

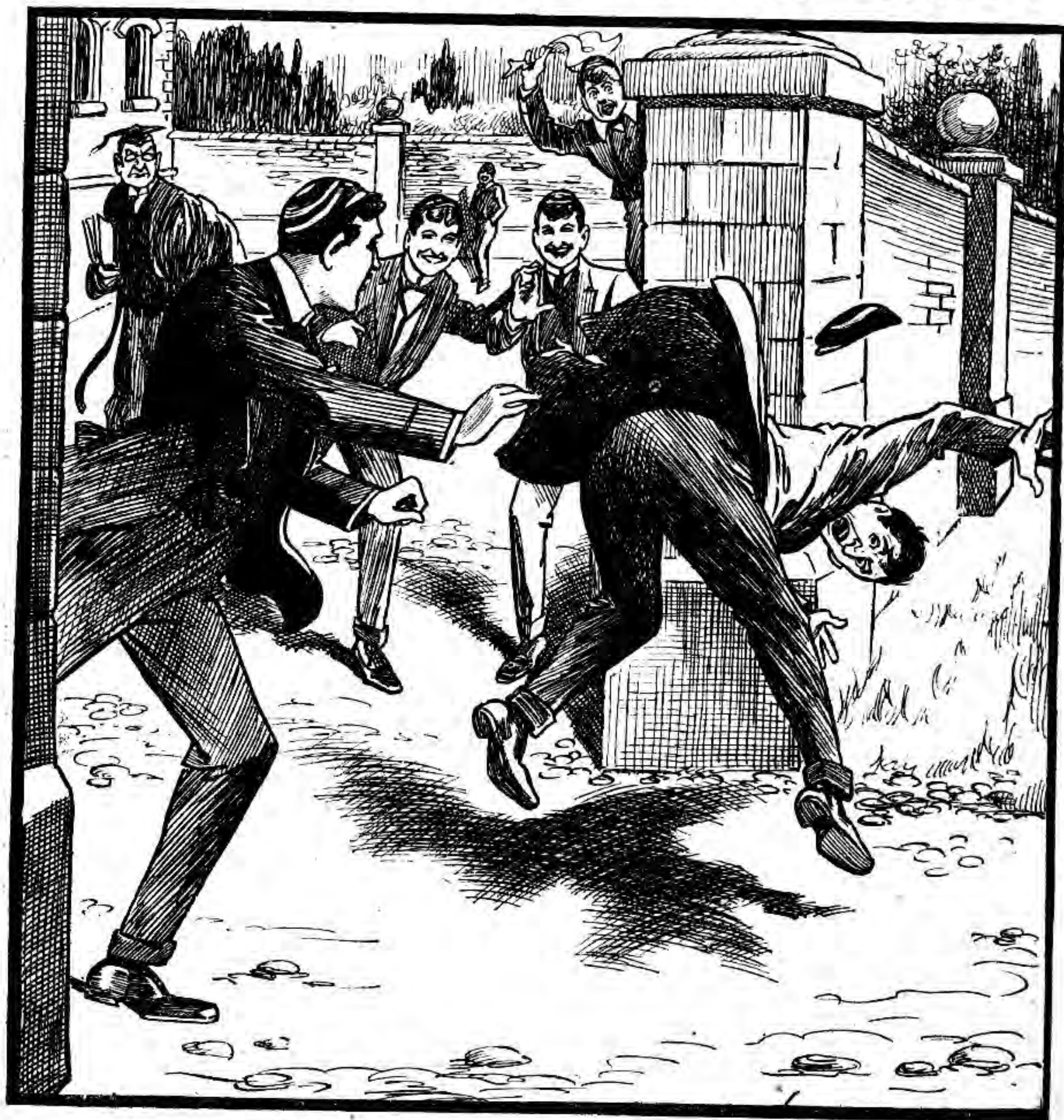


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WHEN ROGUES FALL OUT!



SHUNTING SKINNER!

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WHEN ROGUES FALL OUT

By FRANK RICHARDS.



A Magnificent, Long, Complete Story of Harry
: : Wharton & Co., at Greyfriars School. : :

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Called to Account!

BANG! Bob Cherry planted a boot of considerable size against the door of Study No. 11, in the Remove passage at Greyfriars, and the door flew open as if a battering-ram had smitten it. Skinner, Snoop, and Stott jumped up in alarm.

"What the dickens——"

"What the——"

Bob's good-humoured face grinned into the study.

"All serene, old nuts?" he said cheerily. "Did I make you jump?"

"You did, you silly ass!" growled Skinner.

"You thundering idiot!" said Stott.

"Make the smoke go the wrong way?" asked Bob sympathetically.

There was an atmosphere of cigarette-smoke in the study, but the cigarettes were out of sight the moment the door opened. Sidney James Snoop, however, had not been smoking. He had a book in his hand, and had apparently been studying for once.

"Look here, get out, and shut the door after you!" said Skinner gruffly.

Bob shook his head.

"I've called for you," he explained.

"Thank you for nothing!"

"You're wanted."

"Oh! The Head?" asked Skinner uneasily.

"Nunno! You're wanted in Study No. 1. Special invitation for all three of you—especially you, Skinner."

"Well, I can't come," said Skinner. "I've got to go over to Highcliffe."

"I'm not surprised to hear that, under the circumstances," remarked Bob Cherry rather drily.

Skinner looked at him sharply.

"I don't see what you're driving at," he said. "I'm goin' to Highcliffe to see a chap. No harm in taking a Sunday walk as far as Highcliffe, is there?"

"That depends," answered Bob.

"Just at present you're wanted to take a Sunday walk as far as Study No. 1. Will you come?"

"No!"

"Will you come, Stott?"

"No, I won't," grunted Stott uneasily.

"Will you come, Snoop?" continued Bob Cherry, with great politeness.

"I don't mind!" said Snoop, after a moment's hesitation. "Is it anything important?"

"Yes, rather!"

"Then I'll come."

"Good boy!" said Bob Cherry approvingly. "You two fellows prefer to be carried?"

"Carried!" ejaculated Skinner.

"Exactly. You see, you've got to come, and if you don't walk you'll be carried," explained Bob. "Shall I call

Wharton and Johnny Bull and Inky? They're ready."

"Look here——"

Bob put his head out into the passage. "Hallo, hallo, hallo!" he roared. "Roll along, you fellows! They want to be carried."

"Look here——" howled Skinner.

There was a patter of footsteps in the Remove passage. Harry Wharton, the captain of the Remove, arrived at the door of No. 11, followed by Frank Nugent, Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh, Johnny Bull, and Peter Todd. Squiff and Tom Redwing brought up the rear. The doorway was crowded with faces.

"Snoop's going to walk," said Bob Cherry. "Take him along, Franky. Take his arm, in case he bunks!"

Snoop grinned feebly as Frank Nugent took his arm, and walked him along the passage to No. 1. Skinner and Stott drew behind their study table, with angry scowls.

"Pick 'em up, as they're too tired to walk!" said Bob. "I'm afraid the smoking is telling on them, and they don't feel equal to the exertion. Lucky they've got some Good Samaritans like us to help them along!"

"Hands off!" yelled Skinner.

"Look here——" exclaimed Stott.

"Better come!" said Harry Wharton. "You're not going to be hurt. You've got to make an explanation. It's rather important."

"Rats!"

"You'd better not kick up a row now," said Stott. "You know what Quelch would say about ragging on Sunday."

"This isn't a rag—it's an inquiry!" said Wharton.

"About what?" snapped Skinner savagely.

"About what happened over the Lantham football match yesterday."

Skinner started, and bit his lip.

"What do I know about that?" he muttered.

"That's what you're going to explain before a committee of the Remove in my study."

"Well, I don't choose——"

"Are you coming?"

"I've got to go over to Highcliffe before dinner."

"Highcliffe can wait. I suppose Ponsonby isn't giving a bridge party in his study on Sunday morning," said Harry.

"I'm not going to see Ponsonby. It's somebody else."

"Well, he can wait," said Wharton.

"You'd better come, Skinner."

"Well, I won't, and that's flat!"

"You'll be taken, then. Take his arms, you fellows!"

Johnny Bull and Hurree Singh pinned Skinner on either side; Bob Cherry and Squiff did the same for Stott. Harold Skinner's face was dark and savage, and he opened his mouth to shout—but he

closed it again. The Remove fellows did not look as if they were to be trifled with.

"Skinner and Stott decided to go."

They were led out of the study, scowling furiously, and along the Remove passage to Study No. 1, with Harry Wharton & Co. round them.

Sidney James Snoop was already in the study, with Nugent and several more of the Remove—Vernon-Smith, Mark Linley, Tom Brown, and one or two more. Study No. 1 was a good-sized apartment, but it was pretty full by the time the door closed.

Skinner, Snoop, and Stott stood together, angry and uneasy. The three black sheep of the Remove probably had plenty of things on their consciences that they did not want to be called to account for. They were always more or less "up against" the Famous Five. But in this case it was quite a numerous committee of the Remove they had to deal with. And the mention of the Lantham match had made all three of them feel very uneasy.

"You've nothing to be afraid of," said Harry Wharton. "That is, if you can answer up fair and square. But there's something that's got to be settled, and at once."

"Oh, you can run on!" said Skinner disdainfully. "If there's any ragging, I'll yell for a prefect. I warn you!"

"Never mind that now. I dare say we could stop your yelling fast enough. It's about the Lantham match yesterday," said Harry Wharton quietly. "There was foul play attempted in connection with that match."

"I don't know anything about it."

"I hope you don't! But that's what's got to be settled. Call in Bunter, Toddy."

Peter Todd stepped into the passage.

"Bunter! Billy Bunter! Roll up, tubby!"

"Look here, Toddy! I'm working up my Milton for Quelch!" came a fat voice from Study No. 7.

"Come here, fatty. Do you want me to come and roll you along?"

"Oh, rats!"

Bunter of the Remove came out of No. 7, with a volume of "Paradise Lost" in his fat hand. He blinked at Peter Todd over a big pair of spectacles.

"Look here, Toddy——"

"This way, you walrus!"

Peter Todd marched his fat study-mate into No. 1, and the door closed again, and Bunter blinked round at the numerous assembly in some alarm.

"All serene, fatty!" said Harry Wharton, with a smile. "Nothing to be worried about. We want you to tell us the exact facts——"

"Wha-a-at?"

"We're making an inquiry, and we want you to tell us——"

"The truth, the whole truth, and

nothing but the truth!" said Peter Todd sententiously.

Bunter gave the juniors one wild blink, and then leaped for the door.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

The Inquiry!

"BUNTER!"

"Stop him!"

"You fat duffer!"

The fat junior's hand was on the door, when two or three fellows grasped him and yanked him back.

He struggled with a strength that was really surprising in the fat Owl of the Remove.

"Yaroooh! Lemme go! It was only fun, anyway. I've done no harm!" he howled breathlessly.

"What?"

"Hold him!"

"What's the matter with you, Bunter, you fat chump? Nobody supposes you've done any harm," exclaimed Wharton in amazement.

"Eh?"

Bunter suddenly ceased to struggle. He blinked at Wharton, and then at the other fellows, in evident uneasiness.

"You—you said——" he stammered.

"We want you to tell out straight what happened in connection with the Lantham match yesterday for these fellows to hear?"

"Oh!" gasped Bunter.

The relief in his fat face was unmistakable, and the juniors looked at him very curiously.

It was plain enough that Bunter had feared something else—that he was brought to Study No. 1 to be called to account for some sin of his own.

"He's been up to something," said Bob Cherry. "He thought he was found out."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Have you been raiding a study cupboard, you fat boulder?" demanded Nugent.

"Nunno!"

"Then what are you afraid of?"

Bunter grinned.

His fears were quite relieved now.

He had been terribly alarmed for a moment or two. For those moments he had believed that his secret had come to light—the secret that was not even suspected at Greyfriars so far—that he was not Billy Bunter at all, but his cousin and double, Wally Bunter. It was, in fact, a guilty conscience that had caused his attempt at flight, though Wally's conscience was not really very guilty, for he had changed places with his cousin by mutual consent, and no one was wronged thereby.

But he realised that his secret was still safe, though in his sudden alarm he had run a great risk of giving it away himself.

He grinned at the puzzled juniors in great relief.

"Oh, that's what you want, is it?" he said. "All serene. Go ahead with the bizney, and don't mind me."

"What did you think we wanted, then?" demanded Vernon-Smith.

"Ahem! Never mind that. Go ahead, and let me get back to merry old Milton," answered Wally Bunter.

The juniors gave him suspicious looks. However, Harry Wharton went ahead with the business in hand.

"Tell us what happened yesterday, just as it happened," he said.

"Certainly, old top! I've told you once already——"

"It's for Skinner to hear."

"Oh, all right. Ponsonby came over from Highcliffe to see me on Friday, thinking I was—I—I mean——"

"Thinking you were what?"

"Never mind. He talked me over—or thought he did—and asked me to hocus the Remove Eleven before the football match on Saturday afternoon. He gave me a little bottle containing some medical muck—an opiate, he called it—stuff they send invalids to sleep with. I was to stand ginger-pop all round to the Remove team, and put some of the stuff in it, so that Lantham would walk over your crowd in the match. I let him run on, thinking it rather a game to give him rope enough to hang himself."

"The awful cad!" said Snoop.

"So I thought," said Wally Bunter, with a rather curious look at Snoop. "I didn't say I'd do it. I let him run on, and he thought it was all right. He thought that—till the match was played. Then he found out, and I gave him away before the whole crowd to show him up—rammed his blessed bottle down his neck, and the chaps kicked him off Little Side. There you are!"

"You hear that, Skinner?"

"I'm not deaf," said Skinner sullenly. "I hadn't anything to do with it. Bunter knows that."

"Have you anything to say, Skinner?"

"No," muttered Skinner.

"Did you bet with Ponsonby on the Lantham match?"

For a brief second Skinner hesitated. Even to a fellow like Skinner the lie direct came rather unpalatably, but his hesitation was brief.

"No," he answered.

"Of course, you're innocent till you're found guilty," said Wharton. "But I remember you were hanging about this study when we got the letter from a chap at Lantham telling us their team was rocky. You knew that, and knew that Lantham couldn't win. I'm afraid you laid money on the Remove with Ponsonby, knowing that in advance."

"Can you prove it?" sneered Skinner.

"Look here," growled Stott, "suppose a chap betted on the result of a footer match. Is that your bizney, Wharton?"

"Not exactly. I'm not censor of morals," said the captain of the Remove. "But that kind of thing isn't good enough for Greyfriars, all the same. You see yourselves what it led to. Ponsonby



No escape for Bunter! (See Chapter 2.)

"I never supposed you had," said the fat junior. "Ponsonby certainly never mentioned you to me."

"Why did you think Ponsonby asked you to play this dirty trick, Bunter?" questioned Harry Wharton.

"Well, I reckoned Pon had bets on the match," said Bunter. "I supposed he had backed Lantham, and got the news too late that they were off colour, and couldn't win."

"That's what I think," said Wharton. "Now, it's pretty clear, I think, from what Bunter's said, that Ponsonby had money laid on our football match yesterday."

"Clear as daylight," said Squiff.

"It's not likely that outsiders would lay money among themselves on Greyfriars junior matches," went on Wharton. "It seems clear, too, that if Ponsonby bet on the match he betted with a Greyfriars fellow."

"The clearfulness is terrific!" said Hurrer Jamset Ram Singh gravely.

Skinner & Co. exchanged a quick glance.

found that he had laid his money on a team that couldn't win, and he tried foul play. He persuaded Bunter, as he thought, to commit what was actually a crime to save his dirty money. What you fellows do is no business of mine, but it's not allowed for a Remove fellow to lay money on a Remove match. You know that."

