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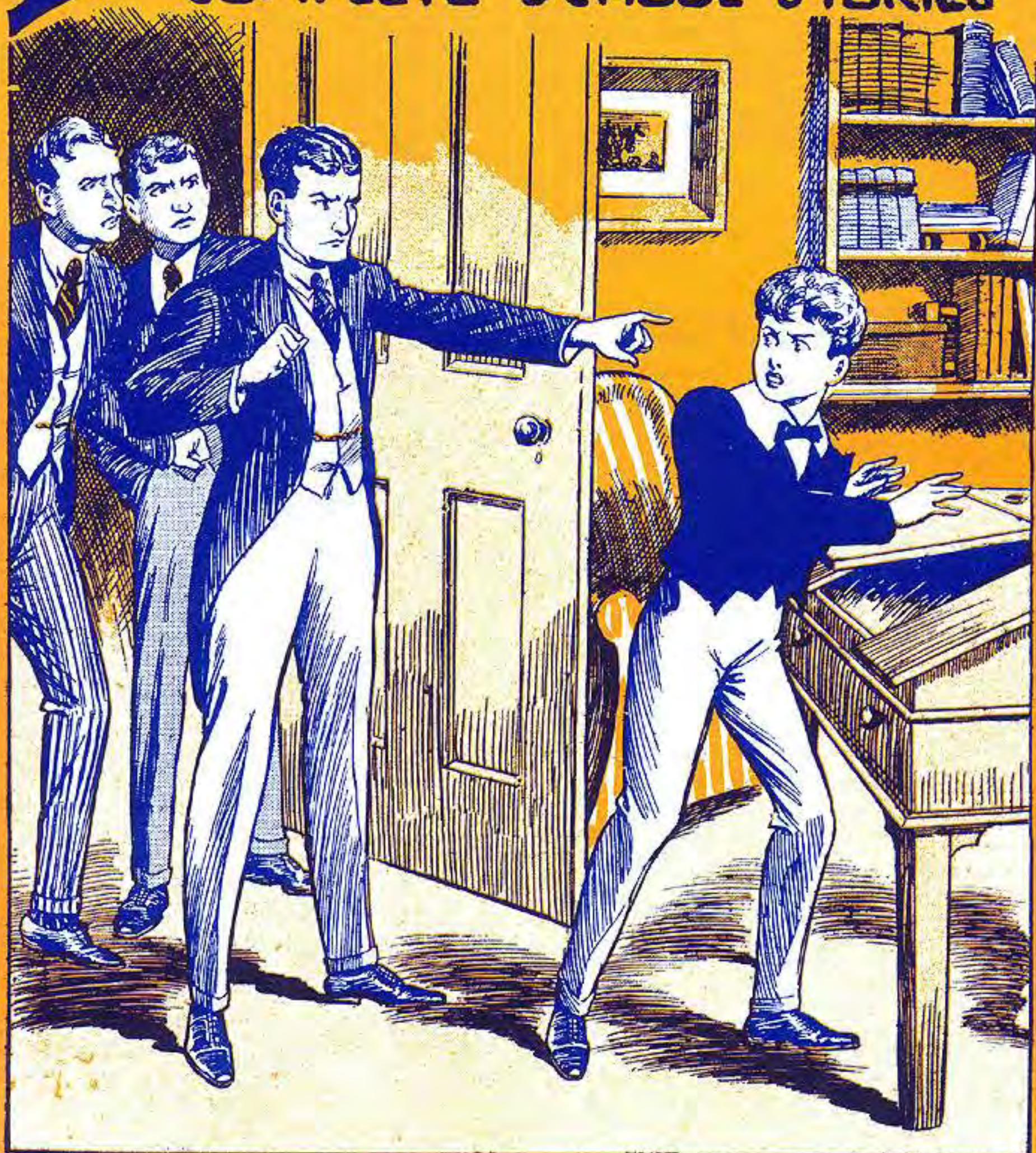
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CAUGHT IN THE ACT!

(A dramatic incident in the long complete school story—"THE PREFECT'S PLOT!"—inside.)

TROUBLE! Gerald Loder would seem to be born to trouble, for he can't run straight for any length of time. But the unpopular prefect has an unhappy knack of dragging other people into his troubles, and this time the unfortunate victim is a boy in the Third Form!



The Prefect's Plot!

By
**FRANK
RICHARDS**

A Magnificent, New, Extra-long Story of Harry Wharton & Co. at Greyfriars, featuring Gerald Loder, the rascally prefect of the Sixth Form.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Bolsover Major is Angry!

"WELL, I'm blowed!" Dicky Nugent of the Second Form at Greyfriars spoke in tones of astonishment and wrath.

He and Tubb of the Third, and a troop of noisy, inky fags, had just come into the Second Form room, laden with kippers, muffins, jam, and other delicacies.

The heroes of the Second and Third had come in for tea looking quite merry and bright, but their expressions changed as Dicky Nugent made a discovery.

The Form-room cupboard door was open, and on a lower shelf was a large box, which apparently had been broken open. On the side of the box was stuck a sheet of impot-paper bearing one cryptic word:

"THANKS!"

"Oh crumbs!" said Tubb. "Was—was the gramophone in that box, young Nugent?"

"Ye-es!" stuttered Dicky in a faint voice.

"And somebody's been in here and boned it!" roared Wingate minor.

"Great Scott!"

George Tubb gave a snort—a most emphatic snort.

"I told you what would happen, young Nugent, if you kept the gramophone in here," he said. "It would have been as safe as houses in our Form-room. But you would have your own obstinate way—and now it's gone!"

"Well, my only Aunt Jane!" gasped Dicky. "Our gramophone gone!"

"Oh crumbs!" said Bolsover minor.

The fags looked quite frantic at the awful discovery.

Dicky Nugent had bought a gramophone the day previous—at least, he had **THE MACKAY LIBRARY—No. 937.**

bartered two cricket-bats, a few pocket-knives, a pair of roller-skates, and a uibless fountain-pen for a decrepit talking-machine unearthed from the mysterious "junk" at the Friardale second-hand stores.

The arrival of the gramophone, complete with six records, had been hailed with delight in the fag domain at Greyfriars. Admittedly, it was a very old gramophone, rusty and badly battered, and the motor made a noise like a lawnmower when it was running, and the records were out of date and very scratchy. But, nevertheless, it was a gramophone, and it brought music and melody of a sort into the Second Form-room, making a change from tin whistles and combs-and-paper.

Tubb & Co. of the Third had wanted to take care of the gramophone, and Dicky Nugent had declined the offer without thanks. But the rival fags had buried the hatchet, so to speak, for the time being, and this afternoon Dicky Nugent & Co. had invited the Third Formers in to tea—the guests standing the kippers.

They had all just been down to Friardale to purchase the kippers—delicacies which, though not recognised as suitable articles of diet by the powers that were at Greyfriars, were dear unto the fags' hearts and palates—and had just come back, looking forward to a musical tea.

And now they found the cupboard door open and the gramophone gone, and no clue remaining, save the mocking word of thanks left by the heartless raider.

"What awful nerve!" hooted Gatty. "Who's got the gramophone? We—we can't—"

"Oooogh! Wow! Oh dear!"

Those plaintive sounds of woe broke in suddenly, and, turning, the fags saw the plump form of Sammy Bunter standing by the fireplace. Sammy had an

anguished expression on his podgy face, and he was clasping a hand tenderly to his ample waistcoat.

"What's the matter with you, Bunter minor?" demanded Dicky. "Have you been scoffing the bloater-paste and made yourself ill?"

"Ow! Nunno!" gasped Sammy. "I say, you chaps, a lot of rotters from the Remove have taken the gramophone! Groogh! Skinner's the ringleader—Yow! I happened to come in here just as they were taking it out. Skinner had the gramophone, and the others knocked me over and trod on me while the beast made off with it. Ow-wow! I'm hurt!"

"My only sainted Aunt Jane!" exclaimed Dicky, clenching his fists. "So our gramophone's in the Remove! What dashed sauce! Come on, kids, we'll give Skinner music! Take your stumps!"

Dicky & Co. and Tubb & Co. grasped cricket-stumps and bats and all other weapons that came to hand and rushed forth on vengeance bent.

They flocked down the Remove passage and then halted.

"Hark!" said Dicky hoarsely.

Scratchy strains of melody were issuing from behind the closed door of Study No. 11, the room occupied by Harold Skinner.

The tune was "The Old Hundredth," and between the scratches and the squeaks a wheezy baritone could be distinguished, although the words were unintelligible.

Dicky Nugent set his teeth hard.

"Oh crumbs!" he gasped. "That's our gramophone playing! The rotters have got it in there! Come on!"

Crash!

The door of Study No. 11, with Dicky's boot behind it, flew open with a resounding crash, and the other fags-poured in.

Yells of alarm and wrath arose at the fags' sudden entry.

There were five Removites in the room—Skinner, Snoop, Stott, Trevor, and Bolsover major. The gramophone was on the table, its battered tin horn turned towards the window. Skinner & Co. jumped up as Dicky and his myrmidons swarmed in.

"Here, what the dickens—Yaroooooooooh!" roared Skinner, as a whirling cricket-stump caught him a terrific clump on his rather prominent nose.

"Oooooooooop!" howled Stott, and Snoop chimed in with a fiendish bellow.

The fags piled on them, fists and stumps whacking out to right and left.

Trevor staggered back, with fags assailing him from either side, whilst Bolsover major was caught in the vortex of the scrum and was whirled off his feet with the swiftness of a hurricane.

Bump!

"Woooooooooop!"

"Go it, kids!" roared Dicky valiantly. "Sock it to the rotters! We'll teach 'em to pinch our gramophone!"

Whack! Biff! Wallop!

"Yoooooh! Yah! Wow! Oooooop! You little rotters! Ow-wow!" howled Bolsover major. "I'll smash you—Yerragh!"

The bully of the Remove exerted all his strength to hurl his assailants from him, but the lusty youngsters who had him in their grip gave him no chance. He was rolled about and sat on and trodden upon, and bumped and biffed, and his head was rubbed in the coal-scuttle.

Tramp, tramp, tramp!

Dicky Nugent & Co., indignant at the liberty that had been taken with their gramophone, proceeded thoroughly to rag the raiders. Skinner & Co. put up a desperate fight, but the odds were overwhelming.

Crash!

The table rocked and the gramophone went over on the floor with a fearful clatter. Dicky let out a whoop of dismay.

"Look out!" he shrieked. "The gramophone's on the floor! Don't tread on it, for goodness' sake!"

"Grooooooh! Yerroooooh! You little hooligans—" moaned Bolsover major, who was having a decidedly rough time of it.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" said Bob Cherry's breezy voice at the door. "Wherefore all this thushness?"

"Oh, my hat!"

Bob was accompanied by Harry Wharton, Frank Nugent, Johnny Bull, and Hurree Singh. The Famous Five gazed into Study No. 11 in great astonishment.

"My hat!" said Nugent. "I thought at first that you were smashing up the happy home, Skinner."

"Looks as though it's pretty well smashed up, anyway!" grinned Johnny Bull.

"The smashupfulness is truly terrific!" murmured Hurree Singh.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Dicky Nugent & Co. and their allies of the Third looked round on the scene of the conflict. They were dusty and dishevelled, and bore many signs of the fray, but they had wreaked their vengeance on the raiders of the gramophone.

Skinner & Co. and Bolsover major were lying on the floor, moaning and struggling.

"Dicky, you little scallywag!" exclaimed Frank Nugent severely. "What's this kid's game?"

"These rotters raided my gramophone from the Form-room!" snorted

Dicky. "We just called for it, that's all!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the Famous Five.

Dicky grabbed the gramophone and Tubb the records, as Bolsover major and Skinner struggled up. The hero of the Second looked grimly at Harry Wharton & Co.

"We're flitting now, and if you chaps interfere we'll pile into you!" he said. "Kim on, kids!"

"Hurrah!"

Harry Wharton & Co. laughingly stepped aside as the fags trooped out of Study No. 11. Doors were opening up and down the Remove passage, and fellows were coming out to ascertain the cause of the disturbance.

Skinner & Co. and Bolsover major and Trevor came dashing furiously out of the study, yelling to the others to hold the fags. Dicky & Co., deeming discretion to be the better part of valour, took to their heels and ran off at top speed, the gramophone now safe in their possession.

"Stop, you little rotters!" shouted Bolsover major, tearing after them. "I'll smash you for this! I'll—Ah! Got you!"

Just as the last of the fag horde was turning the corner, Bolsover gave a desperate spurt, grabbed him, and hauled him back.

There was a sharp cry of pain from the fag as Bolsover shook him and twisted his arm viciously.

"Now, you little rat!" hissed the Remove bully, who was in a royal rage at the rough handling he had received.

"I'll pay you out for—"

"Oh! Don't, Percy, please! You're hurting me! Oh!"

Bolsover started, and his burly face became darker as he recognised the youngster who was struggling in his grip.

It was little Hubert Bolsover of the Third, his minor.

"So you were in this, you little sweep!" grated the bully, giving the fag's arm another tweak.

"Oh! Leggo!" cried Bolsover minor. "I'm sorry, Percy—really I am! Oh! I didn't know you had the gramophone, or I wouldn't have let the others come arter you. Oh! Don't!"

"You lying little whelp!" grated Bolsover angrily. "You knew jolly well where you were coming. You were only too glad of a chance to come 'arter me,' as you express it in your lovely English."

The little Third-Former winced. A taunt from his major cut him more deeply than any physical hurt.

Tubb and Paget, his chums of the Third, and Dicky Nugent & Co., made merry over the peculiar Cockney dialect he had picked up in Angel Alley, the mean slum where he had spent his childhood, and which slipped out when Bolsover minor grew excited. But theirs was purely good-natured chaff. Billy, as Bolsover minor was called, knew that his chums would not hurt his feelings for the world, and he took their remarks quite cheerfully. But with his elder brother it was different. Bolsover of the Remove was half ashamed of his minor, and the knowledge of that cut the little fellow to the very heart.

Lost in childhood, Hubert had been discovered in the underworld of the East End of London—a poor little waif of the streets, selling newspapers for a living. His early life at Greyfriars had been a hard struggle. His brother had resented his coming to the school, had made the fag's life a misery at first, and had it not been for the staunch friendship of Harry Wharton & Co., Billy

would many a time have run away from Greyfriars to escape the sneers and taunts of his major.

It was a strange fact that, despite the cruel treatment he had received at his hands, the little ex-waif loved his bullying brother with a devotion that amounted practically to worship.

Bolsover major had in time come to lose many of his worst traits, and of late had not been so "down" on his minor as he had been at first. But Bolsover, when in a temper, showed the worst side of his temper, and the rough handling he had just received at the hands of the fags had thrown him into an ungovernable fury.

He shook his minor brutally, his face suffused with anger.

"Don't tell lies to me, you little brute!" he snarled. "You thought it a good opportunity to get one back on me, didn't you?"

"No, no, Percy. I ain't told you any lies—'onest I haven't! I didn't know you was in Skinner's room, and I 'aven't done anything to 'urt you! Oh! Oh! Don't, Percy!"

Cuff, cuff, cuff!

The Remove bully's heavy hand struck out brutally at his minor, and the little fag cowered down as best he could, his arms upraised to ward off the vicious blows. But he did not think of hitting back. Bolsover minor's early life had made him as hard as nails, and he was as plucky as a lion. As a "scrapper" he was one of the best among the fags, and was never afraid to tackle anyone, however much bigger than himself. Had it been anyone else cuffing him, the fag would have defended himself valiantly, but nothing would have induced him to hurt his major.

He struggled and tried to get free, but he was powerless in the burly Removite's hands. Bolsover major was still striking the youngster when Harry Wharton stepped up quickly and caught his arm.

"Enough of that, Bolsover!" he rapped sharply. "Let the kid go!"

Bolsover major wheeled round furiously on the Remove captain.

"Mind your own business, Wharton!" he snarled. "I'll do as I like with my own minor."

Wharton cast a compassionate glance at Hubert Bolsover.

The fag's wan face was drawn and white, except for the livid marks left by his brother's hand. There was a suspicious glistening upon his eyelashes, and his little lips were trembling.

"Will you let the kid go, Bolsover?" said Wharton curtly. "He may be your minor, but that's no excuse for bullying him."

"Look at the state I'm in!" roared Bolsover furiously. "Isn't that an excuse? The little hooligan was one of the ringleaders in that attack on me, and—"

"I wasn't, Percy!" cried the fag piteously. "I never saw you till you got up—'onour bright!"

"I'll skin the lying little brai!" said Bolsover between his teeth. "Stand back, Wharton!"

Harry Wharton's eyes gleamed, and he motioned to his chums, who were standing near by.

"You've given the kid enough, Bolsover, whatever he's done!" he exclaimed. "Will you let him go?"

"No!" shouted Bolsover. "I'll lam him all the more! I won't be dictated to by you, Wharton, or anyone else, either! Take that, you little brat—Yaroooooooooh!"

It was Bolsover major's turn to yell, for the Famous Five grabbed him as one man and hurled him back against the wall, where his head struck with a nasty crack.

"Oooooogh! Wow! Yowp!" howled the Remove bully.

"Bump, him!" said Bob Cherry.

"We've got to teach the cad that he can't act the tyrant here!"

"Hear, hear!"

Bump!

Bolsover major fought wildly, but he was whirled over and bumped hard on the linoleum. His minor stood by, looking on with a terrified expression. Harry Wharton turned to him.

"Better cut, young 'un," he said kindly.

"Don't hurt Percy, please, Wharton!" said the fag. "He didn't mean any harm! I—I'm not hurt much!"

Bob Cherry gasped.

"My only hat! The kid's sticking up for Bolsover now!" he exclaimed. "Of all the silly chumps!"

"Yerroooooogh! Lemme go, you rotters! I'll smash you! Oooooop!" gurgled Bolsover.

Bump!

"There!" said Harry Wharton. "That's enough, I think. Perhaps that'll teach Bolsover not to be such a rotten bully!"

The burly Removeite struggled to his feet, his face crimson with rage.

Tubb & Co. and Dicky Nugent & Co. had returned, and were looking on from round the corner. Bolsover minor was about to speak to his brother, but Tubb and Paget grabbed him and pulled him back.

"Tea's ready, kid," said Tubb. "You'll only get another hiding if you stay here. Your major isn't safe in his present mood."

The bully of the Remove clenched his fists and looked bitterly at his minor. He was in a furious rage, but he could see that it was futile for him to attempt further to molest the youngster.

So, with a snarl of anger he strode away, and went into his study, shutting the door with a loud slam.

"Bolsover's in a temper, but he'll get over it," said Harry Wharton evenly. "It was his own fault, for backing up Skinner in raiding the kids' gramophone. Don't worry, kid," he added, turning to the fag; "he'll calm down soon!"

"Thank you, Wharton!" said Bolsover minor. "You're very kind! I—I hope Percy isn't hurt much!"

"He's more wild than hurt, young 'un!" grinned Bob Cherry.

The Famous Five strolled away, and Bolsover minor suffered himself to be led back to the Second Form room by his chums.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Loyal to His Major!

THERE was a smell of cooking in the Second Form room, accompanied by the stench of burning.

Sammy Bunter, Gatty, and Myers had cooked the kippers, and tea was ready.

The fags had prepared their feed earlier than usual, so as to have time to spare for some music and jollification before Mr. Twigg came along to take them for prep.

"These kippers are prime!" said Dicky Nugent appreciatively. "Pile in, kids!"

"What ho!"

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The fags piled in with great good will.

Only Bolsover minor seemed to lag behind. He sat at the festive board with his kipper untouched before him, his brow wrinkled and his eyes fixed upon vacancy. He was brooding hard, and was quite unconscious of the eyes of his chums fixed upon him.

"Billy, you ass!"

Bolsover minor came out of his reverie with a start when Tubb shouted those words in his ear.

"Hallo!" he said. "Ole Twigg hasn't come in yet, has he? It's too early."

"Tea's ready, ass!" exclaimed Paget.

"We've all started."

"Orlright!" said Billy, not appearing to be at all interested.

Tubb snorted.

"You young fathead!" he exclaimed.

"You're mooning over your rotten major! He's been bullying you, and you're upset because he's cross! Oh, I know!"

Bolsover minor crimsoned.

"Silly little chump!" said Dicky Nugent. Dicky was quite a year younger than Bolsover minor, but that made no difference. "Silly little chump! Fancy bothering over a mere major! You never see me bothering over mine!"

"I'm not bothering!"

"You're looking like a giddy boiled owl, anyway!" exclaimed Tubb indignantly. "Why, if I had a major like yours, I'd forget all about him! Anybody would think he was a blessed angel, the way you worry over him! Instead of which he's a rotten beast and a bully!"

"Hear, hear!" said the other fags feelingly.

Bolsover minor jumped up, his small fists clenched.

"Look here, you shut up about my major!" he said, with a flash in his eye. "I'm not goin' to 'ear you say anything against Percy!"

"You're going to get a beautiful thick ear if you don't shut up and have your tea like a sensible kid!" said Paget darkly. "We're fed-up with your precious Percy, and he can go and eat coke! He's not worth bothering about! If he was my major, I'd boil him in oil!"

"Hold your row about Percy!" said Billy angrily. "I tell you I won't have you chaps running him down!"

"Oh, bow-wow!" said Paget crossly. "Your major's a rotter and a beastly bullying cad—Ow!"

Bolsover minor's knuckles rapped on Paget's nose, and made him break off abruptly with a loud cry. Paget fell backwards and toppled off the form, landing on the floor with a resounding concussion.

"Yaroooooop! Oh dear! You—you young rotter—Ow!"

"Well, you would 'ave it!" said Bolsover heatedly. "You won't leave Percy alone."

"I'll Percy you!" howled Paget, jumping up with fists doubled. "You—you—you—"

He wasted no further time on words, but hurled himself at Bolsover minor. That youth, nothing loath, closed with him, and the pair were soon fighting hammer and tongs. They clasped each other lovingly round the neck, but pommelled away most unlovingly, until at last they fell with a crash to the floor. There they continued the fight, rolling over and over round the Form-room.

"Go it, Paget!" yelled Dicky Nugent.

