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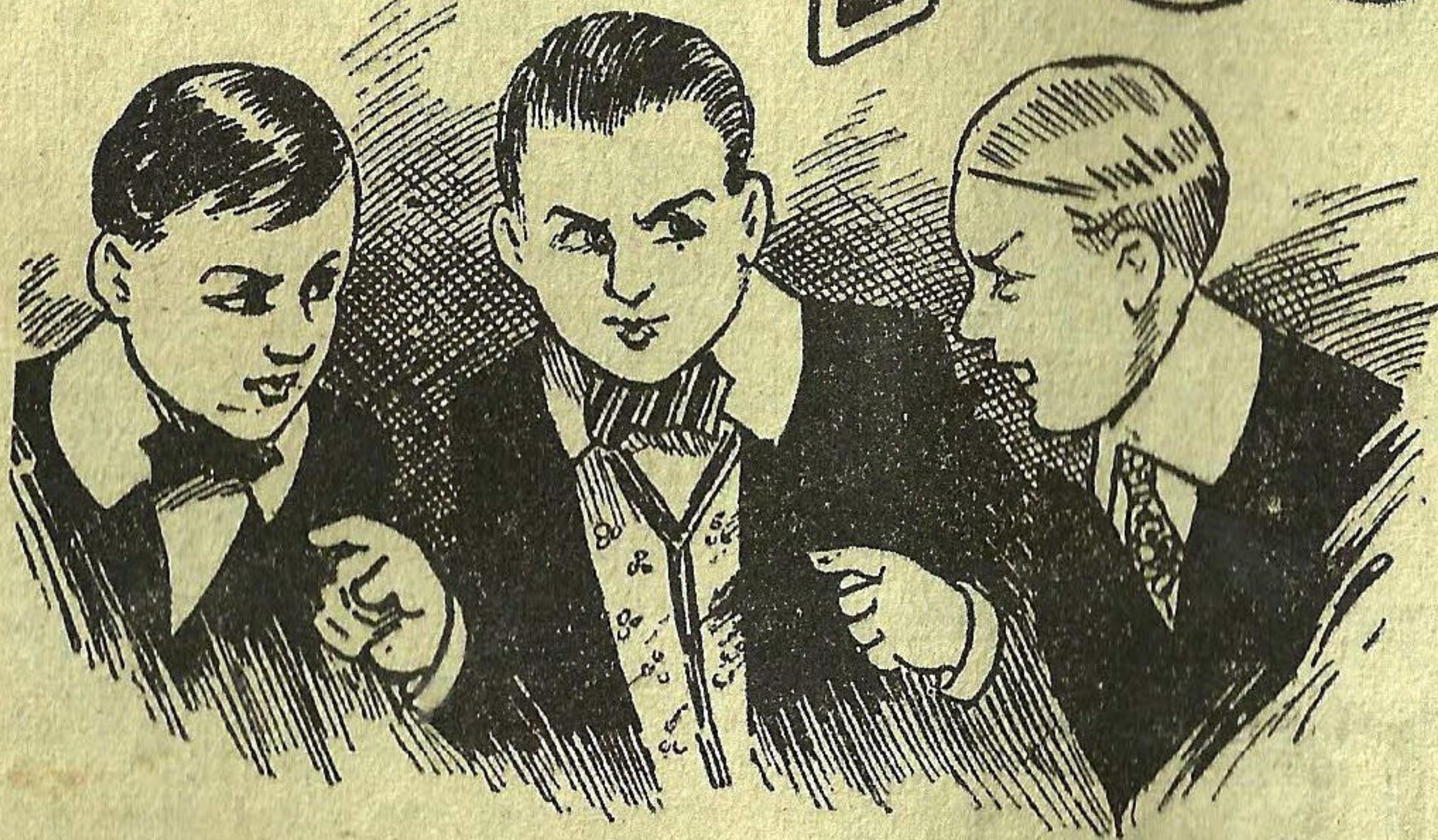
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# Peele's Plot!

A FINE TALE OF THE  
CHUMS OF ROOKWOOD  
SCHOOL.  
By OWEN CONQUEST.

## The 1st Chapter. Not Pleasant!

"Extra French!"  
"Rotten!"  
"Why can't we have a holiday?" said Cyril Peele sulkily.  
"Echo answers why!" grinned Arthur Edward Lovell. "It would be a jolly good idea; but the Head doesn't seem to see it."  
"I say, it's a ripping good idea, though!" said Tubby Muffin eagerly. "Suppose we got up a deputation to the Head, and suggested to him a holiday for the Fourth until the new master comes?"  
"Fathead!" said Jimmy Silver.