"Well, prove that we've done it!"

"You deny it?"

"Yes," said Skinner savagely.

"And you, Stott?"

"Certainly."

"What about you, Snoop?"

Sidney James Snoop hesitated, and licked his dry lips. All eyes were upon him, and the colour flushed into his pale face.

"I—I never laid bets with Ponsonby," he said haltingly at last.

"Or with any Highcliffe chap?"

"N-n-no!"

"Why not tell the truth?" suggested Peter Todd. "My dear man, a blind billygoat could see that you are lying!"

Snoop crimsoned.

"I—I'm not lying!" he stammered. "I never laid any bets on the match at all. That's the truth."

"Were you concerned in any bets laid by another fellow, then?" asked Peter Todd keenly.

Snoop did not answer.

"Good for you, Toddy!" said Harry Wharton. "That's how it was, then. It's not been forgotten, Snoop, that last week you three fellows were borrowing money up and down the Remove. Everybody was talking about it. You owe money right and left. It looks to me now as if you were raising money to lay on the Remove in the match because Skinner had heard the news about Lant-ham."

There was a general nodding of heads. It was pretty clear to all present that Wharton had hit on the exact truth.

"Is that it, Snoop?"

Sidney James Snoop breathed hard.

"Buck up, Snoop," said Bunter encouragingly. "Make a clean breast of it, old chap. You're not such a good liar as Skinner!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Snoop looked helplessly at his comrades. Stott and Skinner scowled at him. Only a thumping lie was wanted to see them clear, and Skinner and Stott couldn't see why their companion hesitated. There had been a time when a falsehood cost Sidney James Snoop very little. But that was before Snoop's father had donned the King's khaki, and the desire had been born in the irresolute fellow's breast to make himself more worthy of his father. There was good somewhere in Snoop, and of late it had been working to the surface. Somehow, he hardly knew why, he could not face so many honest eyes and utter the lie that was required of him.

His distress showed in his troubled face; but it was, in fact, as good as a confession.

"Well, Snoop," said Harry Wharton quietly, his look much kinder than before, "out with it!"

"I—I had money on the match!" gasped Snoop at last. "I didn't lay any bet, but I had a share in it."

"The bet was laid with Ponsonby by another Remove fellow?"

"Ye-es."

"Who was it?"

Silence.

"Skinner, of course," said Johnny Bull. "We know how thick he is with Ponsonby and Gadsby and the rest at Highcliffe."

"I'm not going to give any fellow away," said Snoop at last. "You oughtn't to ask me to. I—I own up to my share. I—I never thought much about it, and I never dreamed that Ponsonby would play such a dirty trick to get out of the bet. I'm sorry I did it now, if you want to know. I was hard up, and it seemed an easy way of making some money. I've done it before, and had rotten bad luck. This time—"

He paused.

"This time you've won the bet?"

"Yes."

"Have you collected the stakes yet?"

"No."

"Who's holding the stakes?"

"Spencer, of the Sixth Form at Highcliffe."

Skinner gritted his teeth, and Stott scowled furiously. Snoop did not look at his fellow "sportsmen." It was pretty plain that he was ashamed of his share in the shady transaction.

"Well, it's pretty plain now," said Wharton. "We can't and won't ask Snoop to give anybody away, but we

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know very well it was Skinner. Will you own up now, Skinner?"

"Nothin' to own up to," said Skinner blandly. "I'm surprised at this in Snoop. I never thought he was a bettin' fellow."

"What-at?"

"I call it shockin'," said Skinner calmly. "I hope Snoop will repent."

Sidney James Snoop stared at him, and so did the Co. Skinner's manner was quite bland and easy now.

"What do you mean, Skinner?" demanded Wharton at last.

"I mean what I say, naturally. Bettin' on a football match is no class, not to say immoral. I'd never have a hand in anythin' of the kind. I shall try to bring Snoop round to my way of thinking."

"Oh!" gasped Snoop.

Stott grinned. He was beginning to find the scene amusing.

"You're lying, Skinner!" said Harry Wharton abruptly.

"Same to you, dear boy, and many of 'em!" said Skinner affably.

Some of the juniors grinned. Skinner was pretty well known to be a rascal; but there was something entertaining in his cool cheek.

"You won't own up, then?"

"I own up to being shocked at Snoop. Nothin' else to own up to, that I'm aware of."

"Bump him!" suggested Bob Cherry.

Harry Wharton shook his head. Morally, Skinner's shady conduct was pretty well proved; but there was no actual proof, and it was necessary to be just.

The captain of the Remove turned to Snoop.

"You've acted badly, Snoop," he said. "I can see that you see it for yourself, so that can pass. But if you're sorry for it, you can't want to profit by the bizney. You won't claim what you've won on the match."

"I won't!" said Snoop, in a low voice.

"That's a promise?"

"Yes."

"Good enough, I think," said Wharton, looking round, and there was a general nod. "But we've still got to find the fellow who actually laid the bet, and who certainly means to claim the stakes from Spencer at Highcliffe. I think it was Skinner, but there's no proof. It's agreed, of course, that the rotter won't be allowed to touch the winnings?"

"Yes, rather."

"The ratherfulness is terrific!"

"You hear that, Skinner?"

"Nothin' to do with me," said Skinner airily. "Never heard of the fellow. I've been tryin' to think who it could have been."

"Look here—"

"I suppose it wasn't you, Wharton?"

"I!" yelled Wharton.

"Well, you suggested that it might be me, you know—no reason why I shouldn't return the compliment," said Skinner calmly. "What do you think, Stott? Was it Wharton?"

"Very likely, I think," said Stott, with a grin.

Harry Wharton drew a deep breath.

"That's enough of your cheek, Skinner!" he said. "The Remove are going to see to it that you don't touch a penny of your dirty winnings—if it was you. There'll be an eye kept on you. You said you were going over to Highcliffe to-day. What for?"

"I'm going to lend Ponsonby a hymn-book," said Skinner, with perfect calmness.

"Why, you—you—" Wharton paused. "You'd better get out, Skinner."

"Thanks! I'm feeling rather bored,"

assented Skinner, and he left the study with Stott.

Snoop followed more slowly.

Then the committee meeting in Study No. 1 broke up.

Actual proof had not been forthcoming, and punishment could not be administered; but there was no doubt on the subject, and it was the grim determination of the Removites to see that Skinner did not profit by his transaction. There was to be trouble, and plenty of it, for the black sheep of the Remove, if he attempted to collect the "tenner" from Spencer of the Sixth Form at Highcliffe.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

A Friend in Need!

HARRY WHARTON & CO. went out into the quad for a run in the fresh air before dinner, and dismissed the matter from their minds for the present. Sidney James Snoop returned slowly to his study with a troubled brow. He was not seeking the company of his study-mates, however. Snoop had been found backward by Mr. Quelch in the "reading" that morning, and he was devoting the time before dinner to going over his Milton, when the summons to Study No. 1 interrupted him. He went into No. 11 for his book, and was greeted with black scowls by Skinner and Stott. Skinner closed the door at once and put his back to it.

"Now, you rotten sneak!" he said, between his teeth.

"I'm not a sneak," said Snoop, in a low voice. "I never said a word about you, Skinner."

"You as good as gave me away. They're certain now that it was I laid the bet with Ponsonby."

"I can't help that. You shouldn't have done it."

"What? You were as keen on it as I was!"

"I don't say that wasn't so. But—but it was rotten, anyway, and I wasn't going to tell lies about it. It's pretty rotten making bets on a match, anyway, and to make a bet when you've got secret information isn't much better than swindling. I've been thinking of that, and I wish I'd never touched the thing at all!"

"Hoity-toity!" said Stott, with a sneer. "Perhaps you don't want to claim your share in the tenner Spencer's got for us?"

"I told the fellows I wouldn't touch it, and I meant it," answered Snoop. "I won't take a penny over my own money back."

"All the more for us, then," said Skinner, shrugging his shoulders. "I'm going over this afternoon to bag the stakes."

"You can do as you like, I suppose." Snoop picked up his book. "Let me pass, Skinner."

Harold Skinner kept his back to the door.

"Not just yet," he said. "You've practically given me away, and I shall very likely be watched after this."

"Don't go to Highcliffe, then."

"How am I to collect the stakes if I don't go?"

"Don't collect them."

"And lose a tenner?" sneered Skinner.

"It's not really yours," said Snoop. "You practically swindled Ponsonby into making the bet."

"Wouldn't he have done the same by me?"

"Yes, I know that."

"That makes it fair, then."

"It doesn't make it anything but a rotten, shady business," exclaimed Snoop, "and I'm fed up with it! I'm sorry I ever touched it. Ask Spencer for your

own stake, and let Ponsonby have his money back. That's my advice."

"Good advice!" grinned Skinner. "I've seen signs of this about you before, Snoopey. You're turning soft. What you want is a study ragging, and that's what you're going to get."

"Let me pass!" exclaimed Snoop, his heart beating faster.

"Not till you've paid for your sneaking, you cad!"

Skinner made a sign to Stott, and Snoop was seized on both sides. He struggled fiercely.

"Pitch him down in the armchair, and I'll give him the tongs!" said Skinner.

"What-ho!"

"Let me go!" shouted Snoop, struggling. "I'll tackle you one at a time, if you like!"

"No, you won't, my beauty! You'll tackle us two at a time!" grinned Stott. "Down you go!"

Snoop, resisting vainly, was forced face downwards upon the armchair, and Skinner snatched up the tongs from the fender.

Whack!

"Yow-ow-ow!" yelled Snoop in anguish.

The study door opened, and a fat face and glimmering spectacles looked in.

"Hallo! You fellows killing anybody?" asked Wally Bunter, blinking in astonishment at the scene.

"Get out, you porpoise!" snapped Skinner.

Whack!

"Help!" yelled Snoop.

The fat junior came into the study at once. For Billy Bunter to rush into the fray to help another fellow was too surprising for Skinner to expect it to happen; but fortunately for Snoop it was quite another Bunter.

Skinner was about to whack again, when a fat hand grasped his collar and swung him back. He crashed into a chair, and rolled on the floor, along with that article of furniture, the tongs flying from his hand.

"Fair play, you know!" grinned the fat junior. "Fair play's a jewel. Can you handle the other one, Snoopey?"

Snoop, left with only one adversary, was already handling him.

"You bet!" he panted in reply.

Stott backed away, followed up by Snoop with lashing fists. Skinner scrambled to his feet as Stott went backing out of the study under a shower of blows and bumped heavily in the passage.

Then Snoop turned back, his eyes blazing, and his pale face flushed with excitement.

"Come on, Skinner!" he shouted.

"Hurrah!" chirruped Wally Bunter. "I'll keep Stott off while you wallop him, old scout!"

Stott was charging into the study again, and the fat junior met him with a right and left that made him glad to hop out into the passage once more. This time he did not return. Skinner had the advantage of Snoop physically, but he did not seem to be yearning for a fair fight. He dodged round the table as Sidney James bore down on him.

"Chuck it!" he gasped.

"Come on, you funk!"

"I—I'm not going to fight you on Sunday!" gasped Skinner.

Snoop dropped his hands at that.

"You were ready enough to rag me, two to one, on Sunday," he answered. "But have it your way. Only get out of the study. If you stay here I'm jolly well going to wallop you!"

"Go and eat coke!" snarled Skinner.

He tramped savagely out of the study. Snoop looked breathlessly at Bunter, and the fat junior grinned.

"You're getting quite a warrior, Snoop!" he remarked.

"What about you?" said Snoop. "I'm much obliged, Bunter. Blessed if I ever thought you'd chip into a row for anybody's sake!"

"You don't know me yet!" chuckled Wally Bunter, more truthfully than Snoop guessed at that time. "Is that your book? Mugging up Milton?"

"Yes."

"So am I. Let's mug him up together," said Wally. "Two heads are thicker than one, you know."

Snoop laughed, and assented. The two juniors sat down by the window, with the volume between them, on the best of terms.

Skinner and Stott did not return to the study, and the remainder of the morning passed pleasantly enough for Snoop. He was on far from friendly terms with his old friends, and he was feeling the need of companionship. Certainly he would never have dreamed of friendship with Billy Bunter. But somehow Bunter seemed different now, and Snoop was too lonely to be particular.

When the bell rang Snoop and the fat junior left the study, and they came into the dining-room together. And that afternoon they were seen going out on a walk together, which was certainly a good deal better for Snoop than sneaking in the back way at the Cross Keys with Skinner for a "hundred up" with a billiard-sharper.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Company for Skinner!

"WHO'S for a walk?"

Bob Cherry asked that question, a little while after dinner, with a merry grin on his face.

"Any old thing!" said Wharton.

"Where?"

"Might trot over the cliffs," remarked Nugent. "Might fall in with somebody or other."

"The esteemed Marjorie, or the excellent and beautiful Barbara!" remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "That would be terrific pleasurable!"

"I'm on!" said Johnny Bull.

But Bob Cherry shook his head.

"My idea is a walk over to Highcliffe," he said.

"Oh, rot!"

"Well, we might give Courtenay and the Caterpillar a look in," observed Wharton. "I dare say they'd be pleased to see us, for that matter. We're always glad to see them."

"Quite so," agreed Bob. "And there's Ponsonby—"

"Oh, bless Ponsonby!"

"And Gadsby and Monson—"

"Blow Gadsby and Monson!"

"And Spencer of the Sixth," pursued Bob, unmoved.

Four astonished juniors stared at Bob Cherry.

"Look here, Bob, what are you driving at?" demanded Wharton. "Do you think we want to call on all the biggest blackguards at Highcliffe?"

"My dear infant, if you used your eyes you'd know what I was driving at!" answered Bob. "Skinner's just started out—"

"Oh!"

"Towards Courtfield," said Bob. "Which means that he's going to collect his merry winnings at Highcliffe, unless I'm mistaken."

"On Sunday?" murmured Johnny Bull.

"Well, Skinner isn't particular to a day—in fact, perhaps he thinks that the better the day the better the deed. Anyhow, I'm pretty certain he's gone to Highcliffe, and if we're going to stop him bagging winnings on our football matches, now's the time!"

"Come on!" said Harry.

The Famous Five started from the school gates at once on the Courtfield road. Harold Skinner's figure could be seen ahead of them on the road, hurrying. Skinner had slipped out quietly, hoping to depart unseen; but Bob Cherry's eyes had been a little too keen for him.

If the chums of the Remove had needed any proof that Skinner was not upon an errand that would bear the light, they soon had it. The cad of the Remove looked back, with a swift, suspicious glance, evidently to make sure that he was not being followed, which was certainly not an act of innocence.

His jaw dropped as he saw the five Removites.

For a moment fury flashed into Skinner's greenish eyes and his teeth came together. But he controlled himself and walked on, slowing down, so that the Co. soon overtook him.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Taking a Sunday walk all on your little lonesome?" asked Bob Cherry affably.

"Yes!" snapped Skinner.

"Wouldn't care for company?"

"No!"

"My dear man, we'll trot along with you if you like!" grinned Bob.

"I don't like!" said Skinner, with a very sour look at the humorous Bob. "I don't care for your company!"

Bob looked pained.

"Floored again!" he remarked. "That's a facer! I'm not such a fascinating chap as I supposed."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Skinner slacked down still more. His object was to let the Famous Five get ahead; but that object was defeated, for the quintette of smiling juniors slackened also.

"Going to Courtfield?" asked Skinner at last.

"I think so."

"Well, good-bye! I'm goin' across the common."