"Hurrah! It'll wake him up and do him good!"

"Give him beans, Billy!"

"One for his boko, Paget!"

"Hurrah!"

The fags left their kippers and watched the combatants in great excitement.

A burly form came along the passage and strode into the Second Form room. No sooner had the newcomer arrived on the threshold than Bolsover minor and Paget, still locked in each other's embrace and fighting furiously, rolled right under his feet, and Gerald Loder of the Sixth—for it was he—came very near to losing his balance.

Loder was not a genial person at the best of times, and he was hated and feared by all the juniors. Now his looks were most homicidal.

Dicky Nugent & Co. had noticed these past few days that Loder had been more savage than usual. As Dicky himself described it, Loder had been going about "like a bear with a sore head."

When they saw Loder, the fags in the Second Form room fell back in dismay and consternation.

"You young sweeps!" exclaimed Loder angrily. "Fighting again!"

He stooped down, grasped the combatants by the scruff of their necks, and hauled them up. Then he knocked their heads together viciously.

Crack, crack!

"Yaroooooop!"

"Yah! Wow! Ow!"

"It's about time you unruly little rascals were taught to keep order!" grated the prefect. "Who started this fight?"

The fags were silent. Loder looked from Bolsover minor to Paget, and then his gaze rested on the former.

"I suppose it was you, young Bolsover?" he said.

"I—I—I—" stammered Billy, going red.

"Good old Slum Alley!" sneered Loder. "I don't suppose you'll ever be broken of your rowdy ways, you young sweep. Paget, you take a hundred lines for fighting! I want you, Bolsover minor, so you can come along with me."

He hustled the fag from the room, leaving the juniors in a foment of wrath and indignation.

"Of all the cads!" gasped Dicky Nugent. "Loder and Bolsover major are a pair well matched. They're both down on poor old Billy! The kid's in for it now, I suppose—he's fagging for Loder, too, isn't he?"

"Yes," granted Sammy Bunter. "I was Loder's fag last week, and it's young Bolsover's turn this week. He's welcome to the rotten job."

The fags returned to their interrupted tea. Meanwhile, Gerald Loder took Bolsover minor to his study.

"I've half a mind to give you a licking, you young sweep!" he said harshly. "Anyway, you can make yourself useful. Run down to Friardale and get me the box of cigarettes I ordered at the tobacconist's. Mind you don't let anyone see you enter or leave the shop. And if you breathe a word to anyone, I'll break every bone in your body!"

Bolsover minor was silent, although a bright light glittered in his eyes, and his tiny fists worked convulsively.

"Do you understand?" rapped Loder sharply.

"Ye-es, Loder."

"When you come back you can hide the cigarettes in the table-drawer, and get on with laying the tea," went on the prefect curtly. "I want tea laid for three. I've invited Walker and Carne; and you needn't wait. They won't be coming in till after the Dramatic Club meeting, and I—I might be going out,

so we sha'n't have tea till late. Remember to shove the cigarettes in the table-drawer."

"All right," said Bolsover minor.

He left the study, casting back a curious glance at the prefect.

There was a strangeness in Loder's manner, something akin to uneasiness and foreboding, and the fag could not help wondering what it meant.

Taking the key from his pocket, he unlocked the desk and took out the cash-box. Inside it were five pound-notes, a ten-shilling note, and some loose silver.

"Five pounds fourteen-and-six," said Loder slowly. "That makes six pounds four-and-six, with the ten shillings you've just given me, Wingate."

"Good!" said the school captain. "The funds are piling in nicely. We shall need all that money, too, for our forthcoming production of 'Hamlet.' Will you be coming to the meeting this evening? It starts soon."

Loder shook his head.

"No; you must count me out, Wingate," he muttered. "I—I don't feel up to attending meetings."

Wingate regarded him curiously.

He could see that Loder was troubled and worried, and he had little doubt that the black sheep of the Sixth had been getting into some sort of a scrape.

Wingate knew that Loder was not all that he ought to be. He had never been on terms of actual friendship with him. Indeed, bitter enmity had once existed between them, when Loder's cunning had compelled Wingate to resign the captaincy of Greyfriars. But that was of the past, and Wingate seldom liked to recall it.

Loder's surreptitious habits of smoking, and playing cards for money, and paying secret visits to the Cross Keys at Friardale for the purpose of backing horses and playing billiards, were not unknown to Wingate. He had warned Loder in a friendly spirit, and told him his opinions on the subject, but the sportsman of the Sixth had paid no heed, except to exercise more caution in his rascally practices.

The school captain, however, was good nature itself, and he felt a touch of compassion for Loder. He looked so haggard and miserable.

"Is there anything the matter, Loder?" he asked quietly.

Loder gritted his teeth.



THE THIRD CHAPTER.

The Voice of the Tempter!

GERALD LODER flung himself into the arm-chair when Bolsover minor had gone. His face was darkly clouded, and his brows knitted together.

He gave a groan.

"What can I do?" he muttered. "I—I never realised what an awful fix I was in. If the facts come out now, it will mean the sack—ruin for me. To-day is my last chance—my last chance—"

A tap at the door interrupted his broodings, and Loder looked up quickly.

"Come in!" he said, in a harsh voice.

The visitor was Wingate, the captain of Greyfriars.

He stared at Loder's drawn, haggard face.

"Hallo! What's up, Loder?" he exclaimed. "You look ill, man."

"Oh, I—I'm all right," muttered Loder. "I have a bit of a headache, that's all. Do you want me for anything, Wingate?"

"I've brought along another ten shillings, sent by one of the old boys, for the Dramatic Club funds," replied Wingate, handing Loder a Treasury note. "How much is there on the account now?"

"I'll have a look," said Loder. And he crossed to his desk.

As secretary of the Senior Dramatic Club at Greyfriars, he had been taking charge of the subscriptions which had lately fallen due. The money was being kept in the cash-box in his desk.

Crash! The gramophone went over to the floor with a fearful clatter. Dicky Nugent let out a wild howl. "Look out!" he shrieked. "Don't tread on the gramophone, for goodness' sake!" "Hallo, hallo, hallo!" said Bob Cherry from the doorway. "Oh, my hat!" The Famous Five gazed into Study No. 11 in great astonishment. (See Chapter 1.)

"No!" he panted. "I'm all right, I tell you!"

"You look pretty 'seedy," said Wingate shrewdly.

"I've got a headache, that's all."

"Very well."

Wingate gave him a nod and left the study.

Loder turned from the door, his face pale and his eyes glittering. He looked at the cash-box, now standing on his desk, and he caught his breath.

"Six pounds!" he muttered. "Six pounds—just the amount I want! Oh, if it were only mine—if I dared take it—if I dared—"

The unhappy prefect gave a groan.

"What a fool—a confounded fool—I've been! It's my own fault. I've landed myself in this awful mess, and I can't get out. Unless I get six pounds somehow this afternoon, it's all up. I might as well pack up and bolt—"

He broke off and wheeled round abruptly as the door opened again.

This time Walker and Carne, his two cronies, entered.

They stared at Loder's pale face and haggard eyes.

"My hat!" exclaimed Carne. "You're looking pretty blue, Loder!"

"Shut the door!" muttered Loder. "I—I feel rotten. I'm—I'm in the dence of a hole!"

Walker and Carne looked sympathetic.

"Had bad luck on the gee-gees, old chap?" said Walker.

"No!"

"You've run yourself into debt?"

Loder nodded miserably.

"Cobb, I suppose?" said Carne. "He's been stinging you at cards?"

"It's all through Cobb that I'm landed in this fix, but it's not him I owe the money to," said Loder savagely.

"Well, if it's one of the chaps here who—"

"It isn't."

"Then who the dickens is it?" demanded Walker.

"A moneylender."

"Whew!"

The other two prefects looked surprised.

"Well, you idiot!" exclaimed Walker.

"You've got into the hands of a moneylender!"

Loder nodded.

"Yes. I was a fool—a fool!" he exclaimed bitterly. "It was down at the Cross Keys one night—I never told you fellows, but I had been going the pace pretty fast. I owed Cobb four pounds, and I tried to get my revenge on him at cards, but lost another pound. Cobb was half-squiffy, and we had a row in the bar-parlour. He demanded the money at once, threatening to give me away here if I didn't settle up. I'd hardly got any money at all, and I didn't know what to do to shut Cobb's mouth."

"We had been playing cards with Hawke and Cohen, the moneylender from Courtfield. He's been pretty thick with Cobb lately—I suppose he picks up a good deal of business at the Cross Keys. Anyway, Cohen was there, and he offered to lend me a fiver there and then, saying I could pay him back in easy instalments. Like a silly fool, I accepted his offer, and signed a paper. I didn't know what I was signing; I was in too much of a hurry to read it. All I cared about was the fiver Cohen handed me, which squared me with Cobb."

"My hat!" exclaimed Walker. "And Cohen's been dunning you ever since?"

"Yes," said Loder miserably, "the cad got me right into his clutches."

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Cobb apologised afterwards and said he didn't mean to cut up so rusty, but I believe he's in the swim with Cohen. I've paid the rotten moneylender back the five pounds, but he says I owe him another six pounds in interest to wipe off the debt. I don't know how he makes it out, but he holds the paper I signed, and he refuses to surrender it to me until I've paid the six quid."

Carne gave a low whistle.

"Whew! Ten quid to repay five!" he exclaimed. "I've heard yarns about these grasping Shylocks, but this is a bit too thick! Why, it's sheer robbery!"

"Of course it is!" groaned Loder. "Cohen wouldn't dare try the game with anyone else, but he knows he's got me. He couldn't claim the money in law. In fact, what he's charging is illegal. But unless I pay him he'll go to the Head, and that will mean the finish for me. Everything will come out—"

"And then the chopper will come down, and no mistake!" exclaimed Walker. "Well, you were a mad idiot, Loder. You'll have to keep Cohen quiet somehow. If he gives the game away here we may get implicated—"

"Oh, good heavens!" gasped Carne nervously. "Cohen knows us, and he's seen us at the Cross Keys, and the rotter's bound to raise a proper shindy once he gets here, Loder. Can't you do anything?"

"What can I do without the money?" said Loder savagely. "I've borrowed all over the place, sold things, and cadged from all my relations, before I fell foul of Cohen, and I can't raise any more. I'm broke, and I've got no means of raising the cash, unless you fellows can help. If I get it in the neck you'll get it, too!"

"We can't help you, Loder," said Walker desperately. "We're stumped right out. I, for one, can't lay hands on any money—not yet awhile."

"Same here," muttered Carne. "I dare not write home for a penny more. Look here, Loder, can't you stall off Cohen somehow? Tell him you'll pay next week—"

"He won't take that yarn. I've told him that before," said Loder. "I've got to see him this afternoon at the woodman's hut—that's where he meets me, or at the Cross Keys, for it's too risky for me to be seen entering his office in Courtfield. I'll tell him I've had some money promised; but—but I don't think that will satisfy him."

"Try it, anyhow," said Walker eagerly. "We'll try and help you out next week, Loder. For goodness' sake, keep Cohen going for a while! It's up to you!"

"All right," muttered Loder. "You chaps had better come down with me to see him. Perhaps you could talk to him."

"No fear!" said Carne hastily. "You'll have to arrange matters yourself. Loder, while we're at the Dramatic Club meeting. We'll see you afterwards—ahem—at tea."

The two prefects walked from the study, leaving Loder alone.

The black sheep of the Sixth pressed a hand to his forehead in an agony of foreboding.

"It's no use—no use talking to Cohen!" he moaned. "I've tried, but he won't give me any longer to pay. He'll want some money this afternoon, I know. I shall have to pay him something. If only I could borrow this money—"

His eyes looked fascinatedly at the six pounds in the cash-box on his desk.

The sight of the money he so desperately needed seemed to mock him. It was so near—so easily within his grasp—yet it was not his own to use.

His eyes glittered with a new light as a desperate thought occurred to him. Supposing he took the six pounds—the money belonging to the Dramatic Club? That would enable him to pay Cohen and stay the rascally moneylender's hand. Cohen had threatened to place the facts before Dr. Locke unless settlement was made that afternoon. If the Head learned of Loder's dealings with the shady company of sportsmen at the Cross Keys, there was no hope for Loder—he would be expelled from Greyfriars and ruined for life. He groaned aloud in anguish at the thought of what a fool he had been to bring himself into such straits.

Six pounds was the amount he needed to save himself from expulsion and disgrace. Here, in his actual possession, was the money—funds he held in keeping for the Dramatic Club. What difference would it make if he took the money now and replaced it later on? It would not be wanted for a week at least—perhaps a fortnight, or longer. Why let the six pounds remain there, idle, when it would be the means of saving him from ruin?

These thoughts raced through Loder's mind as he stood there, gazing at the open cash-box.

He knew what it meant if he took the money—that he would be committing the crime of embezzlement. He would be appropriating money that did not belong to him. Whatever his straits, he had no right to use that money without the permission of the club members who had subscribed it. Yet he wanted the money. He must have it—and would have to find means of replacing it later.

Supposing he could not replace it? Loder knew that Walker and Carne could not be relied upon to see him through his difficulty, once they knew that their own skins were safe. Their promises were like piecrust—made to be broken.

Loder's eyes took on a glitter as he weighed the matter over in his mind. Perhaps he could invent some story to cover himself—that he had lost the money, or that it had been stolen?

Loder, crafty and unscrupulous, was not above telling any lies or taking steps, however desperate, in order to safeguard himself.

He tried to think things out clearly. The thing uppermost in his mind at the moment was that within a few hours he would be disgraced and ruined unless he took the club money to pay Cohen. Yes, that was what it all amounted to—come what may afterwards, he must take the money now and settle with the blackmailing moneylender.

Loder made up his mind.

He took up the cash-box, transferred the Treasury notes to his wallet, and replaced the box, containing only the few odd shillings, in his desk, locking it afterwards. Then he took up his cap, left the study, and hurried down to the gates.

Walking with quick, nervous steps along the Friardale Lane, the prefect turned into the wood and came at last to the old woodman's hut.

A short, sleek and grossly overdressed man was awaiting him there, smoking a fat cigar. Mr. Jacob Cohen bore the typical characteristics of his race in his

face and form, but he was a reprehensible-looking specimen. His face, though florid and oily, was hard in its expression, and his little black eyes had a crafty glitter in them. He rubbed his fat hands and gave a chuckle as the Greyfriars' prefect came up.

"Ah! Goot-afternoons, Master Loder!" he said affably. "I vas been waiting some time, and if you did not come I vas go on to Greyfriars to see you. You haf brought der money?"

"Yes, hang you!" muttered the prefect. "I've got the money here. Where's that paper?"

"Der paper vas here," said Cohen, with an oily grin, tapping his breast-pocket. "Vat I vant is to see der money before I hands over the document. Show me der money."

Loder took out his wallet eagerly and showed the moneylender the rustling Treasury notes.

Cohen's beady eyes gleamed greedily, and his manner became more suave and cringing.

"Goot—goot, Master Loder!" he said. "I will sign der receipt, and everytings will be all right."

He took a book from his pocket, scrawled a receipt with a fountain-pen, and this paper, with one bearing Loder's signature, he handed to the prefect in exchange for the money.

The Jew counted the notes carefully and stowed them away in a fat pocket-book. Then he rubbed his hands with satisfaction and smiled at Loder.

"Another time I haf der pleasure of doing piziness with you—eh, Master Loder?" he said.

"You won't catch me again, you swindling rotter!" grated the prefect savagely. "You're a dirty thief and a blackmailer!"

Cohen gave a shrug. "Piziness is piziness," he said. "I vas haf to take a goot many risks in my line, and I must safeguard against der losses. Ve may meet again at der Cross Keys van evening, and perhaps you have your revenge at cards—yes?"

Loder did not reply, but turned on his heel and strode quickly away.

He walked back to Greyfriars, turning matters over in his mind.

He was not in an enviable position, even now. He had managed to get free from the usurer's clutches, but now another dilemma confronted him.

He was an embezzler—a thief! Yes, if the money could not be replaced in time, he would be branded a thief. He gritted his teeth savagely as he thought of that. If the worst came to the worst, and the money was missed, he would have to think out some plausible tale that would shift suspicion from himself.

Gerald Loder was desperate now, and would stop at nothing to save his own skin.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Loder's Dilemma!

BOLSOVER minor had been to Friardale to execute his errand for Loder, and he hurried back to Greyfriars with the cigarettes in his pocket.

He had missed his tea with Dicky Nugent & Co., but that did not trouble him much. He did not feel like tea, anyway.

He went up to Loder's study and opened the door.

A sharp exclamation of alarm sounded in the room as he entered.

Sammy Bunter was there, bending over Loder's desk, which was open.



The door of Bolsover major's study flew open and Harry Wharton & Co. rushed in. "Good heavens!" ejaculated the captain of the Remove. "Bolsover—you cad!" The Bully of the Remove had his minor sprawled across his knees and was belabouring him with a leather strap. "Let him alone, Bolsover!" exclaimed Wharton. "Mind your own business!" came the reply. (See Chapter 7.)

Sammy turned round with a guilty start.

"Oh crumbs! So it's you, Bolsover! I—I thought it was Loder!"

"What are you doing here, Bunter?" Sammy Bunter blinked.

"N-nothing," he said.

"What were you nosin' in Loder's desk for?" asked Bolsover suspiciously.

"Nothing," said Sammy Bunter sullenly.

"Don't tell lies, Bunter! You came 'ere after something. What's the game?"

Billy's voice rapped out sharply. The fat junior of the Second blinked through his spectacles.

"Oh, really, Bolsover, if you mean to suggest that I came here to steal—" he expostulated.

"You have no business to be sneaking in 'ere while Loder is out," said Bolsover minor sternly. "You know that as well as I do."

"Oh, rats!" growled Sammy Bunter. "It's no business of yours, young Bolsover. But if you want to know, I'm after my penknife that beast Loder confiscated when he caught me carving my initials on the chimney lab. door."

Bolsover minor's face cleared.

"Oh! I thought as 'ow you were stealing something, Bunter," he said. "I know you ain't above that sort of thing."

"Really, you rotter—"

"Ow did you get the desk open?" asked Bolsover minor, looking hard at Sammy. "Loder always keeps it locked."

Sammy's plump visage wreathed into a grin.

"Ho, he, he! I've got a key—one of Loder's keys, which he lost some time ago," he chuckled. "I used to be Loder's fag, you know, and one day last week he lost the key to this desk, and he had to have another one made. I happened to find the lost key wedged in a groove in the floor, and I stuck to it. Loder's always confiscating things belonging to me, and I thought the key would be jolly useful."

"My word! You 'aven't 'arf got a cheek, young Bunter," said Billy. "I'm glad I caught you, too. Why, if Loder discovered that his desk 'ad been opened, I'd get the blame. 'E's down on me as it is, and I'm not going to risk being accused of prying in 'is desk. You gimme that key!"

Sammy Bunter blinked indignantly.

"Not much!" he said. "That's my key! I found it, and I'm sticking to it."

"Tain't your key—it's Loder's!" said Billy firmly. "You've no right to stick to it, Bunter, and I want it."

"I suppose you're going to use it for yourself!" said Sammy furiously.

"No, I'm not. I'm going to 'and it back to Loder," retorted Bolsover minor.

interposing himself between Sammy and the door. "Now, will you gimme that key, or shall I wallop you for it?"

"Look here, Bolsover, this key's jolly useful, and—"

"Rats! Gimme the key!"

The Third-Former grabbed Sammy's arm, and the key dropped with a rattle to the floor.

"Yarooooogh!" roared Sammy. "You rotten slum beast! Wow! You want to thief from Loder's desk yourself—I know! You—oh! Yah!—Gerraway! Keepoff! Yarooooogh!"

He dodged wildly round the study as Bolsover minor made a rush at him, upsetting a pile of books in his haste. Sammy saw the war light glinting in Bolsover's eye, and he made a bee-line for the door. He stood not upon the order of his going, but fled precipitately through the doorway—helped along by a hefty boot.

"Wow!" roared Sammy.

The Third-Former closed the door of Loder's study and picked up the key.

"Jolly lucky I caught 'im with this," he muttered. "I'll give it to Loder when 'e comes in. I suppose I'd better be clearing up. Loder won't be long now."

He picked up the books that had been upset by Sammy in his rush for the door, and stacked them neatly on a shelf, afterwards taking from his pocket the cigarettes he had fetched for Loder, and putting them in the table drawer.

Then, key in hand, he crossed over to Loder's desk, the lid of which was still wide open, as Sammy had left it.

Bolsover minor intended to close the lid and relock the desk, but scarcely had his hand grasped the open lid than there was a tramp of feet outside, the door was flung suddenly open, and Loder appeared, with Carne and Walker behind him.

The fag gave a startled cry on seeing the prefects, and the desk lid dropped out of his hand with a crash.

Loder & Co. stopped short in amazement.

"Good heavens! The little sweep's been nosing in your desk, Loder!" exclaimed Walker.

"Caught red-handed, by Jove!" said Carne, with relish.

Loder panted.

At first, when he saw his desk open, a great fear had overwhelmed him—the fear that the empty cashbox had been discovered. But the sight of Bolsover minor there, with his face flushed, as though with guilt, and his hands trembling, sent a new thought coursing through the prefect's brain.

Bolsover minor, the ex-waif of the London streets, discovered at his open desk, which was supposed to be locked! The money was gone—Walker and Carne were bound to look for that—and it would be the easiest thing in the world to accuse the fag. What an opportunity for Loder to shift his guilt on to the youngster!

The prefect's eyes glittered, and, stepping quickly to Bolsover minor's side, he took his arm in a rough grip.

"You prying little sweep!" he hissed. "What are you doing at my desk? What have you been thieving?"

"I—Oh! Leggo! I—I wasn't doin' any 'arm!" cried the fag, struggling. "I haven't stolen anything, Loder—really! I—"

"What business had you in opening my desk?" demanded Loder brutally. "Tell me what you've been up to, or I'll skin you, you slum bounder."

"I—I—I—"

Bolsover minor was silent, his lips trembling.

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How could he explain to Loder, without giving Sammy Bunter away? Sneaking was out of the question—the little lad from Angel Alley, with all his rough ways and crude mannerisms, was the soul of honour.