A dozen fellows in the Classical Fourth at Rookwood were discussing the matter, and nobody looked satisfied.

Matters had not really gone well with the Fourth since Mr. Bootles, their Form-master, had left Rookwood School.

The new master who had come in his place had turned out extremely unsatisfactory, and had left suddenly. His place had not yet been filled. So there was an interregnum. Many members of the Fourth Form thought it an excellent opportunity for the Head to give them a special holiday. They were quite prepared to find occupations for themselves until the new master arrived. But that splendid idea never even occurred to the Head.

Somehow, he seemed to have an impression that the juniors had come to Rookwood to learn things, and that he was there to see that they did it!

The Fourth were in quite an unsettled state. Mr. Greely, of the Fifth, and Mr. Mooney, of the Sixth, took them sometimes. At other times they were taken by prefects—Bulkeley, or Neville, or Knowles, of the Sixth. The latest idea was extra French. Monsieur Monceau was going to give them whole afternoons with his delightful language.

At this the Fourth would have kicked, if there had been any room for kicking, so to speak.

Most of them rather liked Mossoo; and French was as tolerable as any other subject—more tolerable than Latin, in fact. But all the Fourth felt that they had enough of it normally. Extra French did not appeal to them one little bit.

"After all, it's only for a few days!" Jimmy Silver remarked philosophically. "The new master will be along soon—"

"A few days' holiday wouldn't hurt us!" said Arthur Edward Lovell. "But—"

"But—" grinned Raby.  
"Tubby can go and suggest it to the Head!" said Newcome. "Your move, Tubby!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"  
"I think Jimmy ought to go, as captain of the Form," said Tubby Muffin. "The Head might see it—"

"He might," said Jimmy, "and he mightn't—and the odds are on the mightn't. Keep smiling, you fellows! Extra French will come in no end useful when you get a vac. in France some day."  
"Rot!" said Peele. "They don't speak Fourth-Form French in France."

"Ha, ha, ha!"  
"I'm not standin' it," said Peele. "It's bad enough havin' old Greely grunting at us, and Mooney hootin' at us, without havin' Mossoo chirpin' French irregular verbs at us. Let's rag him."

"Good egg!" said Lattrey and Gower together.

Jimmy Silver shook his head. "Mossoo's all right!" he said. "He's not going to be ragged. If you want a rag, try it on old Greely."  
"Too jolly dangerous!" grinned Lovell.

"Thank you!" said Peele sarcastically. "I don't believe in wakin' up savage dogs. But Mossoo's harmless—he will only tear his hair an' dance, and give us lines that he'll forget to ask for. Mossoo's safe."

"Safe as houses," agreed Gower. "Even if he licks a chap, he only gives a flick—nothin' like old Greely."

Jimmy Silver sniffed. "So you want to rag him because he won't hit back!" he snapped. "Well, you're not going to!"

"Who's going to stop us?" demanded Peele.

"Little me!" answered the captain of the Fourth serenely. "Your Uncle James, old scout! No harm in pulling Mossoo's leg a little; but if you really worry him, you look out for squalls."

"But I say, Jimmy!" exclaimed Tubby Muffin. "If we make him fed up with us, you know, we shall wedge out of the extra French."

"Rats!"  
"We might wedge into extra something else!" remarked Mornington. "How would you like the Head to take us in hand with extra Latin?"

"Oh dear!" gasped Muffin, quite horrified at the prospect.

"Or extra maths from Mr. Bull!" said Oswald.

Tubby shuddered.

"Better let well alone!" said Jimmy Silver, laughing. "As the Johnny remarks in Shakespeare, 'I fear there will be a worse come in his place.' Let old Mossoo rip."

"Rats!" grunted Cyril Peele. And he turned sulkily away.

"There goes the bell!" remarked Lovell. "Get ready for French—think out your giddy irregular verbs—consider your conjugations—dig up your declensions—"

"Oh dear!" mumbled Tubby Muffin. "I'd much rather go for a walk, you know. I'm awfully weak in—"

"In the head?" asked Lovell sympathetically.

"In French, you ass! I never can get on with the genders and things—it's such a fool language, you know," complained Tubby. "Why they can't chuck it and speak plain English, beats me! I asked Mossoo once, and he just snapped at me—couldn't give a sensible answer—just snapped, you know."

"Ha, ha, ha!"  
"I don't see anything to cackle at in an afternoon at French!" said Muffin dolorously. "I know I shall get a jawing."