Skinner swung away from the road, on a footpath across Courtfield Common. To his suppressed fury, the Famous Five took the same direction.

"I thought you were going to Courtfield?" said Skinner, between his teeth.

"So did I," answered Bob affably. "But it seems not."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Skinner halted, clenching his hands. "Look here, what are you following me for?" he asked.

"I think you know pretty well. To keep an eye on you."

"You spying rotters!"

Bob Cherry pushed back his cuffs. But he remembered that it was the day of the week when scrapping was barred, and he let them drop again.

"Your nose has just had a narrow escape, Skinner, dear boy," he remarked. "I shouldn't advise you to risk it a second time, though."

"Will you let me alone?"

"Yes; if you go back to Greyfriars."

"I'm not going back."

"Then you'll have to put up with our fascinating society. The fact is, Skinner, you're going to Highcliffe to collect the stakes, and we're going to see that you don't do anything of the sort."

"I—I'm not."

"Then where's the harm in our coming?"

Skinner gritted his teeth.

"Mind your own business!" he said savagely. "Even supposin' that I had a bet on with Ponsonby, what business is it of yours?"

"None, if your rotten bet is not on our football matches," answered Harry Wharton. "But we know that it is."

"I deny it!"

"Deny it till you're black in the face," said Wharton disdainfully. "We don't take your word."

"Look here—"

"If Bunter hadn't been true blue—which is a bit of a surprise in itself—you know what would have happened to us yesterday in the match," said Wharton sternly. "That's what comes of betting on the footer matches—apart from the rottenness of the thing itself. We don't want to be up against that kind of thing, Skinner. We mean to take care that if a Remove fellow lays money on Form matches he gets a good hiding—and he doesn't bag any winnings. We mean that. See?"

Skinner tramped on savagely without replying.

The Famous Five walked with him. Skinner accelerated his pace, and so did the chums of the Remove. He slacked down, and they slackened. He made a sudden bolt and fled, and the cheery five came speeding on his track, easily keeping pace with the weedy Skinner. And by that time Skinner realised that he could not shake them off, and he walked on to Highcliffe with a sullen brow and glinting eyes.

The half-dozen juniors arrived at Highcliffe School together.

The school gates were open, and fellows coming in and out. In the quad Frank Courtenay of the Fourth could be seen walking under the trees with his chum, De Courcy. The two juniors glanced round, and came towards the Co. with welcoming looks.

"Glad to see you!" exclaimed the Caterpillar heartily. "Hallo, you've brought Skinner! How nice an' friendly! So glad to see the lion an' the lamb pullin' together like this! How do you do, Skinner?"

Skinner muttered something.

"We haven't brought Skinner," said Harry Wharton. "We've walked over with him. Was—was Ponsonby hurt yesterday?"

Courtenay frowned, and the Caterpillar grinned. It was the latter who replied.

"He seems rather tired to-day, dear boys. Football boots are all very well, applied to a football. Applied to Ponsonby, they seem to have been too much of a good thing. He was groanin' in his study last night, and this mornin' he has the temper of a wild Hun. He quite snapped at me when I asked him if he believed in the old proverb, that there's nothin' like leather!" And the Caterpillar shook his head sorrowfully. "I was really bein' sympathetic, you know, only Pon seemed to misunderstand."

"The cad got what he deserved," said Courtenay abruptly. "I can't tell you fellows how sorry I am, and ashamed, that a Highcliffe fellow should have played such a dirty trick. Luckily, it came to nothing."

"That's all right," said Harry Wharton. "Where are you going, Skinner?"

"I—I wasn't going."

"Don't, then. You see, Courtenay," explained Wharton, "we've worked it out that Ponsonby played that game because he had bets on the match, and couldn't afford to see our team win. We think it was Skinner he betted with, and we've an idea Skinner's here to collect his winnings. We're not going to let him do it. You think that's right?"

"Most decidedly," said Courtenay at once. "Skinner seems to have dished Ponsonby by making the bet after he found that Lantham were no good for the match. It was sharp practice, at least. That's the only excuse there is for Ponsonby—not that it is an excuse, of course. The whole affair's disgraceful."

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from beginning to end, and nobody ought to be allowed to get any profit out of it."

"Listen to him!" said the Caterpillar admiringly. "Isn't Franky simply tip-top when he gets on his seventhly manner?"

"Oh, don't be an ass, Rupert!" said Courtenay, more sharply than he usually spoke to his chum.

De Courcy made a grimace.

"I stand corrected," he said meekly. "Don't jaw me, Franky, old chap. Haven't you been tellin' me about Milton for the last half-hour, an' haven't I borne it like a martyr at the stake? Talk to Skinner! Show him the error of his ways. Come here an' be improved, Skinner. You can do with it, you know."

Skinner, with a black brow, was edging away.

He had caught sight of Spencer, of the Highcliffe Sixth, chatting with another senior near the chapel rails. It was Spencer he had come to see, that youth being stakeholder for the young rascals. Spencer was a prefect and a Sixth-Former, but he was one of the most reckless of the "fast set" in the Highcliffe Sixth, and, in his own reckless way, was good-natured. Most of the Highcliffe Sixth were tarred with the same brush, but Eustace Spencer was probably the only prefect Ponsonby would have cared to ask to act as stakeholder in a gambling transaction.

Spencer's good-looking and somewhat weak face was clouded as he stood chatting with Langley, the captain of Highcliffe. He did not seem to be in a happy mood that bright Sunday afternoon.

Skinner watched him covertly, wondering how he was to get away from the juniors who had come with him. He was anxious to get his fingers on the ten pounds Spencer had in charge—as well as his own five. He could rely on the stakeholder to hand over his winnings, but he was anxious to get the money into his own possession, all the same.

While Skinner watched Spencer, Bob Cherry watched Skinner, grinning. He, too, had observed the sporting prefect, and he knew what was in Skinner's mind.

As Skinner edged towards the chapel rails, where the two seniors were standing, Bob Cherry edged after him, and the rest of the juniors followed. The Caterpillar chuckled, and joined in the movement—and even the grave Courtenay smiled slightly as he moved, too.

"What a game!" murmured the Caterpillar. "We're watchin' you, Skinner! Like merry old Argus, with his thousand eyes—was it a thousand, Franky?"

"A hundred, you ass!" said Courtenay, laughing.

"Well, with a hundred eyes," said the Caterpillar. "Anyway, we're watchin' you, Skinner. Had you noticed it?"

Skinner gritted his teeth, and halted. He wanted to speak to Spencer, but he did not want to lead an army up to him.

Spencer glanced towards the group of juniors, and his face changed as he recognised Skinner.

He muttered something to Langley, and walked away quickly towards the School House, leaving the Highcliffe captain looking rather surprised.

Skinner was growing desperate now; that look on Spencer's face had alarmed him.

He was too keen to mistake it. Spencer of the Sixth, for some reason, did not want to see him—was alarmed at the sight of him.

Why? Skinner asked himself that question with a sudden trepidation. Were the stakes so safe as he had supposed, after all?

That doubt was more than enough to make Skinner desperate.

He made a sudden rush towards the big doorway into which the Sixth-Former had disappeared.

"View-hallo!" gasped Bob Cherry. "After him!"

The juniors ran in pursuit.

But luck was Skinner's way, as it happened. An imposing figure came out of the big doorway as Skinner reached it. It was Dr. Voysey, the Head of Highcliffe.

Harry Wharton & Co. halted suddenly.

It was scarcely possible to run Skinner down under the majestic eyes of the reverend Doctor of Divinity.

Mr. Mobbs followed the Head out, and the two masters stood chatting for some moments on the broad steps. And Harry Wharton & Co., looking as indifferent as they could, retreated. Skinner, with a grin on his face, passed quietly into the House.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

No Money!

"OUT of this, you cad!"

Ponsonby, Gadsby, and Monson were lounging in the hall.

Ponsonby with a sullen and clouded face. The punishment he had received on the Greyfriars football ground had told on Pon, and he was still aching, and in a savage temper.

The sight of Skinner made his eyes glitter.

It was Skinner's exceedingly sharp practice that had led to Ponsonby's attempted swindle, for which he had suffered so severely. Skinner had "done" him, and Pon's attempt to get the stakes back from Spencer had failed. The stakeholder refused even to listen to him. It was pretty clear what Skinner was there for, and Pon & Co. came towards him with malevolent and threatening looks.

"Outside!" muttered Gadsby.

Skinner stood his ground.

"I've come here to see Spencer," he muttered.

"You've come here for a thumpin' good hidin', and you're goin' to get it!" said Monson.

Skinner sneered.

"Put a finger on me, and see what'll happen!" he said. "The Head's just outside. If you want Dr. Voysey to know all about it—"

He raised his voice recklessly as he spoke, and Ponsonby & Co. backed away in alarm. They certainly did not want their headmaster to know anything about it. Weakly and incapably as the Head managed Highcliffe School, there was no doubt as to the view he would have taken of the betting transactions of Ponsonby & Co. if he had known about them.

"Shut up, you fool!" muttered Gadsby, in alarm, with an uneasy glance towards the doorway.

"Let me alone then."

Ponsonby walked sullenly back to the fire.

"Another time!" he muttered to his comrades. And Skinner passed in peace, followed by scowling looks.

The cad of Greyfriars hurried to the Sixth Form quarters. He knew Spencer's study; he had been there before. He tapped on the door, and opened it.

Eustace Spencer was there alone, moodily staring out of the window. He turned as Skinner came in.

"What do you want?" he snapped harshly.

Skinner's alarm intensified. He had seen Spencer many times, and had never seen him anything but good-tempered and good-natured. What was the matter with him now? He remembered, with a sinking of the heart, that at the time the

stakes had been placed in Spencer's keeping, the prefect had been engaged in a poker game with another reckless senior. Were the stakes safe, after all—and his own fiver?

It was a dismaying doubt, and it brought a savage glitter to Skinner's eyes. He faced the Highcliffe senior resolutely, undeterred by his almost bullying manner.

"I've called for the stakes," he said.

"What stakes?"

"You remember! My bet with Ponsonby. You held the stakes," said Skinner. "Pon laid two to one on Lantham, in fivers, for the match yesterday. Lantham were beaten."

Spencer drew a cigarette-case from his pocket, and selected a smoke, with an air of deliberation, but the sharp-eyed junior noticed that his hand trembled.

"I've called—" re-commenced Skinner.

"Have you a match?"

"A—a match? Yes."

"Give me a light, then."

Skinner controlled his almost feverish impatience as best he could, and struck a match, holding it while the senior lighted his cigarette.

Spencer blew out a little cloud of smoke.

"So you've called for your stakes?" he said.

His manner was quite composed now, and Skinner wondered whether he had misjudged him. He was conscious of being a suspicious fellow. He rather prided himself upon the fact that he trusted nobody very far. Yet, to think that a Sixth-Former, a prefect, a wealthy and well-connected fellow like Spencer, would "stick" to stakes entrusted to his keeping was too wild a suspicion even for Skinner—till now. Skinner wondered, but he was anxious to see the money, and thus resolve all doubts.

"Yes," he said meekly; "that's why I've called, Spencer."

"Let me see. How much was it?"

"Pon's ten, and my five—fifteen quid in all."

Spencer nodded.

"Yes, I remember."

He stood leaning on the mantelpiece, smoking, and making no motion to hand over the money. Skinner's uneasiness returned with increasing force.

"I—I— There's some fellows waiting for me," he hinted.

"You're in a hurry?"

"Ye-e-es."

"Well, there's the door."

"Wha-a-at?" stammered Skinner.

"There's the door."

Skinner breathed hard.

"I've called for my stakes," he said.

"Look here, Spencer—"

"Don't raise your voice to me, Skinner!"

The junior set his teeth. He was very alert now, and he knew, he saw, that the Highcliffe senior was looking for an excuse to break out into a temper, and bundle him out of the study. That could only mean one thing, and Skinner's passionate fury was almost beyond his control. But he controlled it. He would give the Sixth-Former no room for excuse.

"Well, will you give me my money?" he asked quietly. "That's what I've called for, you know. Give it to me, please, Spencer."

"Do you know what day it is?" asked Spencer.

"Eh? Sunday, of course."

"And don't you know better than to call here on such business on Sunday?"

Skinner clenched his hands till his nails dug into his palms. This was going to be the excuse, then! Any excuse was better than none.

"Look here, Spencer—" he breathed.

"You can come to-morrow, if you like," said Spencer. "To-day I refuse even to speak on the subject. I've got some sense of decency, I hope."

"To-morrow!" muttered Skinner.

"Come on Monday, after lessons," said Spencer. "That's enough! Now get out!"

Skinner did not get out.

Such a scruple on the part of a reckless fellow like Eustace Spencer was a little too much for his credulity. A Sixth-Form prefect who would hold stakes for betting juniors was not the fellow to scruple about paying over the stakes to the winner on Sunday.

It was an excuse, a flimsy, palpable pretext to avoid handing over the money. Skinner knew it, and he was trembling with rage and disappointed greed.

"Spencer—" he began, his voice shaking.

"I think I've told you to get out," said Spencer.

"I'm not going without my money!" said Skinner desperately.

"What?" thundered the Sixth-Former.

He threw the cigarette into the grate, and made a stride towards Skinner. But the disappointed gambler was too furious to be scared by his anger. He faced Spencer with gleaming eyes.

"Give me my money!" he said, between his teeth.

"I've told you to call for it to-morrow."

"To-morrow!" hissed Skinner. "And when I call for it to-morrow you'll tell me to call another day, or you'll be out, and I can't see you. Give me my money!"

"Do you dare to hint—"

"Give me the stakes, then."

"Leave my study!"

"Not without my money!" shouted Skinner. "You—you thief!"

Spencer started as if he had been struck a blow in the face. The word came like a whip-lash.

"Skinner"—his voice was husky, trembling—"you—you dare—"

"I'll shout it out up and down Highcliffe if you don't shell out!" panted Skinner. "I trusted you. I never dreamed you'd keep the money. Pon never thought you would. It—it's shameful! If you keep my money you're a thief, and you know it. Give it to me!"

Spencer was white to the lips.

"I tell you—" he faltered.

"You're telling me lies!" shouted Skinner, enraged into utter recklessness now. "Lies—lies! You were gambling with Beauchamp when we handed you the stakes, and I believe you lost the money to him, and now you haven't got it to pay me." Skinner was almost weeping with rage. "You've got to find it! You've got to pay me, or I'll show you up to all Highcliffe! I'll expose you!"

"Be silent!" hissed Spencer. "Do you want all the Sixth to hear?"

"I don't care! I'll—"

"Come to-morrow, and you'll find your money here," said the Sixth-Former, between white, quivering lips. "Now go, or I'll pitch you neck and crop out of my study!"

"I won't go till— Oh! Hands off, you thief!"

Spencer grasped the junior by the collar with one hand, and opened the door with the other. With a swing of his powerful arms, he sent Skinner reeling and staggering into the corridor.

Slam!

Skinner reeled against the opposite wall, panting, passionate, almost beside himself with rage.

"You swindler!" he shouted.

Langley came along the corridor, his

eyes wide open, as he heard the junior's furious shout.

"What's that?" exclaimed the captain of Highcliffe angrily.

"It's Spencer—Spencer!" Skinner was stammering, almost sobbing with fury. "He's got my money; he won't hand it over."

"Don't talk rot!"

"It's true!" shrieked Skinner. "He held the stakes for us—fifteen pounds—and he's keeping it; he won't pay! I'll—I'll—you can lick me, if you like. I'll yell it out for all Highcliffe to hear!"

Langley's strong hand dropped on to his shoulder.