"Well, out with it, you little imp!" grated Loder. "What were you doing at my desk?"

"I—I found the desk open, Loder—honest I did!" gasped the fag desperately. "I was goin' to shut it when you came in—"

"Why, the little rotter's got the key in his hand!" exclaimed Walker, suddenly. "That's bowled you out in your lies, young Bolsover!"

Loder started when he saw the key in the fag's hand. He snatched it from him.

"My hat! This is the key I lost last week!" he exclaimed. "Then you've had it all the time, Bolsover!"

"No, I 'aven't. I—I'd only, jest picked it up when you came in—"

Loder gave a scoffing laugh.

"So you expect me to believe that everything happened by accident!" he exclaimed. "Who opened my desk if you didn't?"

Billy bit his lip and was silent.

"There!" said Walker harshly. "The little rotter hasn't a word to say for himself. The thing's as plain as a pike-staff, Loder," he added. "The young guttersnipe thought he had a fine chance to steal while you were out, as he had the key to your desk. He was after the Dramatic Club money, of course. I wonder if it's still there?"

Loder drew a deep breath.

He knew full well the money was not there. It was a critical moment for him, and a desperate ruse formulated itself in the rascally prefect's brain—a plan to enmesh Bolsover minor in a network of circumstances that would bring the cloud of suspicion more heavily upon him.

"Yes, what about the club money?" growled Carne suspiciously. "Wingate said at the meeting this afternoon that you had six pounds odd on the account. You had the cash in your desk, Loder?"

"Yes," muttered Loder. "I locked it up in the cashbox before I went out. I'll teach this thieving little slum rotter to monkey with my desk!"

Instead of opening his desk, Loder reached for a cane, and he turned to the wriggling fag with a brutal expression on his face.

"I'll teach you to come in here thieving from my desk, you rotten little slum arab!" he grated. "Take that—"

Lash! Lash! Lash!

The cane came down cruelly on Bolsover minor's shoulders, and the fag uttered a cry of pain.

"Oh! Don't, Loder! Please, I never stole anything—you look and see—Oh! Leave me alone, you bully! Oh, oh!"

Loder whirled the youngster round, propelling him close to the door. He struck at him viciously, and Bolsover minor struggled and fought desperately to free himself. The stinging blows cut cruelly across his frail body, and he was soon sobbing with pain.

All of a sudden Loder's grip relaxed, and, with a strong twist, the fag disengaged himself from the rascally prefect's grasp, and scuttled through the doorway into the Sixth Form passage.

Walker let up a yell of anger.

"Hold him! Don't let the little rotter escape, Loder!"

"All right!" panted Loder. "Leave the kid to me. I'll fetch him back!"

He ran out into the passage and followed Bolsover minor, whose tiny

figure he saw turning the corner. He shouted after him, but the fag ran on in terror, and disappeared up the back staircase.

Loder's eyes glinted, and he gave vent to a low chuckle. He made no haste to follow Bolsover minor. The fag's escape was just what he had aimed at. He wanted to give his victim time to hide; that was part of his dastardly plan.

Some minutes later he returned to his study, assuming a look of anger and disappointment. Walker and Carne stared when he came in.

"My hat! You've let the little cad escape?" ejaculated Carne.

"Yes," muttered Loder. "He was too quick for me, and he's hiding somewhere. I came back to see if the money was all right."

"For Heaven's sake buck up and look, Loder," said Walker. "You ought to have made sure of that before lamming into young Bolsover!"

Loder's breath came sharply as he raised the lid of his desk and took out the cashbox. He would need all his nerve and composure now.

"Gone!"

Walker and Carne uttered simultaneous exclamations when they saw that the cashbox was empty, save for the loose silver.

"Good heavens!" muttered Loder, in a thick voice. "The money's gone!"

His hand trembled as he set down the cashbox, but he had no thought of backing out of his callous plan now.

"The money's gone—six pounds missing! Bolsover minor must have stolen it while I was out!"

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Falsely Accused!

WALKER drew a deep breath. "My word! Then that little slum brat did take the money!" he exclaimed. "Six quid stolen, and by a kid in the Third! I say, this is a bit thick!"

"Jolly lucky we came in and caught him in the act!" exclaimed Carne. "Things would have looked jolly awkward for you otherwise, Loder. You were a fool, though, to let Bolsover minor escape!"

"I couldn't help it," said Loder sullenly.

"Well, we'd better find the thieving little scamp at once, and make him hand back the money," said Walker. "Then we'll yank him to the Head and get him kicked out of the school. Dash it all, Greyfriars is no place for brats of his class!"

The three prefects left the study together, and hurried away in search of Bolsover minor.

The Famous Five, and Squiff, and Peter Todd, were chatting at the corner of the Remove passage when they came up. The Removites stared at Loder & Co.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" said Bob Cherry. "You chaps look waxy, and no giddy error. What's up, Loder—is anything amiss?"

"I'm looking for Bolsover minor!" rapped out Loder. "Have you seen him?"

Bob Cherry commenced to turn out his pockets, much to his chums' amusement. Loder & Co. glared.

"None of your rotting, you cheeky young sweep!" exclaimed Walker. "We want Bolsover minor. Do you know where he is?"

Harry Wharton shook his head.

"No; we haven't seen him!" he replied. "But what's the giddy rumpus? Has the kid done anything terrible?"

"Yes, he has!" snapped Carne. "He's pinched six pounds out of Loder's desk!"

"Wha-a-at!"

The Removites looked thunderstruck. "Here, draw it mild!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "You chaps must be off your rockers—ahem! Are you sure it isn't a tanner you've lost, Loder?"

"Six quid is missing from my desk, and Bolsover minor is the thief!" snarled Loder.

"But—but there must be some mistake, surely!" exclaimed Harry Wharton seriously. "Young Bolsover isn't a thief. Besides, to accuse a kid of stealing six quid—"

"Well, the little rotter had the money all right—there's no mistake about that!" said Walker impatiently. "We caught him red-handed at Loder's desk, which he had opened with a key that did not belong to him. The money's gone, and Bolsover minor gave us the slip. He's made off with the six quid belonging to our Dramatic Club funds."

"Whew!"

accusing a kid of taking money like that."

Billy Bunter came rolling up, a wide grin on his fat face.

"He, he, he! I say, you fellows, have you heard the news?" he chuckled.

The Removites glared at the Owl.

"He, he, he! Young Bolsover minor is bowled out at last! Loder caught him red-handed! Stealing six quid from his desk—six quid, you know! The young bounder ran off with the money, and Loder and Carne and Walker are looking for him! He, he, he!"

"Oh, stop your silly cackling, Bunter!" growled Bob Cherry. "This is a jolly serious matter!"

"He, he, he!" sniggered Billy Bunter. "I reckon it's a good thing young Bolsover has been caught at last. This will mean the sack for him, and it serves him right. That low little gutter urchin ought never to have been allowed at Greyfriars. Didn't I tell you chaps from the first

wriggled like an eel in Bolsover's grip, roaring.

"Yarooop! Yah! Leggo!"

"What's that you were saying about my minor?" demanded Bolsover ferociously.

"Yow! Nun-n-nothing, really! Your minor isn't a thief, Bolsover—Oooooop! I don't believe for a moment he took Loder's six quid—Yaroooogh! Ow-wow-wow!"

Bolsover turned frowningly to Harry Wharton & Co.

"Has my minor been accused of stealing?" he demanded. "Do you know what this fat rotter is babbling about?"

Harry Wharton shrugged his shoulders.

"You'd better speak to Loder," he said. "He's got a bee in his bonnet over something, but we can't give you any information, Bolsover."

At this juncture there was a heavy tramping of feet in the passage, and Loder & Co. came into view, with

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"The little thief will catch it hot when we do lay hands on him!" said Carne. "Come on—I expect we shall find him skulking in one of the box-rooms."

The prefects hurried on, leaving Harry Wharton & Co. gazing at each other in dismay and consternation.

"My hat! What a giddy go! Bolsover minor's accused of stealing six quid!" said Frank Nugent.

"What utter rot!" exclaimed Wharton, knitting his brows. "Loder's got hold of the wrong end of the stick somehow. We all know young Billy wouldn't steal. He's not that kind of kid."

"No fear!"

"But—but Walker says they caught him at Loder's desk," said Squiff. "The kid had opened it with a key that didn't belong to him. That looks jolly rotten, doesn't it? And if the money's gone—"

"Probably those silly asses have jumped to conclusions, and the kid was up to some harmless prank," said Wharton. "I don't suppose the money has been stolen at all. Loder is always making mountains out of molehills, and he's got a special down on young Bolsover, too. It's jolly rotten, though,

what it would be? It's a disgrace for decent chaps like us to have to mix with a kid taken from the streets. A disgrace—that's what I call it!"

"Bow-wow!" said Frank Nugent.

"Oh, ring off, Bunter!"

"I suppose you chaps are going to stick up for him?" said Billy Bunter, blinking indignantly through his big spectacles. "I'm blessed if you can't stand anything—"

"Well, we stand you, Bunter, and that's about the limit of human endurance," said Harry Wharton. "You'd better shut up about young Bolsover, unless you want a bumping."

"Oh, really, Wharton, if you take the little thief's part—"

"Cheese it!"

"Sha'n't!" roared Bunter defiantly. "Bolsover minor is a thief! He's pinched six quid out of Loder's desk, and—Yaroooogh! Leggo! Whar-rer you at, Bob Cherry?"

"It isn't Cherry—it's me!" said Bolsover major's rasping voice behind him. "What are you talking about, you fat clam?"

The bully of the Remove had come round the corner of the passage, and the Owl had not seen him. He

Bolsover minor struggling in their grasp.

The youngster let out a plaintive cry when he saw his major.

"Percy! Don't let them 'urt me, Percy! They—they say I've stolen some money, but I 'aven't! I—"

"We'll soon see about that, you little sweep!" grated Loder. "You've hidden it, and you've got to tell us where it is!"

Bolsover major strode up angrily to the prefects.

"Here, hold on!" he rapped sharply. "What's this about my minor stealing money?"

"He took six pounds out of my desk!" sneered Loder. "We caught him in the act, and he gave us the slip. He's hidden his loot, and now we're going to make him tell us where he's put it."

Bolsover minor looked appealingly at his brother. His little face was deathly white, his eyes glistening with tears.

"I never stole any money, Percy—really, I never!" he cried. "It's a mistake—I didn't even open the desk! That's the truth—honour bright!"

Bolsover's face darkened. There was no trace of friendliness or compassion. **THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 937.**

in the look he gave his minor. He was, it seemed, ready to believe the worst of the youngster.

"I'll soon get at the truth of the matter," he said brutally. "Look here, Loder, you can leave him to me—"

"I'm taking the little brat to Wingate," said Loder curtly. "This is a matter for him to deal with. If your minor can't prove his innocence, the Head will have to be told. You can come along to Wingate's, if you like, Bolsover."

He and Walker hustled the fag away between them, and Bolsover major, a dark frown of anger on his face, followed behind with Carne.

Harry Wharton & Co. and the other Removites who had gathered round exchanged glances.

"Poor kid!" said Bob Cherry. "I don't believe he's touched Loder's money. Bolsover's a cad not to stick up for his minor. Why, if anyone accused a brother of mine of stealing sixpence, let alone six quid, I—I'd spifficate him!"

Wharton nodded.

"It's rotten for the kid," he said. "But things are bound to turn out all right. Loder's chasing a mare's nest, I reckon. Young Bolsover couldn't have taken the money."

And the Famous Five walked on into Study No. 1, looking frankly distressed at the incident they had just witnessed.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Condemned by his Major!

WINGATE'S handsome face was stern and serious as he looked down at the fag before him.

Loder & Co. had just hustled Bolsover minor into the captain's study, and Bolsover major had followed them in.

"You accuse this kid of stealing, Loder?" said Wingate, when he had outlined the circumstances. "What has he taken?"

"The young sweep has stolep the Dramatic Club subscriptions from my desk," said Loder.

"Wha-a-t!"

"The six pounds I had locked up in my desk are missing, and Bolsover minor is the thief!" rapped Loder in a harsh voice.

Wingate looked in amazement at the unhappy fag, and then he turned to Loder.

"Tell me the facts of the matter," he said.

"The thieving little guttersnipe—"

"You might modify your expressions a little," said Wingate curtly.

Loder scowled at this rebuke.

"Well, Wingate, you know I had six pounds-odd in my desk an hour ago," he grated. "You saw the money there, and I locked my desk before I went out. I might say that last week I lost the key of my desk and, giving up hope of finding it, I had another one made—the one I am using now. Well, I went for a walk to get rid of my headache, and came back a little while ago to have tea."

"I met Carne and Walker in the corridor as they were returning from the meeting, and they accompanied me to my study. As we walked into the room we saw Bolsover minor, with my desk open and my missing key in his hand. We took the young rotter completely by surprise. He had evidently found that key and opened my desk with it while I was out."

"That's about it," said Walker.

"I didn't open the desk!" shouted Bolsover minor. "I—"

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"You'll say next, I suppose, that you weren't at the desk at all, or in the room, even!" sneered Loder. "We caught the little sweep red-handed, Wingate. Carne and Walker will corroborate what I say."

The two seniors nodded.

"What Loder says is quite right, Wingate," said Carne. "We caught young Bolsover in the act. He wasn't expecting us. He had the lid of Loder's desk wide open, and he looked ready to drop through the floor when we came in."

"What about the money, then, Loder?" asked Wingate quietly.

"Well, before we had time to look in the desk the little rascal ran out of the room," said Loder. "I gave chase, but he got away. I came back, and then we looked in the desk. The cash-box was empty, except for the loose silver. The six pounds was missing."

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Wingate. "Bolsover—"

The little Third-Former stood erect, his face pale, but his eyes flashing and his tiny fists clenched tight.

He glanced towards his major, who was standing near, but received only a bitter look in return.

He could see that his brother was against him, and his heart ached with anguish at the thought. He was alone, but he would stand and face the accusation as bravely as he could.

"It's orl a mistake, Wingate," he said hoarsely. "On my honour, I never touched any money!" he cried. "I went to Loder's room to get 'is tea ready after I came back from Friardale, and when I got in I found the desk open and—"

"A likely yarn!" scoffed Loder. "Did it open of its own accord, then?"

"You had the key!" chimed in Walker. "You found that, of course, while you were clearing up Loder's room, and kept it so that you could steal from his desk."

"I was goin' to give Loder the key," said the fag desperately. "The chap who opened the desk 'ad the key, and I—I got it from 'im. I wanted to lock the desk and say nothing about it, and give Loder the key as though I'd just found it. I never looked in the desk even, and I never knew there was any money inside. That's the truth, Wingate."

"Bah!" sneered Loder. "That tale won't wash here, young Bolsover. You're a little thief!"

Billy looked round, and the hot tears welled into his eyes.

"I'm not a thief! You may think me one, 'cos I was brought up poor; but I always kept straight and earned an honest living. I ain't never stolen in my life, and I don't tell lies, neither. I might 'ave told a few when I first came to Greyfriars, but Wharton and Bob Cherry have been jolly kind to me, and 'ave taken more care of me than some who 'ad more call to look after me." He was thinking of his elder brother, and Bolsover major, to whom the words hit home, winced and flushed crimson. "I wouldn't think of telling lies or thieving. I can't do it."

At that juncture there was a commotion in the corridor outside.

Above the wild trampling of feet a number of boys' voices could be heard, and louder than all sounded the mellifluous tones of Sammy Bunter.

"Yah! Oooooop! Leggo, you beasts! I won't go to Wingate! Ooogh! You rotters mind your own business! Yarooooop!"

Crash!

Wingate's door burst open, and Sammy's fat form came in precipitately, with Dicky Nugent, Gatty, Myers,

Tubb, Paget, and a host of other fags behind him.

Wingate looked round in anger.

"You rowdy little rascals!" he exclaimed. "What do you mean by this? What—"

"It's all serene, Wingate," panted Tubb. "We've come to put a word in for Billy. We heard all about Loder accusing him of stealing money from his room, and how he was discovered at his desk with the lid open. We've brought Bunter along to prove that it wasn't Bolsover who opened Loder's desk."

"Ow-wow-wow!" moaned Sammy Bunter, rising painfully to his feet. "I won't confess now, you rotters! Lemme go! Grooogh!"

"Then we'll confess for you," said Dicky Nugent indignantly. "I say, Wingate, young Bunter came into our Form-room a little while ago, moaning because Bolsover minor had booted him out of Loder's study. Sammy told us that he had gone there to open Loder's desk to get a knife Loder had confiscated from him. Sammy had the key. He found it last week, but never said anything to Loder. We know that, because Sammy bragged about it."

Loder started and went quite white.

Wingate looked sternly at Sammy Bunter.

"Then it was you who opened Loder's desk, Bunter minor?" he rapped.

"Ow! Ye-es, Wingate, I confess!" moaned Sammy, with a nervous look at Loder. "But I didn't take the money. I didn't even get the knife, because Bolsover minor came in and took the key and turned me out. He took the money; I didn't."

"Do you know that Bolsover minor took the money?" rapped out Wingate sternly.

"Nunno; but that slum boulder pinched it, of course—"

"Be quiet, Bunter minor!" exclaimed Wingate, and he turned to Loder. "Have you a knife in your desk belonging to Bunter?" he asked.

"Yes," growled Loder.

"I think we can believe young Bunter for once, Wingate," put in Carne. "I don't suppose he took the money out of Loder's desk, or he would have kept quiet about being in the room."

"We've searched Sammy," said Dicky Nugent. "He's more likely to have stolen the money than Bolsover minor, but I think he's innocent this time. Gatty saw him leave Loder's study when Bolsover kicked him out, and he went back to the Form with him. Sammy's been there ever since, so he hasn't had a chance to hide the money if he stole it."

"Very well," said Wingate. "I'm glad you kids came here. You can cut off now. You will do a hundred lines, Bunter minor, for prying into Loder's desk in his absence. Did you see the cashbox there when you opened the desk?"

"I didn't see anything, Wingate," said Sammy. "I'd only just got the desk open when this beast—I mean Bolsover minor—came in."

"That'll do, then, Bunter. You may go," said the school captain quietly.

When Dicky & Co. and Sammy had gone, Wingate turned to Bolsover minor with a grave face.

"Do you realise what a serious matter this is, Bolsover minor?" he said. "Six pounds have been taken from Loder's desk, and there is circumstantial evidence to show that you took the money. If you did take it unthinkingly—"

"But I didn't, Wingate—'onour bright!" cried the fag appealingly. "I'm

not a thief! Percy, tell them I'm not a thief!"

Bolsover major scowled at his brother.

"I'm not going to shield you!" he exclaimed brutally. "You'll get no sympathy from me! If you did steal the money I'll see that you get your just deserts."

Bolsover minor turned away, tears streaming unchecked down his cheeks.

Wingate looked compassionately at the fag. Loder, noticing this, gritted his teeth.

"You're a fool, Wingate, if you let yourself be softened by this young brat's blubbing!" he exclaimed. "He's crafty as well as obstinate. I, for one, won't be taken in by his crocodile's tears."

"Stop that snivelling, Hubert!" said Bolsover major roughly.

Wingate frowned.

"I suppose there couldn't have been any mistake about the money, Loder?" he said quietly. "Perhaps you have mislaid it—"

"Mislaid it?" echoed Loder. "Do you take me for a fool, Wingate? I looked the money, I tell you, in my desk after you had left my study, and you know the money was there. I went out for a stroll, and came back to find Bolsover minor with my desk open, and the money gone. He broke loose, and has had time to hide his loot. Why, the facts speak for themselves."

Wingate bit his lip.

"Have you looked for the money?" he said.

"Of course, I have!"

"We practically stripped the little cad when we searched him," said Carne. "We caught him upstairs on the back landing. We've hunted in all the box-rooms for the money, but can't find any trace of it. But Bolsover minor has hidden it somewhere, it's certain, and as he wouldn't tell us, we brought him along to you."

Bolsover major, taking a quick step forward, grasped his minor roughly by the arm and whirled him round. The fag was sobbing.

"Where have you hidden the money, you thieving little hound?" demanded the burly Removite in a brutal voice. "Tell me where it is, or I'll smash you!"

"I can't tell you, Percy! I don't know where the money is, 'cos I never took it. Percy, don't you believe me?"

"Believe you? Of course I don't!" sneered the Removite bully. "The thing's as plain as a pikestaff, and—"

"Leave your minor alone, Bolsover!" broke in Wingate curtly. "I am dealing with this matter. For the time being, I shall not acquaint the Head with the facts. The missing money is not privately owned, but belongs to our Dramatic Club funds, and I will defer reporting the loss until I have made more extensive inquiries into the matter. You may go, Bolsover major."

The Removite bully turned, scowling, to the door.

His minor looked at him through his tears, mutely appealing to him for the sympathy and trust that were due to him from an elder brother. But there was no brotherly love or pity in the look that Bolsover major gave him as he turned in the doorway. He was only too ready to believe the worst of his minor.

Mistrust and condemnation were in the Removite's look, and he left the captain's study without another word.

"MAGNET" PORTRAIT GALLERY.

No. 21—Sir Jimmy Vivian, Bart (of the Remove).



Now known as Sir James Vivian, Bart., Mauly's relation was once a wail in London, taking all the hard knocks that poverty could give him. His rescue from the slums by Lord Mauleverer's guardian created a nine days' wonder at Greyfriars, and the arrival of "Sir Jimmy" himself at the school prolonged the excitement. Naturally, Vivian's manners were not of the best, and Mauly had to take him in hand. What that exertion cost Mauly is known only to himself. Suffice it to say that Sir Jimmy is now a very different fellow from the wail who was rescued from Carker's Rents. When he is excited Vivian sometimes drops back into the vernacular of the slums, but with all his fallings in the matter of speaking King's English, Jimmy's heart is of gold. Shares Study No. 12 with Piet Delarey and Lord Mauleverer.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Sauce for the Gander!

THE news of Loder's accusation against Bolsover minor, gleefully retailed all over Greyfriars by Billy Bunter, was soon the sole topic of conversation in the school.

