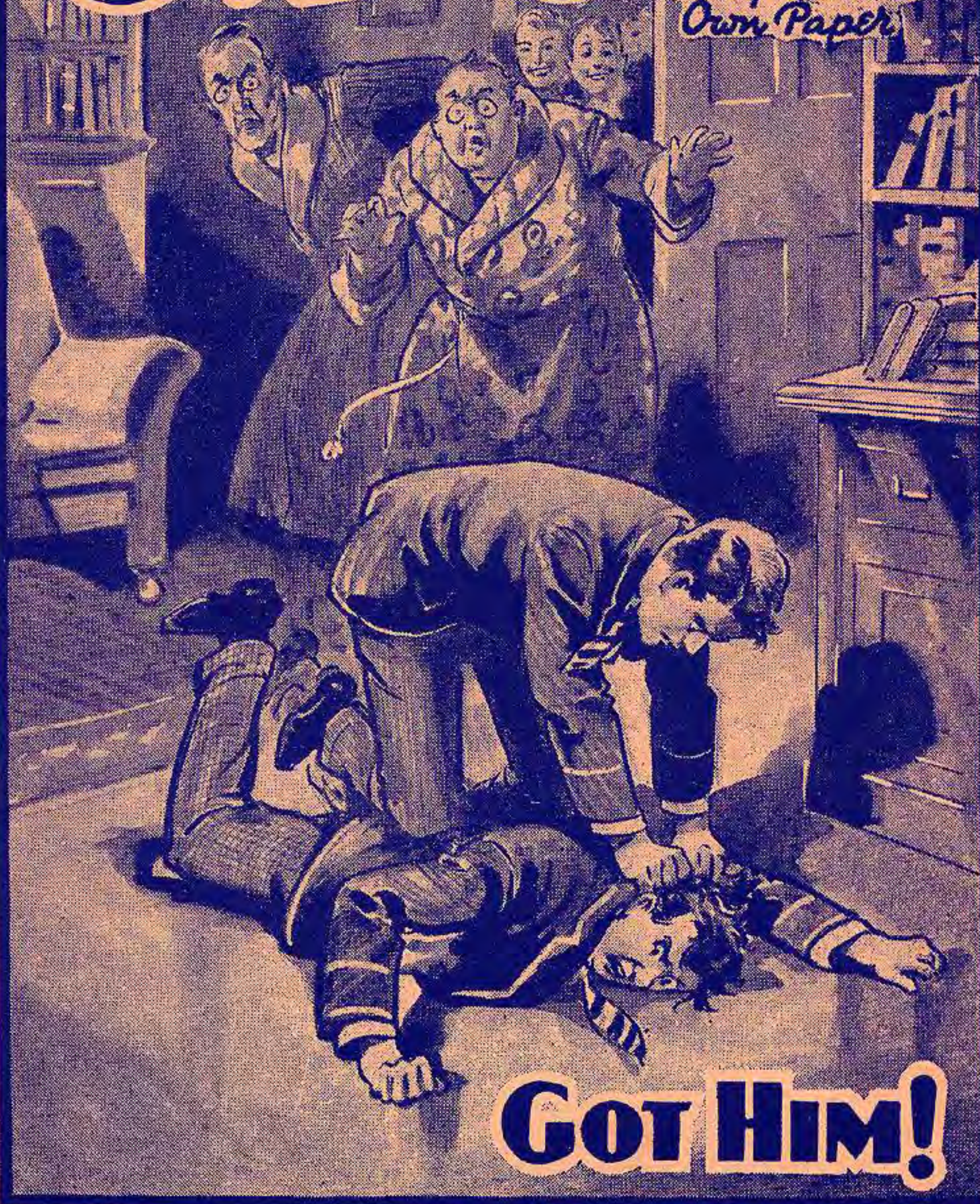


"SEXTON BLAKE MINOR!" Amazing Complete School-Adventure Yarn of **HARRY WHARTON & Co., Inside.**

The Magnet ^{2^D}

*Billy Bunter's
Own Paper*



GOT HIM!



THIS WEEK BY
TOM DUTTON,
the deaf junior of the Remove

I 'VE just punched Skinner's head. He was showing some fellows a cartoon of me, with an ear-trumpet a yard long, treading on a cat's tail and calling it a nightingale. He didn't expect me to join his group or he'd have jolly well kept his silly drawing in his pocket.

He said something about it being "a lark."

"Nightingale or lark," I replied sternly. "It makes no difference. Besides, you've written 'nightingale' yourself. If you meant a lark, why did you call it a nightingale?"

He muttered something about a silly owl.

"An owl?" I cried. "Well, that's better! An owl's screech does sound something like a cat, though I hope I should know the difference. But why should I call an owl a nightingale?"

"Whelp!" gasped Skinner faintly.

Well, of course, I don't take names like that from anyone, so I landed out, naturally, and wiped up the floor with him. He tried to make out that he had shouted "Help!" not "Whelp!" but I'm not deaf—I heard jolly well what he said. Like most of the chaps in my Form, he mumbles such a lot that it's sometimes difficult to make him out. But I'm not such a silly ass that I should mistake "Help!" for "Whelp!" I crumbled him up and left him moaning on the floor.

MUMBLEMANIA

I can't understand why fellows WILL mumble. They must all be suffering from Mumblemania, I think. Take Toddy, my study-mate. He came into the study just now and muttered:

"Have you seen Bunter lately?"

"Never," I replied at once. "I've often seen him looking fat and bloated and horrible, but I've never seen him looking stately. Who says he's stately?"

"Tan me!" gasped Peter.

I call that a potty thing to say.

"Why do you want to be tanned?" I demanded. "I'll tan you, Peter, if you're really serious, but it's a silly trick. I think where shall I do it—in here?"

Toddy mopped his forehead with a hanky and yelled:

"I'm cooking for Bunter!"

That surprised me.

"I shouldn't do that," I replied at once. "Let Bunter cook his own grub. He always dodges his share of the work. What are you cooking—sosses?"

Peter sank into a chair and shut his eyes. Then he sat up and bawled:

"Do you know where Bunter is?"

"No," I answered—"and there's no need to bawl. I don't like bawling, Peter. As long as you speak distinctly, and don't mumble—"

"Queelch's sent me to mind Bunter," explained Peter, rather impatiently, I must say.

"Well, my hat!" I answered. "Isn't Bunter old enough to look after himself? Does Queelch want us to take him out in a pram, or something? I don't see how you can mind Bunter, anyway—unless you shut him up in the coal-cellar."

And then, without the slightest warning, he said:

"Do you want to be birched, you fool?" So, of course, I sailed in and made mince-meat of him, because it's very much too

I give Public Warning, to Whom It May Concern, that in future every fellow who tries that trick will get one on the snozzle. Perhaps that will make them tired of it.

TORNADO TOM! Great Boxing Yarn By Tom Dutton.

Boxing has always been my pet hobby, and I wrote a line yarn about it for the "Herald," but they turned it down, so, naturally, I tried to wipe up the floor with them, but they turned me down, too, so I'm going to put the yarn here, and I hope you won't turn the page down.—T.D.)

Thud! Splock! Wham! Zog! Biff! Bonk!

Never had Tornado Tom, the boy wonder welter-weight, shown such dazzling form. His opponent, Bruiser Bill, thought a dozen fellows were hitting him from all parts of the compass as Tom flizzed like lightning round the ring and showered blows on the Bruiser's massive carcass.

The spectators hooted and screamed, for their money was all on Bruiser Bill at 15,000 to 1. Only a week before, Tom had been a schoolboy, and had never trod the ring in his life, but his father had been ruined by a mob of gangsters, and his mother had been framed-up and sent to prison on a false charge of forgery, and his Aunt Jane had been turned out of her ancestral home to tramp the streets, and Tom suspected that an enemy had done all

thick to speak to a fellow like that, and I told him so. He tried to spoof me that he had said "searched the school," and was speaking about Bunter. But I hope I'm not the fellow to have my leg pulled like that. I heard what he said, and I jolly well mopped him up for it.

I'm not deaf. I may be a trifle harder of hearing than some fellows, but I can hear well enough if a chap speaks up and doesn't mumble. No; the truth is that fellows try to pull my leg by calling me names and then making out they said something else.

this, so he was now earning money in the ring and at the same time trying to find out who had ruined his family.

Whiz! Bang! Bonk! Splock! Wham! Biff! Zog! Thud! Swoosh! Crash! BANG! Blows were still raining on Bruiser Bill, who tried feebly to guard them, and every now and then swung a sledgehammer blow at the spot Tom had left five minutes before.

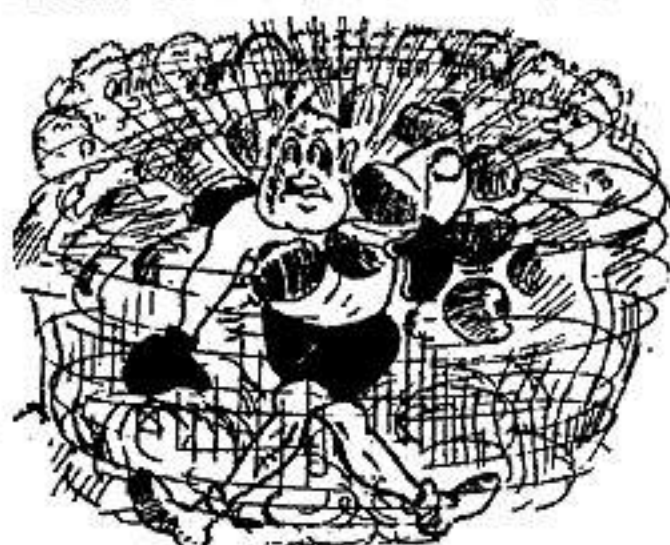
"Ere, ease off, 'ang yer!" gasped Bill, who was getting giddy with trying to see which way Tom went. "Stand still, carn't yer, and let a cove 'it yer?"

"Rats to you!" replied Tom indignantly, and instantly put over a terrific uppercut which spread Bill's nose all over his face.

"Evens, I could scream!" whispered Bill, patting his nose back into place with a shaking glove. "If this goes on much longer I shall 'eave in the towel!"

When the ref heard these words he turned pale, for all his money was on Bill, and he had mortgaged his home and furniture to back such a "stone cert." He gave Tornado Tom a grim look and raised his hand.

"Stop the fight!" he shouted fiercely. "The verdict is awarded to Bruiser Bill, and Tornado Tom is disqualified for a foul blow!"



THE TORNADO STRIKES!

A yell of applause rent the air, mingled with hisses and groans for Tom.

Poor Tom stood white and paralysed with amazement. Seeing that his blow had connected with Bill's snozzle, it could hardly have been under the belt—unless Bill was wearing his belt round his ears. He stared at the ref unbelievably.

"I never did!" he tried to explain. "It's a fearful whopper! I hit him on the boko. Why, you can see the mark!"

"Rats!" snarled the ref. "Get out of this, you young rotter! You've lost the fight, so you can buzz off!"

Tom cast a haggard glance round the hall. Spectators were shaking their fists at him, hissing and booing, casting umbrellas and telling him he ought to be ashamed of himself. The only people on his side were a handful of bookies, and even they were giving him angry looks for losing their money for them.

Disgraced and penniless, Tom crept away. In his fierce resentment, he added the name of the ref to that of the Unknown Enemy, and swore he would get even with them both.

"I will make good!" he vowed through clenched teeth. "Let the blighters wait—I'll give 'em jip!"

(And if I get another page to myself some time I'll put in some more of this yarn. There's a lot more to come, and all jolly good, so keep your eye on this paper—in case.—T.D.)

TOM DUTTON

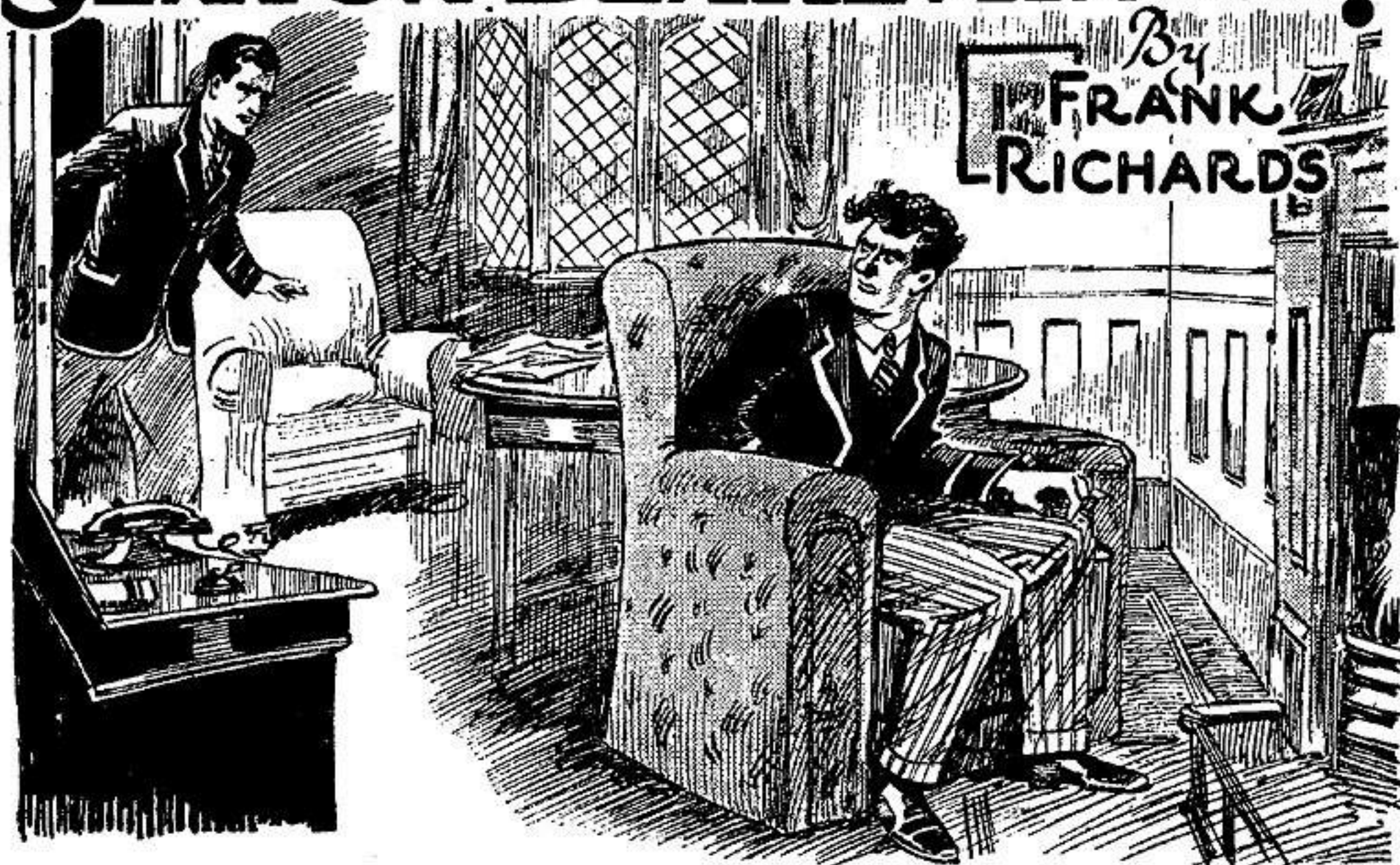
Dutton suffers from the melancholy affliction of deafness, and all the fellows heartily sympathise with him, though possibly they may joke about it now and then. But their humour is without malice, and is brought about by the absurd situations which his deafness creates. Tom is sensitive to insult and he often thinks fellows are insulting him when they are making quite ordinary remarks. Then the band plays!—for Tom is among the first half-dozen boxers of the Form. A right-hander with his beef behind it is no joke. He is really a good fellow, solid and sound, with tons of sense. At games he is a shade above average, except at boxing, in which he always does well. There is every probability that Tom's deafness will be cured in good time, in which case he will probably do better than we think.

(Cartoon By HAROLD SKINNER.)



A MIDNIGHT PROWLER is mystifying all Greyfriars, and no one has been able to lay the culprit by the heels. But where others have failed, Horace Coker, in the role of detective, determines to succeed. Meet—

SEXTON BLAKE MINOR!



Coker glanced over the high back of Mr. Prout's chair as the study door opened, suddenly, and very quietly. He gave quite a start at the sight of Gerald Loder.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

No Exit!

"YOU ass!"

"Shut up!"

"You fathead!"

"Will you be quiet?"

"No!" said Harry Wharton grimly. "I won't! Stand back from that door, Smithy!"

It was rather an unusual scene, considering the place and the time! The place was the Remove dormitory at Greyfriars School; the time was half-past ten o'clock!

Generally, at that hour, the Greyfriars Remove were fast asleep. Some of them were sleeping now. Billy Bunter's snore, at least, was going on uninterrupted. But a good many fellows were awake and sitting up in bed.

Two fellows were out of bed—one of them Harry Wharton, the captain of the Remove; the other Herbert Vernon-Smith, the Bounder of Greyfriars.

Wharton was in his pyjamas, just as he had jumped out of bed. Smithy was dressed, even to his collar and tie.

It was the sound of voices that had awakened Harry Wharton. He had awakened to hear Tom Redwing's voice, low but insistent, arguing with the Bounder, and urging him not to play the goat.

Arguments and urgings had about as much effect on Smithy as water on a duck. He finished dressing himself, while Redwing talked. The captain of the Remove, when he woke, did not waste breath in talk. He turned out to take more effectual measures.

Generally, he gave no heed to the wayward proceedings of the black sheep of the Form. It was not his business to bring up Remove fellows in the way they should go. But matters were not quite as usual now.

Vernon-Smith, heading for the door, found his way barred by the captain of the Form. Other fellows, waking at the sound of raised voices, sat up and stared at the two figures in the bright gleam of moonlight from the high windows.

"Stand back!" repeated Wharton. The Bounder's eyes glittered at him.

Screamingly Funny School Yarn of HARRY WHARTON & CO., the popular Chums of GREYFRIARS.

He had not heeded remonstrances from his chum, Redwing. He was not likely to tolerate interference from others.

"You cheeky fool!" he said. "Are you takin' it on yourself to meddle?"

"You ass! You fathead!" repeated Harry Wharton. "Last week you came as near the sack as a fellow could get without being hoofed out—"

"No bizney of yours!"

"Smithy, old man—" exclaimed Redwing from his bed.

"Oh, chuck it!" snapped the Bounder. "I'm goin'!"

"You're not going!" said Harry

Wharton. "No fellow is going out of this dormitory after lights out until they've found out who it is that prowls the House at night. Do you want them to fix it on you again?"

"Mind your own business."

"Oh, let him go!" came a growl from Johnny Bull. "The sooner he's copped, and sacked, the better. We don't want pub-crawlers in the Remove."

"If Smithy's caught out of the dorm, they won't give him another chance," said Harry. "It will be taken as proof that he's the fellow who's been prowling at night—the fellow who knocked out Loder of the Sixth and banged a study door on old Prout's nose! Some fellows think that that prowling sweep is looking for a chance to pinch something. We're not going to have that sort of thing put down to the Remove!"

"Rather not!" agreed Bob Cherry. "Chuck it, Smithy, and go back to bed, like a sensible chap."

The Bounder did not heed. When his obstinate mind was made up, opposition only had the effect of making him more obstinate.

He moved nearer the door; and Harry Wharton put his back to it. If Smithy was obstinate, Wharton was determined.

"Will you stand aside?" asked Vernon-Smith, in a low concentrated tone of intense anger.

"No!"

"Do you fancy that you can give me orders?"

"Yes!"

That answer was enough for Herbert

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Vernon-Smith. He made a spring at the captain of the Remove, grasped him, and dragged him away from the door.

"Smithy, you cheeky ass!" exclaimed Frank Nugent. He jumped out of bed.

Harry Wharton, quite as angry as the Bounder, gave grasp for grasp. The two juniors struggled, stumbled, and crashed against the door.

"Go it!" chuckled Skinner. "You'll have Quelch up here at that rate! Or Loder! Go it!"

"Is that what you want, Smithy, you fathead?" exclaimed Bob Cherry.

Smithy did not answer, or heed. He was going to have his own wilful way—if he could! He exerted all his strength to throw the captain of the Remove aside.

But Harry Wharton was fully a match for the Bounder, if not a little more. They struggled fiercely and breathlessly; but Vernon-Smith could not throw him aside or break loose from him.

"You meddling cad!" panted the Bounder. "Leave me alone."

"Will you go back to bed?"

"No!" hissed Smithy.

"You will!" answered Harry.

Smithy's answer to that was to hook his leg and throw his weight on him. Wharton went down—but his grasp did not relax. The Bounder went down with him, and they bumped together on the floor.

"My esteemed fatheads!" exclaimed Hurree Janset Ram Singh. "You will have absurd beaks and ridiculous prefects here if you kick up that terrific shindy."

"All the better!" grunted Johnny Bull. "Quelch would be interested to know why Smithy is dressed at this time of night."

"For goodness' sake, Smithy—" urged Tom Redwing.

The Bounder, utterly reckless in his rage, struggled savagely as the two juniors sprawled on the floor. He succeeded at last in breaking loose, and bounded to his feet.

Leaving Wharton panting, he leaped for the door and grasped at the handle.

In another moment he would have had the door open. But in that moment a pillow whizzed from Bob Cherry's bed.

It crashed on the back of the Bounder's head and sent him crashing on the door. Instead of grasping the door-handle and turning it, Smithy smote the door with his nose.

His yell rang through the dormitory. "Well hit!" chuckled Peter Todd.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Vernon-Smith staggered at the door. Before he could recover, Harry Wharton was on his feet and grasping him again.

The struggle was renewed. Smithy's face was red with rage—though not so red as a stream that trickled from his nose. The Bounder had a rather prominent nose, and it had hit the door hard and seemed damaged.

"Let go, you fool—let go, you rotter!" panted Smithy.

Wharton did not waste his breath in words. He exerted himself to the utmost and bore Smithy backwards. Inch by inch, savagely resisting every step of the way, Vernon-Smith was forced back to his bed.

The Remove fellows watched the combat breathlessly. Only Bunter was still asleep now. Bunter snored on—but every other fellow was awake and watching.

Smithy was driven against his bed, the back of his knees jamming on the bedside. With a hefty shove, the cap-

tain of the Remove sent him sprawling across it. Smithy sprawled there on his back, panting for breath.

"Now stick there!" said Harry, panting, too. "You're not going out of this dormitory, Vernon-Smith. If you had the sense of a bunny-rabbit, you wouldn't think of it! Anyhow, you're not going."

"I'm goin', you fool!"