The Classical Fourth trooped off to the Form-room, none of them with very happy anticipations. The Modern Fourth were really more to be compassionated, as they had German and chemistry that afternoon. Jimmy Silver pointed that out to his Form fellows, by way of cheering them up. But in spite of the consolation offered by the contrast, the Classical Fourth were not in a happy mood when they took their places in the Form-room, and Monsieur Monceau came in to deal with them.

## The 2nd Chapter. Trouble in Class!

Monsieur Monceau bestowed a cheery smile upon his pupils. Mossoo's impression was that his class was a very lucky class. He

liked French better than his pupils did.

"Bonjour, mes enfants!" said Mossoo cheerily.

"Bong joor, mossoo!" answered the Classical Fourth dutifully.

"Now he's just going to begin!" moaned Tubby Muffin. "I—I say, Peele, why don't you rag him? You said you would."

Cyril Peele glanced rather uneasily at Jimmy Silver.

The captain of the Fourth had taken the French master under his wing, as it were, and Peele was very doubtful about backing up against "Uncle James," of Rookwood. But Peele was idle, and he hated work; and anything seemed better to him than attending to Mossoo's instructions.

Mossoo was a conscientious little gentleman. He gave special attention to backward pupils. When a fellow didn't understand, Mossoo took no end of pains with him. And when a fellow pretended to be dense, Mossoo hardly ever tumbled to the fact that the said fellow was spoofing him. Quite a number of the Classical Fourth were unduly obtuse that afternoon. Peele & Co. set the example, and many fellows followed it; and in quite a short time, Mossoo's genial smile had faded away, and a worried expression took its place.

But the pretended denseness of Peele & Co. was as a mere nothing to the genuine denseness of Tubby Muffin; compared to that, it was as moonlight unto sunlight, as water unto wine.

Unfortunately, Mossoo's conscientiousness led him to give Reginald Muffin his very special attention.

Reginald Muffin would willingly have excused him. He was quite content with his present knowledge of the French language. To Reginald, Mossoo's solicitude seemed quite superfluous.

"Helas, mon pauvre Muffin," said Monsieur Monceau. "I fear zat you are verree zick in ze head. Vous—you comprehend not, isn't it! Now you sall vatch me, and I write ze simple sentence on ze blackboard. Regardez, Muffin."

Tubby Muffin regarded. Monsieur Monceau took the chalk, and scrawled in large letters on the blackboard:

"Vot're pere et vot're frere sont arrives."

"Translate zat, Muffin."  
"Oh! Ah! Yes! Yourpear—I mean, your apple—no—your father—" stammered Muffin.

"Mais oui! Continuez!"

"Your father—your brother—"  
"Bon! You are not such jackass as one shall suppose, Muffin! You go on, isn't it!"

"I—I—I—"  
"Vot're pere et vot're frere sont arrives!" shrieked Mossoo.

"Oh dear!"

"Your father and your brother have arrived!" roared Monsieur Monceau, translating.

"Oh, sir!" Tubby looked relieved and pleased. "I'm so glad!"

"Vat!"  
"I suppose I can leave the class now, sir?"

"Leave ze class!" gasped Monsieur Monceau. "Why for shall you leave ze class, Muffin?"

"My father will want to see me, sir—"  
"Your fazzer?"  
"Yes; especially as he's brought my brother with him," said Tubby, thinking the French master very

obtuse. "They can only have come down to Rookwood to see me, sir."

"Mon Dieu!"  
"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the Classical Fourth.

"Silence!" shouted Monsieur Monceau. "Taisez-vous! Ze next boy zat shall laugh shall be cane wiz stick! Muffin, vat is it zat you would say?"

"We're always allowed out of class when our relations come to the school to see us, sir," said Tubby.

"Mais vos parentes—your relations—have zey come to ze school?"

"Why, sir, you've just told me they have, yourself!" exclaimed Tubby Muffin, in astonishment.

Monsieur Monceau passed his hand across his damp brow.

"Muffin! You are silly! I have told you nozzing of ze sort!"

"But you did, sir!" exclaimed Muffin. "You told me distinctly, sir, that my father and brother have arrived."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Silence! Boy, you are too stupid! Zat vich I say is translation of sentence."

"Oh dear!" said Muffin.

"Vous comprenez? You shall now understand?"

"Oh, yes!" groaned Muffin, quite dispirited at seeing his hopes of getting out of the French class fade away in this manner.