There was a small crowd of juniors standing at the end of the Sixth Form passage, as Bolsover major came out of Wingate's study. Their excited chatter immediately ceased, and all eyes were cast curiously at the Removite bully.

Bolsover flushed crimson. It galled him to think of the scandal the affair had created.

"Hallo, Bolsover!" said Skinner, his narrow face wreathed in a sardonic smile. "Has your minor confessed what he's done with Loder's money?"

Bolsover clenched his fists. "Mind your own business!" he said fiercely.

"Keep your wool on, old man!" said Skinner, backing away rather nervously. "You can't help what your minor has done, of course. You aren't responsible for him, and, after all, he was bound to break out sooner or later. That's only to be expected from a kid brought up in the gutter, and—"

"Hold your tongue, will you?" hissed Bolsover, his face flaming red. "I'll smash you, Skinner, if you don't shut up!"

Skinner promptly "shut up," and receded to the back of the crowd.

The burly Removite elbowed his way along the corridor.

Temple, Dabney & Co. of the Upper Fourth came strolling along. They stopped Bolsover at the corner.

"I say, Bolsover, what's this about your minor openin' Loder's desk and stealin' a lot of money?" asked Temple. "Is it true?"

Bolsover gritted his teeth, but did not reply.

"I suppose the results of the poor kid's early upbringing are just coming to light—what?" said Fry.

"Oh, absolutely!" said Dabney.

Bolsover major scowled.

Other fellows came gathering round, all agog with the same subject. Bolsover's chagrin increased as question after question was flung at him, some of them callously intended to make him more furious.

It had always been a sore point with Bolsover that his minor had been brought to Greyfriars straight out of the squalor of the slums. His old malice and resentment towards the youngster came back, now, in full measure. He was ashamed of his minor, and angry with him because of the talk and scandal that were going the rounds of Greyfriars.

Bolsover, deep down in his heart, was not essentially a bad fellow, but his pride was his great undoing. To wound his pride was to bring out all the worst traits in his nature. He did not care about Billy; all Bolsover cared was that the supposed thief was his brother, the ex-waif from Angel Alley.

"It's rotten for you, Bolsover, isn't it?" said Sidney James Snoop, with an ingratiating grin. "Your minor will be kicked out of the school, for a cert. What a show-up— Yarooooooooogh!"

Snoop gave a fiendish yell as Bolsover's hard fist smote him on the jaw. He reeled back, and would have fallen down had not Peter Todd caught him.

Bolsover major's eyes blazed.

"You rotters had better not keep harping on about my minor!" he exclaimed passionately. "Don't let me hear any more of it, that's all!"

"Ow-wow-wow!" moaned Snoop, nursing his chin.

Bolsover gave a bitter look round and strode away.

He turned down the Remove passage, and a minute later the fellows in the corridors heard his study door close with a heavy slam.

"My word!" said Hazeldene. "Bolsover's cutting up rough about this, isn't he? Surely he isn't sticking up for his minor?"

"No fear!" said Peter Todd, frowning. "All Bolsover is thinking of is his own wounded dignity."

Tubb & Co. and Dicky Nugent & Co. waited at the end of the Sixth Form passage for Bolsover minor.

Some time elapsed before the fag made his appearance.

His eyes were red, and his cheeks drawn and stained with tears.

Tubb sprang forward and took him by the arm.

"What's happened, Billy?" he said.

"Has Loder found the money?"

Bolsover minor shook his head.

"No," he replied. "Loder still thinks I stole the money. But I never touched it—I swear I never!"

"Of course, you didn't!" said Dicky Nugent stoutly. "We all know you wouldn't do such a thing, old chap. But what's he going to do?"

"I dunno," said Billy miserably. "Oh, I hope he finds the money. That will clear me with Percy."

"Oh, blow Percy!" said Tubb, in scorn. "I suppose you're going to worry your fat because he sides with Loder?"

Billy did not reply.

"A precious sort of rotter he is, anyway!" said Dicky Nugent indignantly. "Why, any major worth his salt would stick up for his minor, whatever the kid had done. Take my tip, young Billy, and let Percy go pot!"

"I—I can't," said the fag brokenly.

"Percy thinks I'm a thief—"

"Let him think!" said Tubb. "His opinion isn't worth tuppence! We know you're all right, Billy, so why worry?"

"That's all very well, but Loder says that—"

"Rats on Loder!" exclaimed the Third Form leader disdainfully. "I don't believe Loder has lost any money at all. You know what a hasty beast he is—always jumping to conclusions, and ready to come down on a kid on the slightest pretext. Give your face a treat, young Bolsover, and smile. Things are bound to turn out all right."

Billy did his best to smile, but it was not a successful effort.

His chums led him away to the fag quarters.

"I say," said Dicky Nugent, as they halted outside the Third Form-room,

"you can borrow our gramophone for the rest of the evening, Billy, if you like. That will cheer you up."

Bolsover gave a wan smile.

"You're very kind—"

"But it's no go, Billy," said Myers ruefully. "The soundbox is busted and the spring won't wind. Somebody gave it a biff while we were scrapping in Skinner's room."

"Never mind," said Tubb. "We don't want your measly old gramophone. In fact, I wouldn't give it houseroom!"

"Look here, young Tubb—" began Dicky Nugent wrathfully.

"Well, young Nugent?"

"If you start running down our gramophone—"

"Impossible, old scout. It's run down already, isn't it?" said Tubb facetiously.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Dicky clenched his fists.

"If you're looking for a set of thick ears, Tubb—"

"Well, if you think you can give 'em to me, Nugent minor—"

"You Third Form waster—"

"You Second Form blitherer—"

The two rival fag leaders looked like coming to blows as they certainly would have done eventually, had it not been for a sudden interruption.

Bolsover major came striding up, his face wearing a grim and very brutal expression.

Billy instinctively cowered back from his elder brother.

"I want you, Hubert!" said the bully of the Remove, fastening a strong grip on the fag's collar. "Come along with me, you little rascal!"

Tubb & Co., and Dicky & Co. gathered round as the Remove whirled Billy away.

"Here, hold on, Bolsover!" exclaimed Tubb. "You're not going to bully that kid any more!"

Bolsover turned round on him fiercely.

"What's that to do with you?" he hissed. "Clear out of my way, you young sweeps!"

The Third Formers and Dicky Nugent & Co. gathered round with threatening looks. They would have hurled themselves on the Remove bully without more ado, but a cry from Billy kept them back.

"Don't hurt Percy! 'E—'e doesn't mean any 'arm. I—I'm goin' with 'im."

Tubb and the others glared.

Bolsover minor suffered himself to be led away by his major.

His chums exchanged meaning looks.

"Poor kid!" said Dicky Nugent.

"His major is going to bullyrag him again, of course."

"Yes, that's evidently what he wants him for," said Tubb, with a growl. "I vote we go along and look after him. The poor kid has quite enough to put up with from Loder, let alone his rotten major."

"Rather!"

The fags trooped after the Bolsovers.

They arrived in the Remove passage just in time to see Bolsover major drag Billy into his study.

Bolsover turned and locked the door behind him. Then he faced his minor grimly.

"Well, Hubert, do you know what I want you for?" he said between his teeth.

"No-n-no, Percy," faltered the fag.

"I'm going to make you confess what you've done with that money!"

"I haven't touched it, Percy. I don't know where it is!" cried his minor.

"You thief, you do know!" was the harsh reply. "You took the money all right, and you've got to tell me where it is. I'm not going to give you a chance

to get rid of your loot. Now, will you tell me?"

"Percy, I can't—really I can't!" cried the fag piteously.

"You can't—eh? You mean you won't!" rapped the bully. "I intend to get the matter finished with this evening, so if you won't confess I'll make you! Come here!"

The fag backed away.

"Don't touch me, Percy! Please—"

He broke off as a heavy hand descended on his shoulder. Bolsover whirled the youngster across his knee and held him there with one hand. He took up a leather strap which he had laid on the table all ready for the purpose, and he commenced to belabour his minor with it.

Lash, lash, lash!

"Oh! Don't, Percy! Oh, don't!"

The blows descended with cruel force on the youngster's frail body, and he cried out in agony. He struggled to get free, but his major held him fast.

Lash, lash, lash!

"Oh, oh! Stop it, Percy—"

"I'll stop when you've told me where the money is," said Bolsover between his teeth. "Will you confess, you brat?"

"I can't, Percy! I don't know—"

Oh! Don't—don't!"

Lash, lash!"

The strap descended again and again with all the bully's brute strength in each stroke. Billy's shrieks of pain rang out through the study, but Bolsover kept on.

A commotion sounded in the passage outside, and there was a terrific kicking on the door.

"Stop that, you cad, Bolsover!" came Tubb's voice furiously through the key-hole.

Lash, lash, lash!

The fags outside could hear the cruel blows descending, and Billy's piteous cries made them frantic.

Bolsover major paid no heed to the shouts and threats the fags hurled at him from the other side of the door. He set his teeth grimly and went on with beating his minor.

"We'll kick the rotten door down!" roared Dicky Nugent wrathfully.

"Keep it up, kids! Wait till we get hold of Bolsover, that's all. We'll teach him to flog Billy like that!"

Bang! Crash! Kick, kick!

The fags, driven to fury, battered at the door of Study No. 10 with all their might.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" said Bob Cherry, looking out of Study No. 1, where he had been chatting with Harry Wharton and the others. "What are you little ruffians making all that noise about?"

"Bolsover's got his minor in there—he's beating him!" shouted Tubb.

"He's locked the door and is pitching into poor Billy like anything. He'll kill him!"

"My hat!"

The Famous Five and Squiff came running up from Study No. 1.

They could hear Bolsover beating his minor. Cry after cry rang out from behind the locked door, broken by sobs.

"Don't, Percy! I haven't got the money. Oh, oh!"

There was a note of agony in the fag's voice that went straight to the hearts of Harry Wharton & Co.

The captain of the Remove rapped on the door with his knuckles.

"Bolsover!" he exclaimed.

Lash, lash, lash!

"Bolsover! Stop that, do you hear?" cried the Remove captain. "Open this door!"

Bolsover major paused.
"Go away and mind your own business!" he exclaimed harshly. "This is no business of yours, Wharton."
"I have a right to interfere with your bullying, Bolsover. Let your minor go at once!"

"Rats!"
With that retort, Bolsover lashed more cruelly than ever at the sobbing fag.

"Shame! Shame!" cried the fags in the passage.

"I say, this is too thick!" exclaimed Bob Cherry, whose rugged face had taken on a very serious look. "It's not usually our bizney, of course, to chip in between major and minor, but Bolsover is lamming that kid a bit too thick. It ought to be stopped."

"Rather!" growled Johnny Bull. "Whatever the kid has done, Bolsover ought to leave it to Wingate. Let's have that door open!"

Thumping and kicking on the door produced no effect on Bolsover. He continued to chastise Billy, and Harry Wharton, now thoroughly angry, told Squiff to fetch his screwdriver.

Squiff negotiated the lock with ease, and the door, propelled by Bob Cherry's large foot, flew open.

Crash!
Harry Wharton & Co. uttered cries of amazement when they saw Bolsover, with his minor across his knees, striking viciously at him with the heavy leather strap.

"Good heavens!" ejaculated Wharton. "Bolsover, you—you cad!"

Bolsover jumped up furiously, retaining his grip on the fag's coat-collar.

"What do you want?" he demanded. "What right have you to break into my study?"

"A perfect right, with you bullying your minor like that!" was Harry's hot retort.

His glance was turned on the fag, who was squirming in Bolsover's grip. Billy's face was wet with tears, and he was sobbing heartbrokenly. He looked appealingly at the captain of the Remove.

Wharton stepped quickly forward. "Let him alone, Bolsover!"

"Sha'n't! He's my minor! Mind your own business!"
Wharton's eyes gleamed.

"I tell you I won't have you bullying him!" he exclaimed. "After all, he's only a kid, and you might do some injury, pitching into him like that!"

"I didn't ask for your opinion, Wharton, and I don't want to hear it! This kid is a thief, and I'm going to get the truth from him. I'll be obliged to you if you'll get out of my study!"

He made a movement towards the strap again, but Harry sprang forward. He took hold of Bolsover's hand, and by sheer force unloosed his fingers and released the fag. Billy scuttled to Tubb's side like a frightened rabbit.

"Now, Bolsover, we'll give you a taste of your own medicine!" said Harry Wharton, with gleaming eyes.

"Hear, hear!" said the rest of the Co.
Bolsover clenched his other fist, and was about to dash it into Wharton's face. But Bob Cherry, Nugent, Johnny Bull, Inky, and Squiff grasped him, and he was whirled over.

"Shove him across the table!" said Wharton, picking up the strap.

"What-ho!"
"Yarooooogh!" roared Bolsover, struggling furiously in the Remove's grip. "Let me go, you rotters! Don't you dare—Oooooop!"
Bump!

Bolsover was raised bodily and dumped face downward on his study table. There he lay sprawled, roaring and squirming, and there he was held down, powerless to free himself.

"Now then, Harry," said Bob Cherry, turning to the Remove captain with a grin. "Let him have it!"

"Hurrah!" roared the fags in the doorway jubilantly.

Harry Wharton let Bolsover have it!

He plied the strap vigorously across Bolsover, and the bully's yells rose crescendo.

Whack, whack, whack, whack!

"Yarooooop! Yah! Ow! Wow! Stop it! Wooooooogh!"

Meet "BAT" BARSTOW

—the modern Hercules—the fellow with a punch like the kick of a mule!



You'll find him in this week's

"GEM"

under the title of

"BAT BARSTOW'S NIGHT OUT!"

"Go it, Wharton!"
Whack, whack, whack!
Bolsover's minor looked on with frightened eyes, his little body still racked with subdued sobs. As his brother's howls increased in anguish he stepped forward, and would have clasped Wharton's arm, had not Dicky Nugent dragged him back.

"Don't chip in, you idiot!" said the Second Form leader grimly.

Whack, whack, whack!

Wharton did not spare Bolsover. Although he was nowadays on a better footing with Bolsover than he had been in early times, and, indeed, had been on quite good terms with him recently, he was determined to keep him from his old bullying tendencies and curb him before he got a bad name for himself again.

Bolsover major's treatment of his minor had been cruel and unconscionable, and he deserved all he received.

"There!" said Wharton, lowering the strap at last and stepping back rather breathlessly. "I think that will do for now. Let him go, you fellows!"

Bolsover was released, and he struggled painfully off the table.

His face was white, and his chest heaved with passion. The chastisement he had received had been intentionally severe, and all the fight was knocked out of him.

"You—you cad, Wharton!" he muttered between clenched teeth. "I'll pay you out for this! You shall suffer for your infernal cheek, hang you!"

"You are welcome to try what you like with me, but leave your minor alone, that's all!" retorted the captain of the Remove.

Bolsover major gripped the table for support. He was panting and gasping with pain.

Dicky Nugent & Co. and Tubb & Co. chortled. Billy, however, was distressed on his major's account. He looked compassionately at him as he stood there, moaning.

"Percy! I—I'm sorry, Percy—" He broke off as his brother turned a baleful gaze towards him.

"Sorry, you scum? Don't you come crawling round me! You're a liar and a thief—a thief!"

"I'm not, Percy! Oh, please believe me, Percy—"

"Bah!" said the burly Remove passionately. "Believe a low-down gutter-snipe like you? I'm done with you! Get out of my sight!"

"Percy, you don't mean that—"

"I do mean it!" shouted Bolsover, beside himself with rage. "I don't want to have anything more to do with you! Go back to your slums and the thieves you used to mix with! Clear out! I don't want you!"

"Shame!"

"Percy—" cried the fag, in an anguished voice.

"Don't Percy me! Don't talk to me again, or ever get into my sight! Perhaps Mr. Chivalrous Wharton would like to adopt you. Perhaps he'd like to turn Study No. 1 into a home for waifs and strays and thieves. I don't want you, you brat! Get out!"

The fag burst into a flood of weeping, and held out his hands appealingly to his major. But Harry Wharton took him gently and led him away.

"Come on, young 'un," he said kindly. "It's no use your staying here."

"Oh, if Percy would only listen to me—"

"Clear off!" shouted Bolsover major harshly.

The fag winced, hesitated for a moment, and then went with Harry Wharton & Co.

The fags crowded from the room, hissing and groaning for Bolsover's benefit. He drove the last of them out, and slammed the door with savage force.

Bolsover's state of mind at that moment was by no means enviable.

Hurt and chagrined, he blamed his minor for it all. Deeply embittered against Harry Wharton & Co. for their interference, this unreasoning animosity towards Hubert was deeper still.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

Bolsover Major is Obstinate.

LODER'S accusation against Bolsover minor had stirred all Greyfriars, and everyone was talking about it next morning.

The fellows were all keenly interested in the affair of the missing club funds, and wondering whether the fag really was guilty.

The circumstances certainly pointed towards Bolsover minor's guilt. The fact that Sammy Bunter had opened the desk did not disprove the suspicion that Bolsover minor might have extracted the money that Loder said was inside.

Had the fag, happening to look into the desk, seen the money in the cash-box and, acting on a sudden temptation, stolen it? That was the question that all were asking. The cloud of suspicion hung heavily over the little ex-wail.

The Sixth, of course, were greatly exercised over the matter. Most of them believed Bolsover minor to be guilty, and thought that Wingate ought to take the matter to the Head without delay. Was it compassion for the fag that deterred Wingate, or was there some lurking doubt in his mind as to his guilt?

The captain of Greyfriars probed the matter deeply that morning. He and his fellow prefects made a thorough search for the missing money, and Loder was closely questioned. But no clue was forthcoming as to the whereabouts of the club funds, and gradually more fellows came round to the belief that Bolsover minor was the thief.

That he would be expelled if he were found guilty of theft was certain, and, surely, in the face of the facts, there was not much room left for doubt!

Bolsover minor found himself the recipient of very peculiar looks from the boys of Greyfriars.

Even some of those in his own Form who yesterday had believed in him now spoke in a very half-hearted way. He was discussed on all sides, and a lot of the fags avoided him. Sammy Bunter openly scoffed. He even went so far as to state that Bolsover minor only took the key of Loder's desk from him so that he could use it for his own nefarious purposes.

The idea was preposterous, and was not taken seriously; but no one called Sammy to account for his wild suggestion. Sammy, who was as mean, suspicious, and callous as his major, naturally took the worst possible view of the matter.

But things certainly looked black enough against the accused fag without Sammy Bunter's prattle. Tubb, Dicky Nugent, and little Hop Hi of the Second were practically the only ones among the fags who stuck to Bolsover minor.

The fag would not have minded that so much had it not been for the harsh and unreasonable attitude his major had taken up. Bolsover major openly snubbed him when he made a pathetic attempt to speak to him that morning.

His brother believed him to be a thief! The bully of the Remove had convinced himself of that, and would hear no word in his minor's favour. Such was the mood that Bolsover major had allowed himself to fall into.

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This alone cut Billy to the very heart. His brother, who of all people should have stood by him and helped him in his hour of trial, was the first to condemn him. The affectionate and loyal little fag would have braved all the rest stoutly, if only Percy had believed in him.

He had Harry Wharton and his chums to turn to for friendship and comfort. The Removites knew Billy better, perhaps, than anyone else at Greyfriars—Wharton especially. He knew that the fag, despite his rough upbringing, was good and honest right to the core, and he did not falter in his belief in his innocence.

The Famous Five were as puzzled as the rest over the disappearance of the money from Loder's desk. But Bolsover minor had not touched it—of that they felt sure. They knew that stealing was quite contrary to the little fellow's nature.

They invited Billy into Study No. 1 and did their best to cheer him up. But the fag was miserable and worried, and all because of his brother.

"Percy doesn't want me," he said brokenly to Wharton in the study after lessons that day. "I won't let me speak to 'im, and won't even look at me. It seems I—I'm an eyesore to 'im!"

Big-hearted Bob Cherry clapped him on the back. Tears were starting in Billy's eyes.

"Keep your pecker up, kid!" said Bob breezily. "Who cares for your major, anyway? He's too proud and pig-headed for anything, and things will come right without his help. You're a young chump to worry about him!"

"I can't 'elp it," said the fag brokenly. "Percy thinks I'm a thief, and I—I've disgraced him—"

"Oh, rot!" said Harry Wharton. "Your major can think what he likes. We'll stand by you, kid. Now, forget all about this rotten affair, and have some tea. Inky has stowed some of Mrs. Mimble's extra-special jam-tarts, and they're prime."

"The primefulness is terrific," said Hurree Singh softly. "My youthful friend will likefully enjoy the esteemed tarts, and the pile-fulness should also be terrific."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bolsover minor smiled bravely and sat down to tea with the Famous Five. The tarts really were "prime," and were calculated to gladden the heart of any fag. But Billy, try as he might, could not enjoy anything. He did his best to be cheerful, but all the time his heart was troubled about his major. The thought drumming at him incessantly was that Percy was ashamed of him and thought him a disgrace. Billy cared not for himself, but for Percy, whom he

loved and worshipped in spite of all. It hurt him to the quick to think that Percy had been shamed and was angry with him.

Meanwhile, Bolsover major was in his study, frowning over an imposition Mr. Quelch had given him that morning.

The Remove bully was still in a savage mood, and as embittered as ever against his minor. Trouble with Mr. Quelch had not improved his temper.

A tap sounded at the door, and he gave a growl.

"Come in!"

Loder of the Sixth entered the study and closed the door carefully behind him.

Bolsover major looked up in some surprise. He had not expected a visit from Loder.

The prefect's eyes were glittering.

"What do you want, Loder?" said Bolsover major abruptly.

"I've come to talk to you—about that affair of your minor."

"Well, what about it? Has the little brat's loot been found?"



Bolsover minor crept up to the bed, bent over it, and kissed his sleeping brother. The sound of a quiet sob broke through the stillness of the dormitory. Wharton sat up in bed. "Billy!" he called out softly. (See Chapter 9.)

"No," said Loder, "the money has not been found. That's what I want to discuss with you, Bolsover. This is a serious matter, you know, and unless something is done the Head will have to be acquainted with the facts."

"Well?" growled the burly Removite. "What's that got to do with me?"

"Quite a lot, I should say," said Loder, looking at him craftily. "Think of the scandal and the disgrace to you, Bolsover, if your minor were expelled, as he will be, if the Head takes the matter in hand."