"You won't yell anything here," he said. "You'll clear out. Another word, and I'll thrash you till you can't yelp! Come on!"

Skinner opened his lips—and closed them again. The grip on his shoulder was like iron, and he was cowed. Unresisting, he was led away, as far as the door. Ponsonby & Co., in the hall, looked round in astonishment.

"Now, get out!" said Langley curtly. Skinner panted.

"Langley, it's true, I tell you!"

"Get out, or I'll take you to your headmaster at Greyfriars, and you can spin the yarn before him," said the captain of Highcliffe, very quietly.

And at that Skinner cowered and slunk away. Langley, with a grim expression on his face, strode away to Spencer's study. He found the wretched Sixth-Former affecting to read.

"You must have heard what that junior said in the passage, Spencer," said the Highcliffe captain. "Is there anything in it?"

"Do you want to insult me, Langley?"

"Is there anything in it?"

"No."

"All right, then."

Langley turned on his heel, and quitted the study. As the door closed after him Spencer threw his book on the floor and rose, pacing the study with hurried, irregular steps. His face was white, his brows wrinkled. There was an old, worn look upon his face, strangely out of keeping with his years.

"What am I going to do?" he muttered huskily. And he muttered the words again and again, but there was no answer to them.

Folly—crass folly—had led him to this pass, and there was no escape. The money Ponsonby and Skinner had placed in his hands he had accepted as a trust. Intentionally, he would never have dreamed of touching it. But luck had gone against him in the poker game. He had played on after his own money was gone, and all the money in his pockets had followed. He had been scarcely conscious of it in the feverish excitement of gambling; it was only afterwards, when the reaction came, that he realised what he had done, and then it was too late.

He remembered miserably how he had once, after a row at home in the vacation, promised his father that he would never touch a card again in a game for money. If only he had kept that promise! He had meant to keep it, too; but, somehow—he hardly knew how—he had let things drift, and had slid back into the old ways, not meaning any harm, and now—

From gambling to theft, for it was theft. And from theft to—what? He had no money to pay Skinner on the morrow. The miserable excuse had only been to gain time. From theft to what? Brazen falsehood and denial; deeper and deeper in the pit he had dug for his own feet. And he had once been an honour-

able fellow. He wanted to be honourable now. But the price of his folly had to be paid—to be paid in falsehood, in self-scorn, in shame that seemed almost too great for him to bear.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

The Happy Punter!

"HALLO, hallo, hallo! Here he comes!"

Skinner came blindly out of the House—blind with rage and chagrin—and fairly ran into the Famous Five. He had forgotten them—forgotten everything but the maddening disappointment he had suffered.

The Co. closed round him in the quadrangle, and Skinner stopped. His white, furious face startled the juniors.

"Let me pass!" he muttered huskily.

"With us, dear infant!" smiled Bob Cherry. "You're too charming to be parted with in a hurry!"

Courtenay and the Caterpillar had been chatting with the five Greyfriars juniors till Skinner came out. They nodded to the Co. now, and walked away, leaving them to deal with Skinner.

The Co. walked Skinner away to the gates. He went in their midst, uncaring. The tenner he had counted on, and his own fiver, were gone. He felt that they were gone for ever. He might rage and complain, and accuse Spencer, but the money was gone. Raging and accusing would not bring it back. Spencer would have handed him the money if he had still possessed it; he knew that. If he did not hand it over, it was because it was gone beyond recovery, and the wretched fellow could not replace it.

Little hope remained in Skinner's breast of ever seeing the money. That hope was replaced by a fierce rage, and a savage longing for vengeance upon the fellow who had swindled him. His sharp practice upon Ponsonby & Co. had recoiled upon his own head with interest.

Harry Wharton & Co. were puzzled by his looks. They supposed that he had collected his stakes, and they were surprised that he came with them so tamely, for he knew they did not mean to allow him to keep his winnings. Skinner did not speak a word as they went. He walked on as if blind, gritting his teeth, his eyes glinting under contracted brows, malice and hatred and all uncharitableness running riot in his breast.

At a good distance from Highcliffe Wharton signed to his companions, and they halted. Skinner was brought to a stop, looking savagely at the Co. under lowering brows.

"You've seen Spencer?" asked Harry.

"Yes, you fool!"

Wharton did not heed that complimentary epithet.

"And you've bagged the winnings, I suppose?" he said.

Skinner's reply to that was a savage laugh.

"You're not going to keep the winnings," said Wharton quietly. "Your own money you can keep. The stakes you've won must be handed back to Ponsonby, and the bet called off. I think, considering how Pon's acted, that he will take care not to pay you himself. This may be a bit high-handed, Skinner, but it appears to us the only thing to be done. You've acted rottenly, and you've got to undo it as far as possible."

"The only way!" grinned Bob Cherry.

"And the clearfulness of your esteemed conscience will be a grateful comfort to you, my disgusting and ridiculous Skinner!" remarked the Nabob of Bhanipur.

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Skinner laughed again bitterly.

"You silly fools!" he said. "If I'd got the money, do you think I'd have walked into your hands with it?"

"Well, haven't you?"

"No."

"My dear man, that cock won't fight," said Johnny Bull. "You went there to collect your stakes, and old Voysey turning up kept us off the scene. It stands to reason you've done what you went to do, and you've got the money about you now."

"You can search me, if you like," said Skinner.

None of the Famous Five was anxious to do that. There was, besides, something in Skinner's tones that sounded like the truth.

"But you've seen Spencer," said Wharton.

Skinner ground his teeth.

"I've seen the swindling hound!" he hissed.

He was too enraged to think of any



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further concealment. The juniors knew he was the fellow who had made the bet with Ponsonby, for that matter; but under other circumstances Skinner would have kept up his denials. Now he did not care; he did not even think about it. He was only thinking of his bitterness and disappointment.

"Well, if you've seen him—" said Nugent.

Skinner broke in.

"You fool! Can't you see? He hasn't paid up."

"Oh, draw it mild!" said Johnny Bull. "Spencer was holding the stakes. It didn't rest with him. He simply had to hand the money over."

"He's spent it!"

"What?"

"The stakeholder spent the money!" howled Bob Cherry.

"Yes."

"My only hat!"

The juniors stared blankly at Skinner.

That was about the last news they had expected to hear. Certainly a fellow of scrupulous integrity would never have been mixed up in the business at all as Spencer had been; but there were limits.

"You mean to say that Spencer is keeping the money entrusted to him as stakeholder?" gasped Wharton.

"He's spent it—gambled it away!" hissed Skinner, and the fury in his look and tone testified to the truth of his statement. "He was playing poker with Beauchamp when we handed him the stakes to hold. I—I never thought he'd be dishonest. Even Pon never thought such a thing, and he's as keen as a razor. Spencer wouldn't have kept the money, of course—we knew that. But—but he had it in his pockets when he was gambling, and it went. That's how it was, I think—I'm certain. Anyhow, he's lost it, and he can't pay!"

"Well, my word!"

Johnny Bull whistled.

"He was a rotter to hold the stakes for you at all," said Johnny. "But to spend the money—well, that beats it!"

Skinner panted.

"I'll show him up! I'll disgrace him before all Highcliffe!" he hissed. "I'll let everybody know! I've told Langley already!"

"Did he believe you?" asked Wharton drily.

"I—I don't know. He turned me out!"

"You'll have to get some jolly strong proof before you get Highcliffe to swallow a story like that."

"It's true!" shrieked Skinner.

Harry Wharton nodded.

"I believe you," he said. "But Highcliffe won't, and you can bet on that—next time you want to bet. If Spencer's spent your money, and can't shell out, he'll deny the whole thing. He can't do anything now but tell lies about it. He can't confess he's a thief. It's your word against his, in that case, and his word is a good deal better than yours at Highcliffe."

Skinner trembled with rage.

He realised that it was true; that he had not a leg to stand on if he accused Spencer.

A fellow who would gamble away another fellow's money would lie about it. That could hardly be doubted.

Spencer might even make out that he had paid the stakes to Skinner—that would be his easiest line of defence—and who was to disprove it? They had been alone, and who was to prove that Skinner had not left the study with the money in his pocket?

The thought made Skinner almost weep with rage.

Of course, Spencer would lie—he was certain to lie. But all Highcliffe would set Skinner down as the liar!

"Oh," panted Skinner, "the—the villain—the awful villain! He's robbed me—robbed me just as if he'd picked my pocket! And—and he—"

The wretched junior broke off, choking with rage.

"There's another thing you don't seem to have thought of," went on the captain of the Remove quietly. "If you make a song about this, it may come to the ears of the masters. Spencer knows that. He may deny the whole bizney, and get clear; but you'll be accusing yourself."

"Oh!" muttered Skinner.

"And if it gets as far as Greyfriars—and it will, if you make Highcliffe buzz with it—the Head will hear of it, and you'll be kicked out of Greyfriars, Skinner."

"Oh!" mumbled Skinner again.

"I must say Skinner's got what he deserves," remarked Johnny Bull in his slow, thoughtful way. "This is really the best way the bizney could have ended."

The jokers chuckled. Johnny Bull was right, perhaps. But Skinner's look did not express agreement.

"After all, you've lost nothing, Skinner," said Nugent, by way of consolation. "We were going to make you hand back the notes to Ponsonby, you know."

Skinner gave a savage laugh.

"You wouldn't have had the chance if I'd once fingered the money," he said. "Besides, it's not only my winnings. There was my own money—five pounds that belonged to Stott and Snoop and me. We owe nearly all of it in the Remove. That's lost, too."

"And Spencer's lost that?"

"He's lost the lot!"

"My hat!"

Wharton looked at Skinner's white, trembling face with something like compassion. The wretched fellow had received a blow that he was not likely to recover from soon. He had won his bet—and lost his money. And all he had left was hatred, fury, and revenge—bitter passions that did not offer much consolation.

"Well," said Harry at last, "we were going to give you a jolly good ragging, Skinner, when we made sure you were the rotter who betted with Ponsonby. But I don't think we need bother now. I think you've had enough, from your look. My advice is, make the best of it, and let the matter drop. You'll only do yourself harm by bandying accusations with Spencer."

Skinner clenched his hands.

"I'll show him up!" he muttered. "I don't care if I get sacked from Greyfriars so long as I make him suffer!"

"I think you'll alter your mind when you're cooler," said Harry. "No good cutting off your nose to spite your face. But you can do as you like, of course. Come on, you chaps!"

The Famous Five left Skinner in the road, and started for a ramble on the cliffs. As Bob Cherry remarked, the sea breezes would take the taste of the unsavoury affair out of their mouths.

Skinner tramped on to Greyfriars, his face still white, his eyes burning. The money was gone, and all that remained was revenge—and even revenge seemed dubious now. And the fact that he deserved all that had befallen him was no comfort.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Black Suspicions!

"I'VE been waiting for you, Skinney." Stott of the Remove spoke eagerly as Skinner came into his study at Greyfriars. Skinner sank into a chair, tired out—more with bitter emotions than with the walk.

Stott did not observe his expression for the moment.

"I've been thinking, Skinner," he went on. "Now Snoop's cut up rusty, I don't see why he should share. We'll let him have his part of the stakes back, of course. But now he's so jolly lofty I don't see giving him a whack in the winnings. What do you think?"

Skinner gave a bitter laugh, and his study-mate looked at him startled.

"You've got the dibs?" he exclaimed breathlessly.

"Not a penny!"

"But you've seen Spencer?"

"He's gambled the money away."

"What?" yelled Stott.

Skinner savagely explained in a few words, and for some minutes afterwards Stott was tramping round the study, brandishing his fists, and kicking over the chairs, in a towering rage. His companion watched him sullenly. The two hapless gamblers were not enjoying their afternoon.

"What are you going to do about it?" panted Stott at last.

A long, bitter discussion followed, interrupted every few minutes by savage anathemas upon Eustace Spencer. The discussion was still proceeding when the door opened and Sidney James Snoop came in. He had returned from his walk with Bunter with a cheery look and with colour in his cheeks.

He glanced rather grimly at his study-mates. He was prepared for more trouble; but Skinner and Stott were not looking for trouble now. They were prepared to make common cause with Snoop against the defaulting stakeholder, if he would join with them.

"I've got something to tell you, Sid," began Skinner, in quite a civil tone.

"Go ahead!" said Snoop curtly.

The story was told again, Snoop listening with something like incredulity in his face.

"That's a pretty steep yarn," he remarked, when Skinner had finished.

"What? It's exactly what happened!" howled Skinner.



Spencer doesn't "dub up". (See Chapter 8.)

Snoop shrugged his shoulders.

"Maybe!" he assented.

"Don't you believe me, you fool?"

"Not fool enough!" answered Snoop calmly. "It doesn't sound to me true. I know Spencer of Highcliffe is a pretty thorough blackguard in some ways; but this is jolly steep! Why, it's stealing, if what you say is true!"

"I told him he was a thief."

"Maybe," said Snoop again.

"Look here, Snoop—"

"Oh, out with it!" said Snoop. "You and Stott have put your heads together and made up this yarn, to spoof me out of my share. Own up!"

"Why, you—you—" stuttered Skinner.

"Nothing of the sort!" roared Stott furiously. "That's the yarn, just as Skinner told it to me."

"Then it looks to me as if he's spoofing the pair of us," said Snoop distrustfully. "It's not likely that a Highcliffe prefect would act like that."

"But he did!" gasped Skinner helplessly.

"Well, you say he did!"

"Have I got the money, you idiot?"

"How do I know whether you've got the money or not?" said Snoop coolly. "Suppose Spencer handed you the stakes, and you decided to stick to them. Then you would make up this yarn for Stott and me."

Skinner sat and gasped.

That aspect of the case had never occurred to him; but it occurred to Snoop quickly enough, and Stott was beginning to look distrustful now.

"My hat!" said Stott, with a deep breath. "Skinner, you cad, is that it—have you got the money in your pockets all the time?"

"No," panted Skinner. "I tell you

"I thought it was steep!" said Stott.

"Jolly steep! Spencer might do it, but it doesn't sound likely."

"It doesn't," said Snoop drily. "Not that I care! I'd made up my mind already not to touch the winnings; I was going to tell you fellows so. All I want is my own stake back, and to get clear of the rotten bizney altogether!"

"Our stakes have gone with the rest!" panted Skinner.

"So you say!"

Skinner sprang to his feet, his eyes ablaze.

"You rotter! It's the truth!"

"It may be the truth, and it mayn't," said Snoop. "You needn't glare at me, Skinner; I'm not afraid of you! This means that my stake's gone, I suppose; and whether Spencer's got it, or you've got it, it comes to the same thing! I don't care! I'm sick of the rotten thing, anyhow!"

"We've got to make Spencer pay up, somehow—"

"Leave me out!" said Snoop, curtly.

"We've been swindled, and I don't know that Spencer's done it."

"I tell you—"

"I know what you tell me, but you're not exactly a Georgie Washington, Skinner. Anyhow, I'm fed up with it. Twenty-five shillings of the stake belonged to me. I've got to lose it! It don't make much difference to me whether you've got it or Spencer's got

it; I know I shall never see it again!" said Snoop bitterly. "It serves me right, I can see that! I'm done with the affair, and done with you! Let the money go—and hang it!"

And Sidney James Snoop walked out of the study, and slammed the door after him.

Skinner looked at Stott. That youth's heavy face was dark with suspicion and distrust now.

"Look here, Skinner—" he began.

Skinner interrupted him savagely.

"Do you think the same as that silly fool, Stott? You can ask Wharton. I've told him, and he believed me."

"Wharton's soft—and I'm not! I don't say I don't believe you; but it's a queer story, anyway!" said Stott sullenly. "We can't afford to lose the money. If Spencer hasn't paid up, he's got to be made to pay!"