"You're not! Get off that bed again and I'll land you on it fast enough!"

The captain of the Remove stood with clenched fists and gleaming eyes. "I'm fed up with your rot, Vernon-Smith! Get off that bed and I'll give you an eye to match Loder's, and a nose to match Prout's!"

The Bounder sat up, panting and gasping. In the moonlight his face showed crimson with fury.

"I'll make you pay for this, tomorrow!" he panted. "I'd smash you now, only the row would bring the beaks here. I'll wait! You won't stand there watchin' me all night, you meddlin' fool!"

And the Bounder, leaning on his elbow on the bed, waited.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Spreadeagled!

HARRY WHARTON stood silent, looking at the Bounder.

He was silent for a long minute; and the other fellows looked on, some of them grinning.

The captain of the Remove was rather nonplussed.

So long as he stood there, ready to bar the way, the black sheep of the Remove could not go. But, obviously, he could not stand on guard all night! The obstinate Bounder had only to wait till he got fed up and went back to bed. Then the way would be clear.

The Bounder waited, with a bitter sneer on his face.

Harry Wharton spoke at last quietly:

"Look here, Smithy, have a little sense! Twice in the last week some fellow has prowled the House at night and got into the Head's study. Nobody knows what he was after, but you yourself suggested that he might be after the money the Head keeps there. Do you want to risk being suspected of a thing like that?"

The Bounder did not take the trouble to answer.

"The first time it happened you were caught out of the dorm, and they put it on you," went on Harry. "The fellow, whoever he was, knocked Loder out when Loder got him in the dark. You were going to be sacked for it. You'd be gone now if the fellow hadn't prowled again while you were locked up in the punishment-room—you know that."

"What's the good of tellin' me what I know?" sneered the Bounder.

"If old Prout hadn't been up that night and spotted him you'd be gone from the school by this time," said Harry. "No fellow ever had so narrow a squeak as that. You got off because the Head thought that the fellow who banged that study door on Prout's nose was the same fellow who knocked Loder out. But if you're caught out of the dorm again, what will they think?"

"Is that a riddle?"

Harry Wharton breathed hard.

"I'm trying to make you see sense," he said. "Any night that fellow may prowl again, and whatever it is he's after he may get away with it. It will be put down to any fellow who's out of his dorm at the time. You know that as well as I do."

"Is that the lot?"

"Yes."

"Then shut up, and give a fellow a rest!"

Wharton's eyes gleamed.

"You're going to take the risk of it for the sake of sneaking out of bounds to see some racing rotters at the Three Fishers or the Cross Keys?" he asked.

"Exactly!" said the Bounder coolly. "And I'm going to do as I please, and take any risk I choose, without asking you."

"Well, I've tried to make you see sense," said Harry. "If you won't, you won't. But you're not going out, and I'm certainly not going to stand here watching you. Take those clothes off and get into bed!"

"Don't be funny!"

"Will you, or not?"

"Not!" drawled the Bounder.

Harry Wharton glanced round.

"Bob! Franky! Johnny! Inky! Lend a hand here! Smithy wants to be undressed and put to bed like a baby! Bear a hand!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bob Cherry, Frank Nugent, Johnny Bull, and Hurree Janset Ram Singh gathered round Smithy's bed at once. Peter Todd and Squiff and Tom Brown and Mark Linley and Wibley and Micky Desmond joined them, grinning. There were many hands to make light work!

Two or three more fellows joined up. All were ready to help, if required. Wharton was not the only fellow who was prepared to put paid to the Bounder's arrogant obstinacy.

Vernon-Smith sat up quickly, his eyes flashing.

"Hands off, you cheeky fools!" he exclaimed. "I shall hit out—I warn you of that!"

"Sure and are ye going to wallop the lot of us?" asked Micky Desmond. "It's a terrible fellow ye are, Smithy."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Will you get that clobber off, Smithy?" asked the captain of the Remove.

"No!" howled the Bounder.

"Get going!" said Harry tersely.

Smithy had said that he would hit out, but he really had little chance. The hands that were laid on him seemed innumerable. He struggled and resisted with all his strength, but garment after garment was dragged off, and he was jammed forcibly into his bed, and the bedclothes spread over him.

"Staying there, Smithy?" asked Harry Wharton.

"Wait and see!" hissed the Bounder, choking with rage.

"That means no, I suppose. Well, there's more ways of killing a cat than choking it with cream! We can't hold you down all night."

"Just thought of that?" snarled the Bounder.

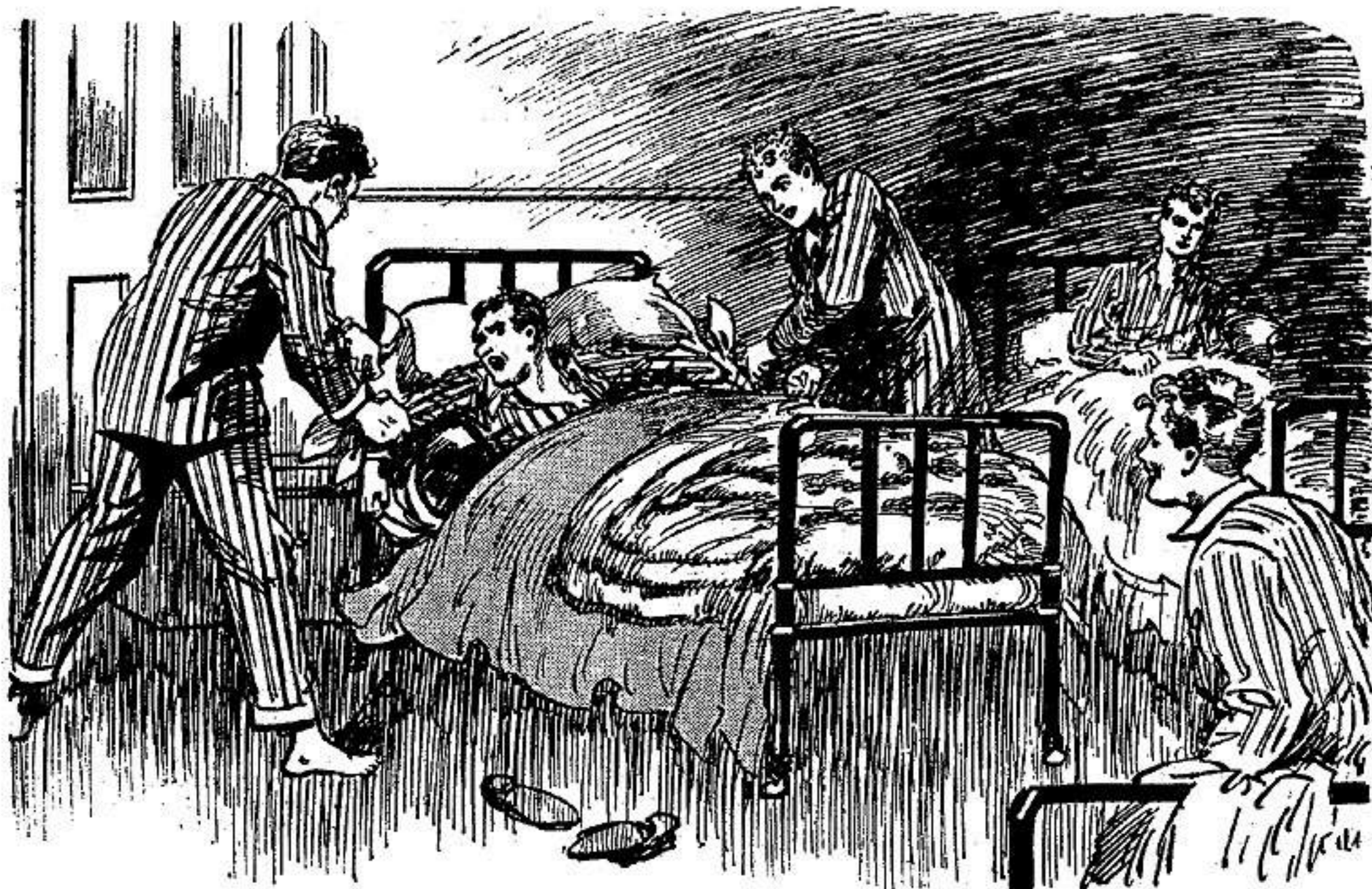
"Take his wrists, Bob and Johnny. Pull them to the sides of the bed," said the captain of the Remove.

"Any old thing!" grinned Bob.

Harry Wharton twisted a sheet and passed it under the bed. He knotted one corner round the Bounder's right wrist. Then he went round the bed, and knotted another corner to Smithy's left wrist.

The Bounder wriggled with fury. Every other fellow chuckled. Smithy was spreadeagled on his back, his arms outstretched, and so long as the knots held, he had no chance of getting off that bed. And his Form captain had taken plenty of care with the knots.

"That will keep the silly ass safe!" said Harry. "Bit uncomfortable for sleeping, Smithy, but you've asked for it."



Vernon-Smith was spreadeagled on his bed and secured there by means of a sheet. "That will keep the silly ass safe!" said Wharton. "Bit uncomfortable for sleeping, Smithy, but you've asked for it!"

"Begged for it!" said Johnny Bull. "You—you—you rotter!" hissed Smithy, suffocating with rage. "Do you fancy you're going to leave me like this?"

"Sort of."

"By gas, what a wheeze!" remarked Lord Maulverer. "Smithy, old thing, you ought to be jolly glad you've got friends to take all this trouble for you."

"He looks glad!" remarked Bob.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"If you leave me like this I'll yell till a prefect comes!" hissed Vernon-Smith.

"Please yourself about that. The pre. will want to know why you've been tied down, and perhaps you'd like to tell him. Please yourself."

"Oh, you rotter!" groaned Vernon-Smith. Enraged and uncomfortable as he was, the Bounder was not likely to yell for a prefect.

"Now turn in," said Harry. "Pleasant dreams, Smithy. You can dream that you've been copped and sacked."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Remove fellows turned into bed again, leaving Vernon-Smith spreadeagled. Smithy wrenched and wrenched till he felt as if he was wrenching his arms from their sockets. But it was in vain. He had not the remotest chance of getting loose.

"Redwing, lend me a hand!" he hissed, at last. "You rotter! Are you going to stick there and leave me like this? Let me loose!"

"I certainly shan't let you loose, Smithy," answered Tom Redwing quietly. "I'm only too glad that you've been prevented from making a fool of yourself."

"You rotter!"

"Good-night!"

"You cad!"

Redwing made no further answer. There were chuckles up and down the Remove dormitory, mingling with the

uninterrupted snore of Billy Bunter. But the fellows soon dropped off to sleep again—except Herbert Vernon-Smith.

He gave up wrenching. It was useless and painful. But sleep did not come easily to the spreadeagled junior. It was very late before Vernon-Smith's eyes closed at last from sheer weariness.

Even then he slept by fits and starts, and his eyelids opened many times before the dim dawn of a February morning glimmered in at the windows of the Remove dormitory. When the rising-bell clanged in the dewy morn, Smithy was awake, and in the very worst temper ever!

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

What's Up?

"I SAY, you fellows, what's up?"

"Goodness knows what!"

Billy Bunter asked that question after breakfast in the morning.

Nobody could answer it.

But it was plain to the most casual eye that something was up in Greyfriars School—something of an awfully serious nature.

Some fellows had spotted trouble in the air before prayers. Everybody knew it at breakfast.

Form-masters who breakfasted with their Forms had solemn faces—faces so fearfully solemn that boiled owls might have been considered frivolous in comparison. Mr. Quelch, at the Remove table, was grim as a gorgon.

Prefects, who sat at the high table, were equally serious. Evidently the Sixth Form prefects knew what was up.

Nobody else seemed to know, though all were curious. Even Billy Bunter, the fat ornament of the Remove, knew no more than the others, though Bunter

prided himself on being the fellow to get the news. No keyhole, it seemed, had so far been available for Bunter!

After breakfast fellows gathered in groups, discussing the mystery. Prout, master of the Fifth, walking in the quad with Hacker, was heard to utter the word:

"Police!"

That word was repeated far and wide, causing a thrill.

Something, everybody guessed, must have happened in the night. If it was something that called for the official intervention of the police, it was going to be the biggest thrill within the memory of the oldest inhabitant.

Mr. Hacker had been seen to shake his head when Prout had dropped that startling word. Later, Wingate of the Sixth was heard to say to Gwynne of that Form:

"Over twenty pounds!"

That was repeated, and caused another thrill. What pounds, and whose pounds, nobody knew; but it seemed that there was money connected with the mysterious matter.

"I say, you fellows, has there been a burglary, or what?" asked Billy Bunter.

He blinked inquiringly at the Famous Five. But Harry Wharton & Co. did not know. Nobody knew.

Loder of the Sixth came out of the House looking round him.

Some of the juniors grinned when they saw Loder. It was more than a week since Gerald Loder had caught the mysterious prowler in the dark in the Head's study, and had been knocked out by him, the prowler escaping undetected and leaving Loder with two black eyes. Loder's eyes were mending, but they had not yet mended. Dark bluish shades round them gave Loder rather a queer aspect which caused smiles among thoughtless fags.

Looking about him, Loder came over to the group of Remove juniors.

"Where's Vernon-Smith?" he asked. "In the quad somewhere, I think," answered Harry Wharton. "Is he wanted?"

And there was a general movement of interest.

Quite a short time ago the Bounder had been in the limelight as a fellow who was up for the sack. So the juniors wondered whether he was in trouble again when a prefect of the Sixth inquired after him.

"Not yet!" said Loder, with a bitter sneer. "I think he will be, though. Do any of you know whether he left his dormitory last night?"

Loder's eyes scanned a dozen startled faces as he asked that question. Probably he hoped to read something in those faces.

And he certainly did read very startled looks.

"We know he never left the dormitory, Loder," said Tom Redwing quickly.

"That's rot!" snapped Loder. "You can't possibly know that, unless you stayed awake all night!"

Redwing did not answer that. He smiled faintly. Nobody had stayed awake all night in the Remove dormitory; nevertheless, the whole Form knew that Vernon-Smith had not left it. They had good reasons for knowing that.

"Do you know, Wharton?" snapped Loder.

"I'm quite sure he did not, Loder!" answered the captain of the Remove.

Loder sneered.

"I see you're all in the same tale together!" he said. "Well, I fancy the Head will get the truth out of you!"

"But what's happened?" exclaimed Redwing.

Loder stalked away without answering that question.

Whatever it was that had happened, it was plain that Loder put it down to Vernon-Smith. That was not surprising, for everybody knew that Loder believed that it was Smithy who had knocked him out that night in the Head's study, and that he had been bit-

terly exasperated by the headmaster taking another view.

Harry Wharton drew a deep breath.

"That makes it pretty plain," he said. "It's the prowler again; he's been up in the night, and done something or other this time."

"But what?" asked Bob.

"Goodness knows! Something in the Head's study," said Harry. "He's been cornered there twice at night—once by Loder and once by Prout. He got away each time, and it seems as if he's got away this time; but what he's done, goodness knows!"

"Not"—Bob caught his breath—"not—"

"By gum," said Skinner, "Smithy suspected that that prowler was after the cash in the Head's study! Can that be it?"

"It can't be," said Harry. "A rag, perhaps; but it can't be anything so bad as that. As if any Greyfriars man would—or could—"

"There was a Greyfriars man who would, and could!" grinned Skinner. "That man Crocker, at the Abbot's Spinney, was sacked for pinching when he was at Greyfriars."

"History of that sort doesn't repeat itself!" growled Johnny Bull. "That's utter rot!"

"By gum!" said Bob. "Whatever's happened, it's jolly lucky for Smithy that we spreadeagled him last night. If he had left the dorm—"

"The reckless ass!" breathed Redwing. "Thank goodness he was stopped!"

"The esteemed Smithy's thankfulness ought to be terrific!" remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "If the spotfulness had occurred he would be in a preposterously bad box now!"

"It's the prowler again, no doubt about that," said Harry. "I suppose they're going to let us know what's happened. Nobody seems to know. Hallo, Coker! You know anything about it?"

Coker of the Fifth came along, with a serious expression on his rugged features. He scanned the group of excited juniors.

All the Removites eyed him eagerly. They did not think very much, as a rule, of Horace Coker of the Fifth Form; but

if Horace had any news they were very keen to hear it.

"That prowling sweep has been prowling again," said Coker.

"Official?" asked Bob.

"Well, it's pretty certain," said Coker. "Potter, of my Form, heard Prout say to Quelch that it was the same boy as before; and Quelch said 'Undoubtedly.' What does that look like?"

"Know what he's done, if anything?" asked Nugent.

"Something in the Head's study," answered Coker. "It's known that he's got a key to that study, whoever he is. Greeno says something is missing."

"Oh!"

"Now, all you kids know that a week or two ago young Vernon-Smith sneaked the key of that study," said Coker. "From what I hear, he handed it back to the Head when he was up on the carpet. But he had it. Was he out of his dormitory last night?"

Evidently Coker's suspicions took the same direction as Gerald Loder's.

"No, he wasn't," said Redwing.

"We're sure of that, Coker."

"I don't see how you can be so sure," said Coker, staring at him. "You didn't sit up watching him, I suppose?"

"We know, all the same."

Harry Wharton laughed.

"We can tell you, Coker, though we can't tell a prefect. That ass Smithy wanted to get out last night, and we tied him down on his bed. He was still tied there at rising-bell, and we had to let him loose. He's going to punch all our heads for it, so he says. Smithy never went down in the night, unless he walked down with his bed on his back."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh!" said Coker. "Well, that may turn out jolly lucky for him. But if it wasn't that young sweep I've no doubt that it was one of you! You Remove kids have too much cheek for anything! Quelch doesn't whop you enough!"

"Fathead!" said Bob Cherry politely.

"What?"

"Ass!" said Bob. "Chump! Blitherer!"

"If you're asking me to pull your ear, Cherry—" said Coker grimly.

"Oh, do!" implored Bob. "That man Crocker pulled my ear the other day, and we left him for dead! If you'd like some of the same— Ow!" added Bob in a sudden yell, as Coker made a sudden grab and captured his ear.

Coker of the Fifth retained possession of that ear for a split second. But he had no time to give it a good pull. As Coker grasped the ear, the Famous Five grasped Coker.

Horace had to let go that ear, as his long legs were swept from under him. He sat down in the quad with a heavy bump.

"Roll him!" gasped Bob.

The Removites rolled Coker of the Fifth, landing him in the nearest puddle.

Coker roared as he was rolled. Then they walked cheerfully away, leaving old Horace, still roaring, to sort himself out of the puddle.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

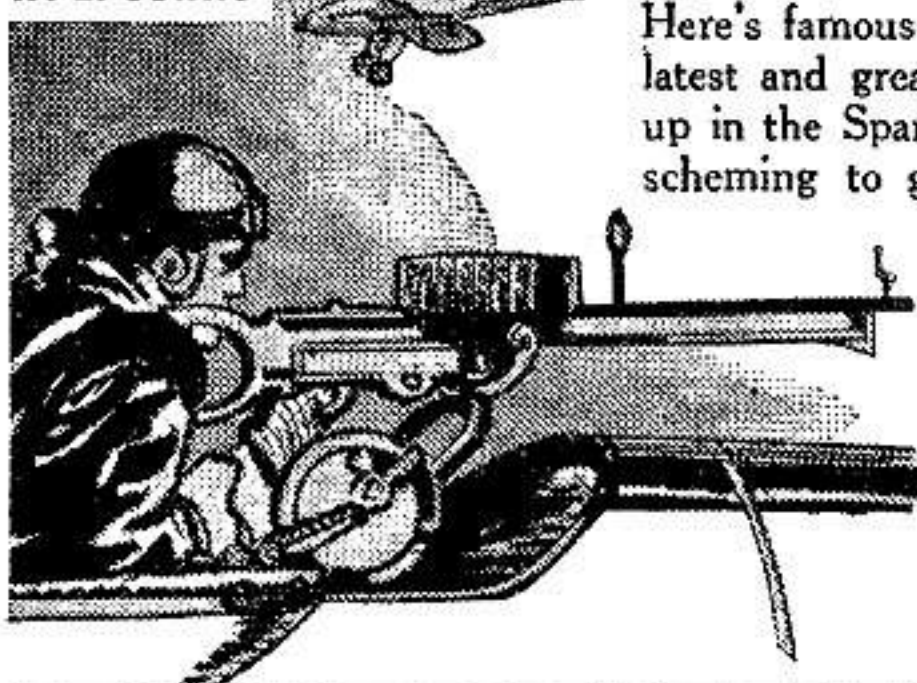
What Happened In The Night!

DR. LOCKE, the headmaster of Greyfriars, stood on the dais at the upper end of Hall and looked over the assembled school.

Every Greyfriars man was present, from the Sixth to the Second. All the masters were there to the last man

WINGS OVER SPAIN

by
Flying-Officer
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There was a deep, tense silence. That something was up, everybody knew already. Most fellows believed that it had something to do with the mysterious night prowler who had mystified the school for a couple of weeks past. If that was so, it was clear that this time the mystery man had not prowled in the dark. Something had happened—something fearfully serious. And as the school had been summoned to Hall instead of going to the Form-rooms at the usual time, the Greyfriars fellows had no doubt that they were about to hear what had happened.

That indicated that the culprit, whatever he had done, had not been caught. Moreover, every fellow was in his place, the culprit, it was to be supposed, among the rest.

Seldom had the school hung so eagerly on the headmaster's words.

Dr. Locke's face was very grave. There were also signs of agitation in it. What had happened had deeply disturbed the headmaster, and evidently given him a shock—a painful shock.

He spoke at last.

"My boys"—the Head's voice was not loud, but it was very distinct, and heard in every corner of the Hall—"before you go to your Form-rooms, I have a communication to make to the whole school. Many of you are doubtless aware that there has been an occurrence during the night."

He paused a moment.

"On two previous occasions," resumed the Head, "some Greyfriars boy has crept down in the night and entered my study, using a key; how obtained is not known. His object in entering my study has remained unknown—till now."

There was a thrill in the assembled school.

On that point there had been keen curiosity; nobody knew what the night-prowler wanted in the headmaster's study. Now, it seemed, it was known.

"That object," said Dr. Locke, with a tremble in his voice, "was theft."

"Oh!" came a general gasp.

"Last night, there was a theft in my study. That makes it only too painfully clear what was the object of the former occasions, when the boy was interrupted. Last night there was no interruption, or suspicion, and the theft took place."

Among the Remove, Tom Redwing glanced round at his chum, but Vernon-Smith avoided his eyes. Smithy's face was pale.

