavy work for Ching-Lung to scale its sloping sides. The report of the rifle came from behind it.

"That hill was a volcano once," said Ferrers Lord; "its shape tells me that. No doubt it was connected with Mount Hecla, in Iceland. It is curious that volcanoes should be so numerous beyond the Antarctic circle and so few here. That gentleman has been defunct for ten thousand years. Give me your hand. It is a stiff climb, but you will enjoy the descent."

"Oh, for a lift to take me up!" sighed Ching-Lung. "Great Scotland, look out!"

A herd of musk-oxen streamed round the shoulder of the hill, and were gone. Ching-Lung's jaw dropped.

"Where, in the name of goodness—" he began. "Look here, Lord, did you see them?"

"Of course I did!"

"Well, that's a relief," said Ching-Lung. "I thought it was a vision, or something. Where on earth are they?"

It was a mystery. The snow sloped upwards, even, and unbroken. There was no place for even a kitten to hide, unless it buried itself beneath the surface. And the lumbering brutes had vanished like shadows. The two hunters redoubled their pace. Then the sleigh, dogs, and men disappeared.

"They've fallen into a hole!" cried Ferrers Lord.

He left Ching-Lung far behind. Hearty laughter dispelled his fears that some of his comrades might be injured. He laughed softly to himself as he peered over the treacherous edge of the hollow, and saw dogs and men in a writhing heap at the bottom. No damage had been done, as the roars of laughter testified, for the snow acted as a downy cushion.

(This thrilling adventure story will be continued in next week's number of "The Magnet" Library. Order early. Price 1d.)



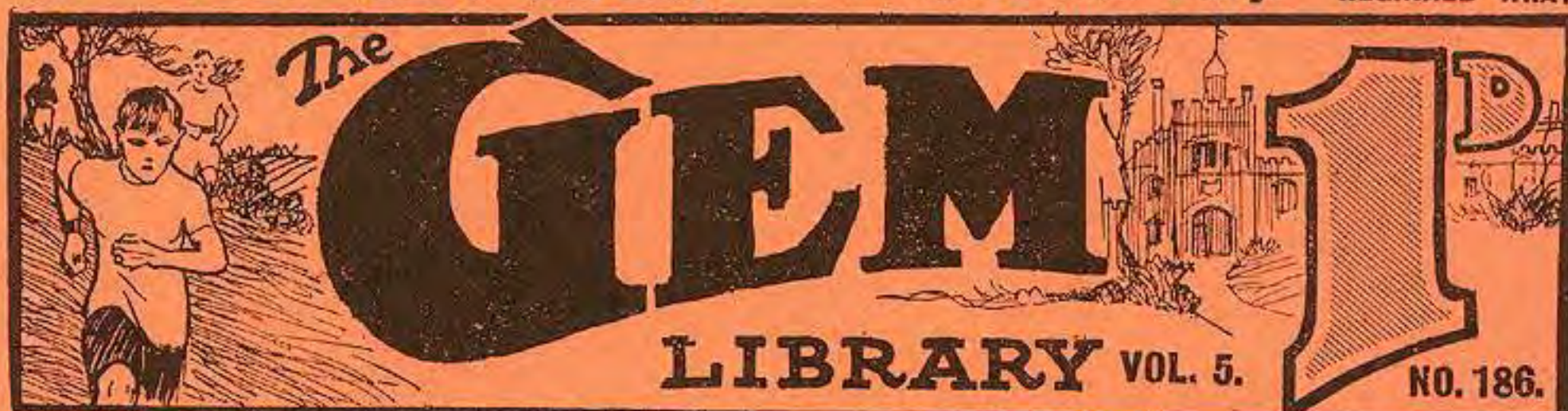
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