"He said I could call to-morrow; but that was only a trick—"

"We'll call to-morrow, then, and I'll come with you. I'll jolly soon see how the matter stands!"

And with that Stott also left the study, and Skinner remained alone—with feelings that could not be expressed in words.

From of old it was said that the way of the transgressor is hard; and the black sheep of the Remove was finding it very hard indeed!

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

The Lowest Depth!

HARRY WHARTON observed Skinner rather curiously the following day.

Skinner was in trouble with Mr. Quelch in the Form-room several times on Monday. He simply could not put his mind into his work.

The Remove-master did not know what was on Skinner's mind—which was very fortunate for the sportsman of the Remove. But he knew that Skinner was inattentive and idle, and he rated him sharply—and at last had recourse to the pointer. Which did not improve Skinner's temper.

Wharton noted, too, that the three black sheep of Study No. 11 did not hang together much that day. Snoop, out of the Form-room, was mostly in company with Bunter, with whom he seemed to have struck up a sort of friendship. Stott had hardly a word to say to Skinner, but he eyed him a good deal. And after lessons Stott sought out the captain of the Remove.

"Stop a minute, Wharton," he said, in the Form-room passage, after the Remove were dismissed.

Harry stopped.

"Skinner says he's told you about what happened at Highcliffe—Spencer refusing to pay, and all that," muttered Stott.

"Yes," said Harry shortly.

"You believe him?"

"Well, yes."

"Snoop thinks that Spencer paid up, and Skinner's keeping the tin."

Wharton made a gesture of disgust.

"You don't think so?" asked Stott, watching him.

"No. Skinner's a good bit of a worm, but I'm sure he wouldn't descend to that," said Wharton. "I believed what he told me, anyway. And, as you've spoken to me about the matter, Stott, I'll tell you what I think. It serves you all jolly well right!"

And with that the captain of the Remove walked on, having had quite enough of Stott's company.

Skinner came along with his coat on, and Stott joined him. He was going over to Highcliffe with his chum. They started in silence. Wharton's opinion

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had some effect on Stott, but he was not of a trusting nature, and the suspicion lingered.

Hardly a word was spoken between the two as they walked to Highcliffe. They reached the school in a glum mood, and went in at the gates. As they came towards the School House Frank Courtenay came out, and he stopped to meet them.

Skinner would have passed on, but the captain of the Highcliffe Fourth barred the way.

"May I ask you what you want here, Skinner?" he said quietly.

"No, you mayn't!" snapped Skinner.

"Mind your own business!" growled Stott.

"I know what you came for yesterday," said Courtenay. "I know what your Form-fellows at Greyfriars think of the matter, too. There will have to be a stop to this kind of thing, Skinner! It's rather too shady!"

Skinner sneered.

"Shady, if you like," he said. "I didn't want to come to-day, Master Clever Courtenay. Only one of your precious Sixth Form prefects is trying to swindle me, and I've come for my money to-day, because he wouldn't pay up yesterday! Is that good enough for you?"

"I can't believe that!"

"Believe it or not, as you choose; but if he doesn't pay up, I'll make all Highcliffe ring with it!" said Skinner savagely. "Now will you let me pass?"

Courtenay, with a very troubled look, stood aside, and the two Greyfriars juniors went in. Skinner led the way to Spencer's study in the Sixth, and threw open the door without taking the trouble to knock. He had not come there to stand on ceremony.

Spencer and Beauchamp were in the study. Beauchamp was speaking as the door flew open, and the juniors caught the tail-end, as it were, of his speech.

"... right as rain, of course. I know your IO U's are all right, Spencer; but if you could make it convenient—"

He broke off with that, turning sharply towards the door.

"Hallo! What the thump does this mean?" he exclaimed.

"We've called to see Spencer," said Skinner, with savage sullenness. "He's expecting us—me, at least."

Spencer's face changed; but he pulled himself together.

He had no money for Skinner; he owed more than he could pay in the Highcliffe Sixth, for that matter. The poker game had cost him dear; he had played for paper after Skinner's money was gone, and Beauchamp—to judge by what he had said—was pressing for payment.

To tell the truth was to draw upon himself a scorn and contempt which would make it impossible for him to hold up his head again at Highcliffe. Spencer simply dared not own to the truth. And there was only one other resource—a resource the bare thought of which made him writhe with shame and humiliation; but which he had resolved to avail himself of, nevertheless.

"I was not expecting you Skinner," he said in a low voice, which he made as steady as he could. "What do you mean? I'm not in the habit of receiving fags in my study. There's the door!"

"I've called for my money."

"Money! What money?"

"You told me yesterday to call for it to-day," said Skinner doggedly. "I knew you were only putting me off, but I've come. I'm going to have it, or there will be bad trouble for somebody."

Stott stood silent, listening and watching. Beauchamp of the Sixth gave Spencer a very odd look.

"I don't quite follow," said Spencer, conscious of the look, and keeping his face calm. "Are you referring to the stakes I consented to hold for you and Ponsonby?"

"You know I am."

"I was a fool to agree—a good-natured fool," said Spencer, frowning. "You remember, Beauchamp. You were here, I think, when the young rascals came in and asked me."

Beauchamp nodded.

"I shouldn't have done it," said Spencer. "It was silly. But I did it, and there's an end. Don't ask me anything of the kind again, Skinner. And you can tell Ponsonby that, too."

"I'm not likely to trust you again," sneered Skinner.

"Don't be cheeky! Clear out of my study!"

"When I've had my money," said Skinner.

"What do you mean? You had your money yesterday."

Skinner drew a deep, hard breath.

"So that's the game, is it?" he said.

"I don't understand you," said Spencer coldly. "I'm fed up with the subject. Clear out!"

"Yesterday," said Skinner, in a trembling voice, "you told me you wouldn't pay me because it was Sunday, and told me to come to-day. I knew you were swindling me then—I told you so, and Langley heard me. But I've come again to-day, Spencer, and I want the money."

"I think I'd better go," murmured Beauchamp.

"Don't go," said Spencer. "I can't make out what this fag means, unless he's mad. Have you lost the money, Skinner?"

"You never gave it to me."

"I think you must be mad," said Spencer steadily. "I gave you the money yesterday in this study—fifteen pounds."

"Liar!"

Spencer compressed his lips.

"What has this fellow to do with it?" he asked suddenly, looking at Stott.

"Half the money's mine," said Stott. "I was in with Skinner."

"Then you had better ask Skinner what he's done with it," said Spencer drily. "He left this study with the cash in his pockets. He may have dropped into Ponsonby's study and lost it there. Anyway, he had it. Now, both of you clear off."

Stott gave his companion a glance of bitter suspicion.

Spencer had schooled himself to this ordeal, and he was carrying off the matter coolly and steadily. His bitter self-contempt and humiliation rankled in his breast, but it did not show in his face. It was almost impossible to believe that the tall, well-dressed Sixth-Former was lying to cover up a theft; and Skinner realised it with savage bitterness.

"That's it, I suppose," muttered Stott. "You played in Pon's study, and lost the money, and came back to me—"

"You can ask Ponsonby— You can ask Wharton how long I was in the House—he was waiting for me outside," muttered Skinner.

"Spencer says you had the money."

"He lies!"

"That's enough," said Spencer, making a stride forward. "I was a fool to get mixed up in your fag nonsense at all, and I'm sick of it. Get out of my study!"

"You won't pay me?" hissed Skinner.

"I've paid you already. Will you go, or shall I kick you out?"

Skinner, with a bitter look, stepped out into the passage. It was not much use matching his strength against Eustace Spencer's.

Stott followed him out, with a lowering brow.

"I'm going, Spencer," said Skinner, between his tight lips. "But this isn't the last of it. All Highcliffe's going to know."

"Oh, don't keep that up," said Stott roughly. "Tell me what you've done with the money."

The door closed on them.

"I never had the money, Stott," said Skinner, with trembling lips. "I swear he never paid me."

"He swears he did, and his word is as good as yours, or better."

"You fool! You fool!" muttered Skinner, clenching his hands. "Can't you see—? Can't you see—?"

"I can see that I want my money, and there doesn't seem much chance of seeing the colour of it," said Stott sullenly. "Tain't only the winnings—there's my own stake. I owe money right and left. You know I borrowed it up and down the Remove!"

"So did I. I'm in the same boat."

"Perhaps you are—and perhaps not!" sneered Stott. "Spencer says you had the money. I shouldn't wonder if you played cards with Pon yesterday and lost it all. Then you'd spin me this yarn. Catch me trusting money in your hands again—hang you!"

"You fool!" shouted Skinner. "I tell you—"

"Lies!" growled Stott savagely. "Ah! Would you?"

He put up his hands as the infuriated Skinner struck out at him. The next moment they were fighting savagely.

Langley of the Sixth looked out of his study.

He stared blankly at the sight of two Greyfriars juniors fighting in the Sixth Form corridor at Highcliffe.

"My hat!" he ejaculated. "Here, Roper!"

Roper of the Sixth followed him out of the study. The two seniors ran up the passage, and collared Skinner and Stott unceremoniously.

The two juniors were dragged apart, panting.

"Out of this!" said Langley roughly.

Roper ran Stott along by the collar, and Langley followed with Skinner. The latter, almost beside himself, struggled and shouted.

"Let me go! Let me go! I've been robbed!"

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

A Scene at Highcliffe!

"ROBBED!"

The word was repeated on all sides as Highcliffe fellows ran up. Langley had run the junior as far as the entrance-hall of the School House, and there Skinner's maddened yells drew a crowd quickly enough.

Ponsonby, Gadsby, and Monson were the first on the scene. Their eyes gleamed at the sight of Skinner, and they were keen to lend Langley a hand if he wanted it. Courtenay and the Caterpillar came in from the quad. A dozen other fellows, seniors and juniors, appeared from all quarters.

"Outside!" rapped out Langley angrily.

Skinner still struggled. He was wrought up to such a terrific pitch of excitement now that he was scarcely master of himself. At any risk to himself he would revenge himself upon the fellow who had swindled him—indeed, he was so maddened that he had forgotten all considerations of risk.

"Let me go! I've been robbed!" he shrieked. "You're all thieves here! Let me go!"

"Is the fellow mad?" said the Caterpillar, in wonder.

Courtenay knitted his brows, remembering what Skinner had said to him in the quad. Skinner's frantic excitement looked as if it were true. This, at all events, could scarcely be acting. In his fury, Skinner was not reckoning that he stood to suffer as much as Spencer if the facts came to light.

"Help! I've been robbed! Help!"

"I really think he's out of his senses," exclaimed Langley, in sheer astonishment.

"Kick him out!" exclaimed Ponsonby.

"More likely to be robber than robbed, I should say, from what I know of him."

"Absolutely!" said Vavasour.

Mr. Mobbs, the master of the Fourth, came dashing up, with whisking gown, his hair standing almost on end. Such a scene in the hall at Highcliffe was unheard-of.

"What is this?" thundered Mr. Mobbs. "Langley, what does this mean?"

"Blessed if I know, sir!" gasped the captain of Highcliffe. "I found this kid fighting with another Greyfriars fag in the corridor, and I'm taking him out. That's all I know."

"Where is the other?"

"He's gone, sir," said Roper, coming in rather breathlessly.

Stott was fleeing as if for his life. Skinner's frantic outbreak had, perhaps, convinced him of his pal's innocence, but it had alarmed him and terrified him. Not for ten times the amount at stake would Stott have been mixed up in such a scene.

He was running for Greyfriars now as fast as he could go, only hoping that he would get clear of the affair, money or no money.

"Gone!" repeated Mr. Mobbs. "Very well, Roper. Let that boy remain, Langley. He says he has been robbed, and such a statement cannot pass without inquiry. Skinner—I think your name is Skinner—"

"Yes, it is; and I've been robbed here!" shouted Skinner. "I don't care who hears me. I've been robbed!"

"That's a thumpin' lie, anyway!" remarked Ponsonby.

"Calm yourself, boy," said Mr. Mobbs severely. "Kindly state what has happened, and the matter will be investigated. Whom do you accuse of having robbed you?"

"Spencer of the Sixth!" shouted Skinner.

Mr. Mobbs jumped.

"What! A prefect? Are you mad, Skinner?"

"He's robbed me, and I'm going to show him up. He's got fifteen pounds of mine!" howled Skinner, almost sobbing with rage. "I don't care what happens. I'll show him up. You're a lot of thieves here—gamblers and thieves, jolly nearly every fellow in the school!"

"Silence!" thundered Mr. Mobbs. "How dare you, Skinner! If you are not out of your senses, tell me how you came to have fifteen pounds, and how you accuse a prefect here of depriving you of it? Your statement is utter nonsense on the face of it."

Ponsonby had turned pale now he smelt danger.

"Oh, I'll tell you!" shouted Skinner, with savage recklessness, amid a breathless silence of the crowd round him. "I made a bet with a Highcliffe fellow, and Spencer held the stakes."

"Impossible!"

"It's true—it's true! And now he won't pay over the money. He's gambled it away!" shrieked Skinner.

Mr. Mobbs' face was a picture.

Not for a single instant did he think of believing the wild accusation.

Ponsonby & Co. were pale now, in

dread of their share in the transaction coming to light.

But Mr. Mobbs did not think of investigating further. He had heard enough, and the excellent Pon was saved from the necessity of uttering the falsehoods that were already being coined in his fertile brain.

"How dare you utter such a wicked slander, boy!" gasped Mr. Mobbs. "You cannot be in your right senses!"

"It's true! Make him come here and answer me!" yelled Skinner.

"I shall do nothing of the sort! I will not so insult a prefect of Highcliffe!" thundered Mr. Mobbs. "I shall take you, Skinner, to your headmaster at Greyfriars, and demand your punishment!"

"I don't care!" shouted Skinner. "I'll have it all out. If he won't pay me, I'll show him up. I'll disgrace him!"

"Langley, kindly remove that young ruffian from the House!" said Mr. Mobbs, his voice trembling with anger. "I have never heard of such a thing—never! This passes all bounds. Remove him, Langley!"

"Certainly, sir."

Langley's grip had been on Skinner's collar all the time. Now it tightened, and Skinner was jerked to the doorway.

He struggled and kicked.

"By gad!" murmured the Caterpillar to his chum. "This is rather lively, isn't it? Is he lyin' or tellin' the truth, Franky?"

"Goodness knows!" muttered Courtenay, with a deeply-troubled look. "Part of it's true, at any rate."

"What a scene!" The Caterpillar smiled a little. "Franky, who wouldn't be a merry blade, bettin' on football matches and gettin' left like this? I sigh for the days when I was a roarin' blade, Franky. I'm sure this little scene makes a chap realise how enjoyable it is!"

"Let me go!" came Skinner's yell, outside the House now.

"Pon & Co. look as if they're enjoyin' it, don't they?" murmured the Caterpillar. "They're thinkin' that somethin' may come to light, the dear infants. If it does they'll be put to some hard lyin'. Luckily, that won't be much of a strain on Pon. He's used to it."

Skinner's howls died away.

The muscular captain of Highcliffe marched him down to the gates, and tossed him into the road as if he had been a bundle.

Skinner sprawled in the road.

"Now cut off!" said Langley grimly. "If you're not gone in a second I'll come out to you!"

The wretched junior staggered to his feet. His excitement was passing now, and he was feeling sick and tired—and apprehensive. Without a word he turned and tramped away.

Langley turned back with a grim brow. Half Highcliffe was in a buzz with excitement. Most of the fellows agreed that Skinner's frantic accusation was "utter rot," but others made whispered remarks, especially among the Sixth, expressing a different opinion. Spencer, in his study, had listened to the distant sound of the "row" with a white face and his knees knocking together.