He had turned out that morning in a savage temper, thinking of vengeance on the fellows who had spreadeagled him. Quite other thoughts were in his mind now.

"My study was entered by means of a key as before—no damage was done to the lock," resumed the Head. "The table-drawers were opened, although locked, by some instrument such as a chisel, which forced them open. From one drawer the sum of twenty-two pounds in currency notes was taken."

"Oh!" came another gasp.

Long ago the Bounder had hinted at that object on the part of the night-prowler. Few, if any, had entertained the idea; it seemed altogether too repugnant and repulsive. But Smithy had been right.

"That sum," went on the Head, "was taken, and must be recovered. Gladly, very gladly, would I have given many times as much for this dreadful act never to have occurred. But it has occurred. There is a thief in our midst, who must be immediately found and sent away from the school."

There was a dead silence.

"The boy concerned," resumed the Head, "is here. At this very moment he is listening to my voice. I tell him, with the greatest earnestness, that he has no hope of escaping detection. If a discovery is not made during the day certain measures will be taken which will make discovery an absolute certainty. I hesitate to take those measures; but I shall delay only until this evening."

There was something like a shiver in the crowd of Greyfriars fellows.

Many of them remembered the word dropped by Mr. Prout—"Police." The bare thought of policemen in the school rooting among Greyfriars men in such circumstances, was horrifying.

"I not only command, but I appeal to this wretched boy to confess," said the Head. "If he shrinks from public confession, he may come privately to my study and speak to me there. He will, of course, leave Greyfriars at once."

There was a long pause.

Fellows looked at one another.

Many eyes turned on Herbert Vernon-Smith. He had been suspected of being the night-prowler. He had been cleared, in the belief of his headmaster and Form-master. But the fact remained that he had been suspected, and no other fellow had.

Smithy was not unconscious of the attention he was getting. His face reddened, and then paled.

The Head's voice broke the silence at length.

"Some boy, now present, left his dormitory last night, and came down," he said. "It is probable, indeed almost certain, that this must be known to other boys in the same dormitory. If the fact is known, it must be stated. Ordinary rules do not apply in such a case as this—a case of theft. No honourable boy could dream of helping a thief to escape detection."

Vernon-Smith, with all his nerve, felt his lips tremble.

No one spoke. No one knew, or, at any rate intended to admit that he knew, of any fellow who had gone down from his dormitory.

But the whole Remove would have known that Smithy had gone down, but for the measures Harry Wharton had taken.

The Bounder of Greyfriars had had many narrow escapes; but he had never had one quite so narrow as this.

Again there was a long silence. But if the Head expected anyone to speak, he was disappointed. No one spoke.

"I shall say no more," The Head was speaking again. "I shall hope that, during the day, this wretched boy will come to me with a confession. I repeat that, otherwise, certain measures will be taken which will render detection inevitable. Dismiss!"

It was a breathless crowd that poured out of Hall.

In the Form-rooms that morning masters found it difficult to get their Forms to give much attention to school work. From the prefects of the Sixth to the fags of the Second, every fellow at Greyfriars was thinking of the happening in the night, the certainty now that there was a secret thief in the school, and wondering who it could be.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Coker On The War-path!

"FOOTBALL?" asked Coker sarcastically.

The sarcasm in Horace Coker's voice was deep, indeed it was sardonic.

He was addressing Potter and Greene of the Fifth, who had come out of the House after dinner.

As it was a fine, clear afternoon, and a half-holiday, it was hardly surprising that Potter and Greene, and crowds of other fellows, were thinking of football. There was nothing, so far as Potter and Greene could see, to be so fearfully sarcastic about.

Harry Wharton & Co., who were in the quad, glanced round at Coker surprised, like his friends, at his tone of withering sarcasm. Like Potter and Greene, they could see no call for sarcasm.

"Soccer, what?" repeated Coker, in the same tone.

"Yes; why not?" asked Potter. "Blundell's fixed up a pick-up this afternoon, and we're playing. Why not?"

"Nothing else to worry about?" asked Coker, still sarcastic.

"Well, what?" inquired Greene. "If you mean about what happened in the Big Boak's study, I don't see that it makes any difference to football. I suppose we're not going to put off Soccer till they find that pincher."

"Hardly!" said Potter.

"Oh, go it!" said Coker. "Pontius Pilate fiddled while Athens was burning! Follow his example."

"Do you mean Nero and Rome?" inquired Potter.

"No!" said Coker. "I don't! Don't you set up to teach me history, George Potter. I mean Pontius Pilate and Athens."

"Ha, ha, ha!" came from the offing, and Coker stared round at five juniors, who seemed to feel rather hilarious at Coker's knowledge of history.

Coker gave them a disdainful glare. Possibly he would have given them something more drastic, but for the fact that he had no time to waste just then in being rolled in any more puddles.

Having glared at the Famous Five, Coker turned back to Potter and Greene—spotting them in the very act of sidling off.

"Hold on!" he exclaimed. "I was speaking!"

"Your usual state!" sighed Potter.

"What?"

"Oh, nothing! Cut it short, old man—the men will be expecting us in the changing-room."

"Let them expect!" said Coker.

"Never mind your fozzling football. Blundell hasn't asked me to play in the pick-up. Just like him to ask a pair of duds like you chaps. Never mind football—"

"But we do mind!" Greene pointed out.

"Don't jaw, Greene! Give a chap a chance to get a word or two in edge-way!" exclaimed Coker impatiently. "I never saw such fellows for jaw! Jaw, jaw, jaw! Look here. I want you this afternoon. I told you I'm going to shift that man Crocker."

Harry Wharton & Co. had been passing on their way. But at that they stopped again. They were interested.

"By gum!" murmured Bob Cherry. "If Coker's going to shift that man Crocker, we're going to see him do it! He will want somebody there to carry home his remains afterwards."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Coker gave the juniors another glare. But it was a quick one. He was in danger of losing Potter and Greene, if he took his eye off them.

"You know what that man's done!" resumed Coker. "He's an Old Boy of Greyfriars, and it's pretty well known that the Head sacked him for pinching."

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donkeys' years ago. If he had any decency, he'd keep away from this school. But what has he done? Butted in, and had to be chucked out. Then he hires that hiker's hut in the old Abbot's Spinney, and puts up a sign that he mends boots and shoes! Fat lot of boots and shoes he mends! He's done that just to annoy the Head!"

"Is that Blundell calling?" murmured Potter.

"Never mind if he is! I'm talking! The other day old Prout told that man Crocker what he thought of him, and he hit Prout——"

"I've heard that. Prout smacked his head or something."

"I dare say he did! Never mind that. Prout's out beak. He's rather an old ass. I know that. He rags a fellow in the Form-room. Still, he's our beak. Are we going to let a cad who was kicked out of the school twenty years ago punch our beak?"

"Has Prout asked you to barge in, Coker?" inquired Greene.

"Don't be an idiot, Greeney! I mean, so far as you can help it! Football!" Coker snorted that word. "Pontius Pilate fiddling while Athens was burning was nothing to you fellows. I think about the school!" added Coker, with great dignity.

"What do you do it with, Coker?" inquired a voice from the group of juniors. But Horace Coker disdained to heed that impertinent question. He continued calmly:

"I'm giving Crocker such a hiding that he will be glad to go. I'm going to do it this afternoon! I'm going now—see?"

"Your business specially?" asked Potter.

"Don't jaw, Potter! Come along to the Abbot's Spinney with me and lend a hand. I'm going to pull down the sign that cheeky cad's stuck up, and I shall want some help."

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Potter. "You can't, old man! That man Crocker has hired that place from the estate agent in Courtfield. You can't touch his property on his own place."

"I said don't jaw."

"The Head will be waxy," urged Greene.

"I fancy the Head will be glad enough if that cheeky cad is shifted," retorted Coker. "Come on!"

Potter and Greene blinked at Coker. The Famous Five exchanged smiling glances. This, of course, was Coker all over! Nobody at Greyfriars liked Randolph Crocker's proceedings. Nobody liked Crocker, once of the Greyfriars Sixth, setting up within sight of the school gates, sticking up a sign that could be seen from the windows, and making himself generally obnoxious to the headmaster who had expelled him so long ago.

Still, nobody saw what could be done—except, apparently, Horace Coker!

The Head disregarded the man; going on his lofty and majestic way without a sign, as if Randolph Crocker did not exist.

Probably that was the wisest course the Head could have taken in the peculiar circumstances.

Certainly Mr. Prout had not prospered when he had interviewed Crocker. All the school knew that he had lost his temper and smacked Crocker's cheeky head—and he had been fairly lifted off his feet with a hefty punch in return.

Crocker had been a boxer at Greyfriars, and was said to have figured in the ring since he had left. Certainly he

was a dangerous man for portly old Prout to have tackled so rashly.

Coker was not the only fellow who was indignant about it. Still, Prout had delivered the smack before Crocker delivered the punch. Coker was the only fellow who thought of avenging that punch, by giving Sportsman Crocker the thrashing he deserved.

"But—but—but——" stuttered Potter. He was really concerned for Coker. "I say, old man, that fellow's got a terrific punch. It won't do you any good to stop it."

"Don't be an ass, Potter!"

"You can't handle him!" said Greene.

"Don't be a chump, Greene!"

"Look here, Coker——" said Potter and Greene together.

"Don't jaw! Come on!" said Coker, and he turned to stride away to the gates.

Potter and Greene, exchanging a glance, turned in another direction, and walked off to the changing-room. They were not disposed, it seemed, to join in a daylight raid on Mr. Crocker's premises.

Coker, glancing round a moment later to make sure that they were following their leader, discovered that they weren't! He had a distant view of two disappearing backs.

"Potter!" roared Coker.

Echo answered "Potter."

"Greene!" bawled Coker.

Echo answered "Greene."

But there was no other answer. Potter and Greene disappeared in the changing-room, where the Fifth Form men were gathering for football, and Horace Coker was left to plough a lonely furrow!

Coker glared! He sniffed! And he snorted! Having glared, sniffed, and snorted, Coker marched on.

Supported by his pals, or unsupported by his pals, Coker was going to carry on. Coker was not the man to turn back. He marched out of gates—on the warpath.

But Coker was not left without a following. Harry Wharton & Co. did not mean to miss this. And word having passed on, many other fellows joined up to see the show. Quite an army of juniors followed the trail of Coker as he headed for the Abbot's Spinney at the corner of Friardale Lane.

Sportsman Crocker, as he had been called in old days at Greyfriars School, wore shabby old clothes and an old hat and a leather apron. He was dressed for his part, as it were, as a wayside cobbler.

But he did not seem to be busy. He was smoking a cigarette and glancing at a racing paper as he lounged in his doorway.

It was probable that Mr. Crocker was rather bored at his establishment in sight of the school gates. His work as a cobbler was well known to be only a pretence and his sign intended only to irritate the headmaster who had turfed him out long ago.

He did not look like a man who liked work. What he had done and how he had lived since he had left Greyfriars twenty years ago nobody knew; but nobody supposed that, whatever it was,

it was much to his credit. It was not likely to have been anything in the nature of honest hard work.

His malice towards his old headmaster was plain enough. Yet it was rather puzzling that he had taken it into his head to persecute Dr. Locke in this peculiar way after the lapse of so many years. If he were going to do it at all he might have been expected to begin at a much earlier date.

Indeed, Vernon-Smith, who was a very keen fellow, suspected that he had some other motive as well as revenge for sticking himself at the Abbot's Spinney. He might, the Bounder had suggested, have some reason for lying low in a quiet corner of the country.

But the answer to that was that Crocker was not lying low! He was far from lying low. Now that he had been over a week at the place he was talked of far and wide.

People came from quite distant spots to stare at his sign over the gate and to look in at the man who announced, for all to see, that R. Crocker, formerly of Greyfriars School, was now a repairer of boots and shoes!

If Crocker were lying low, that was a very peculiar way of setting about it, for he was the talk of the neighbourhood by this time. For miles round Crocker was talked of, and people wondered what the headmaster of Greyfriars thought of it.

Lounging idly in his doorway, Randolph Crocker smoked his cigarette, looked at his sporting paper, and yawned.

But at the sight of a crowd of fellows coming along from the school he threw aside the racing paper and picked up an old boot and a bradawl.

It was Crocker's game to affect to be at his work of cobbling when eyes fell on him.

It was a big, beefy, burly senior who arrived at Crocker's gate. His rugged face was darkened by a frown.

He was a stranger to Crocker, who was so far unacquainted with Horace Coker of the Fifth Form at Greyfriars. He was about to make the acquaintance of that youth.

The old boy grinned cheerily at Coker as he stopped at the gate in the fence. Coker looked as if he had come along for a row, and Randolph Crocker was far from averse to a row.

Probably he liked rows. The more trouble he had with Greyfriars fellows the more the Head would be annoyed, and that was at least one of Crocker's objects, whether he had others or not.

After Coker came a swarm of juniors—half the Remove and a good many of the Fourth and Shell, and a sprinkling of fags of the Third and Second. It was clear that something was going to happen and that a large number of the Lower School were interested.

Coker glanced at the sign over the fence and gave an angry snort. Then he kicked the gate open and strode in.

A muddy path led from the gate to the hiker's hut that had been built over the old stone cell, long since fallen in ruins. Little more remained of the original building except the floor of stone flags. Horace Coker tramped up that path.

Crocker touched his old hat, like a respectful cobbler.

"Good-afternoon, sir!" he said. "What can I do for you, sir? Boots and shoes soled and heeled, with promptness and dispatch——"

"Shut that!" snapped Coker. It was not polite; but Coker never had a lot of politeness to waste, least of all on a fellow like Crocker.

Forty or fifty fellows lined the fence

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

On His Neck!

RANDOLPH CROCKER, once of Greyfriars—as the sign over his gate informed the public—stood lounging in the doorway of the hiker's hut on the site of the ancient stone cell in Abbot's Spinney.

Sportsman Crocker, as he had been called in old days at Greyfriars School, wore shabby old clothes and an old hat and a leather apron. He was dressed for his part, as it were, as a wayside cobbler.

But he did not seem to be busy. He was smoking a cigarette and glancing at a racing paper as he lounged in his doorway.

It was probable that Mr. Crocker was rather bored at his establishment in sight of the school gates. His work as a cobbler was well known to be only a pretence and his sign intended only to irritate the headmaster who had turfed him out long ago.

He did not look like a man who liked work. What he had done and how he had lived since he had left Greyfriars twenty years ago nobody knew; but nobody supposed that, whatever it was,



In the doorway, two wildly wrestling figures appeared. Then one of them became detached and, in the grip of the other, swung in the doorway and flew out. It was Horace Coker who had been ejected!

by the lane to look on. Most of them were grinning.

Dr. Locke had placed the Abbot's Spinney out of bounds, since Crocker had set up there. Coker calmly disregarded that. In this matter, as in others, Horace Coker was a law unto himself.

"I don't want any cheek!" continued Coker, as Randolph Crocker stared at him. "I've come here to give you some plain talk. You're not wanted here! You were kicked out of Greyfriars, so I hear, for pinching. I dare say you're still pinching, if you come to that."

"Oh, my hat!" murmured Bob Cherry, at the gate. "Coker's going strong!"

"A bit too strong, I think," chuckled Hobson of the Shell. "The man could have him up for that."

"Shouldn't wonder if he's right, though," said Vernon-Smith. "That man Crocker is a bad egg all through."

"You make out," Coker's bull voice went on, "that you mend boots and shoes. That's all gammon. How much do you earn mending boots and shoes, I'd like to know?"

"Are you the Income Tax inspector?" inquired Crocker.

"Eh? What? No!" Coker stared. "Ha, ha, ha!" came a yell from the lane.

"What do you mean, you cheeky ass?" hooted Coker. "I'm Coker of the Greyfriars Fifth. You jolly well know I'm not an Income Tax inspector."

"Oh, I thought you might be, by your inquiry!" explained Crocker.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I've said that I don't want any cheek!" roared Coker. "You don't do any work here—that's gammon to worry my headmaster. But you don't

live on air. I dare say there's chickens missing at the farms round here."

"Coker's never heard of the law of libel," chuckled Temple of the Fourth.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Chickens missing. I'll bet!" said Coker. "Washing from the clothes-lines, I dare say. You look that sort. Well, I've told you you're not wanted here. You going—see? The other day you punched my Form-master. I'm going to give you a jolly good hiding for it—see? But, if you choose to clear off, here and now I'll let you rip! Got that?"

"My only summer hat!" said Crocker, staring at him.

"But I'm not waiting," said Coker. "I'm not waiting a minute! Pack up your things, if you've got any, and quit! And be sharp about it!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Go it, Coker!"

Harry Wharton & Co. had fancied that the entertainment would be worth seeing. Undoubtedly it was.

Coker, regardless of the fact that Randolph Crocker was tenant of the Abbot's Spinney with an agreement duly signed and witnessed that made him safe there for three months, was ordering him off.

Coker, apparently, fancied that he could do this. Nobody else fancied that Coker could.

"Go it, Coker!" yelled the delighted juniors.

"Get on with it, Coker!"

"Shift him, Coker!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Horace did not heed the juniors at the fence. His stern eyes were fixed on Randolph Crocker's grinning, impudent face.

"Now, are you going?" demanded Coker, after a brief pause—a very brief pause. He was not wasting time on this fellow.

"Not quite," grinned Crocker.

"I'll put it plain," said Coker grimly. "If you don't shift, I'm going to shift you! You can walk out of that, or I shall step in, and chuck you out on your neck. Which do you want?"

"Carry on!" said Crocker, grinning.

Coker carried on at once. He barged into the doorway, with so hefty a barge that Randolph Crocker was pushed back into the hut, and disappeared from the sight of the eager crowd at the fence.

Coker, barging in, disappeared after him.

Sounds of a struggle followed.

Judging by the sounds, it was rather a terrific struggle.

The junior could hear trampling and panting and the clatter of furniture knocked right and left.

"I say, you fellows, they're going it!" gasped Billy Bunter.

"Watch that doorway, my infants!" chortled Bob Cherry. "Somebody's coming out on his neck soon! I hope it will be Crocker. But—"

"But the butfulness is terrific!" grinned Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Look!" yelled Smithy.

"Oh, my hat!"

"What-ho! He bumps!"

In the doorway two wildly wrestling figures appeared, staggering and lurching. Coker, whether he could handle the Sportsman or not, was giving him a run for his money, so to speak.

To and fro, clutching, trampling, panting, those two figures reeled. Then suddenly one of them became detached, and, in the grip of the other, swung in the doorway, and flew out.

Which it was the juniors could not see for a second. Wildly ruffled and dishevelled, it flew from the doorway, and landed, bumping, on the muddy THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,618.

path. Someone had been chucked out on his neck. Then they saw, as the ejected one sprawled and spluttered.

It was not Crocker. It was Horace Coker! The chucking out had taken place, but not quite according to programme. And it was Horace Coker of the Fifth who had landed on his neck.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

The Only Way!

DR. LOCKE sat in his study as the February dusk closed in, with a grave and troubled face.

Mr. Quelch sat silent, waiting for his chief to speak.

During that day the headmaster had continued to hope that the mysterious prowler, whose mysterious object was now known, would act upon the counsel he had given in Hall, and come to his study with a confession.

But no one had come!

It was a dismaying and shocking thought to the Head that there was a dishonest boy in the school—that some Greyfriars fellow, unknown, had crept down from his dormitory at night to rifle a desk.

Gladly the headmaster would have heard the wretched culprit confess, and sent him quietly away from the school, and avoided any further excitement or discussion on so painful a matter.

But he had given up that hope now. The rascal, whoever he was, intended to keep his secret, keep his plunder, and, most horrifying of all to think of, perhaps repeat his offence later.

The black sheep in the flock, that taw among the wheat, had to be found and rooted out without delay.

But there was no clue—no ghost of a clue! Headmaster and staff, and the whole body of prefects, were at a loss. The mystery prowler, doubtless, felt safe, and, so far as the school authorities were concerned, it seemed that he was right.

Dr. Locke broke the silence at last.

"It appears, Mr. Quelch, that we shall hear no confession."

"I scarcely hoped for it, sir," said the Remove master. "Investigation has been rigid. It has revealed nothing. The wretched young rascal no doubt considers that he has nothing to fear."

Dr. Locke nodded slowly.

"It cannot be learned," continued Mr. Quelch, "that any boy left his dormitory during the night. Any boy who did must have done so while all the others slept, and without a sound to awaken any of them. No one appears to know anything on the subject. As for a search—" He paused.

"A search for the purloined notes," said Dr. Locke, "would be futile. It would be an insult to the school, which I cannot contemplate. Apart from that, it would serve no purpose. We can hardly suppose that the wretched boy would be so foolish as to carry the notes in his pockets, or place them in his box."

"It is very improbable, sir."

Dr. Locke sighed.

"It is a dreadful matter, Mr. Quelch. Many, many years ago, I had to expel a Greyfriars boy for theft—Randolph Crocker. I had never dreamed that such an occurrence would ever be repeated. And now—"

"Now it has recurred, sir, and the sooner it is dealt with the better," said the Remove master.

"Quite," assented the Head. "But the bare idea of calling the police into the school is too repugnant. The alternative—"

the school is too repugnant. The alternative—"

"Obviously, sir; the less said the better. But no time must be lost. Your relative, Ferrers Locke, the celebrated detective, is a resource. I do not mean, of course, that a man like Ferrers Locke himself could be called in to deal with such a matter. But his assistant, Drake, who was once a boy in my Form here—"

"Drake!" repeated the Head thoughtfully. "A mere boy, Mr. Quelch."

"I have remained informed, sir, of the boy's progress since he left school to become Mr. Locke's assistant. I understand that he has proved a valuable assistant to Ferrers Locke. If Mr. Locke would spare him for a time—"

"You think he would prove useful here, Mr. Quelch?"

"I do, sir."

"I remember the boy—a very intelligent lad," said the Head. "But in a matter that perplexes us all—"

"You must remember, sir, that the boy has had training under the most astute detective of our times."

"That is true," assented the Head. "I heard from Locke a few days ago. It appears that he has been engaged in the search for a convict who escaped from Highmoor Prison some months ago. I do not recall the name—"

"Rupert Crook, I think," said Mr. Quelch. "The matter is referred to sometimes in the news given out on the radio."

"Yes, yes; I remember the name now. Locke is, I think, a very busy man at present. Still, he may be able to spare his assistant—and I am assured that he would oblige me, if practicable. But—"

Dr. Locke paused.

"If Drake comes here, Mr. Quelch, as a detective, is not that practically placing the unknown thief on his guard? He will hardly fail to guess why Drake is sent for."

"My suggestion, sir, is that Drake should not come here openly as a detective. I suggest that he should come as a schoolboy and take up his old place in my Form."