"If he's kicked out it will be no more than the little thief deserves!" said Bolsover bitterly. "I don't want him here, after this. I shall be glad to see the back of him!"

Loder bit his lip.

"I—I don't want to be hard on the

kid, Bolsover. It isn't as though it was my own money, you know. I was thinking that if the money could be made up the matter might be dropped, and the Head would not know."

Bolsover major looked hard at the prefect.

"What do you mean, Loder?"

"Well, supposing you pay back the money to avoid a scandal, and settle with your minor afterwards?" said the prefect. "You are the one best able to deal with him. You ought to be able to force him to tell where the money is. In any case, you can watch him and get the money back sooner or later. I thought I'd give you the opportunity, if you preferred to have the matter hushed up, Bolsover."

"Thank you for nothing, Loder," replied Bolsover. "You needn't think I want to shield the little rascal. And as for paying back the money for him, there's nothing doing. Some majors might be glad of a chance like that, I know, but I'm not such a soft fool. If my brother's a thief, I'll see that he gets

I suppose you think you might feel called upon to pay something back yourself?"

Loder did not reply to that. He left the study, scowling.

The prefect had hoped that Bolsover would accept his offer and have the matter kept from the Head's notice. Loder was losing his nerve; he did not want the facts reported to Dr. Locke. He would much rather have had the matter settled by Bolsover major finding the six pounds to save his minor from expulsion. Most fellows, with a brother in such a predicament, would gladly have fallen in with the suggestion, but not so Bolsover major. He was too hard for that.

The burly Removite finished his imposition and then strode from the study.

As he walked down the Remove passage his minor came out of Study No. 1.

"Hubert!"

The fag started, and then looked eagerly at his brother.

"Percy, you—you want me?"

"I want to tell you that unless you part up with that money by Saturday I'll take you to the Head myself!" said Bolsover between his teeth.

"But I 'aven't got the money, Percy! I never took it—"

"Don't keep harping on that yarn. You're the thief, right enough, and I'll give you till Saturday to give up the money. Don't you dare talk to me until you decide to confess. I don't want to have anything to do with you. But I shall keep my word on Saturday, so don't forget."

And with that Bolsover major swung on his heel and strode off.

THE NINTH CHAPTER. The Bounder Takes a Hand!

TWO days passed—days of misery for Bolsover minor. His major still snubbed him and passed him by as though unaware of his very existence. Hard words or blows could not have hurt the sensitive little fag more. He was stared at on all sides; the eads of the school openly sneered at him; the cloud of suspicion hung more heavily over him, and

there seemed no hope that his innocence might be proved. Disowned by his major, and living in a new atmosphere of chilliness, Bolsover minor was quite the most wretched boy at Greyfriars.

He tried to keep up a brave face, but grew more miserable and despondent as the time went on. His brother showed no signs of receding from the harsh attitude he had taken up.

As for the rest of the school, most of the fellows now believed that Bolsover

minor was guilty, and it was only a matter of time before Wingate would have to take him to the Head and recount what had happened. That would mean only one thing, of course—Bolsover minor would be turned out of Greyfriars neck and crop.

Harry Wharton's heart ached for the unhappy fag. He and his chums still remained unshaken in their belief in his innocence, but they were powerless to do anything to help him. They could not even cheer him up now. Billy was completely broken in spirit. Had his brother backed him up, matters would have been different; as it was, he felt totally unable to bear his burden. Percy was against him—that meant more to him, even, than Loder's accusation. He could have faced the whole world with Percy at his side, comforting him, and fighting for him, as a brother should. But Percy was more against him than anybody, and the knowledge of that was a continual torture to the fag's soul.

On the evening of the third day Bolsover minor was standing in the hall when his major came down the stairs and walked in.

The fag started forward, a look of pitiful appeal in his eyes.

"Percy, won't you—won't you talk to me?"

Bolsover's face was hard in expression as he looked at his brother. His eyes glinted coldly, but he did not answer.

"Percy—"

Bolsover brushed him rudely aside and walked on. He disappeared into the quadrangle without a word or any further sign of recognition.

A chorus of sneering laughs came from Skinner, Snoop, Stott, and Billy Bunter, who were standing by the window. The fag turned, his face crimson.

"He, he, he!" sniggered Snoop. "That's what you call the cold shoulder, young Bolsover. Percy doesn't want you—what?"

"Mind your pockets!" said Skinner. "Young Bolsover wants watching, you know. The gentle art of pocket-picking is practised very extensively, I think, by the graduates from Angel Alley."

"He, he, he!"

Bolsover minor set his teeth. At first the hot blood had leapt into his face, and passionate anger flamed in his heart, but they died down again almost as quickly. Anger and resentment were useless; besides, he was getting used to these gibes.

"Anyway, you fellows, it won't be long before that little thief is turned out of the school!" said Billy Bunter, in a loud voice. "Greyfriars is no place for guttersnipes of his class. I've always said so. In fact, it would be a jolly good thing if both the beastly Bolsovers were got rid of. We don't want either of 'em here, really. Bolsover major is a rotter and a bully, and he ought to be kicked out, too. He's a disgrace to Greyfriars!"

At this the Third Form fag strode forward, his eyes flashing, and his little fists clenched tight.

"You 'old your tongue about Percy, you rotter!" he exclaimed hotly. "I won't 'ave you say things like that! I—I'll punch your nose!"

Billy Bunter backed away, blinking nervously through his huge spectacles.

All Bolsover minor's spirit had returned, and he looked so ferocious that Bunter was alarmed.

"Oh, really, young Bolsover—"

"You can say what you like about me, but I won't 'ave Percy run down!" cried the fag shrilly. "Don't you let me 'ear you again, Bunter!"

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his just deserts. I don't want the matter hushed up."

Gerald Loder gritted his teeth.

"Then you're willing for the matter to go before the Head?" he asked.

"Yes—why not? It ought to have been reported to the Head at once. Wingate is a fool to dilly-dally. You needn't bother about a scandal, so far as I'm concerned, Loder. There's been scandal enough. I think it's cool, anyway, wanting me to stand the six quid.

Skinner & Co. looked queerly at Bolsover minor.

"My hat! Fancy the young rat sticking up for his major after the way he's treated him!" exclaimed Stott. "That's the limit!"

"I don't want to 'ear anything against Percy," said the youngster, his small chest heaving. "I don't do you no 'arm!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Skinner & Co. derisively.

At that juncture Harry Wharton, Bob Cherry, Nugent, and Vernon-Smith came forward. They had heard the conversation from the doorway.

Wharton went to Billy's side, and placed a hand reassuringly on his shoulder.

"Never mind these cads, young 'un," he said. "They'll only tease you all the more to get your rag out!"

"Well, Bunter was running down Percy, and I won't 'ave it!"

"He, he, he!" cackled Snoop. "The young brat won't 'ave it, and yet his precious major gave him the cut direct only a minute or so ago."

"You'll get a cut—direct from my fist, you cad, if you don't clear off!" said Bob Cherry grimly, displaying his brawny fist for the rotters' brigade to see. "Any of you like to say any more to Bolsover minor?"

Skinner & Co. looked at Bob's fist and the grim expression on his face, and decided that they did not wish to say any more to Bolsover minor. They slunk away scowling.

Harry Wharton turned to the little Third-Former.

"We're just going up to tea, Billy," he said. "Care to come along?"

Bolsover minor shook his head.

"Thank you kindly, but I—I don't want any tea," he said. "I don't feel like it. I—I want to be alone."

He turned and walked away, his head bowed. He went out of the Hall and was lost to view in the gathering shadows of the quad.

Harry Wharton, Cherry, and Nugent looked at Vernon-Smith.

The Bouncer appeared to be very thoughtful.

"What are you looking so deep about, Smithy?" inquired Bob Cherry.

"I was thinking about young Bolsover," said Vernon-Smith, quietly. "He's a queer kid, but he's a good kid. The way he sticks up for his major is marvellous."

Bob growled.

"Bolsover deserves a jolly good bumping!" he said. "Young Billy absolutely idolises him and thinks there's no one like him. He's fretting himself to death because his major is down on him."

Vernon-Smith nodded.

"Yes, it's a shame!" he said. "If Bolsover stopped to think he'd realise that the kid was innocent."

Harry Wharton looked sharply at him. "Then you—you believe him innocent?" he asked.

"Yes. If he did take Loder's money he would have confessed long ago, for his major's sake. He'd go through fire and water for Bolsover, and wouldn't have stuck out as long as this, unless he were innocent."

Harry Wharton's eyes glistened.

"You're right, Smithy. You're a deep beggar, and can get to the bottom of things better than anyone. Where do you think the money went to from Loder's desk?"

The Bouncer answered after a pause: "I don't know, Wharton. The affair is a mystery so far. But it's interesting, THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 937.

and I should like to solve it. I'd like to find out who really did take that money."

He nodded and walked away.

The chums of the Remove exchanged glances.

"I hope Smithy thinks it out," said Bob Cherry eagerly. "He's cute, you know, and he may be able to clear young Billy. But, for the life of me, I can't see how it's to be done."

"Same here!" said Nugent. "Circumstances are all against the kid. But he's not a thief; I'll stake my bottom dollar on that!"

Wharton could not keep his mind off Bolsover minor all that evening. The Bouncer's words had impressed him. He racked his brains to think of a solution to the mystery of the lost money. In the face of all the circumstances, it seemed impossible to clear the fag from guilt. Everything pointed to his being the thief.

The Remove captain was still thinking over the matter when he went to bed. He lay awake for some time after the others, and then dozed off. He slept lightly, however, and was awakened by the sound of a movement in the dormitory.

He sat up quickly in bed and peered through the gloom.

In the moonlight from the high window he saw a small moving figure.

It was Bolsover minor!

Harry caught his breath and watched him in silence.

The fag was fully dressed, even to his cap, and he carried something—a bag. He was moving softly over the polished floor. He stopped when he reached Bolsover major's bed, and, pausing, set down his bag. Then he crept up to the bedside, bent over his sleeping brother, and kissed him.

The sound of a quiet sob broke the stillness in the dormitory.

Harry Wharton got out of bed.

"Billy!" he called out softly.

The fag straightened sharply and drew back, with a low gasp.

"It's all right," said Wharton, coming up to him. "It's only me, Billy."

"Master 'Arry!"

The fag's voice was unsteady, his eyes were glistening with tears.

"What are you doing here at this time of night?" asked Wharton quietly.

"I—I came to say good-bye to Percy. I've made up my mind. I'm goin'!"

"Going? Going where?"

"I dunno!" said the fag miserably.

"Back to London, I expect. I can tramp there, and earn my living like I used to. I can't stop here. They say I'm a thief, and I shall be expelled—I know that. I've got to clear out of Greyfriars soon. Percy doesn't want me 'ere, and the sooner I go the better 'e will be pleased. I'll save 'im the disgrace of seeing me expelled."

"You little ass!" muttered Wharton. "You can't act like this—"

"I've got to. I can't bear to stay 'ere any longer. It ain't so much the others, though they do look down on me and call me a thief. It's because of Percy."

The fag's voice broke, and Wharton could see that he had great difficulty in keeping back the tears.

"Percy is ashamed of me, Master 'Arry. I'm nothing to 'im only an eyesore an' a disgrace. It's best for me to

go now. I don't blame Percy; it ain't his fault. I know I ain't good enough for 'im. 'E's a gentleman, and I—I'm only a guttersnipe, as they calls me. Me an' Percy 'ave been brought up different, and it ain't right for me to be a drag on 'im. So I've made up my mind to go to-night. Percy won't see me again, and 'e'll be 'appy."

"Billy, you don't know what you're saying, or what you're doing," said Harry Wharton huskily, touched to the heart by the little fag's grief. "You mustn't run away! Do you hear?"

"I must! I've got to go, anyway. They've made out that I stole Loder's money, and I can't prove that I never. I shall be turned out soon, so I might as well go now and get out of Percy's way. I should 'ave been gone by now, only I couldn't leave without sayin' good-bye to Percy. That's all I came for—just to see Percy afore I went."

A lump rose in Wharton's throat. He glanced towards Bolsover major, sleeping soundly there in ignorance of it all; then he turned to Billy and took him gently by the arm.

"Listen to me, Billy! I won't let you run away like this. You must stop and—"

"Wot's the use?" said the fag brokenly. "They're all against me. Percy doesn't want me—"

"Never mind that! Your brother is an obstinate fool, and wants a good talking to. He's not worth worrying about, kid. Forget him, and stay on and fight! I'll stand by you, Billy!"

"I know that, and I'm ever so grateful. But I can't stay 'ere with Percy down on me. I can't stand it any longer. It breaks my 'eart the way Percy treats me, but I don't blame 'im; I'm goin' back to where I came from—to the gutters, where I belong. Let me go, please!"

Bolsover minor made a movement to pick up his bag and go, but Harry Wharton gently held him.

"You're not going, Billy! I won't let you be such a young ass!"

"Let me go!" said the fag beseechingly.

"No! You must stay and go back to bed!"

Billy commenced to struggle, but Wharton held him firmly.

"Don't be a fool, Bolsover minor!" said a quiet voice from the darkness behind. "You'll wake the rest of the dormitory in a minute, and that will make matters worse for you. The fellows will think you are running away because you are guilty."

Both Harry Wharton and the fag wheeled round.

The form of Vernon-Smith came walking up quietly out of the gloom.

"Smithy!" ejaculated Wharton under his breath. "Then you—you heard?"

The Bouncer nodded; his face was sternly set.

"Yes; I was awake when Bolsover minor came in. I saw him go to his major's bed. I've heard all he said. You're a little fool, young Bolsover. Don't you realise that by running away you will make things look all the blacker against you?"

"What does that matter?" said Billy miserably. "Nobody cares, and I don't see 'ow it will make much difference—"

"You can't stay here, arguing the point, kid," said the Bouncer tensely. "Come down to my study, and we can talk things over."

Bolsover minor hesitated at first, but at length he consented to go.

Vernon-Smith took his bag, and the

ANSWERS
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three crept out of the dormitory and along the dark, deserted corridors to the Remove passage.

The Bounder opened his study door and his companions entered.

"We'd better not have a light, in case any of the masters happen to be about," he muttered. "Now, young Bolsover, you're going to chuck playing the giddy goat, and will go back to bed like a good kid."

Billy made a gesture of despair.

"Why don't you let me go now? I shall be turned out in a little while," he said. "There's no hope of my getting out of this trouble—"

"There is hope," said Harry Wharton reassuringly. "Something may turn up at the last moment, kid, that will clear you. Don't be a coward, Billy."

The fag winced at that, and his eyes filled with tears.

"I know I'm a coward, Wharton, but I can't 'elp it. It's Percy being against me that makes all the difference. I'd stop an' face it all, only Percy doesn't want me; 'e'll be glad to see me go, even if it does turn out that I'm innocent. I don't want to be an eyesore to Percy. It's best for me to go from Greyfriars and let him alone."

Vernon-Smith was standing by the window, looking out thoughtfully into the moonlit quad.

Suddenly he gave a start and his eyes took on a hard glitter.

"Look here, Wharton," he said, pointing down. "Here's the precious treasurer of the senior dramatic club going out on the tiles, as usual. Look at him, skulking out by the side gate!"

Wharton crossed to the window and looked out.

He could see the burly form of Gerald Loder moving stealthily and quickly among the shadows in the quadrangle, to disappear in a minute through the side gate, of which the prefects had a key.

Wharton drew a deep breath.

"That's Loder, going on one of his night jaunts to the Cross Keys, I suppose!" he muttered.

The Bounder gave a sardonic laugh.

"Yes, breaking bounds to go pub-haunting!" he said. "What a fine treasurer for any club! Fancy the fellows in the Sixth trusting their money to a cad of Loder's calibre! No wonder the money disappeared!"

Wharton gave a start.

There was a meaning in the last words of the Bounder's, and their significance flashed across him at once.

"My hat! You don't think, Smithy, that Loder took the money!" he exclaimed in a low voice.

Again Vernon-Smith laughed—a grim, mirthless laugh.

"Think? I'm pretty well certain of it!" he said. "I'm willing to wager anything that Loder knows more about the disappearance of that money than he cares to own. I wouldn't trust that rascal any further than I could see him. I've had dealings with Loder in the past—I know him."

The Bounder's eyes were narrowed and glittering. He was right when he said that he knew Loder. Vernon-Smith had had more dealings with Gerald Loder than any other junior at Greyfriars, and, being a shrewd thinker and a keen observer, he knew every trait in the rascally prefect's make-up. There had been a time when the Bounder had been on friendly and intimate terms with Loder, when he had even broken bounds with him and joined him in the merry circle of "sportsmen" down at the Cross Keys at Friardale.

That was before the Bounder's reformation, back in the old days when he had been the most reckless fellow at Greyfriars, frequenting the Cross Keys regularly to back horses and smoke and gamble, and generally "going the pace" more wantonly, even, than Loder. Vernon-Smith, seeing the folly of his ways, had given up all that, and so he and Loder had not been particularly friendly of late.

"Yes," said the Bounder; "I know Loder. He had the money, right enough. I don't believe there was any cash in the desk at all, when young Bunter opened it. Loder had gone out and taken the money with him—had borrowed it, probably, to put on a sure cert, or to repay some debt—and when he got back with Carne and Walker, and saw Bolsover minor at the desk, he saw an excellent opportunity to shift the blame on to him. That would be just like Loder—out to save his own skin, whoever else had to suffer."

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Harry Wharton. "I—I had never thought of that, Smithy, but I can see it now. You've thought of a possible explanation of the mystery. Loder himself had the money, of course, and accused Billy to shield himself. The confounded cad!"

"The point is," said Vernon-Smith quietly, "how can we prove it? It's no use accusing Loder unless we have

slung some togs on and get out as quickly as I can."

"Right-ho, Smithy."

The Bounder went, and Harry Wharton turned to Bolsover minor, who had been standing quietly by the table.

"Well, Billy, there are hopes that we shall get at the truth, you see. Smithy's a clever chap, and if there's anything to be nosed out he'll get it. We're going to bring the thing home to Loder—see?"

"Oh, Master 'Arry, if you only could clear me—"

"Don't worry, young 'un. Things will turn out all right. Now, are you going to be a sensible kid and go back to bed?"

The fag's voice was firmer as he replied:

"Yes, Master 'Arry. I—I'm sorry I acted the coward, and I'll go back to bed now. You won't tell Percy?"

"Of course not, you young ass! Keep a stiff upper lip, Billy, and wait to see how things turn out. I'm sure the Bounder will get at the truth—and prove it."

He gave the fag a reassuring clap on the back, and Bolsover minor returned to the Third Form dormitory, feeling more cheerful than he had been for days.

Meanwhile, Harry Wharton went to the Remove dormitory, and waited up for Vernon-Smith.

It was on the stroke of one when the Bounder returned.

Wharton let him in at the window.

"Well?" he said eagerly. "Any luck?"

"Rather!" was the muttered and breathless reply. "I've found out quite a lot. But we'd better not discuss it now—in case we are overheard. I'll tell you in the morning, Wharton."

"All serene, Smithy. It's best to talk in the morning, as you say. Good-night, old chap!"

"Good-night!"

The two juniors turned in, and no more was said.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

Preparing the Plot!

THE Famous Five were all in Study No. 1 next morning, when there was a tap at the door, and Vernon-Smith came in.

The Co. looked eagerly at him. They had been discussing the events of the night previous, and wondering what the Bounder had found out at the Cross Keys.

"Well, Smithy," said Bob Cherry, "any news?"

"Heaps!" said the Bounder, closing the door carefully behind him. "I think we can look forward to bowling out Loder now, you fellows. Last night, when I broke bounds from here, I went down to the Cross Keys and hid outside the bar parlour, in a little secret place that Cobb showed me, a long time ago. Loder was in there, with Cobb and Joliffe, and the rest of the happy gang, and they were trying to persuade him to play poker for high stakes. Loder, it appears, had been lucky on a horse, and had just collected a quid or two from Cobb. Well, he gave in to them, and played, and lost the lot except ten shillings."

"The blackguard!"

Vernon-Smith gave a chuckle.

"But while Loder was playing, he let out quite a lot!" he said. "He had to go carefully now, he said, because he had only just got out of one bad scrape, and he didn't want to let himself in for any more. That brought up a very

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something to substantiate our statements. Loder is the thief all right, but how can we bring it home to him?"

Wharton nodded.

"Yes, that's just the trouble," he said. "But surely we can get proof somehow, Smithy. We must get proof—to clear this poor kid from blame."

Vernon-Smith's mouth set grimly.

"I'll see what I can do—to-night," he muttered. "I'll follow Loder to the Cross Keys and listen there. I'll find out what's been going on. I know the place well, and can hide where no one will see me. Keep the dormitory window open for me, Wharton. I'll be back later."

Wharton drew a deep breath as the Bounder stepped quickly to the door.

"You're going to break bounds now, Smithy? You're going down to the Cross Keys!"

"Yes—to spy on Loder. Don't forget about the window, Wharton. I'll

interesting topic of conversation, from which I gathered that recently Loder has been in the hands of Cohen, the moneylender at Courtfield. It appears that Loder borrowed five quid in the first place, and after repaying the capital amount, was dunned by Cohen for another six before the matter could be settled. Cohen had to press Loder for the money, and threatened to place the matter before the Head unless he stumped up—the same old blackmailing yarn. So Loder, on the very afternoon that the six quid was stolen from his desk, paid Cohen six quid to prevent him coming to Greyfriars to give the show away. Do you see the connection?"

Harry Wharton & Co. were astounded. "My hat!" ejaculated the Remove captain. "Is that a fact, Smithy?"

"That's what I heard from Loder's own lips!" said the Bounder quietly. "The day before the theft he was broke, yet that afternoon when Cohen was threatening to expose him to the Head, he met him in the wood and paid him six pounds. At the same time, that very amount was missed from the cashbox in Loder's desk. It's pretty evident, then, where Loder got his six quid from."

"Great Scott!" gasped Bob Cherry. "Loder took the money—embezzled it—and then accused Bolsover minor of the theft!"

"That's about the size of it, I reckon," said Vernon-Smith.