He had hardly suspected that the junior would take such a desperate step—against his own interests as well as those of his enemy. He had not counted on the desperation of a disappointed and swindled gambler.

But even so, he had no other resource, and now, at all events, he had to stand by what he had said, and if the matter came before the school authorities he

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had to pile lie on lie, deceit on deceit, to save his skin.

He knew it, and the bare thought sickened him, but he had left himself no other way.

If Skinner could have known what the thoughts of the wretched swindler were like, even he might have forgiven Spencer of the Sixth. Skinner had lost his money, but the unhappy Sixth-Former of Highcliffe had lost more than that—his last shred of honour, his last ray of self-respect—and his loss was the greater.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

Before the Head!

HARRY WHARTON & Co. met Skinner as he came into the School House at Greyfriars with very grave faces.

Stott had already returned, and he had told what was happening—told, with a pale, scared face, that Skinner was "kicking up a shindy" at Highcliffe. Stott was scared almost out of his wits by the dread of what would follow.

For such a scene could not fail to have its consequences. It must be followed by action on the part of the Highcliffe School authorities, that was undoubted; and if the whole miserable affair was dragged out into the light of day, what was to happen to the wretched "punters" of the Remove, who had believed themselves so excessively clever in their schemes for annexing other people's money?

Stott would have given all he possessed a dozen times over never to have laid a farthing on the result of the Lant-ham match.

The miserable fellow went to his study, where he found Snoop, who was soon sharing his terrors. Sidney James Snoop was sorry enough for his share in the shady business. He had been willing to lose his money to get clear of it all, but it seemed that his repentance had come too late, as repentance generally does.

If it all came out now he was involved equally with his companions, and how could it fail to come out, after Skinner's frantic outbreak at Highcliffe?

Most of the Remove knew of the affair now, and they discussed the possibilities with bated breath. The Famous Five waited for Skinner to come in, anxious and uneasy. They met him at the doorway, looking pale and almost sick as he tramped into the House.

The excitement had passed, and the reaction had come, and Skinner was able to think of what was to follow. His state of mind by this time was as unenviable as Stott's. In his fury he had said that he did not care what happened to him so long as he was avenged upon the swindler; but now that he was calmer he knew that he cared very much indeed.

Harry Wharton led him quietly into the Common-room, Skinner accompanying him in sullen silence.

"What's happened?" asked Harry.

"We've heard something from Stott." "I've shown him up, anyway," said Skinner, with quivering lips. "I—I don't care. All Highcliffe knows now that he's swindled me. Mr. Mobbs knows it, too, only he pretended not to believe it."

"Mobbs was there, then?" asked Bob Cherry.

"Half Highcliffe was looking on, I think," muttered Skinner. "The awful cad! He actually said to my face that he'd paid me yesterday, and you know he hadn't, don't you?"

"You might have guessed he'd take that line if he never intended to pay."

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said Wharton, with a curl of the lip. "But that won't help him much if it all comes out. He can't admit to his headmaster that he had anything at all to do with such a business."

"I suppose he'll tell more lies if he's asked about it," muttered Skinner. "Of course, there's no proof. Pon and that lot will back him up, and so will Beauchamp, I suppose. He knows. It's my word against that lot, and, of course, they won't believe me."

"Then what did you kick up a shindy for?"

"I—I was wild, of course. Wouldn't you have been?"

"I shouldn't have been in such a position at all, I hope," said Wharton drily. "But suppose you blackened Spencer at Highcliffe—that wouldn't help you when it comes before our headmaster."

"I—I know! I was in a fury," said Skinner. "Oh, I know I've played the fool! You needn't tell me that! I—I believe Mobbs is coming over here to speak to the Head. I—I saw the Highcliffe trap on the road just before I got in."

Skinner's voice shook.

"Well, my hat!" said Johnny Bull, with a whistle. "You're in for it now, Skinner! What the dickens will you say to the Head? It won't matter much to Dr. Locke whether Spencer paid you or not. What he'll be concerned about is your making bets with Ponsonby at all—and you've owned up to that in public."

"I—I know!" muttered Skinner wretchedly. "I—I suppose I'm done for here. I was a fool to let myself go at Highcliffe, but—but it was more than flesh and blood could stand. He told Stott I'd had the money, and made him believe I'd kept it—me, you know—when he was keeping it all the time!" Skinner clenched his hands. "How could a fellow take that quietly. Why, anybody would have broken out, I should think!"

There was a sound of wheels in the quadrangle. Bunter put a fat, startled face into the Common-room.

"I say, Mobbs's coming in," he said. Skinner shivered.

"It—it's all up now," he muttered.

Vernon-Smith came into the Common-room a few minutes later, with a very grave face.

"Mr. Mobbs is here," he said, with a curious look at Skinner. "He's been shown into the Head's study. It's about you, Skinner?"

"Yes," muttered Skinner.

"What are you going to say to the Head?"

"I—I don't know!"

"Let me give you a tip, then," said the Bouncer quietly. "From what Stott says, you've let out too much at Highcliffe for lies to do you any good with the Head. Stick to the truth, and make a clean breast of it."

Skinner gnawed his lip.

"I—I suppose I'd better," he mumbled. "But—but own up to the Head that I've been making bets with Ponsonby—"

He trembled.

"You'd better," said Harry Wharton. "In fact, it's the only thing now, Skinner. For your own sake, don't try any lying now."

Skinner nodded.

The juniors waited in a state of tension. Rotter as Skinner undoubtedly was, the Co. could not help feeling for him a little in this extremity. Rotter as he was he had come in contact with a worse rotter than himself, and all his sharp schemes had ended in disastrous failure. The juniors remained with him till Wingate of the Sixth looked in.

"Oh, you're here, Skinner! You're wanted in the Head's study at once."

"Yes, Wingate!" Skinner almost whispered.

He left the Common-room with faltering steps, and dragged himself to the Head's study. There he found Mr. Mobbs, of Highcliffe, with Dr. Locke. The Head's face was sterner than Skinner had ever seen it before.

"Skinner, Mr. Mobbs has made a most astounding statement to me! Is it possible that you, a Greyfriars boy, have created a disturbance at Highcliffe School, like a common hooligan?"

Skinner licked his dry lips.

"Mr. Mobbs also says that you have made a ridiculous accusation against a Sixth Form boy at Highcliffe," continued the Head sternly. "What do you mean by this, Skinner? Have you been involved in any gambling transactions with a Highcliffe boy?"

"Skinner made that statement, but I am assured that it is false," said Mr. Mobbs, with a glare at the junior.

"Kindly allow the boy to speak, Mr. Mobbs. I am waiting, Skinner."

"Yes, sir," muttered Skinner, with white lips. "I—I confess, sir. I—I'm sorry. I made a bet with Ponsonby."

"Ponsonby would certainly do nothing of the kind," remarked Mr. Mobbs. "I refuse to give that statement the slightest credence."

"Kindly give me the particulars, Skinner," said the Head, ignoring Mr. Mobbs's interjection.

Skinner, with hanging head, faltered out the miserable story. The Head's keen eyes were on his face, and Mr. Mobbs, in spite of his determination not to believe a word of it, remained silent, with a rather curious expression upon his face.

"A disgraceful story!" commented the Head. "Mr. Mobbs, you have very properly requested me to take account of this boy's conduct. May I inquire what steps are to be taken with regard to Ponsonby and Spencer?"

Mr. Mobbs knitted his brows.

"None whatever, sir," he said coldly. "Not a single statement that Skinner has made would meet with the slightest credence at Highcliffe. Spencer, a Sixth Form prefect, certainly would not have acted in such a manner, and I shall not even insult him by a question on the subject. Ponsonby is in my own Form, and I have the highest opinion of him, and I will defend him, sir, anywhere, against slanders from Greyfriars persons."

"I believe every word Skinner has uttered, Mr. Mobbs. It is perfectly plain to me that he has told the truth!" said the Head sternly.

"Then I beg to differ, sir!" said Mr. Mobbs, with a sniff.

"I am prepared to meet Dr. Voysey, and institute a joint inquiry into the whole affair, Mr. Mobbs."

"Dr. Voysey would certainly refuse to assent to anything of the kind. His opinion is exactly mine. This boy—"

"As Dr. Voysey has apparently sent you here, sir, as his envoy, I am bound to accept your statement. Since the delinquents at Highcliffe are not to be dealt with, I decline to permit any interference, on your part, with this boy, who belongs to Greyfriars," said the Head warmly. "I shall deal with him myself, as I think fit."

"I demand—"

"This is not a place for you to make demands, Mr. Mobbs." The Head touched the bell. "Trotter, kindly show Mr. Mobbs out."

"Yessir, this way, sir."

"Dr. Locke—" began Mr. Mobbs.

"Good-evening, sir!"

"More will be heard of this, sir!"

"Very good. You are aware upon

what terms I am prepared to pursue the matter. Good-evening!"

Mr. Mobbs sniffed, and flung out of the study. From Highcliffe, at least, no more was likely to be heard of it. Mr. Mobbs had too many uneasy doubts in his own breast as to the amount of truth there might be in Skinner's story.

Skinner stood before his headmaster, not daring to raise his eyes, when the Highcliffe gentleman was gone.

There was a brief silence.

Skinner waited for the thunderbolt. He wondered dizzily whether it was to be a flogging or the "sack."

But when the Head spoke at last his voice was not angry.

"Skinner," he said quietly, "you have done very wrong. You are aware of that. I hope and believe, Skinner, that you are sorry for what you have done."

"Indeed I am, sir!" gasped Skinner.

"You have plunged into disreputable pursuits," said the Head. "But from what has resulted I think you may draw a lesson, Skinner, of more service to you than any punishment I could inflict. You have lost your money in an attempt

to win another boy's money, and you have placed temptation in the way of a wretched boy who was too weak to resist it. Spencer has acted basely, and you are partly the cause of his fall, Skinner. That should be upon your conscience. You are to blame, but no more than others, who, it appears, are to escape punishment. For this reason, Skinner, and others, I prefer to make an appeal to your conscience."

"Oh, sir!" gasped Skinner.

"You have incurred a serious loss, you have caused dishonesty in another, at least, in part. You must surely see, Skinner, that conduct such as yours, to put it on the lowest ground, does not pay. The lesson should not be lost upon you. I appeal to you, Skinner, to think this matter over very seriously, and to resolve never again to risk your future, and stain your honour, in a miserable attempt at illicit gain."

Skinner listened in wonder. The kindness of the Head's tone touched even his hard heart, and his eyelashes were glistening.

"Oh, sir," he faltered, "I—I'm sorry."

"I—I know I've been a cad! If you'll forgive me this once, sir, I'll try to do better—I will really, sir!"

"I shall trust you, Skinner," said the Head, quietly and gravely. "It is understood, of course, that the matter ends here! You will not visit Highcliffe again. You may go, Skinner."

And Skinner went.

There was a strange expression on his face as he came down the passage and met the Famous Five at the corner.

"Well?" said Wharton quietly.

"The Head's a brick," said Skinner. "I—I don't deserve it, but—but he's only spoken to me, instead of—I—I say, Wharton, you mayn't believe me, but—but I'm going to chuck it—I'll never play the fool again! I can tell you, the Head's a real brick!"

And there was no doubt that Skinner meant it, and Harry Wharton & Co. could only hope that it would last.

(Don't miss "STANDING BY SNOOP!"—next Monday's grand complete story of Harry Wharton & Co., by FRANK RICHARDS.)



Goggs Grammarian

By Richard Randolph

SYNOPSIS.

Four new boys come to Rylcombe Grammar School from Franklingham, which has been burned down. Goggs, the real leader of the four, ventriloquist, ju-jitsu expert, and all-round sportsman, looks particularly simple, and has before this played upon that simplicity to take in others. Blount, Trickett, and Waters, his chums, agree to help him in spoofing the Rylcombe fellows; and the campaign begins when Gordon Gay, Frank Monk, and the two Woottons meet the new boys at the station. On the way to the school Goggs mystifies these four by his ventriloquism.

(Now read on.)

Interviewing the Head.

TADPOLE was very simple and good-natured. But he would argue the hind leg off a donkey, as his Form-fellows put it; and he had a rooted conviction that he was a really great artist.

Perhaps the Rylcombe juniors were not good judges, but they could never see any merit in Tadpole's sketches.

Tadpole, looking at Goggs, thought that at last he had found a fellow with whom he could be really chummy. He did not think himself a fool. In that he may have been wrong. But he did not think Goggs a fool either. And in that he was most certainly right.

He sidled up to Goggs when dinner was over and the whole school had trooped out of the dining-hall.

"Allow me to introduce myself!" he said affably. "My name is Tadpole—Horace Tadpole. I think that you and I may have something in common."

"My name is Goggs—Johnny Goggs," said the ex-Franklinghamian, "and I should think we ought to have."

"Do you sketch or paint?" inquired Tadpole eagerly.

Goggs shook his head.

"I have drawn corks—and inferences," he

said. "Farther than that I am afraid that my artistic education has been shamefully neglected."

"Never mind. I will teach you," replied Tadpole, seizing his arm. "I am sure that you have latent artistic ability. Your countenance is most distinctly artistic."

Perhaps it was, though hardly in the way Tadpole meant.

"Here, Taddy, what are you doing with Goggs?" demanded Frank Monk.

"I am making his acquaintance, my dear Monk. I was just about to ask him whether he cared to share my study."

"There would be three freaks together then, and no error!" said Wootton minor.

"Taddy and Weird and Goggles! Oh, my hat! What a trio!" chuckled his brother.

"I consider Tadpole a much more agreeable person than you, Wooden!" said Goggs primly. "I fear that Joy misled me as to the character of the inhabitants of the Never, Never Land. He said that they never do what they ought not to do. Now, my dear grandmother always says that we ought not to hurt one another's feelings; and you hurt my feelings extremely by your unkind remarks."

"Boo-hoo!" said Wootton major. "You make me weep, Goggles. I wouldn't hurt your feelings for—for—for a monkey-nut!"

"And yet you must be very fond of monkey-nuts, I should imagine," said Goggs simply.

"Look here—"

"Oh, come off it, Jack! I've got to take these new chaps to the Head and Adams," said Gordon Gay. "Adams will fix up about the studies, of course. Do you really want to pig in with Taddy and our mad poet, Goggs?"

"If Blount does not mind," replied Goggs meekly.

But it seemed that Blount did mind.

"Can't he did, old chump," he said. "We've got to keep together. You seem to forget that you're in my charge."

"Oh, yes! There was something said about your acting as my keeper, was there not,

Bagshaw?" answered Goggs. "I had forgotten that."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Sure, an' doesn't he look as if he needed a keeper?" chortled Micky O'Donnell.

"Indeed, and he does that, whatever!" said his chum David Morgan.

"Humph! I'm thinking I wouldn't care to be the keeper of him!" said Donald Donaldson, the third member of the Triple Alliance, which inhabited No. 2 of the Fourth Form studies.

"He ees vrainment a foonyay—how you say hees name?" said Mont Blanc, the French junior.

"Come along!" snapped Gay. "And if you could look just a little bit less like a loony, Goggs, the old man might get a better notion of you!"

Which was true, though perhaps hardly as Gay meant it. If Dr. Monk got the notion that Johnny Goggs was in the very least "loony," he would be right off the mark.

"As for Adams," observed Frank Monk, "it's no use sharpening yourself up for him. He'll be seeing you every day in Form."

"Nice for Adams!" sneered Carker.