"But he is known, Mr. Quelch—he is, I believe, a personal friend of some boys in your Form—Wharton and others—"

"Perfectly true," said Mr. Quelch. "But it would be a simple matter for Drake to come here as a stranger and remain quite unknown to anyone who had the closest acquaintance with him. Such devices as this, sir, are ordinary everyday routine work to a detective."

Dr. Locke remained silent for a few moments.

"You have faith in the boy, Mr. Quelch?" he asked at last.

"I have, sir."

"You think that he could enter Greyfriars as a new boy and remain unknown to his friends here?"

"I have no doubt whatever of it, sir."

"That, indeed, would be a solution," said Dr. Locke slowly. "A detective in the school, whose presence was entirely unsuspected, should solve this problem. And not a word need be said outside the school."

"Not a word, sir," said Mr. Quelch. "I have every hope that in a short time Ferrers Locke's assistant would put his finger on this unknown delinquent, and the whole disagreeable matter would be at an end."

"It seems the only resource," said Dr. Locke, after another pause. "It is a dreadful thought, Mr. Quelch, that

this wretched delinquent, whoever he may be, may continue his depredations if he is not discovered. Obviously, such a state of affairs cannot be allowed to continue. I shall act on your advice."

"I do not think that you will regret it, sir."

Dr. Locke turned to the telephone.

"I shall speak to Mr. Locke," said the Head. "If I get through to him, the matter may be decided at once. Then you will make arrangements, Mr. Quelch, for a new boy in your Form."

The Head gave a number. His face expressed satisfaction as a well-known voice came back—the voice of Ferrers Locke, his relative, the celebrated detective of Baker Street. And Mr. Quelch sat, with keen satisfaction in his face, as the headmaster of Greyfriars talked over the wires with the Baker Street detective.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

Not Nice For Bunter!

BILLY BUNTER could have groaned.

He did not groan because Coker would have heard him. Had Coker discovered him just then, and just there, Coker, undoubtedly, would have given him something to groan for.

William George Bunter was, as often happened, in a spot where William George had no business—to wit, the study in the Fifth Form passage which belonged to Coker, Potter, and Greene, of that Form.

Potter and Greene as Bunter knew, were still in the changing-room after the Fifth Form pick-up. Coker, he also knew, had gone along to the changing-room to see them there; Bunter had had his eyes, not to mention his spectacles, on Coker since the great Horace had tottered home after the chucking-out process at Abbot's Spinney.

No opportunity could have seemed more favourable to the grub-hunter of the Remove for investigating the interior of Coker's study cupboard.

But in these matters, you never can tell. Billy Bunter was deeply delighted by what he beheld on the shelves of Coker's study cupboard. His feelings were quite different when he heard a heavy tread, which hinted that a rhinoceros or a hippopotamus was coming to the study.

Bunter, of course, knew that no such zoological specimens ever wandered about the passages. So he knew that it was Coker.

There was one thing for Billy Bunter to do—and he did it promptly. He backed into the lower part of the cupboard and drew the door shut.

Horace Coker entered a few moments later.

As he came along, the fat Owl of the Remove had grounds for hope that he had only pushed in to fetch something, and would depart again. On the other hand it was nearly tea-time, and Coker might have pushed in first for tea.

In a dismal state of uncertainty Bunter listened. He could have groaned—but he very carefully didn't!

To his relief, the Fifth Form man did not sit down. Still, he did not go.

Perhaps he was thinking about his visit to the Abbot's Spinney, and its unexpected and painful outcome.

Every other Greyfriars fellow on the spot had laughed. Coker had not laughed; he had, indeed, no breath left for laughing had he wanted to ever so much—which he probably did not.

Coker was not quick on the uptake. But he had realised that he could not

handle Sportsman Crocker. He had, indeed, realised that the Sportsman could have handled two or three Cokers!

Having realised that painful truth, Coker had limped home to Greyfriars, accompanied by a hilarious crowd. His glum and gloomy countenance revealed only too plainly that he did not share the general hilarity.

He was, indeed, in a fairly bad temper; and Billy Bunter, in the cupboard, fairly cringed at the idea of meeting his eye. Bunter could guess easily that, in his present mood, Coker would derive solace and satisfaction from kicking somebody. Bunter hated the idea of being that somebody.

Tramp, tramp, tramp! went Coker's footsteps up and down the study.

Fortunately he did not approach the cupboard. He did not seem to be thinking of tea before Potter and Greene came up.

Bunter wondered dolorously whether the beast would go before the other beasts came. If he didn't, the Owl of the Remove was in rather a bad box!

"Finger-prints, perhaps!"

Bunter started as Coker uttered those unexpected and surprising words.

Coker was not, apparently, cogitating on the subject of his disastrous expedition to Abbot's Spinney. He was not thinking about that rascally old boy, Randolph Crocker. Quite other matters, it seemed, were occupying Coker's vast intellect.

The fat junior ventured to blink out of the cupboard, the door being open about half an inch.

He had a glimpse of Coker, standing still now with a deep corrugation of thought in his rugged brow.

"Or cigarette-ash!" said Coker.

Bunter could only wonder. Coker evidently was speaking to himself, and had not the faintest idea that anybody was listening-in. But why and wherefore Coker was thinking about finger-prints and cigarette-ash was a mystery to Billy Bunter.

"They can't handle it!" Coker, like Hamlet, was indulging in a soliloquy. He went on soliloquising. "The Head can't, the beaks can't—and as for the prefects, they're a mob of duds, as I've always said! That fool Loder thinks it was young Vernon-Smith all the time! Well, Loder's a fool!"

That section of Coker's soliloquy gave Bunter a clue to the subject of his meditations. He was thinking about the unknown prowler—the mystery man of Greyfriars.

Crocker, evidently, was now a back number. Horace Coker was concentrating his powerful brain on the mystery of the Head's study. Why, Bunter did not know. So far as he could see, it was no business of Coker's.

All the prefects, of course, were on the trail. But Coker was not a prefect—no Fifth Form man was.

Whether it was his business or not, Coker was clearly deep in it. Coker had, in point of fact, a great gift for minding business that was not his own.

Tramp, tramp, came footsteps in the passage.

Again Bunter nearly groaned, but didn't quite.

Potter and Greene came into the study. Bunter could not see them. But he guessed that they smiled, from Coker's next remark.

"Grin!" said Coker sardonically.

"Had a good time, old chap?" asked Potter.

"Grin!" repeated Coker. "Something funny in a chap being chucked about like a sack of coke, I dare say! Grin!"

"Well, we heard——"

"Yes, I know what you heard! You heard that the only fellow at Greyfriars who sticks up for his school was chucked about by a rotter who ought to be in chokey! Grin!"

Coker laughed sarcastically.

"The man's above my weight," he said. "I own up to it. I fancy he's some sort of a prizefighter. If I'd had pals to stand by me he would have been booted off the place, all the same. But you fellows don't care, of course."

"I bagged a goal in the pick-up," said Potter, apparently by way of changing a thorny subject.

"Goalie asleep?" asked Coker.

"Hem! What about tea?"

"I'm not stopping you from teaing, am I? I don't want to be bothered by your guzzling here, though, while I've got something to think out. Cut!"

Potter and Greene did not cut. They had come in hungry, as was natural after football on a keen February day; they wanted their tea.

On the other hand, it was Coker who was going to stand tea in that study. Those excellent things that had delighted Billy Bunter's eyes in the cupboard had been unpacked from a recent hamper from Coker's Aunt Judy. Old Horace was generous in such matters—when stroked the right way. But in his present ruffled state he did not seem hospitable.

"I—I say, old man, I wouldn't worry about that brute Crocker if I were you," remarked Greene. "He's not worth it."

"Who's worrying about him?" inquired Coker.

"Oh, I thought——"

"Did you? First I've heard of it!" Coker was sarcastic. "Keep it up, Greeney! The change will do you good!"

"Well, if you're not worrying about that sweep Crocker, what's the row?" asked Potter.

"I'm hardly likely to worry about that cad Crocker. If the Head chooses to let him stick there, let him stick. I certainly shan't shift him," said Coker.

"Well, what are you grinning at now?"

"Nothing, old chap! Let him rip—and be blowed to him!" said Potter.

"I shall treat him," said Coker, "with contempt. That's the only way to treat a fellow of that kind. I'd almost forgotten him when you reminded me. If you want to know what I was thinking of when you came in——" Coker paused.

Potter and Greene didn't. They were interested in tea; not in the mental processes of Horace James Coker, but it was no use saying so. Frankness on the subject would have pushed tea farther off.

Luckily, it was easy to pull old Horace's leg.

"Go it, old chap!" said Greene. "Do tell us all about it," said Potter.

They had to have it; they knew that. They could only hope that Coker would cut it short.

"Oh, all right!" Coker was considerably mollified. He condescended to expound. "What I was thinking about is that affair of the mystery prowler—the blighter who pinched the Head's notes. They can't get him; they can't spot him. Well, we can't have a pincher in the school. He's got to be spotted—and I'm going to do it!"

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

Cosh For Coker!

HORACE COKER made that announcement, surprising as it was, with calmness.

Potter and Greene blinked at him. They had rather wondered what bee old Horace had got in his bonnet now. They had not expected this particular kind of insect.

"Oh!" gasped Potter.

"Oh!" articulated Greene.

"I've been thinking it over a bit seriously," Coker explained. "You fellows haven't, of course. Still, it wouldn't be much use if you did; you haven't my brains. The truth is I'm the man to do it. I've always taken a good bit of interest in detective work, and I rather fancy that I've a gift for that sort of thing."

"Just fancy, old chap——"

"What?"

"I—I mean, carry on!" stammered Greene.

(Continued on next page.)



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"I mean to say; they talk a lot of stuff about Sherlock Holmes and Ferrers Locke and Sexton Blake and so on," said Coker. "I fancy I could beat the lot of them at their own game. Intellect—I mean, of course, a fairly powerful intellect—can be turned in any direction. I haven't the slightest doubt that if I took up detective work I should be as good a detective as I am a footballer."

"Oh crikey! Just about!" gurgled Potter.

"I'm going to take this up," continued Coker, "for the honour of the school. We don't want pinchers here. That rat's got to be found—and the sooner the better. I'm not keen on shoving myself forward—I'm not that sort—"

"You're not?"

"No!" roared Coker. "Nobody else can spot the man, so I'm going to do it. Somebody ought to do it. Why, now the blighter's got away with the Head's cash he may make a regular round of the studies, pinching right and left. Might butt into this very study and pinch something. There's things about. I shall take up this case—"

Coker was getting quite professional already. "I shall take up the Case of the Midnight Mystery. See? I dare say that's what a detective would call it. And I'm going to get the man!"

"Tell us about it over tea, old fellow," suggested Greene.

"I'm telling you now. Of course, a fellow is a bit handicapped here," said Coker. "I can't tell the Head I'm taking it up. He would very likely think me simply a fool."

"He might!" gasped Potter.

"Very likely, I think," said Greene.

"And I've no assistance," said Coker, shaking his head. "Sherlock Holmes had that man Watson; Sexton Blake had a chap named Blinker, or Winker, or something; and Ferrers Locke has that kid Drake, who used to be at Greyfriars. But I've got no help. No good consulting you fellows; bit too thickheaded, if you don't mind my saying so—"

"Oh, not at all!"

"Don't mind us, Coker."

"I mean you can't help being a bit fatheaded, I know—but there it is!" said Coker. "You're no use to me. It ain't all lavender being the only brainy man in the study. There's a lot of difficulties to be overcome. I've got to view the scene of the crime—"

"The what?"

"I mean the Head's study. But it's no use asking old Locke. I shouldn't wonder if there's finger-prints on his desk, or a spot of cigarette-ash lying about. Detectives find out a lot from cigarette-ash. Look at the Case of the Missing Marquis. I've got the book here somewhere. They found him parked in the suit of old armour through cigarette-ash being dropped in the right spot—"

"They do drop in the right spots in detective novels," admitted Potter. "But do you think that the sweep who burgled the Head's desk would be smoking a cigarette at the time?"

"I'm only putting a case, of course," said Coker. "Might be a lot of clues for a fellow to pick up on the spot. There's another thing—the fellow who pinched that cash must have taken it to spend."

"Not really?" ejaculated Potter.

"Yes," said Coker, "I've thought that out."

"Not to paste up over the mantel-piece in his study?" asked Greene.

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This was sarcasm. Coker did not even know that it was sarcasm.

"Nothing of the kind, Greeney," he said. "That question only shows what a fool you are, old chap! He's taken it to spend! Well, if he's taken it to spend, he will spend it. What about spotting a fellow spending pounds and pounds more than usual?"

"Must be a fearful ass if he does that at the school shop."

"He might do it out of gates," said Coker. "In fact, it's pretty certain that he would."

"Then how would you know?"

"It's no good asking me a lot of silly questions, Potter! That's only one clue. I dare say I shall find dozens. I know I'm sticking to this till I get my man. Like Bandog Blockhead, you know—he always got his man. And when I get him—"

Coker's eyes gleamed.

"When?" murmured Greene.

"Then," said Coker, "I shall unmask him—"

"Oh, my hat! Do you think he wears a mask when he comes down from his dormitory?"

"No, you fathead!" howled Coker. "Of course he doesn't! When I say I shall unmask him I don't mean unmask him, I mean unmask him."

"Lucid!" said Potter. "I say, what about tea?"

"I shouldn't mind," went on Coker, ruthlessly regardless of tea, "giving you a sample of what I can do—like Sherlock Holmes, you know. I'm pretty good at deduction and all that. You know, Holmes could tell whether the baronet's will was hidden in the coal-cellar by the length of the butler's whiskers, and all that. Like me to give you a sample?"

Potter and Greene would rather have had tea. But Coker did not wait for an answer. Coker, when he was talking, had little use for answers.

Coker only paused long enough to take breath, and went on:

"For instance, I could tell you something that would surprise you, Potter, though it's only elementary, as Sherlock Holmes would say. When you went out before dinner you walked down Oak Lane."

"Did I?" ejaculated Potter.

"You did!" said Coker. "I never saw you—never knew you'd been out till you came in. I've deduced that."

"You've did-dod-deduced that?" gasped Potter, staring at him.

"Exactly! Shall I tell you how? It's perfectly simple when explained," said Coker, quite in the manner of Sherlock Holmes.

"Oh, do!" gurgled Potter.

"There's some spots of mud on your shoes—"

"Blessed if I'd noticed—"

"Naturally—you've no detective gift! I have! Well, that mud is a yellow clayish kind—pretty thick in Oak Lane. Easy, what, when I explain?"

And Coker smiled—evidently expecting Potter to ejaculate "Wonderful!" like Dr. Watson.

But Potter didn't. He just stared.

"Is that what you call a deduction?" he asked.

"Yes, that's it—simple, I know, but masterly, in its way!" said Coker.

"But I never went anywhere near Oak Lane!" howled Potter.

"Don't talk rot, Potter!"

"I went in the other direction—"

"I said don't talk rot, Potter." Evidently Coker, like many detectives, preferred his own theories to other people's facts! "I'm sorry to see you descending to prevarication, merely to belittle a pal! Don't do it!"

"I never—" yelled Potter.

"You did!" said Coker calmly. "Don't say any more, Potter! It's rather sickening for a fellow to come down to actual fibs, from silly jealousy of another fellow's powers."

"You silly chump!" shrieked Potter. "I went down to Friardale—"

"He jolly well did, Coker!" hooted Greene. "I met him coming back!"

"You, too?" said Coker, as Cæsar might have said, "Thou, too, Brutus!" "Well, this is the limit! Both of you telling barefaced whoppers, just to make out—"

"You silly chump!" yelled Greene.

"You blithering idiot!" howled Potter.

Potter and Greene had forgotten tea, for the moment! They simply had to tell Coker what they thought of him! So they told him!

It was rather unfortunate, from the point of view of tea! Coker was quite unconscious of being either a silly chump or a blithering idiot, and he had no use whatever for these painful truths. He glared at Potter and Greene for a moment; then, without wasting any time in words, he picked up an Indian club and stepped towards them.

What Coker was going to do with that Indian club his friends did not linger to ascertain. They backed quickly out of the study.

Coker slammed the door on them.

Potter and Greene, in the passage, realised that tea with Coker had faded from the prospect, like a mirage in the desert. So they called through the door to Coker:

"Fathead!"

"Idiot!"

Then they went down to tea in Hall. In the study, Horace Coker frowned.

In his new role of detective, he did not expect much in the way of intelligent assistance from Potter and Greene. But he expected, at least, recognition of his powers when he displayed them. That was the least he was entitled to expect.

Instead of which Potter made out that he hadn't been in Oak Lane, when Coker's masterly deductions showed that he had! Greene backed him up in it! It was, as Coker had said, rather sickening!

Coker resumed pacing the study and cogitating—to the prolonged dismay of a fat Owl huddled in the cupboard, longing for him to go.

But Coker, keen as he was on the problem he had resolved to solve, was reminded by the inner Coker that it was past tea-time.

He stopped his thoughtful pacing, and stepped to the study cupboard!

Billy Bunter quaked.

So far, he had escaped detection—in spite of the presence of a detective in the study! But it was clear that he was not going to escape detection when Coker opened that cupboard door!

Discovery was certain—and Coker's heavy boot was an appalling prospect.

In sheer desperation, Billy Bunter acted—promptly!

As Coker reached the cupboard door and put his hand to open it, the fat junior hurled it open with all his force.

It crashed on Coker!

Coker was taken utterly by surprise. No detective could have deduced that a cupboard door would suddenly fly open with the force of a battering-ram!

Coker gave one gasping howl of astonishment and anguish, and then went over backwards with a terrific crash.

A fat figure flew from the cupboard like an arrow, tore open the study door, and vanished.



Coker was taken utterly by surprise as the cupboard door suddenly flew open. "Ooooooh!" He gave a gasping howl of anguish as he went over backwards. A fat figure flew from the cupboard like an arrow and made for the study door.

Coker did not even see it! Coker was on his back, his head entangled with the legs of a chair, and his senses, such as they were, spinning.

"Oooogh!" gasped Coker. "Ow! Oooooogh! What—whoo—ooogh! Oh! Ah! Oooogh!"

He sat up dizzily, disentangling his head from the chair. He blinked round him, dizzy and dazed. He hardly noticed a trickle of crimson from his nose, on which the cupboard door had banged rather hard. He was quite bewildered.

"Who—who—how—" gasped Coker. It was a good minute before he dragged himself, gasping, to his feet.

He stared at the open study door. He stared at the open cupboard! It dawned on him! Somebody had been parked in that cupboard! He had banged Coker over with the door thereof and scudded. Just what had happened to Mr. Prout the night he had spotted somebody in the Head's study! History had repeated itself!

"Oh!" gasped Coker. He realised that his nose was streaming red, and dabbed a handkerchief to it.

"Oh!" he repeated. "Here! Here, in my study! The first time he's prowled before lights out, and he comes to my study! Oh! Knocking me over with a door, just like he did Prout that night! By gum!"

Billy Bunter, as he scuttled into the safety of the Remove passage, wondered whether Coker would guess who it was and come after him. But he need not have worried.

Coker was not thinking of Bunter! He was thinking of the mystery prowler who had been in his study, hidden in the cupboard, and who had knocked him over with the door, just like he had done with Prout!

Coker had no doubt that it was the mystery prowler who had been in his study—and it was rather fortunate for Billy Bunter that he hadn't!

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

The Fifth Form Detective!

"He, he, he!" With that unmusical cachinnation did Billy announce his arrival in Study No. 1 in the Remove.

Harry Wharton & Co. were finishing tea there when the fat Owl grinned in—the expansive grin on his podgy countenance extending almost from one fat ear to the other.

"He, he, he!" repeated Bunter.

Bunter seemed amused.

"Shut off that alarm clock!" said Bob Cherry, looking round.

"Oh, really, Cherry! I say, you fellows—he, he, he! I say, Coker—he, he, he!" Bunter chortled.

"Oh! Coker! What about Coker?"

The Famous Five sat up and took notice, as it were, at the mention of Coker. Old Horace had entertained them that afternoon, on the warpath. If old Horace was putting up further entertainment, they were prepared to be entertained.

"I say, you fellows—what do you think?" gasped Bunter. "I say—he, he, he! Coker—that ass Coker—he, he, he! That idiot Coker—he, he, he! He's going to—he, he, he!"

"Cough it up, fathead!"

"I was in his study!" trilled Bunter. "I wasn't after his tuck, you know—nothing of that sort! I—I just dropped in! But I thought I'd got out of sight when the beast came in! You know Coker! He would have fancied I was after his tuck, if he'd seen me at the cupboard—"

"You fat burglar!"

"He, he, he! I got into the cupboard, see—so I heard all he said to Potter and Greene! He, he, he! What do you fellows think?"

"Going after Crocker again?" asked Bob, with interest.

"We mustn't miss it if he does!" chuckled Johnny Bull.

"Oh, no! He's fed up with Crocker! Better than that!" chortled Bunter. "I say, you know Coker's always reading those detective books—'The Case of the Cross-Eyed Cat,' and the 'Mystery of the Mizzled Marquis,' and all that—well, he's got it on the brain! He's going to play Sexton Holmes—I mean Sherlock Blake—I mean—"

"What?"

"He's going after that prowler!" giggled Bunter. "He calls it the Case of the Midnight Mystery—"

"Oh, my hat!"

"He thinks he can do detective jobs! He's going to look for clues, and—and nail him! He rowed with Potter and Greene, and turned them out of the study because—he, he, he! Lucky for me he did, or I should have been copped. He, he, he! He copped me in the cupboard! He, he, he! Only I banged the door open on him, and knocked him over, and got off before he spotted me! He, he, he! I say, you fellows, Coker's going to be a detective now! Ain't it funny? He, he, he!" Billy Bunter fairly squealed with merriment.

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

"He's talking about finger-prints, and clues of cigarette-ash—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"He got fearfully wild when Potter and Greene didn't believe in his deduc—"

(Continued on page 16.)

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SEXTON BLAKE MINOR!



(Continued from page 13.)

tions, and went for them with an Indian club—

"Good old Coker!" chuckled Bob Cherry. "Sure he didn't spot you, old fat man! If he did, he will deduce that it was you—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"No, that's all right," grinned Bunter. "You see, the cupboard door got him—cosh!—right on the boko, and he went over like a sack of coke! I think his head banged into a chair—it sounded like it! I didn't stay to look! He, he, he! I'm pretty certain he never saw me, or anything, but stars! He, he, he! Still, if he guessed it was me, and came after me, I should expect my pals to stand by me! I'll stay here for a bit! I'll have some of that cake while I'm here."