"Oh, the rotter!"

"The awful cad!"

"The cowardly hound!"

Bob Cherry clenched his big fists and his face took on quite a vicious look.

"Let's go along to Loder and make him confess!" he exclaimed. "We'll take a strap and larrup him, the same as we did to Bolsover, until he makes a clean breast of it to Wingate and clears young Billy."

Vernon-Smith shook his head.

"That's a bit too rash, I'm afraid," he said. "It wouldn't work! Loder would deny every word, and swear that I had invented the story. No; we can't take matters into our own hands like that. We must have absolute and definite proof."

"How can we get that, unless we make Loder confess?" exclaimed Nugent.

The Bounder's eyes narrowed.

"I'll get Loder to confess—but not by Cherry's method," he said. "Listen, you fellows. I've thought it all out. Loder didn't stay long at the Cross Keys last night. He was nervy, and hopped back to school pretty quickly, after making arrangements to call again to-night for a little card-party that Cobb is holding. I waited a little while after Loder had gone, and then I went into the Cross Keys myself."

"You—you went in!" ejaculated Harry Wharton.

"Yes. I strolled in quite casually, picked up a cigarette from the table and lit it. Cobb and Joliffe were surprised to see me, you can bet. They wondered what the game was at first, but I managed to take them in. They believe that I've gone back to my old merry ways, and that I've started to be a dog, a blade and a goer again. I flashed a pocket-book full of notes, put on a bit of the old talk, and Cobb fairly fell on my neck with joy. I used to be one of his best customers, you see, and he's always been ready to welcome me back with open arms to the fold. We had a little game of nap—I lost twelve bob—and then I packed up."

"My word!" muttered Wharton. "It

was a risky thing to do, Smithy. Did Cobb have any suspicion that you had been spying?"

"No fear!" chuckled the Bounder. "I saw to that! I made out that I had just seen Loder in the lane, and asked whether he had been there. Cobb said that Loder had called in, but not a word about Loder's little affair with Cohen was mentioned, and I didn't attempt to fish for any information, of course. Cobb has swallowed me whole, and I've promised to turn up at his little card-party to-night."

"Whew!" whistled Frank Nugent. "Loder will be there, you say—"

"Yes, Loder will be there, and that's precisely why I'm going!" said the Bounder, with a grin. "I've thought out a little scheme to catch Loder. Cohen will be there, too—in fact, it's going to be quite a convivial gathering."

"What wheeze have you thought of, then, Smithy?" asked Harry Wharton quickly.

"A top-notch—if it works!" laughed the Bounder. "And there's no reason at all why it shouldn't work, so long as we go about it carefully. In the first place, we shall need the help of old Wibley."

"Wibley! What on earth for?"

"Wibley is our champion masquerader, isn't he? He's a great actor, and his impersonations are marvellous. We shall need Wib, to do a little impersonation act to-night. Do you remember

LOOK OUT FOR HARRY WHARTON'S FOOTBALL SUPPLEMENT NEXT MONDAY!

that time he dressed up as Mr. Quelch, and took us all in?"

"Yes, I remember," said Wharton. "But what—"

"We shall need Wib to do that again," said the Bounder calmly.

"What? Dress up as Quelch?"

Vernon-Smith nodded, his lips curled into a quiet smile.

"Yes, we'll get Wibley to dress up as Mr. Quelch and break bounds with us to-night," he said. "Wib's a sport, and he'll do it. Then I'll lay a nice little trap for Loder, and if he falls in it, I shall get a confession out of him and have the matter of that stolen money cleared up so that young Bolsover is freed from blame. Listen, and I'll tell you how."

The Famous Five listened eagerly, and as the Bounder unfolded his plot to them, their eyes and mouths opened wide with astonishment.

"My giddy aunt! What a deep wheeze, Smithy!" Bob Cherry exclaimed. "It's bound to work, if you can keep Loder at the Cross Keys with you. Wib will help us, I'm sure. Let's run along and ask him. We'll take him into our confidence."

Wharton nodded.

"Yes, Wib's a decent chap, and he'll work the giddy trick for us."

The juniors left Study No. 1 and went along to Study No. 6, the room where William Wibley, the great shining light of the Remove Dramatic Society, lived, moved, and had his being.

Wibley was a remarkably fine actor—everyone conceded that. Whatever else he couldn't do, one thing was certain—he could act. His masquerades were marvellous, and as an impersonator he was in his element. Many a time and oft had Wib deluded his schoolfellows by his uncanny gifts of make-up, and it was really wonderful how he could dress up to resemble almost anybody.

Harry Wharton & Co., and the Bounder found Wibley standing in front of the looking-glass trying on some new wigs he had got for the Dramatic Society's "props." He turned round from the glass as the Co. came in, looking quite fearsome in a bushy beard and whiskers.

He gave his Form-fellows quite a start, in fact.

"My word! Is that you, Wib?" said Bob Cherry. "Come out from behind those bushes, old chap; we want to talk to you!"

"All serene!" said Wibley, whisking off the whiskers and beard. "What can I do for you, gentlemen?"

"We want you to dress up as Quelch, and break bounds with us to-night," said Harry Wharton.

It was Wib's turn to give a start.

"Wha-at!" he ejaculated. "Say it again, Wharton—slowly."

"Are you game to impersonate Quelch, and come down to the Cross Keys with us after lights-out to-night?" laughed Wharton.

"My only hat! Do you want me to blemish the Quelch bird's reputation, or what?"

"Ha, ha! Not at all, you ass! Smithy's thought of a ripping wheeze to get at the truth of this missing money affair. We are certain in our own minds that Loder is the thief, and we're out to get proof of it—see?"

"Great pip!" cried Wibley. "Loder the thief! Well, now you mention it, I agree that it's jolly likely. He's more likely to have stolen the money than young Bolsover, anyway. Do you know that Loder is the thief?"

"Yes, rather!"

The chums of Study No. 1 told Wib what the Bounder had found out at the Cross Keys last night.

"My hat!" exclaimed Wibley, drawing a deep breath. "That makes the case clear against Loder; but, as Smithy says, you've got to have proof before you can bring it home to him. What's the idea, Smithy?"

Vernon-Smith told Wibley his scheme, and the amateur actor of Greyfriars listened with glistening eyes.

"Dress up as Quelch? Rather! Why, the business will be as easy as rolling off a form," he said readily. "I'm game to help you, of course. You can rely on me for to-night."

"Good egg!"

And, as the bell rang for morning lessons, the Removites went off together to the Form-room, quietly discussing their project for the coming night.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER. Winning Bluff!

BOOM! The last stroke of eleven tolled from the old clock tower at Greyfriars. Not a light showed anywhere, and the whole school was sleeping—or practically the whole school.

Harry Wharton sat up in bed and looked round in the darkness.

"You fellows awake?" he called.

"Rather!" said a number of whispered voices.

Bob Cherry, Nugent, Johnny Bull, Vernon-Smith, and Wibley turned quietly out of bed. Hurree Singh was awake, but he remained in bed. It was a fine moonlight night, but rather chilly, and the dusky lad from India's sunny clime felt the vagaries of the English weather very keenly. There were enough of the others for the job in hand, so Inky had elected to stay behind and keep watch in the dormitory.

The juniors dressed quickly and clambered down from the window one by one. The lower box-room, which was usually used for bounds-breaking purposes, had been temporarily locked, so they had to climb down the ivy.

A minute or two later they were all in the Close, scudding towards the wall in the heavy shadows.

There was a place where the wall was easy to cross. Near by stood an old oak tree, and Wibley, climbing up to one of the lower branches, brought down a parcel.

"Here are the giddy props, all safe and sound!" he said. "Now we can get on with the job!"

"Rather!"

They all scaled the wall and dropped into the road on the other side.

Their hearts, with the exception of the Bounder's, were thumping with excitement. It was typical of Vernon-Smith that he kept cool under all circumstances, and betrayed no emotion. Breaking bounds was not a new experience to him. In the old days it had been almost a nightly habit of his.

Before them the Friardale Lane ran like a white ribbon between the gaunt trees. The juniors lost no time, but hurried on, keeping well within the shadows.

When they reached the thicknesses of the Friardale Wood, they halted.

"We're not far away from the Cross Keys now," said Vernon-Smith. "I'll go on and do my part, while Wibley gets ahead with his dressing-up. You remember where I told you to keep watch outside the bar-parlour, Wharton?"

The Remove captain nodded.

"Yes, you can rely on me, Smithy," he said. "I'll hide where you said, and listen to all that goes on in the bar-parlour. The others will be hiding near at hand, and when there's a favourable opportunity I'll bang the gate, and you'll know, then, what to do."

"Right-ho!"

The Bounder plunged on through the wood, leaving the others in the glade. He arrived at last in the glimmer of yellow light from the windows of the Cross Keys.

This was the worst place in Friardale, and bore little resemblance to the usual type of village inn. Under the management of Mr. Cobb, who combined his business of a publican with that of bookmaker and sharper, the Cross Keys was the resort of all the blackguards and "sporting" characters in the neighbourhood.

Vernon-Smith opened the side gate, walked up the short gravel path and tapped at the door of the bar-parlour. There was a quick footstep behind, and the door was opened cautiously. Mr. Cobb peered at the junior, and then his coarse face took on an ingratiating smile.

"'Allo! Good evening, Master Smith! Then you've kept your word!"

The Bounder smiled cynically in the gloom.

"Of course I've kept my word. I'm a bit early, too, aren't I?"

"No, Master Smith, you're in good time. Come right in!" said Mr. Cobb cordially.

The Bounder was admitted, and the door closed behind him.

The stuffy little bar-parlour reeked of spirits, and the atmosphere was thick and heavy with tobacco smoke. At the table, on which were cards and glasses, two men were seated. One was Mr. Joliffe, one of Cobb's touts, and the Bounder's eyes narrowed as he recognised the other as Mr. Cohen, the Court-field moneylender.

He had never met Cohen before, although he knew the rascal by sight.

Cobb hastened to introduce them.

"This is Mr. Cohen—Master Vernon-Smith!" he said. "Master Smith used to be one of my best customers, Mr. Cohen, and we was all very good pals, before 'e took it into 'is 'ead to turn over a new leaf and become a goody-goody. I never expected it to last long. Master Smith, you know. You're a real born sport, you are, and the part of a goody-goody don't suit you a bit. I allus knew as 'ow you'd come back to your old pals sooner or later."

The Bounder laughed and lit a cigarette casually.



Harry Wharton & Co. found William Wibley standing in front of the looking-glass trying on some new wigs. He turned round from the glass as the juniors came into the study, looking quite fearsome in a bushy beard and whiskers. "My word!" ejaculated Bob Cherry faintly. "Is that you, Wib? Come out from behind those bushes, old chap; we want to talk to you!" (See Chapter 10.)

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(Continued from previous page.)

eh?—and you don't care whether you win or lose, so long as you have your little flutter."

The Bouncer nodded.

Cobb, Joliffe, and Cohen exchanged sly glances.

Vernon-Smith in the past had been an expert card player, and, indeed, had picked up many a sharp practice from the rascally crew he had mixed with at the Cross Keys. But Cobb now took the view that he was out of practice, and would be easy to rook. He had gathered that impression from the junior's play the night before. Little did he suspect that Vernon-Smith had purposely lost in order to further the ends of the little plot that had formulated itself in his fertile mind.

"All right," said Cohen, catching a sly wink from Mr. Cobb. "We play five shillings up, Master Smith. Put down der money!"

The Bouncer sat at the table opposite Cohen, and the game commenced. Cobb and Joliffe looked on, drinking and smoking.

Vernon-Smith lost the first round, but the next time he won. He lost again, and then, playing with his old skill and cunning, he began to win steadily.

He could see that Cohen was playing sharply, but he countered the money-lender with subtle tricks of his own. It was a case of diamond cut diamond, and the Bouncer proved himself too clever for Mr. Cohen. The pile of money in front of him grew and grew, and Cohen's discomfiture increased.

The game had been in progress some time when the well-known tread of Gerald Loder sounded on the gravel outside. In response to his tap at the door Cobb admitted him.

The prefect gave a start on seeing Vernon-Smith.

The Bouncer was seated at the table, smoking steadily and dealing the cards. He looked round and grinned at Loder.

"Vernon-Smith! You here!" ejaculated the prefect.

"Yes, I've returned to the giddy fold, THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 937.

Loder," was the calm, steady reply. "Things are too jolly slow in the Remove for my liking, so I've come down for a bit of excitement. Care to take a hand?"

Loder did not reply to that. He walked over to the other side of the room with Cobb. Loder's face had gone momentarily pale on seeing the Bouncer there.

"What's his game, Cobb?" he demanded tensely. "Does he suspect anything—about me and Cohen?"

"Lor' bless your soul, no!" said Mr. Cobb jovially. "Why, Master Vernon-Smith only met Cohen for the first time to-night. Don't you worry, Master Loder, 'e doesn't know anything. 'E was down 'ere last night, after you 'ad gone, and 'e can't 'ave got wind of anything. Master Smith 'as come back to 'is old pals, and you might do well to keep friendly with 'im, Master Loder. 'E's got some money to lose."

Loder drew a deep breath.

"All right, then. So long as he isn't down here to spy on me—"

"Spy on you! Wot for?" said Mr. Cobb curiously.

The prefect flashed.

"Oh, nothing!"

Vernon-Smith was looking across at him.

"Coming over, Loder?" he called. "Mr. Cohen says he's going to turn it in."

The moneylender was scowling at the pile of money that had been transferred from his side of the table to the Removite's.

Cohen had fondly imagined that he could fleece the schoolboy, only to find that the schoolboy had fleeced him. It gave Mr. Cohen a pain to part with money, and as he had lost to the tune of over four pounds, he was not feeling particularly happy.

"Der luck was against me," he moaned. "I give you best, Master Smith."

The Bouncer smiled sardonically. His eyes were glinting.

He took out a cigarette-case, which

was well filled with expensive "smokes," and extended it to Loder.

"Have one, Loder?" he said. "How about a little round at nap? I've got a bit of tin to lose, you see."

Loder's eyes gleamed as he looked at the money.

He took a cigarette, lit up, and sat at the table.

"All right, Vernon-Smith, I'll play you," he said. "Only two bob up, though. I'm not very flush."

"Carry on, then!"

Loder had two pounds, having received an unexpected remittance that morning.

He and Vernon-Smith played, and as the Bouncer continued to lose to him, Loder's cheerfulness increased.

Suddenly there was a banging at the gate, and Vernon-Smith sprang up.

"What was that?" he exclaimed, with an air of alarm.

"Only the wind, I expect, Master Smith," said Cobb. "Why, wot are you looking so nervous about?"

"There's someone at the gate!" said the Removite sharply. "I—I didn't say anything, Cobb, but I had an idea I had been followed from Greyfriars to-night. Oh, my hat!"

Vernon-Smith was at the window, and as he looked out he uttered a cry of alarm. Loder sprang to his feet with a clatter.

"Who is it, Vernon-Smith?" he rapped.

"Look here, Loder!"

The prefect sprang over to the window and peered out.

The moonlight revealed a well-known figure standing on the gravel path just inside the gate.

Loder's face paled.

"Mr. Quelch!" he muttered. "Oh, good heavens!"

The figure standing at the gate of the Cross Keys was unmistakably that of the Removite master. Any doubt as to that disappeared from Loder's mind when he heard the sharp voice of Mr. Quelch rap out in the darkness outside.

"Wharton! Cherry! Nugent! Come out of hiding this instant!"

Loder stood at the bar-room window.

looking out in petrified horror and amazement.

Out of the bushes at the side three figures appeared. They were Harry Wharton, Bob Cherry, and Frank Nugent of the Remove.

"Boys, what are you doing here—at this place, at such an hour?"

Mr. Quelch's voice came clearly to Loder and Vernon-Smith, who were at the window.

"I—I—I—" stammered Harry Wharton, as if nonplussed.

"You have followed Vernon-Smith from the dormitory, and have broken bounds in order to warn him that I am out looking for him!" rapped the voice of the Remove master harshly.

Neither of the three juniors replied.

The face of "Mr. Quelch," showing plainly in the moonlight, was very grim and foreboding in expression.

"I thought as much! You lads knew that Vernon-Smith had come down to this disreputable place, to enter into association with the low, gambling wretches who frequent it. You knew that any Greyfriars boy found here would be instantly expelled, and, finding that I was following Vernon-Smith, you came out to warn him, and to defeat my purpose! But the young rascal shall not elude me. He is inside this place, and I shall take it upon myself to enter and catch him red-handed. Even if he has been warned, he cannot leave without being seen. Wharton, Cherry, Nugent, I command you to wait outside, and make no sound!"

"Very well, sir!" replied Harry Wharton.

Vernon-Smith turned to Loder, who was at his side at the window.

"Well, Loder, it looks as though the game's up for both of us," he said calmly. "Quelch will be in in a minute, and we shall both be caught."

Loder panted.

"You won't give me away, Smith?" he exclaimed hurriedly. "You'll let me hide? Mr. Quelch evidently doesn't suspect that I'm here, and—and he mustn't see me!"

The Bouncer smiled cynically.

"Why should I shield you, Loder?"

"There's no need for you to drag me into this!" cried Loder, almost cringing before the Removite. "Quelch is bound to catch you, Vernon-Smith. I'd help you if I could, but nothing can be done. So if I hide, and you say nothing about me, I—I'll do my best afterwards to make things easy for you. You won't give me away, will you?"

Vernon-Smith wheeled round and looked the perfect straight in the eyes.

"Look here, Loder, we might as well be straight with each other!" he said incisively. "It may come as a surprise to you to know that I know who took that money from your desk. It wasn't Bolsover minor, but you!"

Loder fell back as though he had been struck.

"What!" he exclaimed thickly. "You—you know?"

"Yes, I know the truth—and I want you to admit it!" rapped the Bouncer, surveying him with glittering eyes. "Listen to me, Loder; we are both caught in a trap to-night. Mr. Quelch is outside, and he'll be in any minute now, to catch us. You may hide if you like, but if I choose to tell Mr. Quelch that you are here, and rout you out of your hiding-place, where will you be then?"

"You won't do that, Smith?" whined Loder. "You won't sneak on me?"

The Bouncer gripped him by the arm.

"I will sneak on you, Loder—I'll be-

tray you here to-night, unless you do as I say!" he said sternly.

Loder looked wildly at him.

"Do as you say? What do you mean; Vernon-Smith?"

"I mean that I'll save you, if you do the right thing and save young Bolsover," was the calm rejoinder. "You have taken six pounds out of the Senior Dramatic Club funds to repay this scoundrel, Cohen, the interest on a loan. You acted the embezzler and the thief, Loder, and when you saw your opportunity, you laid the blame on Bolsover minor, to safeguard your own miserable skin. You would see the kid expelled from Greyfriars and disgraced for life, rather than own up!"

Cobb, Joliffe, and Cohen, and one or two other rascals from the billiards-room had gathered round and were listening in astonishment.

"But you've got to own up and save Bolsover minor from expulsion—otherwise I shall give you away to Mr. Quelch now, and you can suffer the consequences. Not only will I give you away to Mr. Quelch, but I'll tell the whole story of your dealings with Cohen and prove you to be a thief!"

Loder licked his dry lips.

His face was ashen pale, his eyes glittering like those of a trapped fox.

"What—what do you want me to do, Vernon-Smith?" he muttered.

The Bouncer turned to the table, and

took up the money—both his own and Loder's.

He counted out six pounds and held out the money to Loder.

"Here are the six pounds that will make up the club funds, Loder," he said quickly. "Two pounds of this is your own money, and four I have won from Cohen."

The moneylender snarled at this. He made a movement to snatch at Vernon-Smith's hand, but the junior deftly eluded him.

"You can take this money, Loder, get it changed into notes in the morning, and give them to Wingate, and tell him that you made a mistake about the money being stolen. Tell him that you mislaid it and have just found it. Apologise to Bolsover minor and to Wingate for all the trouble you have caused. You'll look a bit of a fool, I know, and Wingate may smell a rat, but that's your look-out. Anyway, it's a chance, and I give you the alternative of accepting that, or being exposed here to-night when Mr. Quelch comes in. Quick! He'll be at the door at any minute now."

Loder gritted his teeth.

"All right, Vernon-Smith. You've got me in your hands, you rotter. Give me the money, and I'll do as you say."

"One moment!" rapped the Bouncer, as Loder held out his hand to take the money. "I don't trust you—yet. You've got to make a written confession



Vernon-Smith was at the window, and as he looked out he uttered a cry of alarm. Loder sprang to his feet. "Who is it?" he asked hoarsely. The moonlight revealed a well-known figure walking down the gravel path just inside the gate. Loder's face paled. "Mr. Quelch!" he muttered. "Oh, good heavens!"

(See Chapter 11.)

that you took the money and accused Bolsover minor of the theft, knowing at the time that it was a false accusation and that you were the real thief. Write that out, Loder, and sign it, and I'll hold it till to-morrow. If you go to Wingate and do as I say, and clear up the matter without any further bother, I'll hand you your confession back, and you can destroy it. Otherwise, I shall of course, take the paper to the Head. Now, do you agree to that, Loder? You'd better make up your mind quickly. Mr. Quelch will be here in a minute."

Loder clenched his fists.

"You've got me in a trap, hang you!" he muttered fiercely. "I—I shall have to do as you say!"

"Hurry up, then. Here's a piece of paper and a fountain-pen. Write out the confession, and I'll give you the money, and then I'll go out to Mr. Quelch and go back with him to Greyfriars without mentioning you. I'll shield you, Loder—honour bright."

"Very well," muttered the prefect thickly.

He scribbled a hasty admission of his guilt on a page torn from the Bounder's pocket-book. Then, as a peremptory rapping sounded on the bar-parlour door, Vernon-Smith took the paper from

Loder and handed him the six pounds in exchange.

"There you are, Loder. Now hide in the billiards-room—quick."

The rascally prefect lost no time in complying with that instruction. He ran into the billiards-room and crouched fearfully under one of the tables.

Rap, rap, rap! came at the door.