But Goggs paid no heed to any of them. For all that his face expressed he might not have heard them.

Gordon Gay led the way first to the Head's study.

"Come in!" sounded from within in reply to his modest tap upon the door.

Gay walked in, followed by the four new boys.

Goggs was last of the four.

"The new fellows, sir," said Gay. "Blount—Trickett—Waters—Goggs."

"Thank you, Gay! You may go," said Dr. Monk.

Gay withdrew. The door had not closed upon him before Goggs had whipped off his disfiguring glasses and thrust them into a pocket.

Even as he did so a change came over his face. Nothing could ever make Johnny Goggs handsome; Nature had seen to that.

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But he looked bright and intelligent enough now. All the vacuity of expression had gone; and as Dr. Monk scanned the faces of the four boys who had been placed under his charge for an indefinite period, through his old friendship with Mr. Hayter, who had been their Housemaster at Franklingham, the most noticeable feature of any one of them seemed to him the clear blue eyes of Johnny Goggs. Blount was the best-looking of the four; Trickett, smiling and curly-headed, looked the good-tempered, fun-loving youngster he was; there was nothing to cavi at in the appearance of Waters; but it was Goggs who struck the Head of Rylcombe as the outstanding personality of the quartet.

Dr. Monk rose from his armchair and stretched out his hand over the table. Each junior in turn shook hands with him gravely.

"I trust you will be happy here, my boys," the Head said kindly. "I think you will. I know Franklingham, and conditions here do not differ greatly from those obtaining there. I have, on the whole, a very good report of all of you from Mr. Hayter. I gather that you are not—ahem!—precisely angels; but, having been a boy myself, and having had to do with boys for many years past, I am resigned to a standard of conduct short of the angelic. None of you has any black mark against him at Franklingham, and I feel sure that none of you will disgrace Franklingham here. I hope to see you doing credit to both schools."

He paused. The four did their best to look as they felt they ought to look, an effort which made three of them distinctly self-conscious. The one whom it did not thus affect was Goggs.

They felt that they were going to like the Head. He was a man, anyway. Lots of masters fail to realise it; but the first thing that counts with the average healthy-minded boy is that a master should be a man. Perhaps the second is that he should not have forgotten that he was once a boy.

"Goggs, Mr. Hayter writes in very high praise of your behaviour on the night of the fire. He says that all four of you bore yourselves manfully and well, and that Blount helped you in one gallant rescue. But he singles you out for special mention."

"That's quite right, sir!" said Rags eagerly. "Nobody who saw it is going to forget how Goggs behaved!"

"Rather not!" chimed in Tricks.

"I should jo—I should say not!" said Wagtail.

Goggs said nothing; but he looked neither swanky nor silly.

"You will all be in the Fourth," went on the Head. "That is already arranged. You shared a study at Franklingham, I gather?"

"Yes, sir," replied Goggs.

"Our studies here are a distinctly tight fit for four; but I presume you would rather stick together?"

"Oh, yes, sir!" said Goggs.

Gordon Gay & Co. would have been surprised to hear Goggs acting as spokesman. But Goggs' chums were used to it.

"Very well! Kindly tell Mr. Adams that you have my sanction to such an arrangement, if there is an empty study available, or if matters can be fixed up without causing annoyance to others. I have no more to say. You are not in need of any such advice as boys fresh to the pitfalls of school life need. You already know what life in such a place as this is. Take away from here when you go as clean records as you have brought with you, and both your parents or guardians and myself will be satisfied, I am sure."

They bowed, Goggs in much better form than the other three, for being polite was never any trouble to Goggs, and filed out.

As they went Goggs slipped on his glasses again, and the expression of almost utter vacuity once more masked the intelligence of his face.

The Simplicity of Goggs.

THE four looked round as they came out of the Head's study.

Gordon Gay had disappeared, and they saw no one to direct them to the study of Mr. Adams, whom they were expected to visit next.

"We can go back," said Goggs.

"That chap Gay ought to have waited for us!" grumbled Waters.

"Rats! We aren't all supposed to need keepers—only the Goggs-bird!" said Blount.

"And you are really such a very kind and

considerate keeper, my dear Ragshaw, that I do not in the least mind," remarked Goggs, in the high, thin voice that went with his silliest look.

There came a sound like a half-suppressed snigger.

"What—?"

Before Wagtail could get out another syllable Goggs had clutched his arm.

"What is the cause of your risibility, my dear Trickett?" he asked, in tones loud enough to be heard some yards away.

"My—er—whichever?" returned Tricks, grinning.

All four had spotted something; and the other three understood quite well that Goggs' game was not to let on that they had spotted it.

They were just nearing the green-baize door which shut off the Head's private domain from the school part of the big building. On either side of this door was an alcove, and in each of these overcoats and mackintoshes hung.

It was just the sort of place which fellows willing to take a risk might choose for an ambush; and it was far enough from the Head's study to make the risk not too great.

The four, all on the alert, did not fail to see the rope stretched across the floor. They knew what would happen when they reached it—or, rather, what was expected to happen.

It would be pulled up suddenly; and the programme was that they should trip over it, barge into the door, and go floundering into the passage beyond in a heap.

But programmes of that kind depend upon the intended victims as much as upon those who have schemed their downfall. Was it not the Psalmist who said, "In vain is the snare spread in the sight of the bird"? And Goggs & Co. were too much in the way of being old birds to be caught readily with chaff.

The passage was wide enough to admit of their going four abreast. But they were too wide to approach that door thus.

Waters fell behind Goggs, Trickett behind Blount.

Goggs and Waters kept close to the right-hand side, Blount and Trickett kept close to the left.

Goggs was the only one of the four who had noted and remembered those two alcoves. The disfiguring glasses did not prevent Goggs from noticing things.

But the other three were quite well used to following his lead unquestioningly. A hint was enough for them.

No words were needed to prepare them now. As the rope swung suddenly up all four swerved aside and fell upon the enemy in ambush.

"Yow!"

It was Larking who gave vent to that ejaculation as Bags and Tricks dragged him out.

He came almost without a struggle. There were four hands upon him, and he knew himself overmatched.

But it was otherwise on the other side of the passage.

Snipe and Waters rolled on the floor together, struggling frantically.

Carpenter struck hard at Goggs.

What followed Carpenter put down to an accident. But, somehow, his blow quite failed to get home, and he found himself on his back on the linoleum, with Goggs sitting on his chest. He was conscious, too, of pain in two distinct places, almost as though Goggs had done something rapid and effective to bring him to ground.

Carpenter may have heard of ju-jitsu, but his knowledge of it went no farther than a cognisance of its existence. Now, Johnny Goggs knew quite a lot more than that about it.

But how should Carpenter suspect? Even as Goggs sat on his fallen enemy's chest there was upon the face of Goggs a look of surprise, almost of bewilderment, that seemed to ask how on earth he had come there, and what on earth he was to do now that he found himself there. Carpenter did not look a bit more amazed than Goggs, and Carpenter was sufficiently amazed, and showed it.

"How dare you! Come here at once!" sounded a voice that seemed to come from farther along the passage.

Larking groaned aloud.

"The Head!" he said dejectedly.

"It certainly sounded like our revered preceptor!" bleated Goggs.

"Gerroff my chest!" gasped Carpenter.

"As you are to go to Dr. Monk, I suppose that it will be necessary for me to do that," replied Goggs, looking down at the flushed face

of his fallen foe with a sad and mild expression. "But—Ragshaw, my dear fellow, do you think it is safe for me to arise? This person—to whom I have not even been introduced—looks so excessively ferocious that I fear he may use violence if I remove my weight."

"He'll have to make it 'Pax,'" said Blount, grinning. "Now, then, you bouncers, is it 'Pax'?"

"You think we can trust them after so wanton and unprovoked a trick as this, my dear Ragshaw?"

"They've got to go to the Head, you know, old ass. I don't think they will want to play any more tricks before they see him; and afterwards—well, I should say he's as hefty with a cane as most men of his age."

Snipe wriggled, Carpenter grunted, and Larking cursed under his breath.

"You are an exceedingly ill-behaved person!" said Goggs to Carpenter. "If I felt that I were sufficiently your superior in physical strength I should smack you hard. Why, we might have fallen over that rope!"

"That, Goggles, my son, was the kind idea these bouncers had!" said Blount, grinning.

"Do you really think so, Bagshaw? I should wish to think more charitably of my new schoolfellows; but I bow to your superior knowledge of wickedness. If they were merely careless, their conduct was to be reprehended; but if they acted out of malice—well, all that can be said is that the respected Dr. Monk is the proper person to deal with them."

"Is it 'Pax'?" asked Blount.

The trio growled that it was. They were out of conceit with their genial dodge for making the new fellows feel quite at home at Rylcombe. They even began to have dim suspicions whether some of them needed to be made to feel at home.

But to no one of the three did it occur to think that Goggs was other than the simpleton he seemed.

The four new boys passed through the green-baize door.

The three plotters looked at one another.

"Are we going to the Head?" asked Larking.

"There'll be the merry dickens of a row if we don't!" bubbled Snipe, always weak-kneed.

"I'm game to risk not going," said Carpenter, inclined to be reckless at times.

"That's the best thing," said Larking. "After all, I don't believe we were twiggled. And if he asks any questions about it later we needn't give ourselves away."

"That soft ass Goggs will give us away fast enough!" objected Snipe.

"The Head won't ask them. The old boy never does that sort of thing," answered Carpenter confidently.

"He won't wait to be asked!" whined Snipe.

"Oh, you're a dashed funk!" said Larking roughly. "I should say go and give yourself up, only it would be giving us away. So, as we are two to one, you'll have to risk it, whether you like it or not; and if old Monkey comes down on us you can wriggle out of it by any hole you see."

"We'll make those new rotters sit up for this!" said Snipe vengefully.

"I've nothing against the other three—nothing much, anyway," said Carpenter. "But I'll make that tame lunatic of theirs remember me, you bet!"

Snipe shivered as they passed through the doorway and the door closed noiselessly behind them. He expected to hear the Head's stern voice calling them back.

But it did not call them back—for the simple reason that it was the simple Goggs who had called to them earlier. Dr. Monk knew nothing about it, and Snipe's fears were wasted.

In the corridor beyond the door Goggs & Co. had found Gay, and he took them to Mr. Adams. Again Goggs came in the rear. Again Gordon Gay was told he might go after he had introduced the quartet.

This time Goggs did not take off his glasses. He proposed to wear them in Form for the present, and it was as well that the Form-master should not see him without them.

But he took off the appearance of imbecility; and Mr. Adams merely saw in him a plain fellow, with a face by no means unpleasant and quite intelligent.

"Study No. 3 is vacant," said the Form-master. "It is not a large room; but it is scarcely as small as some of the studies, and you should all be able to squeeze in. That is, of course, unless—"

"Oh, we would much rather stay together, if you don't mind, sir!" said Goggs, as he paused.

"Very well. Gay will tell you anything you need to know as to the hours, and that kind

of thing. Oh, there is the matter of dormitory! I have consulted the House-dame, and she tells me that the only dormitory in which there are four empty beds is No.—er—let me see: I have a note of it here—No. 29. Our dormitories here are smaller than you have been accustomed to at Frankingham, probably; none of them have more than ten beds. There are nine in No. 29, and at present only five are occupied—by Carpenter, Snipe, Larking, Tadpole, and Weird. You may have met some of these boys already?"

"Tadpole has shown himself friendly, sir," said Goggs, in his precise way.

The master shot a quick glance at him.

"Ah!" he said drily. "Well, there is no harm in Tadpole, though he is scarcely a normal boy. You may go."

They went.

"Weren't Carpenter and the other two the three pretty beauties who laid that trap for us?" asked Tricks.

"I believe so," replied Goggs.

"Why didn't you tell Adams that they also wanted to be friendly?" inquired Bags, grinning.

"Because I am really not clear that they had any such intention, my dear Bagshaw. In fact, I was inclined to suspect that they had views of a precisely opposite character."

"Good old Goggles!" cried Wagtail, slapping him on the back. "Keep on keeping on after that fashion and you'll take them all in! I rather fancy, you fellows, that we shall have some fun with these Rylcombe sharps before we have done with them!"

"What about your dear grandmother, Goggles?" asked Bags.

"I shall write to her to-day. Of course, you will not think of mentioning the circumstance to anyone, Bagshaw?"

"Oh, of course not! We'll keep it as a pleasant surprise. You will also keep dark about it, old gun?"

"I shall merely let it be known to a few fellows whom, in the simplicity of my heart, I feel that I can trust absolutely," Goggs said.

"There's not a fat lot in it!" objected Wagtail. "We know that you haven't a granny, so she can't come."

"I have no grandmother now, it is true," said Goggs. "I do not weep to relate that sad fact, for both my dear grandmothers left this mortal vale before I was born."

Then he dropped suddenly into ordinary schoolboy phraseology.

"But what will you bet the old geezer doesn't turn up, Wagtail?" he said.

Study No. 2.

"WELL, it might be worse," remarked Bags, looking round him in Study No. 3 on the Fourth Form passage.

"And it might be better," said Wagtail, rather turning up his nose.

"It's as good as the den we had in the old show," observed Tricks.

"Better," said Goggs.

"How do you make that out?" demanded Wagtail, always the most disposed to grumbling of the four.

"I like the window better," Goggs answered.

"Can't see why. There isn't half so good a view."

"No, my dear Waters. But if you will look out you may perceive that there is quite easy communication with other study windows, by means of that broad string-course of masonry and the ivy that clusters so poetically on the ancient wall."

"Well, duffer, if you want to go to the other studies, there's the door, isn't there? I don't expect we shall want to much; far as I can see, we'd do best to keep ourselves pretty much to ourselves here. I don't care a lot for either the Gay crowd or the Carpenter gang myself."

"Rats! Gay and his crew are all right; not so sure about the others," said Bags. "It's you who are the duffer, Wagtail; you don't tumble to what the Johnny-bird is getting at."

"Why doesn't the ass talk plain English, then?" growled Waters.

"Goggles means that there may be times when we shall want to get at the other studies without the merchants in them knowing we're doing it," said Tricks.

"Oh, I see! Yes, that's all right! We shall be up against the whole crowd, of course."

"Wagtail's ready for war to the knife with all Rylcombe!" said Tricks, grinning cheerily.

"Of course I am. So are we all, aren't we?"

"On the contrary, Waters, my friend, I desire nothing but peace and loving-kindness," said Goggs solemnly.

"You look like it, don't you?"

"Yes, I really think that, on the whole, I do look like it. Can you imagine anyone with a more entirely pacific appearance than is mine?"

"You look as if you couldn't say 'Bo!' to a chicken, old top. But looks aren't everything!"

"How extremely fortunate for me, my dear Waters!"

Gordon Gay and Frank Monk grinned in at the door at that moment.

"You fellows thinking about furniture?" asked Gay.

"Well, it looks as if it could do with a bit," answered Bags, glancing round No. 3.

"That's all right. Come along, and have a look over the spare stuff that's stored away. You can choose anything you like out of that—in reason, of course."

"And they can't go beyond reason with what's there, Gordon, old gun," said Frank Monk. "If they took the whole blessed shoot this study wouldn't exactly be a place of luxury."

"I suppose we're allowed to add anything we like to the sticks that we take from store?" said Tricks.

"Oh, yes; that will be all serene! No objection to Brussels carpets—"

"Or brussels sprouts!" put in Gay.

"I do not think I should regard brussels sprouts as furniture," said Goggs mildly. "I respect them as a comestible—"

"A whiche?" inquired Frank Monk.

"Not a whiche—a comestible—something to eat, that is."