Billy Bunter helped himself to cake. He was not a fellow to let his chances, like the sunbeams, pass him by!

It was not a large cake. Bunter helped himself to half of it, to go on with.

"I say, you fellows!" Bunter's voice came muffled, through cake. "I say, fancy Coker tracking down that prowler—he, he, he! He thinks the chap may have left cigarette-ash about, like they do in detective novels! He, he, he! Fancy that chap smoking a fag while he was pinching at the Head's desk last night! He, he, he! Gurrgrgh!"

Bunter choked. Giggling and gobbling did not seem to work together.

"Gurrgrgh! Urrgrgh! Oooooogh!" gasped Bunter. "Oooooogh!"

There was a step in the passage—a heavy tread.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! That sounds like jolly old Horace—or an escaped elephant!" ejaculated Bob Cherry.

"Gurrgh! Oh! I say, you fellows, if he's after me, you stand by me!" exclaimed Bunter, in alarm. "I—I was sure he never spotted me! But if he's guessed—"

Billy Bunter backed round the study table, to place the Famous Five between him and the door, as a burly figure appeared there.

Harry Wharton & Co. smiled at Coker of the Fifth.

Coker was always entertaining. He was considered really frightfully funny at football! But as a detective, it was probable that he would break his own record.

His aspect, too, was rather entertaining, at the moment. He looked ruffled and breathless, and was dabbing a large nose with a handkerchief that was spotted crimson.

Obviously that cupboard door had given him rather a bang!

Billy Bunter blinked at him, uneasily and warily, across the table. But to his relief, and rather to his surprise, Coker did not even glance at him.

Coker fixed his eyes on Wharton. Apparently he had come there, not on Bunter's track, but to speak to the captain of the Remove.

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"Here, young Wharton!" he began. "I want some information, and I want it quick. Do you know whether any Remove kid has been in the Fifth Form passage?"

"Has the Head made you a prefect, Coker?" asked Harry.

"Eh? No."

"Then don't ask questions."

Coker's brow darkened.

"I don't want any cheek!" he said. "Look here, I'll tell you what's happened. That prowler has been in my study."

"What!"

"That night-prowler, you know—sweep who pinched in the Head's study. He's taken to getting about earlier now, it seems. So far he's only prowled after lights out! Now he's started rooting in the studies when fellows are out of the House! I jolly nearly had him!"

"Oh crikey!" gasped Bunter.

"You—you—you jolly nearly had the prowler?" gasped Harry Wharton.

"Jolly nearly!" said Coker. "So far as I can make out, the scoundrel was in my study when I went in there—"

"Oh, my hat!"

"He hid himself in the study cupboard—"

"D-d-did he?" gurgled Bob Cherry.

"I mean, he must have, because when I went to the cupboard he banged me over by banging the door on my face, just like he did to Prout that night, you know—"

"Oh scissors!"

"And got away!" said Coker. "Of course, I was taken by surprise. Any fellow might have been. That prowler has never prowled during the daytime before. I've been thinking a good bit on the subject, but I admit I never thought of that! But that's his game now—clear enough!"

"You—you—you didn't see him?" gasped Nugent.

"No! You see, I was knocked over so suddenly, and he fairly whizzed—I never knew he'd been there till he was gone! But there's no doubt that it was the prowler, of course."

"Sure there's no doubt?" stuttered Harry Wharton.

As the Famous Five had just heard from Billy Bunter that he was the fellow who had been parked in Coker's study cupboard they could not help feeling that there was doubt in the case. They gazed at Coker.

"Oh, no! Absolutely none!" said Coker. "I've got my cash in my study, you know, and he was after that—same as last night in the Head's study—"

"Oh, really, Coker—"

"You shut up, Bunter! Don't butt in while I'm talking! I fancy I surprised him, coming in, and he hunted cover!" said Coker. "Bowled me over with a door, just like he did Prout last week when he saw he was going to be copped! Pretty cool card, and no mistake! Nothing's missing luckily—I seem to have interrupted him before he could rifle my desk, like he did the Head's—"

"Oh crikey! I say—"

"Will you keep quiet, Bunter? Who wants you to jaw? Now, Wharton, if you can help me put my finger on that scoundrel, you can see it's your duty to do it! Most likely that prowler's in the Remove—you're a gang of young scoundrels, as I've told you often enough. If you know anything about a Remove chap being in the Fifth Form passage, that's the man. See?"

"Not quite!" gasped Harry.

"If a Remove kid was in our passage, he's the man!" hooted Coker. "Surely you can see that!"

"Not quite!" repeated Harry.

"Well, if you're too silly to see it, take my word for it!" snapped Coker. "I'm after that prowler. If I don't spot him in the Remove, I shall try other Forms—but I fancy he's in the Remove—scrubby lot! Now you've been sitting here at tea, and I notice the door was open! You must have seen anybody scudding for his study in a hurry—this being the first study in the passage! Did you?"

Coker gazed inquiringly at the captain of the Remove.

"You think that the pincher is a Remove man, Coker?" asked Harry.

"Practically sure of it!" answered Coker.

The captain of the Remove rose to his feet.

"Gentlemen, chaps, and sportsmen," he said. "Coker thinks we've got a pincher in our Form! I move that we let Coker know exactly what we think of compliments like that in the Remove."

"Passed unanimously!" said Bob.

"Bag him!"

"You cheeky young asses!" roared Coker, as the Famous Five rushed. "Stop it! I haven't come here for a row! I came here to—yaroooooop!"

Coker said that he had not come there for a row. But that was one of Coker's many mistakes. He had!

There was, undoubtedly, a terrific row as Horace Coker whirled in the grasp of the Famous Five. And the bump, as he landed in the passage, rang the length of that passage, and brought fellows staring out of study doorways. Louder yet louder rang the yell of Horace Coker.

"Yoo-hoo-whooop! Ooooh!"

"Roll up, Remove!" roared Bob Cherry. "Roll Coker home!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Coker did not wait to be rolled. He departed, across the landing, before the Removites could roll him! Coker had had enough to go on with, and he stood not upon the order of his going, but went at once—in a gasping and spluttering state.

Horace realised that he was not going to get any help in the Remove in tracking down a pincher in that Form! The Removites did not seem, somehow, to like the idea!

"I say, you fellows," Billy Bunter chuckled, as the Famous Five came back, grinning cheerfully into the study. "I say, that ass—he, he, he!—thinks it was the prowler in his study—he, he, he!—and it was me all the time! He, he, he! I say, don't you fellows let Coker know that I banged that door on his nose! I'd rather he thought it was the prowler! He, he, he! I say, ain't he a jolly wonderful detective? He, he, he!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Famous Five roared. They really hoped that Horace Coker would keep up his detective work on what he called the Case of the Midnight Mystery! He seemed likely to add considerably to the gaiety of existence at Greyfriars if he did!

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

What Smithy Saw!

HERBERT VERNON-SMITH stopped suddenly, and listened. It was the following day, after dinner; and Smithy had just come along the dormitory passage and stopped at the door of the Remove dormitory.

Smithy came up that passage very quietly. It was against the rules for any fellow to go up to the dormitories

in the daytime, without special leave. That rule, like many others, the Bounder broke with utter recklessness when so disposed. But he did not want to be copped, so he was very careful.

Smithy only wanted something from his box in the dorm. But as what he wanted was a packet of cigarettes, hidden under other things at the bottom of the box, he preferred to keep his proceedings strictly private.

That was why he made no sound as he came along to the dormitory door, and he was just about to open the same when he heard a sound from within and realised that someone was there.

It was probable that it was only some other Remove fellow who had come up for something. But it was possible that it was not, and Smithy was not the man to take chances. He did not want a hundred lines from Quelch for breaking rules; still less did he want six from his Form-master's cane.

He stopped and listened.

It was a scraping sound that came from the room. It sounded rather like someone trying a key in a lock that would not work. Few of the fellows kept their boxes locked, though Vernon-Smith was one of the few who did. If that sound came from some fellow unlocking a box, he seemed to be having trouble with the key.

Following that sound came a suppressed, angry grunt. The fellow in the dormitory seemed annoyed.

Then came a scraping sound again. It sounded as if the fellow was trying another key on the lock.

Considerably surprised, the Bounder listened outside the door. A fellow unlocking his own box was not likely to have all that trouble. Really, it sounded as if someone was trying to open somebody else's box, and could not find a key to fit. If that was the case, it was very odd and very surprising.

The Bounder listened for a few moments to that grating sound within the dormitory. Then, very quietly, he turned the door handle, making not the slightest sound and pushed the oak door open about an inch, so that he could peer into the room.

A junior's box, in the dormitory, was placed at the foot of his bed. A fellow kneeling at one to open it would have his back to the door. Smithy calculated on that. He was going to see who the fellow was and what he was up to. If it was a Remove man, he could show himself. If it was not, he could retreat unheard and unseen, if he chose. But he was going to know what it meant first.

He suppressed an exclamation of surprise and rage as he saw!

It was not a junior in the dormitory.

It was a Sixth Form man!

From the door, Smithy had only a back view of him, but he knew at a glance who it was. It was Loder of the Sixth.

The Bounder's eyes fairly blazed as he saw how Loder was occupied.

Gerald Loder, kneeling in front of Smithy's own box, was trying key after key from a bunch on the lock!

None of the keys appeared to fit. The box remained locked! The bunch clinked, and Loder gave another angry grunt as he tried another key. Still it did not work.

Vernon-Smith watched him with glittering eyes. He knew what it meant now.

Loder of the Sixth had never changed his opinion that it was Herbert Vernon-Smith who was the secret prowler. That prowler had knocked Loder out in the dark, blacking his eyes. His eyes were still darkly shaded! Loder, convinced

that he owed that adornment to Smithy, was after Smithy rather like a dog after a bone!

Believing that Smithy was the prowler, Loder believed that it was Smithy who had filched currency notes from the Head's desk on Tuesday night. And he was searching.

The Head had ordered no search. Loder fancied that he knew better than his headmaster! He was searching—on his own!

If he got that box open, he was going to root through it in the hope, probably in the expectation, of finding the plunder hidden there. Such a discovery would prove that Vernon-Smith was the man, and that Gerald Loder had been right all along the line!

So long as the mysterious prowler had only blacked Loder's eyes and banged a door on Mr. Prout's majestic nose, Smithy did not care two straws whether Loder suspected him or not. But now that it was known that the prowler was a secret thief, he cared very much indeed.

That was quite a different matter. Smithy was not particularly sensitive, but to be suspected of being a pilferer was enough to put any fellow's back up.

He barely restrained himself from rushing into the dormitory and landing out with his boot. Loder was, at the moment, well placed to receive it, as he bent at the box.

But booting a Sixth Form prefect was not practical politics. Moreover, Smithy was there without leave, a fact that he did not desire to make known.

He stood silent, watching, his eyes burning, and as he stood, Loder rose to his feet with a disappointed, angry grunt, having tried the last of his keys and tried it in vain.

He might have turned at any moment now, and Vernon-Smith instinctively drew the door shut, latching it without a sound.

He cut down the passage to the landing. Loder seemed to have finished in the Remove dormitory, and Smithy did not want to be spotted when he emerged.

As he cut across the landing, he heard a door open.

Loder was coming out!

Smithy went down the stairs by way of the banisters and shot off on the lower landing. He cut away to the Remove passage without delay.

A couple of minutes later he had a glimpse of Loder going down the lower staircase with a disgruntled scowl on his face. He shook his fist at the top of Loder's head over the banisters.

Then Loder, being safely off the scene, the bounder went quietly up to the dormitory again, and this time he unlocked his box and extracted the packet of cigarettes—it was hardly safe to leave them there! Loder might have better luck next time he tried a bunch of keys on that box! Smithy had no doubt that Gerald Loder would try again when he got some more keys.

Smithy went into the quad with a grim and angry brow.

Loder could suspect him, if he liked, of blacking his eyes or banging Prout's nose. He was not going to suspect him of pilfering—not without being made to sit up for it. And for the next half-hour, Herbert Vernon-Smith's thoughts were concentrated on ways and means! And the grin that suddenly overspread his face indicated that he had evolved a scheme for making Gerald Loder sorry for himself.

If Gerald Loder, the unpopular prefect of the Sixth, wanted a clue, why shouldn't he have one? Vernon-Smith was only too willing to oblige in this respect.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

Cash Wanted!

"**L**END me all your pound notes!" "Eh?" "What?"

Harry Wharton & Co. regarded the Bounder with astonishment. Smithy seldom—or, rather, never—borrowed money. He generally had more than he needed. And this was a rather wholesale request.

"How many do you want?" asked Bob Cherry, with a cheerful grin. "I don't think I've got more than a few dozen!"

"Twenty-two!" answered Smithy airily.

"Is that a joke?" answered Harry Wharton, mystified.

"More or less!" agreed the Bounder. "But I mean it!"

"That's the amount that was taken from the Head's desk on Tuesday night!" said Frank Nugent.

"Yes; that's why I want that amount."

"What on earth for?"

"For a few hours!" answered Vernon-Smith.

"Fathead! I mean why?"

"Never mind why! If you've got any pound-notes, let me have them! I'm not Bunter!" added the Bounder sarcastically. "Your money's safe."

"Don't be an ass, old chap!" said Bob. "But what the thump—"

"Have you got any? I've got five of my own—"

"Lucky bargee!"

"Mauly's changed a fiver at the shop to oblige me. Newland's lent me three. How about you?"

Harry Wharton laughed.

"You and Mauly and Newland are the only bloated millionaires in the Remove, Smithy! I've got one."

"I've got one," said Johnny Bull. "But what on earth's the game?"

"Oh, quite an amusing game!" said Vernon-Smith. "I'm not telling anybody till it comes off—least said, soonest mended. But I'm not going to spend the money—you can have your notes again this evening, if not before. Take the numbers, though."

"Why the dickens—"

"Because I want you to. Ten-bob notes will be useful, too! Look here, it's a jape, and nothing will happen to the cash! But I've got to raise exactly twenty-two pounds in currency notes."

"Oh, all right!"

The Famous Five were utterly mystified. No fellow in the Remove, even Lord Mauleverer, ever had, or wanted, such a sum. Why Smithy wanted that sum—exactly the amount that had been taken from the Head's study by the secret pilferer—was simply mystifying.

But Smithy, of course, was to be trusted with cash, and the chums of the Remove had no difficulty about handing over their supply into his temporary keeping.

Wharton and Johnny Bull had a pound-note each, as it happened, and Hurreo Jamset Ram Singh and Nugent had a ten-shilling note each. Bob Cherry had a half-crown, but this the Bounder declined. Only paper money, it seemed, was of any use to him.

The juniors scribbled down the numbers of the notes as Vernon-Smith requested. Then they stared after him in astonishment as he walked away.

"What on earth is he up to?" asked Bob.

"Goodness knows!" answered Harry. "He says it's a jape! It will come pretty expensive to him if anything."

happens to all those notes! Blessed if I can make him out."

Leaving the Famous Five astonished, Herbert Vernon-Smith proceeded on his quest for currency notes. He still required six pounds to make up the amount he needed. Smithy's credit was good—and fellows were quite willing to oblige; but pound-notes, naturally, were not in plentiful supply in a junior Form.

Peter Todd and Squiff, Hazeldene, and Tom Brown, produced a ten-shilling note each. Bolsover major lent a pound note; Russell and Ogilvy a ten-shilling note each. Smithy's total was then twenty pounds.

Then he ran down Wibley and extracted a ten-shilling note from him; and then Morgan, with a similar result. His chum, Redwing, contributed another. But that seemed to be the total supply of paper money, and ten shillings more was wanted.

But Smithy was not to be beaten. He wanted exactly twenty-two pounds.

From four fellows he collected half-crowns, which he carried into the school shop and handed over to Mrs. Mible, who gave him a ten-shilling note in exchange.

By that time, naturally, Smithy's proceedings had excited wide interest in the Remove.

More than half the Form had contributed more or less; all were aware that Smithy had some jape on; and most considered him a silly ass for japing with currency notes, whatever the jape was.

But what it was, was a mystery.

He was not going to spend those notes. The fellows were to have them back, the same notes, and the same day. Every fellow who parted with a note was made to take the number. Even Mrs. Mible, in the tuckshop, had been requested to take the number of the note she handed over for the four half-crowns! It was really mystifying.

By the time Smithy had finished, the Remove were in a buzz of curiosity; and it was close on time for the bell to ring for class.

Then Smithy suddenly disappeared.

He was not to be seen when the Remove gathered at their Form-room door.

Mr. Quelch arrived to unlock that door and let his Form in; and then Smithy came on the scene, rather breathless, just in time.

All eyes were on him as he went into the Form-room with the rest.

Billy Bunter's spectacles fairly glittered at him! Bunter was quite breathless at the bare idea of such a sum in one fellow's pocket. The amount of tuck that could have been obtained in exchange for such an enormous sum quite dazzled Bunter.

Bunter could not help thinking how rotten this was! Fellows seemed to think that their cash was as safe in Smithy's pocket as in their own! They did not regard Bunter like that!

Smithy had collected practically all the money in a numerous Form and nobody minded! And every one of them would have thought twice, if not three or four times, before lending Bunter half-a-crown! It was undoubtedly rotten!

Bunter could only hope that, out of that enormous supply of the currency of the realm, Smithy would be willing to lend a fellow the moderate sum of ten bob until his postal order came! Ten bob wasn't much out of twenty-two pounds, Bunter thought.

He was very anxious for class to be over that day! So was Vernon-Smith—

and so were all the Remove, every fellow being keenly curious to know what this extraordinary jape was going to be like.

Mr. Quelch did not remain unaware of a certain excitement in his Form. His gimlet eye gleamed over the Remove several times as there were sounds of subdued whispering.

However, the time came to dismiss at last, and the juniors went out.

Billy Bunter hooked on to the Bouncer at once.

"I say, Smithy—"

"Leggo, fathead!"

"I say, I was going to say—Beast!" The Bouncer walked on, leaving the fat Owl sitting down.

"Yah! Beast!"

Bunter gave up hope of a whack in that vast wealth!

The Bouncer sauntered in the quad, apparently unconscious of the many eyes on him.

The jape, it appeared, whatever it was, was not coming off yet! What it could possibly be, and who was going to be the victim, nobody could guess.

Smithy strolled placidly, his hands in his pockets, till Loder of the Sixth came out.

Loder gave him a scowl in passing. Loder never could see the junior who had, as he believed, blacked his eye, without a scowl. Smithy, as a rule, gave the bully of the Sixth a rather wide berth.

On this occasion he did not give him a wide berth. Suddenly breaking into a run, as if in a hurry to go to the House, he ran right into Loder.

Loder staggered.

"You clumsy young ass!" he gasped. "What do you mean—barging into me like that?" And he gave Vernon-Smith an angry and savage shove that sent him sprawling.

Something clinked as Smithy sprawled.

He did not seem to notice it. He jumped up and scudded off, as if only anxious to get out of Loder's reach.

Loder scowled after him. Then his expression suddenly changed as his eyes fixed on a small bunch of keys lying on the spot where Vernon-Smith had sprawled over.

Loder, with a quick movement, placed his foot on that bunch.

Vernon-Smith disappeared into the House.

Loder breathed quickly.

He drew his handkerchief from his pocket, dropped it, and stooped to pick it up. In picking it up, he picked up the bunch of keys, hidden in the handkerchief.

It was quite neatly done! And when Loder of the Sixth went back into the House, Vernon-Smith's bunch of keys was in his pocket—and his way lay in the direction of the Remove dormitory!

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

Proof Positive!

"COME in!"

Mr. Quelch did not speak very cordially. He did not want to see Gerald Loder of the Sixth Form.

Quelch, after class that day, was sitting in his study—pen in hand, but thinking about other matters than the papers before him.

The mystery of the secret prowler worried him, as it worried the Head and most of the staff. Dr. Locke had adopted his suggestion of calling in the aid of a detective, and the reply from Ferrers Locke had been favourable.

Locke was only too willing to oblige

his venerable relative, the headmaster of Greyfriars School. His boy assistant, Jack Drake, was to come to his old school as soon as practicable.

But, at the moment, Drake was occupied. Both he and his chief were busy in the search for the Highmoor Convict, Rupert Crook, who seemed to have vanished into thin air since his escape. Locke, however, had promised that Drake should be sent at the earliest possible date.

With that, Dr. Locke and Mr. Quelch had to be content.

Quelch was thinking of this matter when Loder of the Sixth tapped at his door and opened it.

Quelch dismissed Drake from his mind and gave his attention to Loder; a little surprised by the keen, though suppressed excitement in the prefect's face.

Loder came in and closed the door. His face was flushed, his eyes gleaming, and he breathed quickly.

"Well?" said Mr. Quelch, with a slight snap.

"I have something to tell you, sir, of some importance!" said Loder. "You will remember that I have never changed my opinion that it was Vernon-Smith, of your Form, sir, who knocked me out that night in the Head's study."

"If that is the case, Loder, it is sheer obstinacy on your part!" interrupted Mr. Quelch icily. "And I desire to hear nothing more on the subject."

"I think you had better hear me, sir, as something has now come to light!" said Loder coolly.

"Indeed! Then you may proceed."

"The young rascal's object is now known, sir—since the Head's desk, in his study, was pilfered on Tuesday night. It was Vernon-Smith—"

"I do not believe so for one moment," said the Remove master coldly. "Vernon-Smith has his faults, and very serious ones; but I do not believe him to be capable of any such act. Neither, if he were capable of it, has he any need of money—his father, who is very wealthy, treats him only too liberally—I have, in fact, had to speak to him on that subject."

"A fellow who gambles may run out of money, even if he is a millionaire's son!" said Loder venomously. "And you cannot have forgotten, sir, that a few days ago, Vernon-Smith was up before the Head for having gambled on football pools."

Mr. Quelch compressed his lips.

"Come to the point!" he said sharply.

"Very well, sir! Believing, as I did, that Vernon-Smith was the guilty party, I had no doubt that his box should be searched—"

"The headmaster has given no such order, Loder!"

"As a prefect, sir—"

Mr. Quelch breathed hard.

"Loder! You do not venture to tell me that you have made such a search on your own account, unauthorised by the headmaster?" he exclaimed.

"I have done so, sir."

"In that case, Loder, I shall lay a very serious complaint before Dr. Locke!" exclaimed the Remove master. "I will allow no such meddling in my Form."

"You had better hear what I have discovered first, sir," said Loder, with cool sarcasm. "I think that the Head will consider my action justified, in view of the proof—proof positive—"

"Proof of what?" snapped Mr. Quelch.