"Ere, I say, I don't 'arf like this business!" exclaimed Mr. Cobb. "If this is a plant, Master Smith—"

"It isn't a plant!" said the Bounder between his teeth. "I'll open the door and face the music, Cobb. Mr. Quelch has caught me, and there's no getting out of it."

He stepped to the door and opened it.

The figure of Mr. Quelch stood revealed in the doorway.

There was an exclamation in the well-known sharp tones of the Remove master.

"Ah! Vernon-Smith! Then I have caught you, frequenting this low haunt when you ought to be in bed at Greyfriars! I have caught you red-handed, you reckless young scoundrel!"

"Yes, sir!" said the Bounder calmly.

"Are you not ashamed, Vernon-Smith, of your reprehensible conduct? Do you not realise the baseness and gravity of what you have done?"

"There's no need to rub it in, sir,"

said the Bounder, with his characteristic coolness. "I'll go back with you quietly."

"You had better, you young scoundrel. Come with me!"

Vernon-Smith turned in the doorway and bestowed a cynical smile on the assembled company. As for "Mr. Quelch," the look he gave Messrs. Cobb & Co., was of the deepest contempt and disgust. Then he took Vernon-Smith by his jacket collar and hustled him away.

Loder did not come out of his hiding-place until "Mr. Quelch" and the juniors had disappeared in the darkness outside.

He peered nervously through the bar-parlour blind, and then drew a deep breath of relief.

"Thank goodness!" he muttered. "Vernon-Smith has not given me away. I—I think he'll keep his word. If he doesn't, I'm done for!"

Cobb gave a growl.

"Master Vernon-Smith is as deep as they make 'em!" he said. "I shouldn't be surprised if 'e 'adn't 'ad all this thought out afore'and. 'E's a cute card."

"He's a leetle schoundrel!" moaned Cohen. "He vas von four quid of my money—and he cheated—I know he cheated, because I tried to trick him meinself. Oh, mein gootness!"

Meanwhile, Herbert Vernon-Smith was marched away into the wood by "Mr. Quelch," with Harry Wharton & Co. behind. When they were a safe distance from the Cross Keys, they stopped, and Bob Cherry slapped "Mr. Quelch" heartily on the back.

"Good old Wib! You worked the giddy oracle a treat!" he said.

"Ow! You needn't break my backbone, then, you wall-eyed chump!" gasped the pseudo Mr. Quelch. "Well, Smithy, did I time everything all right?"

"You couldn't have done it better!" chuckled the Bounder. "The trick worked like a charm!"

"Have you got Loder's confession?" asked Harry Wharton quickly.

"Rather! It's here, in my pocket-book. I've handed Loder the six quid to give to Wingate in the morning—two quid of it was his own money he had come down to gamble with, and the other four I got from Cohen, playing cards. So both the scoundrels have had to pay something towards it!"

"My word! How ripping!"

"You're jolly artful, Smithy!" said Bob Cherry admiringly. "I'm blessed if I don't learn to be a bit of a bounder. It must be awfully useful."

Vernon-Smith smiled.

"My old tricks were certainly useful to-night," he said. "I properly put the wind up Loder. He was in a blue funk, and wrote the confession like a lamb. I left him hiding under a billiards-table, frightened to move in case Quelch spotted him."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors returned to Greyfriars in great good spirits.

Wibley and the Bounder were congratulated on the parts they had played in outwitting Loder and forcing him to clear the name of Bolsover minor.

They got back to bed in the Remove dormitory without mishap, and went to sleep, feeling immensely satisfied.

And a long, weary hour later Gerald Loder of the Sixth slunk into Greyfriars fearfully, and crawled into bed in a far from cheerful state of mind. He lay awake for a long time, obsessed with disquieting thoughts, and the first grey streaks of early dawn were creeping in

NEXT MONDAY'S STAR ATTRACTIONS!

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at the windows ere at last he fell into a troubled slumber.

Loder was surprised next morning when he saw Vernon-Smith on the stairs, chatting cheerfully with Harry Wharton & Co. and Wibley.

He stopped short, and the Bounder walked over to him.

"Well, Loder, have you gone to Wingate yet?" he asked.

"Not—not yet," muttered Loder. "But what—why—how is it you are here, after—"

"After last night, you mean?" smiled the Bounder. "You are wondering why I haven't got into a fearful row—eh? Well, Quelch was very decent over it. In fact, I don't think I shall get into a row at all!"

Loder looked dazed.

"You—you mean you've worked him round with some plausible yarn, you young sweep!"

The Bounder shrugged his shoulders. "That's my business, Loder. The point is, are you going to Wingate and give him that money?"

"Yes," muttered the prefect. "I—I'm going now."

"Good egg!"

And Loder went.

The news went round after dinner that the mystery of the missing club funds had been cleared up. Loder had mislaid the money, and had just found it and handed it intact to Wingate. Bolsover minor was innocent, after all!

Great was the joy in the ranks of the Third and Second when Billy, after being summoned to Wingate's study, came back with a happy face and shining eyes to tell that the news was true and that his name was cleared. Loder had apologised to him in front of Wingate, and nobody now could call him a thief.

The affair created a great stir at Greyfriars.

Fellows who had previously downed Bolsover minor now turned angrily against Loder for fooling the school and bringing such a grave and unfounded accusation against an innocent fag. Some even went so far as to hazard at the actual truth—that Loder himself had stolen the money, and had only just been able to scrape up enough to repay it.

Wingate as good as intimated to Loder that he did not believe he had mislaid the money at all, but had used it for his own purpose. But he took no further action other than to have a new treasurer of the dramatic club elected—which the whole school agreed was only right and proper, under the circumstances.

Many hard things were said concerning Bolsover major. He heard most of them, too, but showed no resentment. Harry Wharton had a word with the Remove bully after dinner, and told him how he had made his young brother suffer. Bolsover was completely changed from his former attitude of resentment towards the fag. Wharton did not weigh his words, and he succeeded in bringing out the best in Bolsover's nature and making him feel ashamed of himself.

Bolsover called Billy into his study afterwards.



Herbert Vernon-Smith was marched away into the wood by the pseudo Mr. Quelch, with Harry Wharton & Co. following behind, grinning. When they were at a safe distance from the Cross Keys "Mr. Quelch" removed his hand from the Bounder's collar. "Good old Wib!" said Bob Cherry. "You worked the giddy oracle a treat!" (See Chapter 11.)

The fag went in timidly.

Bolsover closed the door, and then turned with a crimson face towards his minor.

He held out his large hand.

"I'm sorry, Hubert," he said huskily. "I've been a bully and a cad, but I—I see where I was wrong now. Will you forgive me?"

Billy put his own tiny hand in his major's and clasped it warmly.

"It's alright, Percy. There's nothin' to forgive. You ain't ashamed of me now, are you?"

"Ashamed of you! I—I'm ashamed of myself, kid, for the way I've treated you. But I—I'm sorry."

Bolsover could say no more—his rugged nature would not let him, but the look in his eyes and the warmth of his handclasp were eloquent enough of his feelings.

Tears shone in Billy's eyes—tears of happiness.

The brothers had tea together that

day, and there was no happier fellow in the whole of Greyfriars than Bolsover minor of the Third.

Vernon-Smith visited Loder during the afternoon. He gave Loder his written confession, and saw the prefect hurl it savagely into the fire.

And then the Bounder, in cool, deliberate tones, told Loder of how he had been hoodwinked last night. He explained how he and Wibley had played their parts, and as the full significance of his revelations dawned upon Loder the prefect flew into a royal rage.

Vernon-Smith left him, fuming with wrath and chagrin, and went back to the Remove quarters, his face wreathed in a triumphant smile.

Loder had worked his plot well, but it was the Bounder's counter-plot that had been his undoing and brought the truth to light!

THE END.

NOW LOOK OUT FOR:

"THE HAND OF AN ENEMY!"

Next Monday's ripping story
of Harry Wharton & Co., by

FRANK RICHARDS

A TOUGH NUT! Despite their force of numbers and their cunning wiles, the Wolves find in Ferrers Locke a foe more than worthy of their steel. He gets the last laugh, anyway, out of—



THE MYSTERY OF LONE MANOR!

(Conclusion.)

Introducing Ferrers Locke,
the world-famous detective,
and his boy assistant,
Jack Drake.

In the Wireless Room!

"O H, my hat!" breathed Jack. "May as well have a look at 'em while we are about it," drawled Locke. He stooped, and crawled through the opening, followed by the other three.

There was scarcely sufficient space for them to stand erect, as they crowded together in the tiny room below the old moat. The two torches revealed the heaped jewels upon three sides of them, lying in the shadow of the dusty shelves that lined the stone walls. Diamonds sparkled in careless profusion, and beside them heaped necklaces of creamy pearls. Rings and pendants of old carved gold, embedded with precious stones; gold-plate that glowed like sunlight! Jewelled collars and tiaras, exquisite ornaments of beaten gold!

Jack Drake laughed, and rubbed his eyes.

"Jove," said the youngster, "this takes the biscuit! This lot must be worth giddy millions! I'd never dreamed it'd be so wonderful as this, the treasure of Lone Manor!"

"No wonder Silva and Drood, and the rest of 'em, were mighty keen to get their claws into this little lot!" muttered Travers.

Old Armitage was staring round-eyed, his red nightcap set at a rakish angle. Ferrers Locke laughed coolly.

"Yes, it is a wonderful sight," he murmured. "The ancient heirlooms of some of the noblest and wealthiest families of Imperial Russia! Saved from the wreck!"

The detective paused suddenly, listening.

Faintly though it came to them, down in that underground room, Locke's ears had caught the sound of a motor-car's engines from somewhere above.

"Who on earth can that be?" Locke frowned. "Odd, at this time of the morning!"

"I'll go and see, guv'nor," said Jack Drake.

He slipped out through the opening, and they heard his feet on the winding stone steps that led up into the tower. Of the car there was now no sound.

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"Let's get out of here," said Locke. It was as they were replacing the dummy slab that Jack's returning footsteps rang out above their heads. The youngster was running.

"What's up?" cried Tom sharply. And before Jack came into sight round the bend in the stairs, his breathless words had made their faces go tense.

"Guv'nor! It's Silva—Silva, and Scaramanga, and Kyushu, and Strovol-sky! The Wolves are here!"

"The Wolves!" The shaking cry broke from old Armitage, and his lips had gone colourless. A clutching, claw-like hand trembled on Locke's sleeve.

"The Wolves! Oh, my heavens—the Wolves! They've come again!"

Locke's face was very grim.

"I never thought they could get here so soon," he said coolly. "Silva, Scaramanga, and the Japanese must have come straight down here from East-crouch, and picked up the Russian on the way! Clear enough that Strovol-sky has told them of the hiding-place of the treasure—"

He broke off, turning to Jack Drake. "Are they in force?"

Jack nodded. "Looks like full strength," he said.

"I saw three car-loads of 'em. Silva and the other leaders were in one, and the other two were packed with about a dozen underlings. What's the programme, guv'nor?"

The youngster's voice was cool, but it held a faint tremor that revealed his inward excitement. The eyes of the detective, too, were gleaming.

The situation was desperate. But Locke loved a tight corner; there was in him a reckless trait that made adventure the very breath of life to Ferrers Locke. And now, with what must prove to be the great final battle of wits between himself and that sinister organisation, the Wolves, close at hand, Locke was at his best; cool and unruffled, a faint expectant smile lurking at the corners of his mouth, but with lips of steel, and eyes that held the glitter of steel.

"Quick!" he snapped. "Up we get! Out of this hole, or we shall be caught

like rats in a trap; they'll come straight here! We must gain the wireless-room!"

"My hat, the wireless!" cried Jack. "Exactly!" murmured Locke, and sprang for the stairs.

As they came up into the lower part of the tower, the party could hear a thunderous knocking on the front door of the house. Of the three cars, or of the attackers, there was no sign. All seemed to be upon the farther side of the house, by the drawbridge.

The thundering on the door ceased, and was followed by a sudden crash.

Crash, crash! Dull and ominous.

"Sounds like a battering-ram!" muttered Travers. "They must have taken one of those felled trees from the plantation, and are using it to smash in the door!"

"Talk about the Middle Ages, this is the real thing!" put in Jack Drake dryly. "Attackers have won the draw-bridge, and are smashing on the main gateway with a battering-ram!"

The great thudding blows could be heard plainly. No need for secrecy or caution in an attack on so lonely a house as Lone Manor!

There was no means of ascent in the tower itself from the lower to the upper room. Ferrers Locke & Co. had to get into the house before they could gain the room where the wireless was. Even as they scrambled in through an open window at the back, they heard the front door splinter and break, and crash in before the final blow from the tree-trunk, wielded by ten men.

"They're in!" breathed Jack.

"How can we get upstairs?" muttered Locke. "Can't go through the hall—they're swarming into the hall like bees and—"

"This way, this way!" cried old Armitage shakily. "Follow me!"

Led by the old manservant, the party hurried up a back stairway from the kitchen quarters. Two minutes later they were in the little room at the top of the tower.

Adam Guelph had furnished it as a study. Thick carpets contrasted oddly with the stone floor, and the walls had been panelled. Against one side of the room was the table on which the big

wireless set was arranged. Near it stood a heavy cupboard.

"That's going against the door!" said Locke.

It took the united strength of the detective and the two youngsters to drag the cupboard into position, but once done it formed a barricade that was all but impregnable. Then Locke turned swiftly to the wireless apparatus.

He sat down before it, and clapped the phones and mouthpiece to his head—the transmitting apparatus was fitted for telephony. His hand went out and switched over from receiving to sending, and the big power-valve lit up. The detective's crisp voice spoke into the microphone:

"Ferrers Locke, private investigator, calling. Help wanted, urgent! Trapped at Lone Manor, near Sharn, in Kent, by a criminal organisation."

He repeated the message half a dozen times in the same quiet, steady voice, then switched back to reception. His hand turned the variable condenser as he listened intently for any reply that might come to him out of the ether.

"No answer," he muttered. "I'll try with a bit higher wavelength; I was sending out on about two-twenty metres and—"

As he spoke, there was a quick cry from Tom Travers.

The Larkham City footballer had been at the narrow window that lit the tower-room, overlooking the stretch of moat that ran along the back of the house. He swung round with gleaming eyes.

"Here they are!"

And while Ferrers Locke again sent out that desperate message to the outside world, Jack Drake and old Armitage joined Tom at the window.

A little knot of men had come round the far corner of the building, hurrying along the path on the inner side of the moat towards the tower.

The slim, panther-like figure of Silva, with his dark eyes and handsome face, could be seen beside that of Scaramanga, the tall Greek. With them was Strovolsky, the bearded Russian, who strode beside Kyushu, the little Japanese.

Three other men completed the hurrying group.

"Coming straight to the tower to find out if it's true, those words Strovolsky read on the emerald," muttered Tom. "I suppose the rest are searching the house for us. They must know we are here. There's our car to give the game away."

They peered down. Silva was talking and laughing, his face lit with his silky smile. He seemed very pleased with himself. Apparently the capture of Dood was not worrying the half-breed Spaniard unduly. He was not the man to trouble himself about a friend who had gone under.

Without glancing up the little group vanished into the tower beneath, and at the same time other footsteps could be heard approaching down the passage outside the barricaded door.

"Now they'll tumble to it!" muttered Jack.

Armitage gave a frightened gasp as the door-handle turned and rattled in the silence. There was a heavy knock upon the panels, and Tom chuckled grimly.

"They'll be unlucky if they try to break that door down!" whispered the young footballer.

Behind them Locke was switching over once more for transmission.

"No luck yet," he murmured. "It's too early in the day. If I'd sent this out in the evening, hundreds of thousands of listeners-in would have picked the message up all over England!"

A thunderous knock shook the door behind the cupboard that had been dragged against it.

"Come out of it!" yelled a voice. "The game's up!"

"Trapped at Lone Manor, near Sharn, in Kent," the voice of Locke went on steadily into the microphone.

Another blow upon the door, then retreating footsteps died away down the passage.

For five minutes or more they were left undisturbed. Then Jack Drake, at the window, called softly to the others. Staring down, they saw Silva and

Strovolsky come into sight below. Silva's purring laugh came floating up to them, exultant.

"So we win at last, Strovolsky!"

And as he spoke Silva opened his hands. In each lay a glittering heap of jewels, touched to a thousand glittering points of fire by the morning sun.

Strovolsky threw back his head in a burst of triumphant laughter, and suddenly his face set. His eyes were upon the watching faces at the tower window. He clutched at Silva's arm.

"Look! There they are! Up there!"

Silva swung round, startled, and his eyes gleamed up darkly. A moment later he was smiling, and with a mocking bow he held out the jewels in his fingers.

"Good-morning, gentlemen!" he called suavely. "We had wondered where you were hiding! But the first thing we wished to find was the little hoard of trinkets we knew to be secreted here at Lone Manor. As you see, we have already been fortunate enough to discover their whereabouts. They look remarkably pretty, do they not?"

He laughed mockingly.

"And now, might I suggest that you end this farce of resistance—if you intend to resist us? We have you trapped. It will be better for you to give us as little trouble as possible by coming down, gentlemen. But I do not see Ferrers Locke. Surely he has not deserted you?"

"Mr. Locke is engaged at the moment," answered Jack Drake in the same cool, mocking tones. "But let me answer for him. You wish us to come down?"

"It would be best!" snarled Strovolsky.

"Then here is our answer," said the youngster steadily—and the next instant an automatic was gleaming in his hand. Like a flash Strovolsky and Silva flung themselves forward, out of sight, at the foot of the tower. At the same moment the sharp crack of a bullet came splintering through the door of the room behind Jack. Unheard, the attackers had crept softly back, and now the assault upon



"Here's your friend," said Ferrers Locke tauntingly. And with all the strength of those steel arms the detective sent the writhing Japanese hurtling through the air at the oncoming knot of men. (See page 27.)

the door of the wireless-room was about to commence.

For a while the room echoed with deafening noise. The men in the passage were attacking the stout door with axes and crowbars. Of Silva and the men who had discovered the treasure-chamber there was no further sign. They had taken the precaution of leaving the tower at the farther side, where the door was not commanded from the room above.

The door itself would not withstand the attackers long. That was soon clear. But the heavy cupboard would prove a difficult obstacle.

The cupboard had stopped the bullets that had been pumped in through the door very effectively. On a sudden impulse Jack crept forward and put the muzzle of his automatic to the crack between the cupboard and the already splintered door-panels. He pressed the trigger, and the lead went smashing through into the passage beyond. A scream rang out, and a string of muffled oaths followed.

"That's made 'em think!" chuckled Tom Travers.

Old Armitage was seated on a chair by the window, on the look out for a sign of the men below. Locke was still seated, as though utterly unconcerned, at the wireless apparatus.

"I say, Jack," muttered Tom suddenly, "d'you smell anything?"

The youngster sniffed. His eyes grew startled.

"By gum, yes! Burning!"

He glanced towards the window. Old Armitage was on his feet, his face white. Up past the window a thin stream of smoke was rising.

"My heavens!" breathed Jack, and jumped for the window.

Locke turned his head.

"What's up?" he asked calmly.

The beating on the door had ceased. Tom Travers turned from the window abruptly.

"Mr. Locke," he said, "they're trying another plan now. They're trying to smoke us out! By Jove, feel the heat of the floor! They've cleared the treasure out from the secret room, I suppose, by now, and they've lit a great fire beneath us while we've had our attention taken by the attack on the door! There's a furnace in the room below!"

The smoke was rising thicker. The wind sent the heavy wreaths curling in at the window, and Jack sprang to shut it. Choking fumes were creeping into the barricaded room, and the flagstones of the floor were already hot to the touch of Tom's fingers.

"There's one thing," muttered Jack, "the tower's of stone, so it won't burn."

"No, but they can bake us alive easy enough," said Locke quietly. His mouth was set grimly. Then suddenly he turned back to the wireless apparatus and moved the condenser. His face showed that he was listening intently.

"Guv'nor," cried Jack, "have you got an answer?"

For some moments the detective did not answer. He switched back to transmission, and spoke quickly.

"Thank goodness, you can help! It's urgent—not a minute to lose! Tom Travers is in this, too—yes. We're relying on you!"

He slipped the phones from his ears and sprang to his feet with gleaming eyes.

"They're coming now!" he cried.

"They're six miles away, at Sheerchester. Apparently they've been down there in training for Saturday's match. One of 'em has been listening-in, and picked up my message! They're coming by car, with the police. Won't take 'em long if they don't miss the road!"

"But who on earth is it?" cried Tom Travers.

"Why," laughed Locke, "none other than your pals, the Larkham City football team!"

Into the Moat!

TOM TRAVERS' eyes lit up.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed.

"The Larks to the rescue!"

"That's the stuff to give 'em!"

"What a wonderful bit of luck!" breathed Jack Drake. "You say they're at Sheerchester, guv'nor, six miles away? They ought to be here in half an hour."

The air of the wireless-room was becoming unbearable. The imprisoned party could hear the roar of the flames in the room below. Though the window had been closed, fumes were penetrating somehow, creeping up through the interstices of the old stone floor. Old Armitage was coughing and gasping. Ferrers Locke stooped and touched the floor.

"Warming up all right," he remarked dryly. "The stones are getting pretty well red-hot! I can feel it through the soles of my shoes, too. Talk about a hothouse—"

Beads of sweat were standing out on the brow of everyone in there. The heat was increasing with every minute.

"We can't stand this much longer!" muttered Jack. "We shall be baked brown if we stay here, guv'nor! We shall have to get out; and I suppose they're waiting for us in the passage, like ferrets at a rat-hole!"

Smoke was pouring up past the window, darkening the room. The Wolves had done the job thoroughly; there were no half-measures about Silva, Scaramanga, Strovolsky, and Kyushu. Furniture, and logs from the plantation, well drenched with oil, had been piled in the lower part of the old stone tower. A minute after its lighting the pile had been a roaring furnace.

"Yes, we've got to get out," said Locke. The detective's voice was wonderfully calm, considering the desperate position that they were in. "My head's beginning to reel with the heat, let alone the fumes. But we'll fight for it. We must drag the cupboard away as silently as possible, then dart out on the beggars when they aren't expecting us. If we can only surprise them—"

He broke off. A hoarse cry had come from the old manservant. Armitage was pointing a shaking hand up at the roof.