"Oh! Ah! Yes. I'd forgotten that. People do eat 'em sometimes," said Gay. "Carrots, too. Is he ever stubborn, Blount?"

"Who—Goggles? Well, I have known the image to want his own way when it wasn't exactly good for him."

"Ever tried dangling a carrot in front of his nose? Works like a charm, they say."

"Gay means you are a bit of an ass, Goggles," interpreted Wagtail.

"I am sure that he would never be so unkind as to suggest that," purred Goggs, regarding the Australian junior almost with affection. "I intend being very friendly with Gay—I think he has such a nice, plain, harmless face."

"Oh, do you?" snapped Gordon Gay.

"Truly, my dear fellow! I never pay empty compliments, so that there is no need to discount anything pleasant I say about you. Do you think the Head would mind if I asked my grandmother to bring some antimacassars with her? A place always seems to me such a wilderness without antimacassars, you know."

"Is she coming to see you?" asked Monk.

"I trust that she is coming to live here, my dear Monkey! How nice it will be, Bagshaw, to find the dear old lady sitting at the window with her knitting when we come in from playing marbles or 'I spy'!"

"Marbles!" groaned Gay.

"I spy!" Oh, my only Sunday hat!" murmured Monk.

"His granny?"

"Sitting at the window with her knitting?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Goggs frowned, and clenched his hands. In doing that he put the thumb of each between the first and the second finger.

"I detest brawling; but if you throw contempt upon my respected grandmother I shall be reluctantly compelled to biff you one—one each, that is!" he said, in a voice that seemed trembling with emotion. "I think 'biff' is the correct word, is it not, my dear Bagshaw?"

"With your fists like that?" chorled Gay. Goggs held up his fists.

"What is wrong with them?" he asked simply.

"You silly ass! Look at the thumbs!"

"Is that all? I put them so in order that when I biff anyone it may really hurt."

"It might—if you got the chap in the eye. But if you landed him where he was hard, you'd just sprain your silly thumb!"

"Do you think so, Joy? Perhaps, after all, slapping would be best. But I imagined that this would hurt my victim more. I do not, of course, desire to hurt myself."

"Ha, ha, ha! Have you had many victims, Goggles?" asked Monk.

"Not a large number. To be candid, hardly any at present. Everyone at Frankingham was so very kind. But here, Monkey, my dear fel—"

"Monk, if you please!"

"If you please, Monkey, is a boy in the Fourth, quite a weak boy, and rather backward in—er—biffing, allowed to fight with those in the Second or Third? I think the

Second would be best. Then one might work upwards, so to speak."

"Oh, you're an ass!" snapped Monk. "I don't suppose anyone will be wanting anything quite so soft as you are to punch. If they do, there are pillows about, though our pillows aren't anywhere near your mark for softness, by Jove! You fellows coming along to look after some sticks?"

"Too late now," said Gordon Gay, with a glance at his watch. "Bell for classes will go in about half a jiffy. Leave it till then."

They went down, and on the way Goggs informed Gay that he really liked him much better than Monk. He was sure that Gay's apparently unkind remarks were meant playfully, whereas when Monk called him an ass he had quite a strong suspicion that Monk really meant it.

And Gay assured him that he thought it extremely likely.

Everyone was on the watch during the afternoon's work for Goggs to display himself as the semi-imbecile that everybody but his chums fancied him to be.

But he disappointed them all. Without in the least giving away the fact that his brains were the best there, he got through his lessons in a manner that satisfied Mr. Adams.

Gay, good-naturedly ready to be of help to them, without prejudice to anything in the way of japing that he might choose to attempt in the future, sought them out again after classes were over, and took them to the store-room. Frank Monk did not accompany them; and the Woottons merely sniffed when Gay asked them if they were coming along.

The furniture available consisted of only the absolutely necessary articles, and naturally of such as had been again and again discarded by previous choosers when a study had to be fitted out. When anything at all desirable was returned to stock it was at once exchanged for stuff less to be desired in some study.

But they secured a serviceable table, and four more or less usable chairs. One of them had only three legs; but Bags said that would do for Goggles, and Goggles acquiesced without a murmur.

"We shall want five, however, my dear Bagshaw," he said.

"Whaffor, chump?"

"There is dear granny, you know."

"Oh, yes, there's dear granny, of course! See anything here likely to suit dear granny, Tricks?"

"There's one with only two legs," replied Trickett. "Gran's a bit of an acrobat—isn't she, Goggles?"

"Hardly an acrobat, my dear fellow. She certainly has a wonderful fund of youthful high spirits for one of her advanced age. But to speak of her as being an acrobat is somewhat wanting in respect. And I hope to be able to induce her to feel as a grandmother towards my dear friends as well as towards me. On the whole, I think the best thing I can do will be to buy her a nice wicker-chair, and a cushion—no, two cushions. I hope she will not forget to bring my work-basket along. Then I can sit and keep her company while you fellows bat and bowl, and kick goals and play marbles, and 'Here I come gathering nuts and may.' By the way, has it ever struck you, my dear Joy, that gathering nuts and may is rather a confused idea? May is in flower in June—hardly after that—while there are no nuts until—"

"My hat! Does it ever run down?" asked Gordon Gay, gazing at Goggs in amazement.

Gay was not, as a rule, a fellow easy to take in. But Goggs had taken him in most completely.

Goggs seemed so utterly simple and so much in earnest in everything he said. And his three chums did not snigger as if he were joking. They seemed to take his weird talk as a matter of course.

"I think you are very rude, Joy!" said Goggs, with an air of being mildly offended.

He stalked ahead of them on the way back to No. 3, carrying the three-legged chair. Gordon Gay seized the chance to get a word with Bags.

"Can he help it?" he asked.

"What, Goggles? Doesn't look as if he could, does it?" growled Blount.

"Seems to me sheer cruelty to send such a silly ass here!"

"Well, he didn't take any harm at Frankingham, and we'll see that he doesn't take much here, Gay!"

"Do you chaps really cotton to him?"

"Rather! We fairly love the old bird! I don't mind owning that."

"Well, there's no accounting for tastes. He'd jolly soon pall on me."

"I doubt it," said Blount drily.

He was thinking of the time when Rylcombe should come to know Goggs as Franklingham and Highcliffe had known him.

Bags had no doubt at all about what Gordon Gay's sentiments would be then. For he had no doubt about Gordon Gay. This was a fellow of the right sort, and the right sort always liked Johnny Goggs—when the right sort knew him.

Meanwhile, Gay was worth taking in. And he was being taken in, with a vengeance!

"Does he really think his grandmother will come?" he asked.

"Eh? Yes, of course! She will, too, you bet!"

"Well, she can't stay."

"I suppose not. But she'll come, all serene. I'd put my last bob on that."

Gay gave it up. Bags and the other two puzled him almost as much as Goggs. He began to wonder whether Goggs had really been driven silly by his experiences during the fire. If so, it would only be decent to go easy with him. But the effects of funk could hardly have made him what he was. He must have been a ninny before that.

He little guessed that the very last thing Goggs wanted was that anyone should go easy with him.

One warning he gave, prompted thereto by the doubts he felt.

"Better look out in your dorm, Blount," he said. "Taddy and Weird are harmless enough, though nearly as silly as your tame sheep. And Carpenter isn't really so bad, except for the company he keeps. But Larking's rather a vicious beast, and Snipe is about as rank an outsider as you could find anywhere."

"Thanks, old chap!" replied Bags.

He said no more than that, but it was enough. That warning had been given and received in the right spirit.

Larking & Co. Again.

"DON'T let's ask anyone in," said Wagtail. "It would be a giddy, silly thing to be getting chummy with them too soon. Let's regard them as the enemy till Goggles has got all the change out of them."

The question was that of tea. Hampers had been opened, and the result was a spread to which half the Form might have been invited.

"I have no objection to Joy," said Goggs primly. "He is not really bad at heart, although somewhat rough in manner. But Monkey and the two Woodens, as well as the three unfriendly individuals whom we encountered in the passage, are quite impossible persons, in my opinion."

"Ass! You needn't keep up that sort of thing when we are alone."

"I fail to understand you, my dear Waters. To what do you refer?"

"Your silly talk, chump!"

"But I am talking exactly as I habitually talk, Waters."

"It's all serene. He'd best keep it up, and he can do it on his head. It isn't so far off his usual tripe," Bags said. "If anyone heard him talking schoolboy English they'd smell a mice in a twink."

"Well, what about the grub?" asked Trickett.

"There is Tadpole. I think I could find in Tadpole a congenial spirit," murmured Goggs. "Shall we ask Tadpole to tea, my dear friends?"

"One lunatic's enough!" snapped Wagtail.

"But I thought you might desire company of your own kind, my dear Waters," sighed Goggs.

"Oh, dry up! Let's start!"

"We haven't a kettle or a teapot," remarked Tricks.

The study was still far from being furnished. Some of the things needed could wait until the next day, or longer; but a kettle, a teapot, and cups and plates and knives and forks were immediate necessities.

"Might ask Tadpole and the other potty idiot—what's his silly name?" said Bags. "They don't matter. No fun in pulling Tadpole's leg; too dead easy."

"I will repair to their study and give them the invitation, with a suggestion that such utensils as we require would be in the nature of a welcome loan," said Goggs.

And he went.

"Does he know where to find 'em?" asked Waters.

"Oh, teach his grandmother to suck eggs!" growled Bags. "What doesn't he know that's worth knowing?"

"I don't think that chap Tadpole's worth knowing!" retorted Waters.

"When you think one thing and Goggles thinks another, which is likely to be right?" demanded Bags.

"Goggs—sometimes," replied Wagtail.

"What do you think, Tricks?" Blount asked.

"Goggs—every time!" answered Trickett readily.

"And what about you chaps?" said Wagtail warmly.

"Oh, we know better than you do!"

"You think you do, anyway!"

"But not so well as Goggles."

"Oh, well, if you put it like that! I know Goggles has more brains than all the rest of us together. Hallo! What's that row?"

The sound of a heavy fall had come from the passage. It was followed by a howl.

The three rushed out.

Goggs stood in the middle of the passage. His hands were full of cups and saucers; knives, forks, and spoons protruded from his pockets, and a kettle and a teapot were slung round his neck by footlaces.

He looked as mild and simple and innocent as ever.

Larking, who sprawled on the floor, his face red with wrath, looked anything but mild and simple and innocent.

Yet it was plain that there had been an encounter of some sort between them, and that Larking had not exactly scored.

"Barge the lunatic over!" he howled, just as Goggs' chums rushed out.

It was to Carpenter and Snipe that he addressed this adjuration.

And Carpenter and Snipe might have complied, but for the advent of Bags & Co. They might at least have tried to comply. But Bags & Co. knew that to barge Goggs over, even when his hands were full, was by no means an easy operation.

"What's up?" asked Tricks.

"Better not barge the lunatic over, I fancy," said Bags warningly. "He's our lunatic, and we like him nicely treated, you know."

"What did these rotters do, Goggs?" asked Wagtail wrathfully.

"Those two persons—the one with the nose and the individual whose knees are somewhat too contiguous," said Goggs politely. "did nothing, and we will not hold them to account for what they may have contemplated doing. The extremely unpleasant youth who wished me barged over had the misfortune to catch his foot in mine as we met, and somehow he fell."

"The cad was trying to trip you up when your hands were full, you mean!" snapped Wagtail.

"I have no evidence as to that. He might be able to make out a case against me for having attempted to trip him up," said Goggs coolly.

Larking did not attempt to make out any such case. It would have been just a trifle too thin.

"You chaps leave our Goggles alone!" said Bags. "Accidents are always happening when he gets meddled with."

"I think fortune must favour the weak and humble," remarked Goggs blandly.

"Look here! What did you mean about my knees, you spouting chump?" asked Snipe.

"I am not sure that I recall exactly what I said. If you will repeat my words—"

"Oh, you know well enough! Something about their being contiguous, wasn't it? Means catching. There's nothing catching about my knees!"

"I am glad of that—truly glad," said Goggs blandly. "I should not like to catch it. At the same time I consider that they are catching in one sense. They catch the eye, arrest the attention, if you follow my meaning. But what I said was not 'contagious,' but 'contiguous,' meaning 'near.'"

"Do you mean that I'm knock-kneed, you rotter?" hooted Snipe.

"Oh, come away! What's it matter? You are knock-kneed, anyway," said Larking, who had now risen, with a fiendish scowl on his dark face.

Carpenter sniggered. He was not so bitter against Goggs as the other two, and the reference to his nose had not annoyed him. It was rather a large nose; but Carpenter had always flattered himself that it was an aristocratic and well-shapen one.

The three departed. The four sought the somewhat bare seclusion of Study No. 3.

(To be continued next Monday.)

The Editor's Chat.

For Next Monday:

"STANDING BY SNOOP!"

By Frank Richards.

Sidney James Snoop seemed at one time quite the most hopeless rotter in the Remove. Even Skinner appeared to have greater capacity for good in him, though Skinner gave himself very little chance.

But Snoop has bucked up of late. The things that have happened to his father have made quite a lot of difference to him. That he has not reformed completely is evident from the share he had with Skinner and Stott in the recent Highcliffe trouble. But his heart was not really in that. Next week's story will show what Snoop has really at heart just now—and it is something that may surprise most of you.

He falls under suspicion in this story; and, considering the circumstantial evidence against him, and his past record, no one can say that the suspicion is wholly unfair or unjustified. The general feeling in the Remove is one of grave doubt; but one fellow in the Form stands by the luckless Snoop.

That fellow is Bunter—Wally Bunter, of course, though everyone believes him to be Billy.

In the old days it would have been a matter for amazement to find Bunter standing by anyone down on his luck; and if he had done it his championship would not have counted for much. But already, in spite of all the legacy of debt left him by his cousin, Wally has brought about some changes in the attitude of Greyfriars towards Bunter; and Wally really does help Snoop through his trying time.

FROM AN OLD READER.

From Rock Ferry a correspondent writes:

"Just a few lines from one who has read the MAGNET from 'Bob Cherry's Barring-Out' and the 'Gem' since 'Stage-Struck.' I always look forward to Monday and Wednesday morning. I go out after breakfast and get the Companion Papers. I think your stories are top-hole. I like the present Bunter Change. I have heard people say the MAGNET stories are jolly good, but won't bear reading twice. I don't agree with that at all. I often read them twice. I had nearly a hundred, but have sent most of them to the boys."

Whether the stories will bear re-reading is very much a matter of taste. Some people don't care to read anything a second time; and, of course, much of what is published in weekly papers has but a very brief appeal to one's interest. But I do not think this is true of the best of Mr. Richards' stories. "Bob Cherry's Barring-Out," for instance—I could read that again with pleasure. And the success of the "Penny Popular" shows that there are many others who feel the same.

FOOTBALL NOTICES.

Matches Wanted by:

GWLADYS ROVERS—15.—H. Woods, 45, Gwladys Street, Walton, Liverpool.

HILLSIDE THISTLE—12-13½—8 mile radius.—Joe McConville, 276, Stewart Crescent, Glasgow Road, Wishaw, Lanark.

SMITH & SONS' (M.A.) JUNIORS.—H. Elsdon, 1, Warple Way, Acton, W.

Players Wanted by:

AVONDALE—good goalkeeper and left-back, also three reserves—15-16.—C. Wright, 15, Rowsell Street, Mile End, E. 3.

ST. ELMO—15-17½—cricket and footer.—D. W. Catling, 71, Brudenell Road, Upper Tooting, S.W. 17.

YOUR EDITOR.

In this week's "GEM" is
"BUNTER'S FUND."
A Funny, Long, Complete
Story of Billy Bunter.