"Proof of Vernon-Smith's guilt!" retorted Loder. "Ten minutes ago, sir, I unlocked his box in the Remove



Watched by Gerald Loder, Mr. Quelch sorted over the contents of Vernon-Smith's box and then disinterred a sock. From the sock he drew a wad of currency notes fastened together by an elastic band. "Bless my soul!" he gasped.

dormitory, and searched it. Concealed among the clothes I found—"

"What?" breathed Mr. Quelch.

"A wad of currency notes, sir—the sum of twenty-two pounds, in pound and ten-shilling notes."

"Impossible!"

"You have only to visit the dormitory yourself, sir, and look in the box. I have re-locked it, and brought away the key. I have also locked the dormitory and brought the key away, in case the young rascal should take the alarm, and attempt to hide his plunder in another place before you have seen it. It awaits your inspection, sir."

Mr. Quelch rose to his feet.

His eyes were fixed on Loder, and his face was a little pale.

He had been satisfied, and the Head had been satisfied, that Herbert Vernon-Smith was cleared of suspicion. He had been annoyed and irritated by Loder's persistent belief that he and the headmaster were mistaken, and that Vernon-Smith was the guilty party.

But what could he say now?

There was no need now for Ferrers Locke's assistant to come to the school. Loder of the Sixth, it seemed, had solved the mystery.

Loder, it seemed, had been right, and everybody else wrong.

It was a blow for Mr. Quelch. Worse still was the certainty that the prowling pilferer was a boy in his own Form! Quelch had felt assured that that pilferer, whoever he was, was not in the Remove. He cared a great deal for the good name of his Form.

"There may be some—some explanation," Quelch almost stammered. "This boy, Vernon-Smith, has often been in possession of more money than is allowed in my Form. I have, as I said, had to intervene for that very reason. What has occurred once may have occurred again."

Loder did not trouble to suppress a sarcastic grin.

Quelch was catching at straws.

"You think that Vernon-Smith may have had such a sum as twenty-two pounds, sir?" he asked.

"It is improbable, but possible."

"Exactly the sum that was taken on Tuesday night."

Quelch did not answer that.

"A rather singular coincidence, sir. Don't you think so?" asked Loder blandly. "Twenty-two pounds in currency notes was taken from the Head's desk. Twenty-two pounds in currency notes—the exact sum, for I have counted the notes—is hidden in Vernon-Smith's box. Is not that rather too much of a coincidence, sir?"

Quelch did not speak.

It was, he knew, altogether too much of a coincidence.

"I may add that the box was locked. Vernon-Smith keeps the box locked, which is somewhat uncommon in a junior dormitory," went on Loder. "I could not have searched it had not the key fallen into my hands by accident. And why, sir, if the money was the junior's own, was it hidden?"

"Are you sure that it was hidden?"

"It was packed inside a sock at the bottom of the box, under everything else. Is that usual?"

Quelch drew a deep breath.

"If this is correct, Loder, your methods, deeply as I disapprove of them, must be excused," he said. "I will accompany you to the dormitory at once."

Quelch lost no time. In three minutes he arrived at the door of the Remove dormitory with Loder at his heels.

Loder unlocked the dormitory door and they entered.

The Remove master compressed his lips as Loder produced a bunch of keys to unlock Vernon-Smith's box. He

knew that that bunch must belong to Vernon-Smith, but he made no remark.

It was scarcely possible to find fault with Loder, if he had actually solved the mystery that puzzled all Greyfriars, and detected the secret prowler who had robbed the Head's study.

Loder unlocked the box and threw up the lid.

"I have left everything, sir, as I found it, in order that you might see for yourself," he said.

Mr. Quelch, without answering, stooped over the box. He proceeded to remove the many articles packed within, finally disinterring a sock that gave a sound of crumpling paper as he picked it up.

From that sock he drew a wad of currency notes, fastened together by an elastic band.

In silence he counted the notes—pound notes and ten-shilling notes—the total sum being exactly twenty-two pounds.

There was no doubt now.

With the wad of notes in his hand, Mr. Quelch left the dormitory, followed by Loder of the Sixth. They descended the stairs in silence.

At the foot of the staircase Mr. Quelch paused.

"Loder, please find Vernon-Smith at once, and bring him to the headmaster's study," he said.

"Certainly sir!"

Mr. Quelch turned away to proceed to Dr. Locke's study. His face was grave and grim.

But there was a sardonic grin on Loder's face as he went in search of the Bounder. He had got his man at last—fairly nailed down the young rascal who had knocked him out in the dark—and the next item in the programme was the sack for Herbert Vernon-Smith.

Loder gloated.

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THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.

Before The Beak!

"I SAY, you fellows, here comes Loder!" Tom Brown had his radio on in the Rag, and a good many Remove fellows had gathered there before tea.

Browney shut the radio off. He supposed that Loder had looked in to say that there was too much row going on in the Rag—it being one of Loder's ways to make himself unpleasant.

But Loder did not heed the radio. He glanced round over the crowd of juniors, and called out:

"Is Vernon-Smith here?"

"Here!" The Bouncer rose from an armchair, with a lurking grin on his face. "Anything wanted, Loder?"

"Yes; you are!" sneered Loder grimly. "I'm to take you to the Head's study at once, Vernon-Smith."

"Always glad to see the Head!" said the Bouncer cheerfully. "Is he asking me to tea, do you know, Loder?"

Some of the juniors grinned. But Tom Redwing looked rather anxious. A summons to the headmaster's study meant trouble, and Smithy was always asking for trouble, in one way or another.

"All serene, Reddy!" said the Bouncer. "Bet you I can guess what is wanted! Loder still thinks I'm that jolly old prowler, don't you, Loder?"

"The Head couldn't want to see you about that rot, Smithy," said Redwing.

"Oh, I shouldn't wonder!" said the Bouncer airily. "Isn't that it, Loder?"

Loder gave him a gloating look.

"Yes, that's it," he said. "You've got copped at last, you young scoundrel. Come with me!"

"I say, you fellows," squeaked Billy Bunter, in great excitement, "it was Smithy, after all! Oh crikey!"

"What utter rot!" said Harry Wharton. "Don't you worry, Smithy. Plenty of fellows here to prove that you're not the man."

"Oh, I'm not worrying!" said the Bouncer.

"The rotfulness is terrific!" remarked Hurree Jamsat Ram Singh.

"Bosh!" remarked Bob Cherry.

"Tosh!" said Johnny Bull.

"Look here, Loder, what have they got against Smithy now?" exclaimed Tom Redwing.

"Only that the money's been found," answered Loder quietly.

"The Head's cash?" asked Peter Todd.

"Yes."

"Where did they find it, Loder?" asked a dozen eager voices.

"In Vernon-Smith's box—hidden in a folded sock and locked up," answered Loder. "There's no secret about it now. It will be all over the school in a few minutes. Vernon-Smith is going to the Head now to be sacked."

"Wha-a-t?"

"Oh crumbs!"

"Great pip!"

"It's not true!" shouted Tom Redwing, his face crimson with anger and indignation. "There's not a word of truth in it."

"Follow me, Vernon-Smith!"

"Coming!" drawled the Bouncer. "Don't you worry, Reddy—Loder does these funny things to amuse us! He's taking a leaf out of Coker's book, and setting up as the funny man of Greyfriars."

Loder stared at him. Everybody stared at him. For a fellow who was going up to the Head to be sacked, the Bouncer's way of taking the news was

really remarkable. Obviously, he was greatly amused.

"Look here, Loder!" exclaimed Harry Wharton. "There's some mistake about this—"

"That will do, Wharton!" said Loder.

"Lots of us can prove that Smithy never went down that night—"

Loder laughed.

"The Head's currency notes walked into his box and wrapped themselves up in a sock?" he asked banteringly.

"Well, Vernon-Smith can tell the Head that, if he likes. Follow me at once, you young rascal!"

"Coming, you old rascal!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Loder gave the Bouncer a glare. Then he marched off, and Smithy followed him out of the Rag.

Smithy glanced back in the doorway.

"All serene, Reddy!" he called back.

"Loder doesn't know how funny he is—but he will soon! Get ready to laugh."

"Follow me!" hooted Loder.

And the Bouncer, lounging coolly along with his hands in his pockets, followed him, leaving the Rag in a buzz.

Several times, on the way to the Head's study, Loder glanced at Vernon-Smith. He could not understand him, and he was puzzled.

Smithy was well known to have tons of nerve. If he had to face the music, he could face it with his ears up. But what he had to face now was enough to shake a nerve of iron. To be expelled, on the disgraceful charge of theft, was overwhelming—or should have been.

But the Bouncer did not turn a hair. He even hummed a tune as he followed Loder along Head's corridor.

However, he composed himself to a proper gravity as Gerald Loder opened the door of the Head's study and they entered.

Dr. Locke sat at his writing-table. Mr. Quelch stood by that table. Both masters looked as if their faces were moulded in iron. On the table lay the little wad of currency notes, in its elastic band.

"Here is Vernon-Smith, sir!" said Loder.

"Vernon-Smith!" Dr. Locke's voice was like ice. "It appears that I was in error, and your Form-master was in error, in supposing that you were cleared of suspicion."

"I hope not, sir!" said the Bouncer meekly.

"It transpires that you are guilty, Vernon-Smith," said the Head sternly. He pointed to the wad of notes. "This money, Vernon-Smith, which your Form-master tells me is the exact sum taken from this study on Tuesday night, was found hidden in your box in the Remove dormitory."

"Indeed, sir!"

"You do not claim that this money is your own, Vernon-Smith?" asked Mr. Quelch, perhaps with a lingering hope. "Can you say that you had in your own possession such a sum as twenty-two pounds?"

"No, sir."

"Such a statement would be incredible, Mr. Quelch!" said the Head. "But I am glad, at least, that the boy does not resort to falsehood. Loder, I am far from approving of the methods you appear to have used; but as this discovery has been made, I cannot say that the end does not justify the means."

"I felt quite certain, sir—"

"It appears, at all events, that your belief was well-founded!" said the Head. "Vernon-Smith, you will be

expelled this instant, and sent home without an hour's delay—"

"What for, sir?" asked Vernon-Smith calmly.

The Head gave him a look.

"Such a question is sheer impertinence!" he snapped. "You are expelled, Vernon-Smith, for theft—"

"Have I taken anything, sir?"

"What—what? This money, Vernon-Smith, has been found concealed in your box. Do you deny that you concealed it there?"

"No, sir!"

"Then what do you mean?" snapped the Head.

"I don't see that I've done any harm, sir!" said the Bouncer meekly. "Fellows have played practical jokes before this, and no harm done."

"Practical jokes!" repeated the Head, staring. "Have you the audacity, have you the impudence, to tell me that you pilfered in this study for a practical joke?"

"Oh, no, sir! I never pilfered in this study!"

"Vernon-Smith!" exclaimed Mr. Quelch.

"I can only tell the truth, sir!" said Vernon-Smith. "I know that Loder thinks I'm a pincher, and I've jolly well pulled his leg, to show him up for spying on me—but that's all I've done."

"I fail to understand this boy!" said the Head. "Vernon-Smith, the sum of money which was taken from my desk has been found concealed in your box, and—"

"That money wasn't taken from your desk, sir."

"What?"

"That isn't the packet of notes that was taken from your desk, sir!" said Vernon-Smith, with icy coolness.

"What—what? You have already confessed that it does not belong to you, Vernon-Smith!"

"That is true, sir! Only five pounds of it belongs to me. The rest of it belongs to other fellows in the Remove. If you have the numbers of the currency notes that were taken, sir, you have only to examine these. You will find that the numbers are quite different."

"Wha-a-t?"

"Anyhow, the fellows who lent me those notes have the numbers—I made them take the numbers specially!" said Vernon-Smith. "That money is not yours, sir—it's about all there was in the Remove this afternoon, and I borrowed the lot. Every fellow who lent me a note can prove it, sir."

"Bless my soul!"

Dr. Locke gazed at the Bouncer blankly. Mr. Quelch gazed at him as blankly as his chief!

Loder fairly goggled at him. For a long moment there was a silence of utter amazement.

THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER.

Bad Luck For Loder!

DEAD silence reigned in the Head's study.

The Bouncer stood as cool as an icicle. He had nothing to fear; and he was quite well aware of it.

It was Loder of the Sixth who had something to fear; now that enlightenment was dawning on his headmaster.

Smithy had done nothing—nothing, at any rate, to be visited by punishment. There was no law, written or unwritten, against a fellow parking currency notes in his box, under lock and key.

It could not be said that Smithy had brought either his headmaster or his Form-master into the matter. Loder had done that! But for Loder, the wad

of notes in Smithy's box would not have come to light at all.

The Head spoke at last.

"You say, Vernon-Smith, that this sum is not the sum that was abstracted from my desk?"

"It is not, sir."

"It is precisely the same sum."

"Yes—that is so, sir; twenty-two pounds. You will remember that you referred to the amount in Hall."

"Where did you obtain this money?"

"I borrowed all the paper money in my Form this afternoon, sir! There wasn't quite enough, and I got Mrs. Mumble at the shop to give me a ten-shilling note for four half-crowns to make it up."

"And why?" demanded the Head.

"Only to put in my box, sir! I put it there, to pull the leg of any fellow who went spying into my box!" said the Bounder, very distinctly. "If a search had been ordered by my headmaster, of course, it would have been different. But nobody had a right to search my box without an order from you, sir. So I made a fool of him."

"Bless my soul!" said the Head.

Mr. Quelch smiled faintly.

If he did not precisely approve of such a jape, he was, at all events, relieved to learn that the whole affair was, after all, a mare's-nest. No member of his Form, after all, was going to be expelled on the charge of theft! Loder had been made a fool of; or, rather, he had made a fool of himself! And that was all!

The gloating gleam had died out of Gerald Loder's eyes. The expression on Loder's face was quite extraordinary now.

Only the discovery of the secret pincher could have justified his methods!

"Am I to understand," said Dr. Locke, in a rumbling voice, "that you had any reason to suspect that Loder would make an unauthorised search of your box, Vernon-Smith?"

"Yes, sir. I knew that he fancied he knew better than my headmaster and my Form-master—"

"Oh!"

"And I knew he had tried a bunch of his own keys on my box," said the Bounder coolly. "So I collected that amount in currency notes, sir, and hid it at the bottom of the box in a sock; and after class to-day I dropped my bunch of keys where Loder could see them—"

Loder gave a start.

"As his own keys weren't any good, I thought I'd let him try mine," said Vernon-Smith cheerfully. "If he's done with them I'd be glad to have them back."

Dr. Locke turned an icy eye on Loder. "Have you this junior's keys, Loder?" he asked.

"Oh, yes! I—I—"

"Return them to him immediately!"

Loder, in silence, handed the bunch of keys back to the Bounder.

"Thanks!" said Vernon-Smith. "You can have them again, any time you like, Loder—next time you want to find a mare's-nest!"

"Be silent, Vernon-Smith!" said the Head, frowning. He paused. "In point of fact," he resumed, "I have no list of the numbers of the missing Treasury notes. Mr. Quelch, do you credit this boy's statement?"

"It will be easy to verify it, sir, by referring to the Remove boys to whom, according to Vernon-Smith, the notes belong."

"Quite so. The statement must be verified—"

"Wharton lent me one of the pound notes, sir," said Vernon-Smith. "I made

him take the number, and he can identify it."

"Mr. Quelch, will you call Wharton here?"

The Remove master left the study. He returned in a couple of minutes accompanied by Harry Wharton.

During those two minutes the Head sat like a graven image. Loder stood almost wriggling with discomfort and apprehension. Glad, very glad, would Loder have been for the strange affair to end there and then. But it was not at an end yet.

"Wharton, Vernon-Smith states that you and other boys lent him currency notes this afternoon. Is that the case?"

"Yes, sir," said Harry.

"Are you aware of the total amount?"

"It came to twenty-two pounds, sir, with what Smithy had."

"Can you pick out a pound note belonging to you from that packet?"

"Certainly, sir, if it is there."

"Do so!"

Harry Wharton took a slip of paper from his pocket, on which a number was written down. Then he sorted over the wad of notes. He drew a pound note out from the rest.

"That is my note, sir."

"Very well. There can be no further doubt, Mr. Quelch," said the Head. "Vernon-Smith, I hardly know what to say to you! Obviously, these are not the notes that were taken from my desk, but you undoubtedly led Loder to believe so."

"Loder would never have seen them, sir, if he had not pinched my keys and spied in my box!"

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Harry Wharton involuntarily. He understood the Bounder's mysterious jape now.

Dr. Locke's glance turned freezingly on the captain of the Remove.

"What did you say, Wharton?" he inquired.

"Oh nothing, sir!" stammered Harry.

"Kindly be silent! You may leave my study! And you, Vernon-Smith—the Head paused a moment—"you may go also!"

"Thank you, sir! May I take the currency notes?" asked the Bounder demurely. "They belong to over twenty fellows, and I promised to return them to-day."

"Bless my soul! You—you may take the notes, Vernon-Smith!"

The Bounder picked up the wad of notes, and left the study with Harry Wharton.

Mr. Quelch, with a lurking smile on his face, followed them out.

Loder of the Sixth would have been glad to do the same.

But Loder was not done with yet.

He stood, crimson and pale by turns, under his headmaster's stern eyes. The chopper was coming down, and he was only too painfully aware of it.

"Loder," said the Head at last, "you have failed to justify my trust in you as a prefect!"

"I—I—" stammered Loder.

"You have persisted in suspecting this junior, Vernon-Smith, in disregard of your headmaster's judgment! You have taken it upon yourself to make an unauthorised and surreptitious search of his belongings! You have provoked his very natural resentment! I cannot punish him for what he has done, though it has the effect of bringing the office of prefect into contempt and ridicule! The fault is yours!"

"I—I—I thought—I—I—I certainly believed—" stammered the wretched Loder.

Dr. Locke raised his hand.

"There is no excuse whatever for you, Loder! You have acted in a

manner unworthy of a Greyfriars prefect, with the result that you have covered yourself with ridicule! I cannot continue to place confidence in you, Loder!"

"I—I—"

"You are no longer a prefect, Loder!" said the Head. "Next term I may consider whether I can reinstate you. For the present term, no! You may leave my study, Loder!"

"I—I—"

"I have said that you may leave my study, Loder!"

And Loder, with the deepest of deep feelings, left it.

THE SIXTEENTH CHAPTER.

Coker—As Usual!

"LESS noise there!"

It was Horace Coker of the Fifth Form who barked in at the doorway of the Rag.

There was undoubtedly a row in that apartment. There seemed to be a swarm of juniors there, and every fellow yelling or howling or roaring with all the power of his lungs. Roars of laughter rang far beyond the confines of the Rag.

Any prefect might have looked in to rap out:

"Less noise there!"

Coker was nobody in particular. He had no right whatever to butt in. But that was Coker all over. Coker of the Fifth never could get it into his head that he did not speak as one having authority, saying: "Do this!"—and he doeth it. Coker had had quite a lot of lessons on the subject; but experience, which is said to make fools wise, had never had that effect on Coker.

The Rag was in a roar.

Harry Wharton and Herbert Vernon-Smith had returned there from the Head's study. The tale of Loder's discomfiture had been told, and it made the fellows yell.

The bare idea of that dutiful prefect carting all the currency notes that Smithy had collected up and down the Remove to the Head's study, in the belief that they were the missing cash, made the juniors howl. Remove and Fourth and Shell were howling with merriment, and the Rag rang and echoed with their hilarity.

That hilarious roar reached Horace Coker's ears and drew him to the spot—to mind business that was not his own, in Horace's usual happy way.

Coker was not, anyhow, in the best of tempers.

He had had no luck so far in his role as amateur detective; no more luck in tracking down the secret prowler than he had had in shifting Randolph Creeker from the Abbot's Spinney.

No clues had come Coker's way; no spot of cigarette-ash, if any, had met his eagle eye.

He was not even taken with any seriousness in his detective role. Fellows seemed to think it funny—Coker did not know why.

Nobody, except Coker, believed that the prowler had prowled in his study, and hunted cover in the cupboard when Coker came in, and banged the door on his nose, just like he had on Prout's.

Somebody had banged the cupboard door on Coker's nose. The state of his nose proved that. But only Coker believed that it was the prowler.

Potter and Greene had even suggested that it might have been some fag after Coker's tuck—a suggestion that Coker treated with the contempt it deserved.

Coker was annoyed. That made him all the more ready to barge into the

Rag and tell those noisy juniors to keep quiet. But Coker would have barged in anyhow. That was Coker's way.

"Ha, ha, ha!" came a cheery roar from a mob of hilarious juniors, drowning Coker's authoritative bark at the doorway.

"Loder's face was worth a guinea a box!" chuckled the Bounder.

"Moroi!" said Harry Wharton, laughing.

"What a jape!" gasped Bob Cherry.

"Fancy Loder——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Coker strode in.

He was not heeded. Coker was not the fellow to be unheeded. Uproarious fags could not pass Coker by like the idle wind which they regarded not!

"Stop that row!" roared Coker.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Want anything here, Coker?"

"I want you noisy fags to stop that row, and at once!" said Coker. "No more of it, or you'll hear from me!"

"From you?" asked Bob.

"Yes, from me!"

"And who may you be?" further inquired Bob. "Anybody in particular?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Obviously—to Coker—there was only one reply to be made to such an impertinent question. That reply was a smack at a cheeky head.

Coker smacked, swinging round a long arm and a large hand.

The smack did not reach Bob. He dodged. But every bullet has its billet! The long arm swung on, the large hand landed—on the wrong head—fairly ringing on a fat ear attached to the fattest head in the Remove.

"Yaroooo!" roared Billy Bunter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I say, you fellows—yoo-hoo!" howled Bunter, clasping his suffering ear in anguish.

"Beat that Fifth Form man out!" shouted Hobson of the Shell.

"Shift him!"

"Bargo him out!"

Coker of the Fifth had come in to stop the noise. But there was more noise than ever as Coker of the Fifth went out.

He went out with his long limbs flying, his powerful voice sounding on its top note. Every fellow in the Rag who could get at Coker got at him, and the result, for Coker, was quite unpleasant and painful.

Coker travelled through the doorway almost like a bullet from a rifle. He landed in the passage outside like a sack of coke.

He sprawled and roared.

Coker had not been in a good temper, to begin with. After this, he was in quite a bad temper.

He scrambled to his feet, panting, and rushed back at the crowded doorway of the Rag. He charged, punching right and left.

Coker's punches were hefty. Follows who stopped them roared. But Coker was not given time for many punches. The whole crowd of juniors swarmed over Coker.

Coker went down, bumping.