"Helas! If all my pupils vas so stupid as Muffin, ze life would not value ze pain of to live," said Monsieur Monceau.

And he turned to some more hopeful pupils, and gave Reginald Muffin a much-needed rest. Then he came on Cyril Peele. Mossoo was heated and worried, and Peele pursued his little game of affecting an obtuseness as profound as Reginald Muffin's. Jimmy Silver gave him a warning look; but Peele affected not to see it. It was much more amusing to pull Mossoo's leg than to work. But Mossoo seemed to tumble all at once, and, to Peele's surprise and rage, the pointer descended on his knuckles.

"Yaroooh!" roared Peele.

After that, Peele was a little more careful. But when the juniors had to write down French verse dictated by Mossoo, Peele fairly spread himself again. When the papers were handed in, Peele's version of the Henriade began like this:

"Zhe sha'n't de sir ayro kee raynyer sir la France.  
Ay pa draw de konkette ay pa draw da naysance."

Monsieur Monceau lingered over those charming verses as if they fascinated him. Perhaps he was wondering whether Peele had written in Esperanto by mistake. He looked up suddenly, to behold Cyril Peele winking at Gower, and Gower grinning.

Then Mossoo took up a cane.

"You shall know to spell better zan zis, Peele!" he said. "Zis is one disgrace to small infant! You shall hold out ze hand, Peele!"

"Swish!"  
"Now ze ozzer hand!"  
"Swish!"

"Now you shall not make such chokes in class, isn't it, Peele!"

Cyril Peele did not make any more jokes in class. He was chiefly occupied in rubbing his hands and scowling.

## The 3rd Chapter. Peele's Little Game!

"The rotter!"  
Peele muttered that uncomplimentary remark, when the Classical Fourth were dismissed at last—greatly to their relief, and still more to the relief, probably, of the French master. Monsieur Monceau had not enjoyed his afternoon.

"Oh, rats!" said Jimmy Silver gruffly. "You asked for it, Peele, and you got it! There's a limit, you know."

Peele gritted his teeth. "I'll make him sit up for it!" he said savagely.

"You won't!" said Jimmy Silver. "No tricks on Mossoo, or you'll have the end study on your track!"

"Go and eat coke!" growled Peele. "If Mossoo hadn't caned you, I'd jam your head against the wall for ragging him!" added Uncle James.

"Mind your own business, confound you!" hissed Peele.

"I will anyway, in fact!" said Jimmy Silver. And he did!

Crack!  
Cyril Peele's head came into collision with the corridor wall, and there was a fiendish howl from Peele.

The Fistical Four walked on, leaving Peele rubbing his head and scowling. Peele was in a savage temper when he went up to his study and found Lattrey and Gower there. Over tea, the three black sheep of the

Fourth were deep in discussion; and the scowl cleared from Peele's face, and gave place to a grin which was not much more pleasant to see. Peele had an active brain, and he might have been a credit to his Form if his talents had taken the right direction. Unfortunately they didn't.

"Easy as winking!" said Peele, propounding the scheme that had come into his active brain. "It only needs a number of fellows to take a hand in it, and lots of the fellows are waxy with Mossoo. The trouble is that we shall have to write a lot of lines."

"H'm!" said Gower.  
"Well, we can do it, to pull the brute's leg," argued Peele.

"I suppose we can," said Lattrey dubiously. "Blessed if I like that part of it!"

"Too much like work!" remarked Gower.

Peele grunted.

"It's worth the trouble," he said. "Mossoo hasn't given us any lines. If we all take in lines and things it will make him jump. He's an excitable little beast, and awfully absent-minded. Make him think that he's forgetting things, and he'll think he's going off his dot. Worry him no end."

"But—"

"A Greyfriars chap put me on to the wheeze," said Peele. "He said he worked it successfully. Besides, we needn't do the lines ourselves, now I think of it. We'll try something else. Other fellows can take in lines."

Gower and Lattrey brightened up.

"That sounds better," said Lattrey. "Much better!" agreed Gower.

"We'll get Higgs and Muffin and Jones minor, and Townsend and Topham, and Flynn and Hooker, at least," said Peele. "No good asking those cads in the end study, or Morny or Erroll, or Conroy and his set. They're too dashed goody-goody to play a game like this. Just you call in the fellows I've named, and we'll put it to them."

And there was a meeting in Peele's study of all the slackers of the Fourth, and two or three fellows who were not slackers, but were thoughtless enough to fall in with Peele's scheme without reflecting on it. There were many chuckles and chortles in the study, to such an extent that Jimmy Silver, passing along the passage, heard the merriment, and wondered what it was. He looked into the study.