"Look, sir! See there? Surely—isn't it a trap-door in the roof?"

Ferrers Locke turned swiftly, staring up.

"Where, Armitage? It all looks solid stonework to me."

"Then come here, sir!" muttered Armitage, coughing between his gasping words.

Locke moved over to where the old manservant stood. From that position his keen eyes detected instantly what had caught the old man's notice—a narrow chink of light between two of the flagstones of the heavy, raftered roof.

"By gad, yes!" cried Locke.

In a moment he had dragged the table into the centre of the room and had sprung upon it. His hands went up above his head, pressing upward on the stone. It lifted to the pressure, and a gust of cool wind came beating down.

"A spot of luck at last!" laughed Ferrers Locke.

Heavy though the stone was, he soon had it swung aside. Leaping up and catching his hands on the edge of the opening, he swung up out of sight.

A few moments later Tom Travers was beside him.

The two crouched on the flat roof of the tower drinking in the fresh, crisp air. Then Locke turned to the opening, and, reaching down, gripped old Armitage's hands. With Jack Drake helping the butler from below, and Locke from above, Armitage was hoisted through on to the roof, and Jack Drake came crawling up after him.

"Keep well down!" said Locke. "They'll be watching from below, that's a sure thing!"

"What now, guv'nor?" muttered Jack. Ferrers Locke laughed quietly.

"We'll make ourselves snug somewhere on the roof," he chuckled, "and wait for the rescue-party. No good trying to get down through the house; it's swarming with Silva's men."

The black, curling smoke hid them as they made their way cautiously from the roof of the tower to the leads of the gable beyond.

It was as they were creeping along a narrow stone coping overlooking the moat that there came a sudden warning cry from Jack Drake.

"Down!"

He dropped as he spoke and lay flat. A moment later a bullet went humming over him.

"It's Strovolsky potting at us from the drawbridge!" jerked Travers. "We've been spotted!"

And then there came a splash from below, and he swung round where he crouched on the stonework. A quick cry of alarm broke from his lips.

Old Armitage had missed his footing, had gone headlong over the edge, and vanished beneath the dark waters of the moat.

There was a shout from somewhere below in the thick, guttural accents of Strovolsky:

"There they go! They're on the roof! One's in the moat—"

And then there came a second splash.

Like a streak a slim figure had curved down from the edge of the roof and taken the water with a clean dive.

Tom Travers had gone to the rescue of the old manservant!

In Silva's Power!

LOCKE'S lips had set into a thin line.

He saw Strovolsky rush from the drawbridge into the house. Clearly the Russian had gone to raise the alarm. In the moat below Tom Travers was striking out for where Armitage had gone under.

"Now we're ditched!" murmured Jack Drake grimly.

He was staring down, and saw that Tom was now swimming for the edge of the moat, supporting Armitage's head above the water as he went.

"I'm going down!" said Locke quietly.

This accident had spoilt their plans

utterly; but Locke did not mean to desert his friends now and remain in the comparative safety of the roof, where, with their backs to a wall, they might well have kept their enemies at bay for a while.

The detective rose to his full height, and his arms went above his head. Already he had thrown off his coat, and now he dived. Jack saw the detective take the water with scarcely a splash; and then the youngster followed.

The water closed above Jack's head, and he struck upwards, head bobbing above the surface, to find Locke already hitting out for the farther bank.

Travers was hauling the old man out of the water now. But even as Jack turned to swim after Locke, a little cat-like figure came slipping from the bushes behind Travers.

It was Kyushu, the Japanese.

Travers had just hauled Armitage to safety when he heard the light footsteps behind him and swung round. But as he did so a wiry, yellow hand came coiling round his throat, dragging back his head.

Travers fought to free himself. But his right arm was twisted into the small of his back, and a terrible pain shot up his spine. A cry escaped him, and from the little Japanese broke a gloating, purring laugh.

"Keep still, my honourable friend!" whispered the Japanese.

Travers made a convulsive effort to free himself again, but the terrible jujitsu of the Japanese had him helpless. He crashed to the ground with a groan, and Kyushu knelt above him, purring cat-like, his slanting eyes glinting with a cruel delight.

The next moment footsteps came thundering over the bridge. Strovolsky, Scaramanga, and Silva himself, followed by three of their men, were racing out of the house to the aid of the Japanese.

The moat was broad, but Locke was a powerful swimmer. Jack Drake was no novice in the water; but Locke had outdistanced the youngster by yards, and Jack was still swimming in the middle of the moat by the time Locke was hauling himself up the slimy steps at the edge of the moat.

Kyushu saw him coming, and jerked an automatic from his pocket. With the wonderful jujitsu at his command, the Japanese was holding Travers helpless with one hand alone.

The automatic barked, and Locke flung himself aside. The bullet ripped over the moat and thudded into the wall of the house. Then Locke was on Kyushu like a panther.

There was a terrible cry from Travers as the Japanese wrenched his arms in such a way as to leave them numbed and helpless—another inch and they would have been broken. Then Ferrers Locke, avoiding the clutching, yellow hands of his foe, which sought to do to him as they had done to Travers, seized Kyushu round the waist and swung him high.

Silva, Scaramanga, and Strovolsky were very near now, their followers at their heels. The Greek had raised his automatic to fire, but now he lowered it, uncertain, afraid of hitting the Japanese.

From Locke broke a cool, defiant laugh.

"Here's your friend!" he cried tauntingly, and with all the strength of those steel arms the detective sent the writhing Japanese hurtling through the air at the oncoming knot of men.

The flying figure struck Scaramanga in the face, and he staggered back.

Over the edge of the moat he and Kyushu went tumbling, clutching together. Then Strovolsky's automatic spat out venomously, and Jack Drake, hauling himself out of the water, saw Locke reel and clap his hand to his shoulder.

"Don't fire!" snarled Silva. "I want Locke alive, curse him!"

There was something in the soft, ice-cold voice of the half-caste Spaniard that frightened Jack. He read there only too well how terrible Locke's fate would be were he once to fall into the hands of the leader of the Wolves.

A moment later Locke and Silva were struggling together, their trampling feet thudding on the grass. Strovolsky sprang at Jack Drake, but the youngster met the Russian with a straight left from the shoulder which sent him to earth like a bundle of old clothes. He glimpsed Locke fighting in the centre of a knot of struggling figures. Then, next moment, a man came racing across. Silva turned his head, startled.

"What is it?" he snapped.

"Danger!" gasped the frightened man. "Mr. Silva—quick, there are four motor-cars coming over the marsh road, racing for this house!"

Jack Drake drew a deep breath. His eyes were gleaming joyously, recklessly. He gave a great shout.

"They've come!" he cried. "They've come! Larks to the rescue! Give it to 'em, guv'nor!"

And with the words Jack Drake struck with all his strength at an ugly face thrust close to his own.

After the Football Match!

"**S**AVED, Travers! Saved, sir!"

"Well saved there!" The leather flew from Travers' foot, away over the heads of the onrushing forwards, to his own forward line. The Larkham City players were away in a moment, sweeping on towards the West Ham goal.

In the grand-stand Ferrers Locke and Jack Drake watched with eager eyes. Only two minutes more to play, and so far the game—West Ham versus Larkham City, in the third round for the English Cup—had been an even struggle, without a goal scored on either side. Despite the superiority of the West Ham attack, Travers in the visitors' goal had been apparently impassable.

But now Larkham were attacking with all their skill, and at last the West Ham defence was beaten. The ball went humming into the net from the foot of Crisp, the Larkham City centre-forward; and a few seconds later the long blast of the referee's whistle proclaimed that the goal had been scored during the last hundred seconds of play.

Jack Drake was on his feet, shouting excitedly, carried away. Locke, laughing, took the youngster's arm.

"You'll burst a blood-vessel, Jack! Come along! We've got to get round to see Tom and take him off to Baker Street and have a long jaw with him."

"But what a tonping goal!" grinned the youngster. "Crisp is great! The way he scored that goal was like—like—well, like the way he led the team, and the police, to the rescue at Lone Manor! That was a fight, wasn't it, guv'nor? Crumbs, but I've never been in a better!"

"Nor have I," murmured Locke as they filed out of the football-ground to where Locke's car, the White Hawk, was waiting to speed them and Tom

Travers to Baker Street. "The way those footballers waded into the Wolves was a treat. I sha'n't forget it—neither will Silva and Strovolsky!"

"They'll have plenty of time to think over it," agreed Jack, with a chuckle, "while serving their sentences! Thank goodness the law is looking after the beggars at last! It wasn't an easy job, bringing 'em into the dock, but you pulled it off in the end—as I knew you would, guv'nor!"

A little later Tom Travers joined them. He was looking fit and well again, after the few weeks that had elapsed since the final scene of that grim struggle at the old manor house.

The White Hawk soon ate up the distance between the football ground and Baker Street. As the three entered Locke's rooms, Sing-Sing, Locke's Chinese servant, appeared with a letter on a salver.

"Came by the last post, eh?" said Locke in answer to a remark from the Chinese. "Sharn postmark—looks like a letter from your uncle, Tom, at Lone Manor."

In the detective's cosy study Locke opened the letter and read it through. He handed it across to Jack and Tom.

"Yes, it is from your uncle, Tom. He writes to say that his Russian friends, free at last of the unwelcome attentions of the emissaries of the Bolshevik government, have come for their jewels and taken 'em off. Jove, Adam Guelph must feel a good deal more comfortable now that Lone Manor no longer holds that little lot."

There was a sudden knock on the door, and Sing-Sing glided in. He was carrying a little sealed packet which, he said, had just been brought by messenger boy.

"Addressed to all three of us!" murmured the detective in surprise. "Open it, will you, Jack, and find out what's in it?"

Jack opened the packet curiously. A small green leather case lay within, and as he clicked it open a quick cry escaped Tom Travers.

"My hat!"

For in the silk-lined case lay three glittering diamonds of immense size, shimmering with dancing fires in the lamplight.

"My aunt!" breathed Jack Drake. "Crumbs, guv'nor, but these look as though they're worth something!"

In the lid of the case was a small card, and Tom Travers took it, and read aloud the words written upon it:

"A slight expression of the gratitude of a few exiles."

The words were unsigned, but the identity of the donors was clear enough; it could only be the Russian aristocrats to whom the treasure of Lone Manor had at long last been returned.

Ferrers Locke took one of the great diamonds from its silken setting, and held it to the firelight. Tom Travers and Jack Drake gazed fascinated into the liquid, shimmering depths of the magnificent stone.

"A princely gift!" murmured Locke, smiling in the firelight. "And a very pleasant souvenir of a rather peculiar case!"

THE END.

(Look out for the opening chapters of "The Case of the Langdale Wanderers!"—a brilliant new football and detective story starting next Monday, also the first issue of Harry Wharton's Football Supplement.)

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Hurt and chagrined, he blamed his minor for it all. Deeply embittered against Harry Wharton & Co. for their interference, this unreasoning animosity towards Hubert was deeper still.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

Bolsover Major Is Obstinate.

LODER'S accusation against Bolsover minor had stirred all Greyfriars, and everyone was talking about it next morning.

The fellows were all keenly interested in the affair of the missing club funds, and wondering whether the fag really was guilty.

The circumstances certainly pointed towards Bolsover minor's guilt. The fact that Sammy Bunter had opened the desk did not disprove the suspicion that Bolsover minor might have extracted the money that Loder said was inside.

Had the fag, happening to look into the desk, seen the money in the cash-box and, acting on a sudden temptation, stolen it? That was the question that all were asking. The cloud of suspicion hung heavily over the little ex-waif.

The Sixth, of course, were greatly exercised over the matter. Most of them believed Bolsover minor to be guilty, and thought that Wingate ought to take the matter to the Head without delay. Was it compassion for the fag that deterred Wingate, or was there some lurking doubt in his mind as to his guilt?

The captain of Greyfriars probed the matter deeply that morning. He and his fellow prefects made a thorough search for the missing money, and Loder was closely questioned. But no clue was forthcoming as to the whereabouts of the club funds, and gradually more fellows came round to the belief that Bolsover minor was the thief.

That he would be expelled if he were found guilty of theft was certain, and, surely, in the face of the facts, there was not much room left for doubt!

Bolsover minor found himself the recipient of very peculiar looks from the boys of Greyfriars.

Even some of those in his own Form who yesterday had believed in him now spoke in a very half-hearted way. He was discussed on all sides, and a lot of the fags avoided him. Sammy Bunter openly scoffed. He even went so far as to state that Bolsover minor only took the key of Loder's desk from him so that he could use it for his own nefarious purposes.

The idea was preposterous, and was not taken seriously; but no one called Sammy to account for his wild suggestion. Sammy, who was as mean, suspicious, and callous as his major, naturally took the worst possible view of the matter.

But things certainly looked black enough against the accused fag without Sammy Bunter's prattle. Tubb, Dicky Nugent, and little Hop Hi of the Second were practically the only ones among the fags who stuck to Bolsover minor.

The fag would not have minded that so much had it not been for the harsh and unreasonable attitude his major had taken up. Bolsover major openly snubbed him when he made a pathetic attempt to speak to him that morning.

His brother believed him to be a thief! The bully of the Remove had convinced himself of that, and would hear no word in his minor's favour. Such was the mood that Bolsover major had allowed himself to fall into.

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This alone cut Billy to the very heart. His brother, who of all people should have stood by him and helped him in his hour of trial, was the first to condemn him. The affectionate and loyal little fag would have braved all the rest stoutly, if only Percy had believed in him.

He had Harry Wharton and his chums to turn to for friendship and comfort. The Removites knew Billy better, perhaps, than anyone else at Greyfriars—Wharton especially. He knew that the fag, despite his rough upbringing, was good and honest right to the core, and he did not falter in his belief in his innocence.

The Famous Five were as puzzled as the rest over the disappearance of the money from Loder's desk. But Bolsover minor had not touched it—of that they felt sure. They knew that stealing was quite contrary to the little fellow's nature.

They invited Billy into Study No. 1 and did their best to cheer him up. But the fag was miserable and worried, and all because of his brother.

"Percy doesn't want me," he said brokenly to Wharton in the study after lessons that day. "I won't let me speak to 'im, and won't even look at me. It seems I—I'm an eyesore to 'im!"

Big-hearted Bob Cherry clapped him on the back. Tears were starting in Billy's eyes.

"Keep your pecker up, kid!" said Bob breezily. "Who cares for your major, anyway? He's too proud and pig-headed for anything, and things will come right without his help. You're a young chump to worry about him!"

"I can't 'elp it," said the fag brokenly. "Percy thinks I'm a thief, and I—I've disgraced him—"

"Oh, rot!" said Harry Wharton. "Your major can think what he likes. We'll stand by you, kid. Now, forget all about this rotten affair, and have some tea. Inky has stowed some of Mrs. Mimble's extra-special jam-tarts, and they're prime."

"The primefulness is terrific," said Hurree Singh softly. "My youthful friend will likely enjoy the esteemed tarts, and the pile-fulness should also be terrific."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bolsover minor smiled bravely and sat down to tea with the Famous Five. The tarts really were "prime," and were calculated to gladden the heart of any fag. But Billy, try as he might, could not enjoy anything. He did his best to be cheerful, but all the time his heart was troubled about his major. The thought drumming at him incessantly was that Percy was ashamed of him and thought him a disgrace. Billy cared not for himself, but for Percy, whom he

loved and worshipped in spite of all. It hurt him to the quick to think that Percy had been shamed and was angry with him.

Meanwhile, Bolsover major was in his study, frowning over an imposition Mr. Quelch had given him that morning.

The Remove bully was still in a savage mood, and as embittered as ever against his minor. Trouble with Mr. Quelch had not improved his temper.

A tap sounded at the door, and he gave a growl.

"Come in!"

Loder of the Sixth entered the study and closed the door carefully behind him.

Bolsover major looked up in some surprise. He had not expected a visit from Loder.

The prefect's eyes were glittering.

"What do you want, Loder?" said Bolsover major abruptly.

"I've come to talk to you—about that affair of your minor."

"Well, what about it? Has the little brat's loot been found?"



Bolsover minor crept up to the bed, bent over it, and kissed his sleeping brother. The sound of a quiet sob broke through the stillness of the dormitory. Harry Wharton sat up in bed. "Billy!" he called out softly. (See Chapter 9.)

"No," said Loder, "the money has not been found. That's what I want to discuss with you, Bolsover. This is a serious matter, you know, and unless something is done the Head will have to be acquainted with the facts."

"Well?" growled the burly Removite. "What's that got to do with me?"

"Quite a lot, I should say," said Loder, looking at him craftily. "Think of the scandal and the disgrace to you, Bolsover, if your minor were expelled, as he will be, if the Head takes the matter in hand."

"If he's kicked out it will be no more than the little thief deserves!" said Bolsover bitterly. "I don't want him here, after this. I shall be glad to see the back of him!"

Loder bit his lip.

"I—I don't want to be hard on the

kid, Bolsover. It isn't as though it was my own money, you know. I was thinking that if the money could be made up the matter might be dropped, and the Head would not know."

Bolsover major looked hard at the prefect.

"What do you mean, Loder?"

"Well, supposing you pay back the money to avoid a scandal, and settle with your minor afterwards?" said the prefect. "You are the one best able to deal with him. You ought to be able to force him to tell where the money is. In any case, you can watch him and get the money back sooner or later. I thought I'd give you the opportunity, if you preferred to have the matter hushed up, Bolsover."

"Thank you for nothing, Loder," replied Bolsover. "You needn't think I want to shield the little rascal. And as for paying back the money for him, there's nothing doing. Some majors might be glad of a chance like that, I know, but I'm not such a soft fool. If my brother's a thief, I'll see that he gets

I suppose you think you might feel called upon to pay something back yourself?"

Loder did not reply to that. He left the study, scowling.

The prefect had hoped that Bolsover would accept his offer and have the matter kept from the Head's notice. Loder was losing his nerve; he did not want the facts reported to Dr. Locke. He would much rather have had the matter settled by Bolsover major finding the six pounds to save his minor from expulsion. Most fellows, with a brother in such a predicament, would gladly have fallen in with the suggestion, but not so Bolsover major. He was too hard for that.

The burly Removite finished his imposition and then strode from the study.

As he walked down the Remove passage his minor came out of Study No. 1.

"Hubert!"

The fag started, and then looked eagerly at his brother.

"Percy, you—you want me?"

"I want to tell you that unless you part up with that money by Saturday I'll take you to the Head myself!" said Bolsover between his teeth.

"But I haven't got the money, Percy! I never took it—"

"Don't keep harping on that yarn. You're the thief, right enough, and I'll give you till Saturday to give up the money. Don't you dare talk to me until you decide to confess. I don't want to have anything to do with you. But I shall keep my word on Saturday, so don't forget."

And with that Bolsover major swung on his heel and strode off.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

The Bunder Takes a Hand!

TWO days passed—days of misery for Bolsover minor.

His major still snubbed him and passed him by as though unaware of his very existence. Hard words or blows could not have hurt the sensitive little fag more. He was stared at on all sides; the eads of the school openly sneered at him; the cloud of suspicion hung more heavily over him, and there seemed no hope that his innocence might be proved. Disowned by his major, and living in a new atmosphere of chilliness, Bolsover minor was quite the most wretched boy at Greyfriars.

He tried to keep up a brave face, but grew more miserable and despondent as the time went on. His brother showed no signs of receding from the harsh attitude he had taken up.

As for the rest of the school, most of the fellows now believed that Bolsover

minor was guilty, and it was only a matter of time before Wingate would have to take him to the Head and recount what had happened. That would mean only one thing, of course—Bolsover minor would be turned out of Greyfriars neck and crop.

Harry Wharton's heart ached for the unhappy fag. He and his chums still remained unshaken in their belief in his innocence, but they were powerless to do anything to help him. They could not even cheer him up now. Billy was completely broken in spirit. Had his brother backed him up, matters would have been different; as it was, he felt totally unable to bear his burden. Percy was against him—that meant more to him, even, than Loder's accusation. He could have faced the whole world with Percy at his side, comforting him, and fighting for him, as a brother should. But Percy was more against him than anybody, and the knowledge of that was a continual torture to the fag's soul.

On the evening of the third day Bolsover minor was standing in the hall when his major came down the stairs and walked in.

The fag started forward, a look of piteful appeal in his eyes.

"Percy, won't you—won't you talk to me?"

Bolsover's face was hard in expression as he looked at his brother. His eyes glinted coldly, but he did not answer.

"Percy—"

Bolsover brushed him rudely aside and walked on. He disappeared into the quadrangle without a word or any further sign of recognition.

A chorus of sneering laughs came from Skinner, Snoop, Stott, and Billy Bunter, who were standing by the window. The fag turned, his face crimson.

"He, he, he!" sniggered Snoop.

"That's what you call the cold shoulder, young Bolsover. Percy doesn't want you—what?"

"Mind your pockets!" said Skinner.

"Young Bolsover wants watching, you know. The gentle art of pocket-picking is practised very extensively, I think, by the graduates from Angel Alley."

"He, he, he!"

Bolsover minor set his teeth. At first the hot blood had leapt into his face, and passionate anger flamed in his heart, but they died down again almost as quickly. Anger and resentment were useless; besides, he was getting used to these gibes.

"Anyway, you fellows, it won't be long before that little thief is turned out of the school!" said Billy Bunter, in a loud voice. "Greyfriars is no place for guttersnipes of his class. I've always said so. In fact, it would be a jolly good thing if both the beastly Bolsovers were got rid of. We don't want either of 'em here, really. Bolsover major is a rotter and a bully, and he ought to be kicked out, too. He's a disgrace to Greyfriars!"

At this the Third Form fag strode forward, his eyes flashing, and his little fists clenched tight.

"You 'old your tongue about Percy, you rotter!" he exclaimed hotly. "I won't 'ave you say things like that! I—I'll punch your nose!"

Billy Bunter backed away, blinking nervously through his huge spectacles.

All Bolsover minor's spirit had returned, and he looked so ferocious that Bunter was alarmed.

"Oh, really, young Bolsover—"

"You can say what you like about me, but I won't 'ave Percy run down!" cried the fag shrilly. "Don't you let me 'ear you again, Bunter!"

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