This time, he was not allowed to get up again. Bob Cherry grabbed his right leg, Vernon-Smith grabbed his left. Coker on his back, was led down the passage by his legs, as if they were the shafts of a cart.

A laughing crowd of juniors accompanied him.

"Go it!"

"Geo up!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ow! Oh! Ah! Oooogh!" roared Coker, struggling wildly. "Loggo!"

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Lemme gerrup! I'll smash the lot of you when I gerrup! Oooooop!"

"Come on!" grinned the Bounder.

"Take him as far as the door and pitch him into the quad!"

"Oh, my hat! If we run into a beak——" gasped Bob.

"Rot! Come on!"

Smithy, as usual, was reckless of beaks! He marched on with Coker's left leg, so Bob marched on with his right.

Coker, on his back had to follow his legs. His arms sawed the air and the back of his head went tap, tap, tap along the floor! Yells of laughter followed him in his progress.

"Ware beaks!" shouted Johnny Bull, suddenly, as the procession turned the corner of the passage.

"Look out!"

"Prout!"

"Oh, my hat!"

Mr Prout, in a big overcoat, apparently just going out, loomed in the offing.

Bob Cherry and Smithy dropped Coker's legs as if those long legs had suddenly become red-hot. The whole mob of juniors bolted back down the passage to the Rag.

Coker was left sprawling dizzily. He sprawled and he spluttered, and he gurgled for breath.

Mr Prout came to a halt and gazed down at him. Portentous wrath gathered in Prout's portly brow.

"Upon my word!" exclaimed Mr. Prout. "Is—is that Coker? Is that a member of my Form? Can I believe my eyes?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" floated from the direction of the Rag.

"Grooogh! Oooogh!" spluttered Coker. He sat up dizzily almost at his Form-master's feet. "Woooo-hoooo-hoop! I'll smash 'em! I'll spifficate 'em! I——"

"Coker!" boomed Prout.

"Oh!" Horace became aware of his Form-master. "Oh! Yes, sir, I——"

"Get up at once, Coker!"

Coker scrambled breathlessly up.

Prout glared at him as if he could have bitten him. Coker did not look, at that moment, a credit to the Fifth—a senior Form.

He was crimson, breathless, dusty, and rumpled. His hair looked like a mop, his waistcoat had split its buttons, and his collar hung by a single stud. His aspect was not calculated to please any Form-master.

"How dare you, Coker?" boomed Prout in angry indignation. "You, a senior boy—a Fifth Form boy! I am shocked—scandalised! I——"

"I——" gasped Coker. "I——"

"Unparalleled!" boomed the indignant Prout. "Have you no sense of dignity, Coker? Do you think it becoming in a Fifth Form boy to play these foolish, obstreperous games with a crowd of Lower boys——"

"I—I—I never—— I——"

"I saw you!" boomed Prout. "I can scarcely believe the evidence of my eyes, Coker! But I saw you—you, a senior boy——"

"I—I——"

"I will not allow this, Coker! Something is due to the dignity of a senior Form! Something is due to your Form-master——"

"I—I—you see, I——"

"Silence! I will hear nothing in excuse, Coker! You shall certainly not play these foolish games with juniors in the passages!" thundered Prout. "Go to my study! Wait for me there! I will deal with you, Coker, when I return! Go to my study at once, and remain there!"

"I—I——"

"Not a word! Go!"

Coker, almost foaming, went.

Prout, with a snort of contempt, walked out.

In the Rag, the juniors were still hilarious, but their hilarity was not further interrupted by Horace Coker.

THE SEVENTEENTH CHAPTER.

Coker Makes A Discovery!

"O LD ass!" breathed Coker.

Thus, sad to relate, did Coker of the Fifth disrespectfully allude to his Form-master, the majestic Prout!

Coker was waiting in Prout's study! He had been waiting nearly an hour!

It was fearfully annoying.

It was past tea-time. Coker, naturally, wanted his tea. Prout, apparently, hadn't thought of that! Coker thought of it.

But Prout was his beak, and a beak's commands had to be regarded. Prout had gone out, and bidden Coker wait in his study till he returned. Perhaps he regarded that as a suitable punishment for a senior who played obstreperous games in the passages with a mob of fags!

Anyhow, there it was, and Coker had to wait. For a long time he roamed about Prout's study like a tiger in a cage. Then he sat down in Prout's armchair and put his feet on the fender. He had to wait, and while he waited his only consolation was to confide to empty space what he thought of Prout!

"Old goat!" muttered Coker. "Old chump! Yah!"

He longed to hear the sound of Prout's elephantine footsteps coming up the passage; he yearned to hear the study door open. Really and truly, Horace Coker wanted his tea!

The study door opened, suddenly and very quietly.

Coker, sitting in the armchair facing the fire, would not have known it had opened at all, but for the chilly draught from the passage.

He glanced over the high back of the chair in surprise.

Prout could always be heard coming. He had not heard Prout coming! It was not Prout.

Coker gave quite a start as he saw who it was.

It was Gerald Loder of the Sixth Form.

Sixth Form men had no business in the Fifth Form master's study. But if by chance a Sixth Former had any business there, naturally he would tap at the door and open it in the usual way—not in this silent, stealthy way.

Loder had not tapped, the door-handle had turned without a sound, and he had stepped in almost on tiptoe.

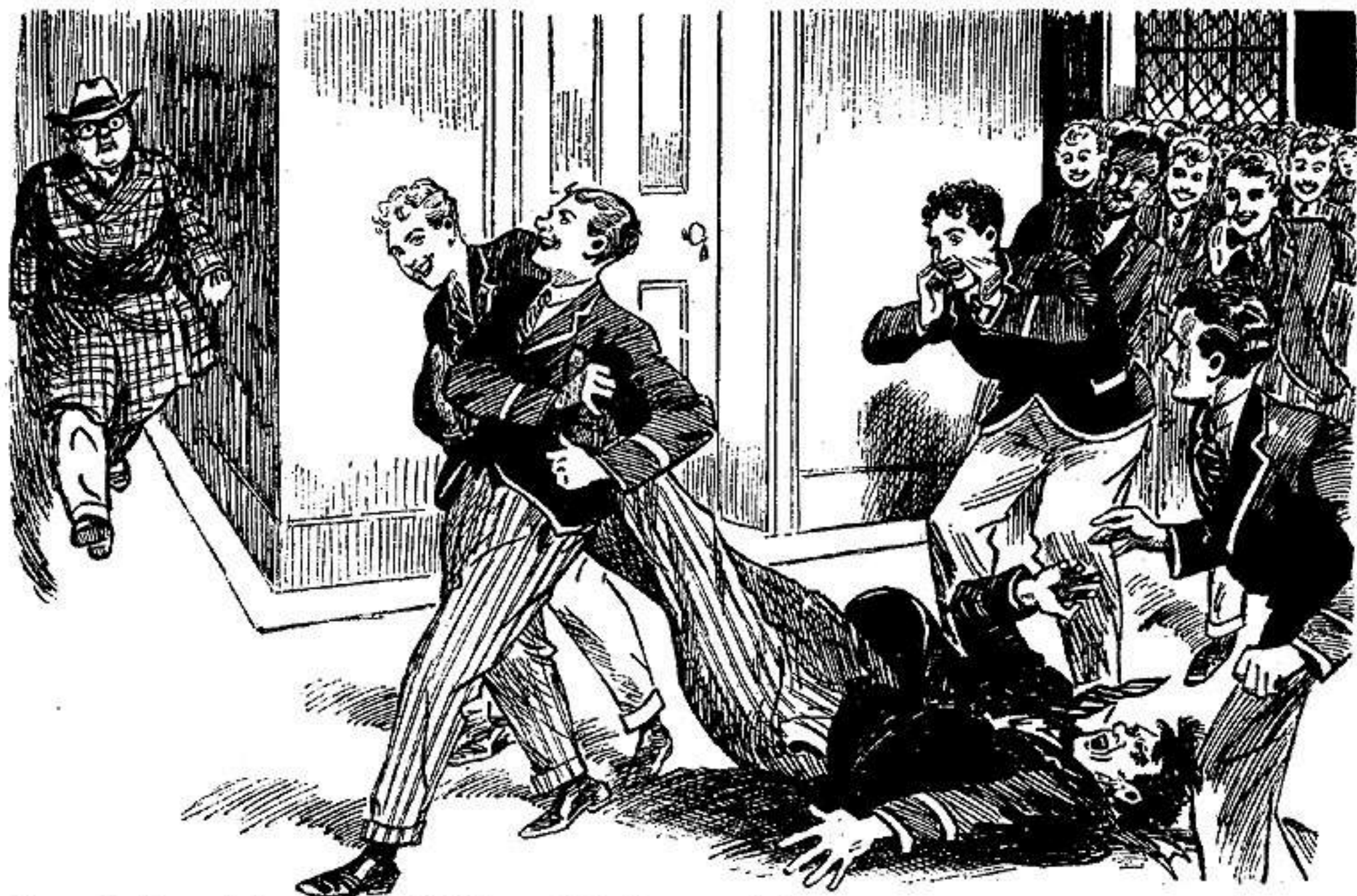
This was so stealthy, and so strangely surreptitious, that it struck Coker at once. He stared at Gerald Loder.

Loder of the Sixth closed the door as silently as he had opened it. He stood listening there.

Coker still stared.

Loder, evidently, knew that Prout was out, otherwise, of course, he would never have entered Prout's study like that. He had come there secretly, and was uneasy lest he might have been seen or heard coming. His whole attitude revealed that.

Clearly, he did not know that anyone was already in the study. The high back of the armchair hid Coker except for his staring, astonished face—and Loder had not glanced towards the fire. He was too intent on making sure that



Vernon-Smith marched on with Coker's left leg, and Bob Cherry marched on with his right. Coker, on his back, had to follow his legs. Tap, tap, tap, went the back of his head along the floor. Another moment, and Mr. Prout would be on the scene.

his surreptitious entry had not been observed.

Satisfied on that point, Loder turned from the door.

Then, and not till then, he beheld the staring face looking over the high back of the armchair.

Loder of the Sixth made only one step. Then he stopped dead, his eyes popping at Horace Coker.

He caught his breath.

"You—you fool!" he muttered. "What are you doing here?"

Coker rose from Prout's armchair. "I'd like to know what you're doing here!" he retorted.

Deep suspicion was in Coker's face.

Coker could not fail to be struck by Loder's stealthiness in creeping into that study! Even Coker did not need telling that Loder of the Sixth was up to something of a stealthy and secret nature.

"Got out!" muttered Loder.

"Shan't!" retorted Coker.

"What are you doing here?"

"Waiting for my beak!" answered Coker. "What are you doing?"

Loder of the Sixth did not answer that.

He was not likely to confide to Coker that he was taking advantage of Prout's absence to borrow Prout's telephone, to ring up Bill Lodgey at the Three Fishers!

Loder, after his painful interview with the Head, had spent some time in exceedingly bitter reflection in his study. He had made a fool of himself—and he had lost his rank of prefect. It was a heavy blow to Loder.

No longer a prefect, he no longer had the privilege of wielding the ashplant; and no prospect, therefore, of making that young rascal Vernon-Smith squirm for the extraordinary trick he had played. The glory had, so to speak, departed. He could no more order Smithy to bend over now than Smithy could

order him to bend over. That, really, was the unkindest cut of all.

But Loder had other matters to think of, savagely disgruntled as he was. It would be some consolation if Peep o' Day had won the three-thirty. Loder had a quid each way on that gee-gee.

So—as Mr. Prout was afar—he had dropped quietly into Prout's study, to phone up his sporting friend Lodgey, and inquire.

There was a telephone in the Prefects' Room; but Loder could hardly have ventured to use it for such a purpose. Loder's keen interest in the sport of kings had to be kept very dark at Greyfriars.

It was very annoying to Loder to find that fathead Coker in Prout's study. He could hardly get on with a phone call to the Three Fishers, with Coker to hear.

He stood irresolute.

As he stood, Coker watched him, with deeper and deeper suspicion.

Coker knew nothing of Loder's sporting speculations. It did not occur to him that Gerald Loder was there to phone up a racing man.

Why was he there—creeping silently, stealthily, into a beak's study, while the beak was out? Grim suspicion was in Coker's mind.

"Well, ain't you going to tell me why you've come?" asked Coker, with cutting sarcasm, after a long silence.

"No, you fool!" snapped Loder. "No business of yours!"

"It might be!" jeered Coker. "This isn't the first study you've sneaked into on tiptoe!"

Loder stared at him.

"What do you mean, idiot?" he grunted.

"I know what I mean!" retorted Coker. "I've spotted you this time! No chance this time to dodge into a cupboard."

Loder stared harder.

"Mad?" he asked.

"No chance to bang a cupboard door on a fellow's face and cut, after knocking him over!" pursued Coker. "Not this time!"

"What are you gabbling about, you gabbling dummy?" asked Loder. Loder of the Sixth had never even heard of that episode in Coker's study, and naturally had not the faintest idea to what Horace was alluding.

"All right!" said Coker. "Get on with it! I'll watch you. Ha, ha!"

Coker laughed sardonically.

Loder gave him an angry glare.

"Will you get out of this study?" he snarled.

"Not likely."

Loder paused, still irresolute. There was no phoning Bill Lodgey, so long as Coker was there! Coker wasn't going—and the only alternative was for Loder to go, in the hope of bagging another telephone elsewhere.

With a final glare at Coker, he went, shutting the door quietly after him.

Coker whistled softly.

"By gum!" he said. "By gum!"

Coker saw it all now. He hardly needed the gifts of a detective to be able to see it all. Coker had spotted the secret prowler. He had, at all events, no doubt about it.

A fellow who tiptoed stealthily into a master's study, and cleared off when he found a fellow there—what did it look like?

In the case of a fag, it might have meant some jape or practical joke on the beak! Not in the case of a Sixth Form man!

What had Loder been going to do there? Coker fancied he knew. Detective Coker had got his man at last—nearly got him. He had, at all events, spotted him; all that remained was to pin him down to it.

"By gum!" repeated Coker.

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Horace was no longer sorry that Prout had sent him there to wait. That happy chance had led to this startling discovery. Coker was in quite a cheery mood, though fearfully hungry, when Prout came in, at last, after another half-hour.

Elephantine footsteps came down the passage, and Prout rolled in.

He started a little at the sight of Coker. Perhaps he had forgotten him.

"Oh! Coker!" said Prout. "I told you to wait—quite so!" Fortunately for Coker, Prout also wanted his tea, and it cut short his eloquence. "As you have waited so long, Coker, you may go. But any recurrence of your foolish and disorderly conduct—"

"I never—"

"Enough; go!"

Prout pointed to the door.

"I think I ought to explain, sir, that I never—"

"Take a hundred lines, Coker, and go!"

Coker went. Prout looked like making it two hundred, if he didn't—and Coker went, followed by a snort from Prout.

THE EIGHTEENTH CHAPTER.

Watsons Wanted!

HARRY WHARTON dropped his hand, carelessly as it were, on the inkpot on the table in Study No. 1.

Frank Nugent, in the same casual sort of way, stretched out his hand to a ruler.

These were merely natural precautions, when Horace Coker of the Fifth Form appeared in the doorway of that study.

Seldom did Coker of the Fifth visit a Remove study with peaceable intent. If he had come for war, the chums of Study No. 1 were prepared for the fray. Inkpot and ruler were at Coker's service. And if he had not come for war, it was difficult to guess why he had come at all.

But he did not look hostile.

He looked a little ruffled, and rather red and annoyed—as if somebody or something had recently come between the wind and his nobility, so to speak. But he gave the two Removites a nod—a gracious nod. He was not wrathful with them. Inkpot and ruler reposed in peace.

Coker shut the door after him. Then he came across and sat on the corner of the study table, looking at the surprised juniors. It seemed as if he had come to talk—though about what, the juniors could not guess.

"I think I can trust you, Wharton!" said Coker slowly. "And you, Nugent."

You're a pair of cheeky young sweeps; but—well, if you gabble what I'm going to say all over the House, I shall jolly well whop you! That's all!"

"What the dickens—"

"Don't interrupt, Wharton! The fact is, I'm in want of a helping hand, in a certain matter, so I've come here."

"A helping hand?" repeated Harry. "Not a foot?"

"Eh? No! What do you mean?"

"Carry on! What can we do for you? Prout been ragging you for spelling 'cat' with a 'k' again?" asked Wharton. "If it's spelling—"

"Don't be cheeky! Listen to me," said Coker. "I don't mind telling you that I've taken the affair of that prowler in hand—"

"Oh!" ejaculated Wharton and Nugent together.

They grinned. Apparently, it was Coker the Detective who had called.

"I've a bit of a gift that way!" explained Coker. "Detective work would be just in my line, if I had time for it. Quick eye—keen, penetrating mind—that sort of thing, you know; right in my line. Well, nobody's able to pinch that pincher, so I decided to do it."

"Done it yet?" smiled Nugent.

"Yes!" answered Coker unexpectedly.

"What-a-t?" stuttered the two juniors together. They stared at Coker.

They had been prepared to be entertained by old Horace on the detective trail. They had not been prepared to hear that he had had any luck! So his statement that he had spotted the man was astonishing—if correct!

"I've spotted him!" said Coker calmly. "I know his name and Form. That's all right. But knowing who he is, isn't sufficient. No good saying anything without proof. But how is a fellow to prove it? Catching him in the act is the only way."

"Quite a good way, if you could pull it off!" agreed Harry.

"If!" murmured Nugent.

"Well, that's the idea!" said Coker.

"That blighter has been known to prowl at night three times. He has started prowling by day, as you fellows know—you remember I came here and told you he'd been in my study—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What the thump are you sniggering at?" snapped Coker testily. "I told you he hid himself in my study cupboard and banged the door on my nose and got away—"

"Oh! Yes! But—" gasped Harry Wharton.

"Now he's prowled again—this time in Prout's study!" said Coker. "As it happened, I was there, and fairly spotted him! Prout was out, you see, and he'd told me to wait in his study, after that row—that's how it happened. The blighter came creeping in—"

"Oh, my hat!"

"You should have seen his face when he saw me there!" Coker grinned for a moment. "You never saw a fellow so taken aback! Of course, I never let on that I knew his game! No good putting him on his guard, you know! But now I know who it was: I've only got to nail him. You see that?"

"But—" gasped Wharton.

"But what do you think?" said Coker. "I told Potter and Greene—and instead of agreeing to back me up, and help me pinch that pincher, they burst out laughing! Laughing!" said Coker, with a deep breath. "Laughed in my face!"

Harry Wharton and Frank Nugent nobly repressed a desire to do the same as Potter and Greene.

Really, it was not very easy to take Detective Coker with proper seriousness. But they did their best.

"That's why I've come here," explained Coker. "I must have help in this! I mean to say, that pincher has got away with the loot from the Head's study, a couple of nights ago. He's safe as houses—so he thinks! He doesn't know I'm after him, of course! Well, will he chuck it after bagging twenty-two pounds and getting by safe? Not he! He will be after another bag!"

"I shouldn't wonder!" agreed Harry. "But—"

"I fancy the beaks will be keeping an eye on the dormitories for a time," said Frank Nugent.

"That won't hurt him!" said Coker. "He doesn't get out of a dormitory when he prowls at night."

"Oh, my hat! Not a Sixth Form man!" exclaimed Harry.

All the Forms at Greyfriars, excepting the Sixth, slept in dormitories.

"You never guessed that!" smiled Coker. "Well, I know it! Yes, it's a Sixth Form man—and a prefect, too!"

"Great pip!"

Coker's manner was so confident that the two juniors began to wonder whether he really had found anything out.

Many fellows suspected that the prowler was a senior, owing to the force of the blow that had knocked Loder out that night in the Head's study. Was it barely possible that Coker, by some sort of fool's luck, had solved the mystery that baffled all Greyfriars?

"Of course, he will prowl again!" resumed Coker. "Thieves are like that—they never can stop! They always go on till they're copped! Well, next time he prowls, I'm going to get him. Only Potter and Greene have actually refused to help! A chap can't keep awake all night, every night! I want a couple of assistants—see? You needn't tell me that it's rather rotten for a Fifth Form man, like me, to ask help from silly fags—I know that! But a man has to use what material he can get, and make the best of it, rotten as it may be."

"Oh!" gasped Wharton. "I see! You put it so nicely Coker—"

"So flatteringly!" said Nugent.

"You will act under my instructions," explained Coker. "As a rule, I should not encourage juniors to break dormitory bounds. In fact, I should smack their heads for it, if I found them at it! But circumstances alter cases."

"Like carpenters!" said Nugent.

"Eh? What do you mean—like carpenters?"

"I've seen carpenters altering cases—packing-cases," said Nugent innocently.

"I don't mean that sort of cases, Nugent! Don't be so dense! And don't jaw! Just listen! As the matter stands, you'll have to break dormitory bounds, but in this case you can take it from me that it's all right, so you needn't worry about that!" said Coker.

Wharton and Nugent smiled. They understood now why Coker was there. Potter and Greene had let him down. He was in the position of Sherlock Holmes in quest of a Dr. Watson—two Dr. Watsons, in fact! Like Sexton Blake in sore need of a couple of

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Tinkers! He had selected them! It was, no doubt, rather a distinction!

They could not, however, see themselves breaking dorm bounds at night, as assistants of Detective Coker! Not quite!

"But who's the man?" asked Harry Wharton. He really was interested to know who it was that Coker had spotted.

"You're not to shout it out all over the shop!" admonished Coker. "But I shall have to tell you, as you're going to help me keep watch for him—turn and turn about, you know. I thought of that young rascal, Vernon-Smith, at first, but as you had him tied up the night of the robbery, I eliminated him, when I heard. Then I thought of you, Wharton—"

Harry Wharton jumped.

"Me!" he gasped.

"Well, the way you acted when I came here yesterday, after the prowler had been in my study, was rather suspicious—"

"Oh crikey!"

"It might have been, cheek—just ordinary Remove cheek—or it might have shown a guilty conscience, see?" said Coker.

"You blithering idiot—"

"That will do! I've eliminated you now!" said Coker. "Now that I've spotted the actual man—"

"Who?" yelled Wharton and Nugent together.

"Loder!"

"Wha-a-t?"

"Loder of the Sixth!" said Coker triumphantly. "And I'll bet that you'd never have guessed that!"

Coker was right there! Wharton and Nugent never would have guessed that! Nobody but Coker ever would have guessed it!

As Loder of the Sixth had had his eyes blacked by the secret prowler, it seemed, to say the least, improbable, that Loder was the secret prowler, and had blacked his own eyes!

Nobody but Coker could have spotted Loder of the Sixth! Harry Wharton and Frank Nugent could only gaze at the great Horace, dumbfounded.

THE NINETEENTH CHAPTER.

No Help For Horace!

HORACE COKER smiled.

It was a complacent smile.

If Coker did not resemble Sherlock Holmes in other respects, he resembled him, at least, in his enjoyment of a surprising climax. And certainly Sherlock Holmes had never dumbfounded Dr. Watson so utterly as Coker of the Fifth had now dumbfounded the two Removites.

They gazed at Coker! They goggled at him! They could not, for the moment, speak! Horace had taken their breath away.

"Surprised you, what?" smiled Coker. "A Sixth Form man—and a prefect, too—though I hear that Loder's been shifted out of that, for some reason. The Head may have a suspicion!"

"Oh!" gasped Wharton.

"Oh!" gasped Nugent.

"I think I should have deduced it, even if I hadn't seen the villain at work!" said Coker. "Look at the way Loder's kept on trying to fix it on young Vernon-Smith! Shifting suspicion off himself, see?"

"Oh crikey!"

"Getting out at night, making out he was looking for that prowler," went on Coker. "Good excuse for being out of bed when he was seen—what?"

"Oh jiminy!"

"But having caught him fairly in the act, that settles it!" said Coker. "I nearly had him in my own study, as you know—"

"That—that—that wasn't Loder!" gasped Harry Wharton.

"Oh, yes, it was!" declared Coker. "I didn't know then, but I know now! Now that I've copped him in a beak's study, you know."

"Oh dear!" moaned Nugent.

"Did Loder really come to Prout's study, or did you dream it?" asked Harry.

"Don't be cheeky! He crept in—tip-toe, without a sound!" said Coker. "Stood listening at the door, after he was in, to make sure! Then he saw my face, and fairly jumped out of his skin! No wonder!"

"No wonder!" gasped Nugent. "See—"

MORE OVERSEAS "FOOTER-STAMPS" WINNERS

In the September Contest, prizes of Five Shillings each have been awarded to the following twenty-five readers who submitted the highest scores received, which ranged from 38 "goals" and upwards:

Victor Campbell, New South Wales, Australia; Hui Siew Chow, Perak, Federated Malay States; H. F. Gilliers, Wynberg, South Africa; Victor Gilliers, Cape, South Africa; Allan Cook, Victoria, Australia; W. Endean, Johannesburg, South Africa; L. W. Haer, Queensland, Australia; Teo Sit Hu, Singapore, Straits Settlements; Cameron Jamieson, Manitoba, Canada; Louis Klein, Pretoria, South Africa; Magnus Levy, Pretoria, South Africa; D. Little, Natal, South Africa; R. S. O'Connor, Natal, South Africa; Thomas Parker, New South Wales, Australia; Jack G. Raeder, The Hague, Holland; P. N. Roberts, Nairobi, Kenya; Ernest Robinson, British Columbia, Canada; Charles Ryan, Queensland, Australia; James Sandell, Tigne, Malta; H. Schneider, De Aar, South Africa; Harold Selikson, Orange Free State, South Africa; R. I. Shake, Natal, South Africa; J. Sismay, Port Elizabeth, South Africa; Johan van Niekes, Transvaal, South Africa; F. C. Wong, Singapore, Straits Settlements.

ing your face suddenly might make any fellow jump!"

"Don't be cheeky, Nugent! He never did what he came to the study for—of course, he couldn't, with me there!" said Coker. "I know what he was after! Prout keeps money in his desk, same as the Head does. He got away with the Head's lot—he was after Prout's!"

"Rot!" gasped Harry Wharton. "Loder's rather a bad hat, old bean, but that's rot! Goodness knows why he went into Prout's study, but it wasn't that, and couldn't have been."

"I said don't be cheeky!"

"Loder!" gurgled Nugent. "Loder! It's too rich, Coker! Don't you remember that the very first time the prowler prowled, Loder caught him in the Head's study, in the dark, and thought it was Smithy—and Smithy was jolly nearly sacked for it?"

"I know he said so!" answered Coker coolly.

"But the fellow he bagged hit him, and gave him two black eyes!" yelled Nugent. "He hasn't got shot of them yet!"

"Think Loder gave himself those black eyes, Coker?" moaned Wharton.

"Yes."

"Oh, Christopher Columbus!"

"As he's the prowler, he must have," explained Coker. "I don't mean, of course, that he punched his own face. A fellow wouldn't do that. Accident of

some sort in the dark—see? Rooting about in the Head's study, in the dark, he rammed his head against something—any fellow might—"

"Oh crumbs!"

"Banged his face on the table or the desk or something!" said Coker. "Well, then, what was he to do? Blacked his eyes—no disguising that! So he makes out that he had copped the prowler, and the fellow knocked him out. That's how I deduce it!"

Coker evidently had been going strong on deduction.

Having settled in his own astute mind that Loder of the Sixth was the secret prowler, Coker had to account for those black eyes that had adorned Gerald Loder so long. Well, he had accounted for them!

Loder had told a tale of a punch in the dark. Coker deduced a bang on something in the dark. And that was that!

"Clear enough when I explain it—what?" smiled Coker. "Elementary, in fact, my dear Watson—I mean, Wharton."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What are you sniggering at?" hooted Coker. "I've had enough of that from Potter and Greene. They sniggered just like that when I said the very same thing."

"Ha, ha, ha!" shrieked the two juniors. They were not surprised that Potter and Greene had sniggered at the idea of Loder having blacked his own eyes!

Coker's masterly deductions satisfied Coker, but they were not likely to carry conviction to others.

Coker's eyes began to gleam.

He had had a row with Potter and Greene because they had received his masterly deductions in a spirit of hilarity. He was not likely to be more patient with sniggering juniors.

"That's enough!" he hooted. "I haven't come here to be sniggered at!"

"That's one more of your mistakes, old bean—you have!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What I want to know is this—are you playing up?" demanded Coker. "I want assistance. You can see that. I can't stay awake from lights out till rising-bell. I want one fellow, at least, to take a turn—two would be better. I've picked out you two—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Will you shut up that silly cackling?" breathed Coker. "Have a little sense! Look at it! The prowler—Loder—tried it on this afternoon and had to chuck it because I was there till Prout came in. What will he do? Try again after lights-out! Can't you see that?"

"Yes—if he's the prowler—"

"No 'if' about it—he is! After old Prout's gone to roost to-night that villain will be at his study again. Prout doesn't lock his door at night like the Head—easy as pie for him! Some time in the night Loder will sneak out of his room and try it on, as he was stopped this afternoon. We keep watch all night—"

"Do we?" gasped Wharton.

"Begin at half-past eleven after the beaks have gone to roost," said Coker. "You fags begin then, and carry on till, say, one o'clock. If you hear him you keep it dark, and cut off to my dorm and give me a call. If not, I come down at one and relieve you. You cut back to your dorm and I carry on—see?"

Coker evidently had it all cut and dried.

This was the scheme, it seemed, that he had propounded to Potter and Greene without having any luck. He was

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after what had happened on Tuesday night.

The rascal, of course, guessed that. It was some other master's study that was to get his attention now. Loder saw that clearly.

The footsteps stopped at a study door.

In the thick darkness Loder could see nothing. He knew that the prowler had stopped at a door, but he was not sure which. Listening intently, he heard a door-handle turn.

His heart beat faster. The prowler had entered a study.

Silently, but swiftly, Loder crept on. He reached the door, which was wide open and he knew now which study it was—Mr Prout's.

All was dark, but from the study window came a pale gleam of starlight, sufficient to outline the doorway.

Within that outline stood a figure, its back to Loder. He could have touched it by stretching out his hand.

Loder could hear its breathing, and he suppressed his own.

The prowler was standing just within the doorway, staring into the dark study, and apparently listening.

Why, Loder did not know. It looked as if the fellow was making sure whether there was, or was not, someone in the study already. But that, of course, was hardly possible, as Prout had gone to bed long ago.

For whatever reason the fellow was standing there, Loder could not exactly see him; but he could make out a patch of shadow, and he could hear the breathing.

Loder's brain worked quickly.

What he was chiefly afraid of was that the young rascal might twist and dodge in the dark, scud back to his dormitory, and deny, with brazen impudence, that he had ever been out of it.

But Loder had him now.

Last time the young scoundrel had knocked him out and escaped. This time Loder was going to be the knocker-out.

Silently, hardly breathing, Loder closed in behind that figure that paused in Prout's doorway.

He drew back his right arm, the fist clenched.

That fist shot out with all Loder's beef behind it, landing a terrific thump on the shoulders of the dim figure.

The figure was bowled over like a ninepin.

There was one startled, gasping howl, and it crashed on its face on Prout's carpet, taken utterly by surprise by that unexpected thump from behind.

As it sprawled prone, Loder sprang. He sprang like a tiger.

Before the fallen one could stir, before he could even yelp a second time, Loder was upon him.

Loder's knee ground into a back, pinning the figure to the floor.

Both Loder's hands grasped a mop of hair, jamming the head down.

There was a convulsive wriggle under Loder, but the fellow had not the remotest chance of getting loose. Loder had him absolutely safe!

"Urrrrgh!" came a horrible moaning gurgle from the face that was grinding into Prout's carpet. "Ooogh!"

Loder shouted. He roared! He fairly raved! He was going to wake the whole House. Everybody was going to see his catch. There was going to be no doubt about it this time.

"Help! Help! Help!" roared Loder.

He was not in need of help. He was completely master of the situation; but he had to wake the House!

"Urrgh!" came a gurgle. "Ooogh—er!"

"I've got you!" snarled Loder. He

jammed his knee harder, as the unseen figure heaved convulsively, and threw his weight on the wriggling head, jamming it down as it twisted. "I've got you this time, Vernon-Smith, you young scoundrel!"

"Oooooogh!"

"Help! Help! Help!" roared Loder.

He wanted to wake the House. He did it; there was no mistake about that. His roar woke every echo, and nearly every sleeper. Doors opened, lights flashed on, voices called.

"Help!" roared Loder. "Help! I've got him! I've got the prowler! This way! Mr. Prout's study! This way! Help!"

And a buzz of excited voices answered Loder's roar.

THE TWENTY-FIRST CHAPTER.

Only Coker!

BOB CHERRY bounded out of bed in the Remove dormitory.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" he roared. "Wake up, you men! Hark!"

"That's somebody calling for help!" exclaimed Harry Wharton.

"What the dooce—" ejaculated Vernon-Smith.

"Come on!" shouted Bob.

Bob made one leap into his trousers, and another for the door.

He was the first out of the dormitory. But Wharton and Nugent, Johnny Bull and Hurree Singh, were swiftly after him, and Vernon-Smith was at their heels, and then almost the whole of the Remove, with a rush.

Wild shouts for help were pealing from below. Lights flashed on in passages and staircases.

As Harry Wharton & Co. came with a rush to the dormitory landing, they were joined by Hobson and a crowd of the Shell, Cecil Reginald Temple and a mob of the Fourth, Blundell and Potter and Greene and a crowd of Fifth Formers.

Helter-skelter, in a buzzing mob, they poured down the stairs.

A portly figure in voluminous dressing-gown towered over the mob.

"What—what—what—" Prout was booming.

"Help!" came roaring from below.

"Help! I've got him!"

"That's Loder's toot!" gasped Bob.

"Oh, my hat! Has he got the jolly old prowler this time?" gasped Peter Todd. "Where's Smithy?"

"Here!" chuckled the Bounder.

"Let me pass!" Quelch, in dressing-gown and slippers, came whizzing. "Give me room to pass!"

The Remove master shot down the stairs. Prout rolled after him. Capper and Hacker turned out and followed on. After the masters swarmed fellows of all Forms. Even fags of the Second and Third were turning out, crowing with excitement. It was going to be a full house.

"I've got him!" came Loder's roar. "I've got the prowler! Prout's study—this way! I've got him! Help!"

"My study!" exclaimed Mr. Prout. "Goodness gracious! Has the scoundrel dared to enter my study?"

"That is Loder calling!" gasped Mr. Quelch. "He appears to have caught someone—"

"Help!" came Loder's roar, as the whole mob poured into Masters' Passage—joined there by a crowd of the Sixth, turning out of their rooms on the ground floor.

Wingate of the Sixth was switching on the lights in the passage. Up the

passage rushed Quelch and Prout; after them an army. Wild excitement reigned on all sides.

At Prout's doorway Quelch reached in and switched on the study light.

Bright illumination flooded Prout's study, and revealed a startling sight.

A figure sprawled on its face, gurgling, with Loder's knee planted in the small of its back, and Loder's hands grasping its head by the hair.

"What?" gasped Mr. Quelch.

"Who?" boomed Prout.

Loder, still grasping his prisoner relentlessly, turned his head, his eyes winking and blinking in the sudden light.

"I've got him, sir!" he panted. "I've got the young scoundrel! I caught him here! I've got him—Vernon-Smith!"

"Vernon-Smith!" ejaculated Mr. Quelch. That statement rather surprised the Remove master, as he could see Herbert Vernon-Smith almost at his elbow.

"Little me!" ejaculated the Bounder. "Oh gad! If Loder's got me, it's the first I've heard of it."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Silence! What do you mean, Loder? Vernon-Smith is here!" snapped Mr. Quelch.

"Eh?"

"That is a senior boy!" snapped the Remove master. "I cannot see who he is, but it is a senior—"

Loder, who was staring round at the crowded doorway, gave a convulsive jump at the sight of Vernon-Smith's face grinning in. As he had been convinced, right up to that moment, that it was Vernon-Smith who was wriggling under his knee, that was rather a surprise to him.

"Not me, old bean!" chuckled the Bounder.

"Not quite!" grinned Bob Cherry.

"Looks like a Fifth Form man!" exclaimed Harry Wharton.

There was a simultaneous gasp of horror from Potter and Greene.

"Oh!" gasped Potter. "That mad ass—"

"Oh!" gasped Greene. "That potty pilfer—"

"Loder! Allow that boy to rise!" boomed Prout. "Let us ascertain his identity! It is certainly not Vernon-Smith—it is not a junior at all—who—"

Loder, in a dizzy state of amazement, removed his pinning knee, and the prisoner was allowed to squirm round at last. Rugged features, dusty and crimson from grinding in Prout's carpet, were revealed.

There was a roar:

"Coker!"

"Coker of the Fifth!"

"Old Horace!"

"That ass!"

"Coker!" gurgled Loder. "Coker! Oh gad! Kik-kik-kik-Coker! Oh!"

Coker struggled to his feet. He clawed dust from his eyes, and gasped and panted for breath. He stood crimson and gurgling under a sea of eyes.

"Coker!" boomed Prout. "A boy of my Form—in my study at midnight! Coker, is it possible—is it credible—that you—you—" Words failed Prout at the awful possibility that the prowling pincher was a Fifth Form man! He goggled in horror at Horace Coker.

"I—" gurgled Coker. "I— Oh erikoy!"

"What are you doing in my study at this hour?" boomed Prout. "Coker! Are you, a Fifth Form boy; the secret pilferer?"

"What?"

Coker jumped clear of Prout's carpet.

"I—I—I thought it was—was Vernon-Smith!" gasped Loder. "I—I certainly thought— But I've caught him, at any rate—"

"Coker!" said Mr. Quelch sternly. "You have been caught here—at midnight! Do you confess that you are the pilferer who has prowled the school at night?"

"No!" yelled Coker. "Wharrer you mean? I ain't the prowler! I was after him! Loder's the prowler!"

"Wha-a-t?"

"Loder!" roared Coker. He pointed an accusing forefinger at the astounded Loder. "He's the man!"

"Is he mad?" gasped Loder.

"Coker!" shrieked Mr. Prout. "If you are sane, what do you mean?"

"I mean that I jolly well knew it was Loder, and came down to catch him!" gasped Coker. "Why he had the cheek to jump upon me from behind, and jam my face in the carpet, and rouse the House, I don't know. But it's Loder all right—"

"Oh, my hat! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Good old Coker! Good old detective!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Coker!" Quelch almost howled. "How dare you make such ridiculous statements? Loder has caught you here—by all appearances you are the boy who pilfered the Head's study, and you came here with a similar intention! You have been caught in the very act!"

"Oh crikey! I never—"

"Boy!" boomed Prout. "If you are guilty—"

"I—I—I ain't!" shrieked Coker, in alarm. "I tell you I came down to catch the prowler, and then that cad Loder caught me—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Mr. Prout, I leave this extraordinary boy to you!" gasped Mr. Quelch. "Boys, return to your dormitories at once! At once!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Silence—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Chuckling crowds were shopped back to the dormitories. Coker was left to Prout's tender mercies. He was quite tired when Prout had finished talking to him!

COKER really had asked for it. Appearances were fearfully against him. But, fortunately, plenty of fellows were able to testify that poor old Horace really had been after the prowler, and wasn't the prowler personally!

Greyfriars School almost rocked with merriment over Horace Coker's wild adventures as a detective. But those adventures were over. Coker was exonerated on the charge of being the prowler! But he had five hundred lines for leaving his dormitory; an impot that was likely to keep him too busy for detective work for some time—

even if he still had a taste for detective work.

But he hadn't! Coker was fed up with detective work!

The mysterious prowler remained mysterious and unknown. Loder still believed that it was Vernon Smith. Coker still had a lingering suspicion that it was Loder! Nobody else could begin to guess who it was—and Mr. Quelch and his chief could only hope that the strange mystery would be cleared up when Ferrers Locke's boy assistant arrived at Greyfriars.

THE END.

COME INTO THE OFFICE, BOYS AND GIRLS!

Your Editor is always pleased to hear from his readers. Write to him: Editor of the "Magnet," The Amalgamated Press, Ltd., Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

JUST imagine, chums, the MAGNET is thirty-one years old this week!

What a record for a school-story paper, eh? A record that speaks eloquently of the popularity of Harry Wharton & Co., the world-famous chums of Greyfriars. What paper, unless it has popularity behind it, can endure such a test? "Magnetites" from all corners of the earth have helped to bring about this wonderful achievement, and my thanks go to them for their loyal support and encouragement. Ever since its inception in 1908 the MAGNET has grown in strength. New papers have come and gone, but the Old Paper goes on for ever!

Many great men of to-day who were readers of the MAGNET in their boyhood days still pay tribute to this old-established school-story paper. In his early days, Noel Coward, the brilliant dramatist, derived many hours of enjoyment reading about the adventures of Billy Bunter. After perusing a recent copy, he remarked that the paper is as good now as it was in its early days. It is not too much to say

that the great majority of distinguished men in the country to-day have laughed over the merry antics of Billy Bunter in their youth, and to this day have an affectionate regard for the MAGNET.

If you want to do a non-reader chum a favour, introduce the MAGNET to him to-day—better still, lend him this copy. He'll be grateful to you, there's not the slightest doubt about it.

Now for next week's programme. Frank Richards' long complete story is entitled

"DUFFER OR DETECTIVE!"

It tells how Jack Drake, late of the Remove, and now Ferrers Locke's clever assistant, comes to Greyfriars and assists in tracking down the mysterious midnight prowler. Our opening feature, "My Page," will be taken over by Frank Nugent, so you can expect something really good. For more "nutshell" news of the week's events at Greyfriars—see the special edition of the "Herald."

YOUR EDITOR.

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Ask at the Post Office for a copy of "The Royal Navy as a Career and How to Join It," which gives full particulars and address of nearest Recruiting Office, or write to the Recruiting Staff Officer, R.N. & R.M. (N). 85, Whitehall, London, S.W.1.

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LETTERS TO ADVERTISERS

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Also be sure that your name and full postal address is included in your letter.

HOW BUNTER COWED QUELCH BY WILL POWER!

When somebody told me that Bunter had resolved to master Mr. Quelch by will power, I must say I could hardly believe it.

Trotting round to Bunter's study to find out the truth, I found the old Porpoise immersed in a massive volume entitled: "Through Will Power to Supremacy."

"What ho, my cheery old Falstaff!" I chortled, giving the fat lad a playful clump on the back. "Going in for swotting in your old age?"

Bunter gave me a fat wink. "I say, Russell, old bean, keep it dark, won't you? I'm swotting at something really worth while. By the time I've finished this book, I shall have enough will power for twenty!"

"The dickens you will!" "Yes, rather!" Bunter gave a fat chuckle. "People simply won't be able to resist my terrific personality! Even Quelch won't be able to stand up against me! One look from my steely eyes, you know, and the blighter will be reduced to a mere quivering slab of jelly! But mum's the word!"

"I'll keep mum, old fat man," I promised. "But you're not seriously thinking of trying to master Quelch by will power stunts, are you?"

"Why not?" asked Bunter. "According to this book, you can master anyone if your magnetic radiation is strong enough."

"And what's your magnetic radiation, when it's at home?"

"Well, it's difficult to explain to a chap like you, who hasn't got any magnetic radiation worth speaking about," said Bunter. "It's the sort of electricity you feel radiating from chaps with a lot of brain and nerve and

personality. Chaps like myself, for instance."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I see anything to chuckle at!" declared Bunter, peevishly.

"I'm developing my magnetic radiation as hard as I can, anyway; and whether you believe it or not, I can tell you it won't be long before I shall hold old Quelch in the hollow of my hand—by sheer will power!"

I let it go at that, and retired, chuckling. I know my limitations; and the task of trying to convince Bunter that in the matter of brain, nerve, and personality, a filleted cod compared quite favourably with him was frankly beyond my powers.

I didn't think for a moment, anyway, that Bunter would ever really attempt to put his theories into practice.

But I hadn't counted on Skinner. When Skinner heard about Bunter's will power stunt, he promptly saw an opening for one of his own peculiar brand of japes. There were several secret meetings of Skinner and his pals in Study No. 11.

field, containing a design of a log stretching all round the cap and engaged in giving the ball a hefty kick! Up to the time of going to press this proposal has not been adopted.

St. Jim's and Rookwood both strengthened their positions in the Championship Table by clear-cut victories over their respective opponents, but while we keep up our present form they can hardly hope to challenge our leadership—more particularly, of course, Rookwood, who, with five points less than Greyfriars, have too much leeway to make up, unless something freakish happens.

St. Jim's, who are still only one point in arrears, are our only real danger now, and they have high hopes, I believe, of changing places with us at the top of the table by beating us when they come to play on Little Side. I need hardly say that it will be our earnest endeavour to disappoint their hopes!

A glance at the table will show you that all teams now stand level on the number of games played, being left with four matches each to play before the championship is decided.

In our case, we have fixtures away with Abbotsford and Bagshot and home games with Rylcombe Grammar School and St. Jim's.

Abbotsford and Rylcombe ought not

to present any difficulties. Bagshot and St. Jim's, of course, are somewhat tougher propositions, but it should not be beyond our powers to extract maximum points from them also.

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