"What's the merry joke?" he inquired.

"You are, old scout!" said Peele affably. "Can't help smiling when we see your face."

"He, he, he!" cackled Tubby Muffin. "I say, Jimmy, why don't you join up with us?"

"Shut up!" hissed Gower.  
"In what, Muffin?" asked Jimmy.

"We're going to— Yaroooh!" roared Tubby. "What beast is that jamming his hoof on my toes? Ow! Wow, wow! Yow!"

"Shut the door after you, Silver!" said Higgs.

The captain of the Fourth cast a very suspicious look round the crowded study, and retired. It was evident that, whatever the joke was, he was not going to be taken into it.

"Those cads at the other end of the passage are up to some rotten trick," Jimmy remarked, when he came into the end study to tea.

"They generally are!" yawned Lovell. "Let 'em rip!"

And Jimmy, who had far more important matters than Peele & Co. to think about, dismissed those youths from his mind.

Meanwhile, Monsieur Monceau had refreshed himself with tea after his labours with the Fourth, and was sitting in his study, with a Parisian newspaper in his hand, reading an account of the umpteenth meeting of the Peace Conference. Mossoo was feeling quite pleasant and serene now, his labours for the day over. He was aroused by a tap at his door.

"Entrez!" said Mossoo cheerily. Cyril Peele entered.

He had a volume of the "Henriade" in his hand, and he closed the door after coming in. Mossoo eyed him.

"Vat is it zat you vant, Peele?" he inquired.

"Please I've come, sir!" said Peele meekly.

"I see zat you have come, Peele, and I ask you why for have you come?"

"You told me to, sir," said Peele, with a look of surprise.

Mossoo raised his eyebrows. "Vraiment! I have no recollection—"

"You were going to give me a quarter of an hour of French spelling, sir," said Peele. "You said my spelling was very bad, sir."

Monsieur Monceau looked at him. He had no recollection whatever of telling Peele to come to his study for instruction in French orthography. But it was simply unimaginable that the idlest slacker in the Fourth should present himself there to work, unless he had been commanded to do so. Mossoo concluded that he must have forgotten.

"Verree well, Peele," he said, at last; "I will give you ze quarter of an hour."

He laid down his "Figaro," and devoted his attention to Peele for the next fifteen minutes. It was a dreadful infliction to Peele. He hated work, and this was work. But it was the beginning of his scheme to make Mossoo "sit up," and he bore it with all the fortitude he could muster.

"Zat vill do, Peele," said Mossoo, when the fifteenth minute had barely elapsed.

"Thank you, sir!"

Peele retired from the study.

Monsieur Monceau took up his newspaper again, but not to read. There was a deep and thoughtful pucker in his brow.

He knew that he was somewhat absent-minded, but he had never known himself to suffer so complete a lapse of memory as this. It made him feel very thoughtful and uncomfortable. His meditations were interrupted by a tap.

"Entrez!"

Higgs of the Fourth came in. He laid a sheet of impot paper on the table before the French master.

"Vat is zat, Higgs?"

"My lines, sir."

"Your—your lines?"

"Yes, sir. I—I hope they're all right, sir."

"Ven is it zat I have give you imposition, Higgs?" asked Monsieur Monceau, after quite a pause.

"This afternoon, sir, in class."

Monsieur Monceau looked at him hard. Alfred Higgs bore the scrutiny unblushingly.

"Verree good, Higgs. You may go," said the French master quietly.

Higgs went.

Left alone, Monsieur Monceau passed his hand across his brow.

"Zat is ze second time," he muttered. "Mon Dieu! Zat lazy boy he never write lines unless he have to do zem. Vat is it zat is happen to me? My memory he is gone. I do not remember zat I have given him lines. I do not remember zat I tell Peele to come here. Mon Dieu! Is it zat my brain he is fail?"

Tap!

#### The 4th Chapter.

##### Awful for Mossoo!

"Entrez donc!" rapped out Monsieur Monceau.

Tubby Muffin entered the study.

There was a slightly nervous expression on Muffin's fat face, as he rolled towards the anxious-faced French master.

"Vell, vat is it, Muffin?" asked that gentleman.

"I—I've brought the 'Henriade,' sir," said Muffin.

"Ze 'Henriade'?"

"Yes, sir."

Monsieur Monceau breathed rather hard. Here was evidently something fresh that he had forgotten, and he was feeling a growing inward alarm. But he naturally did not wish to betray himself before a pupil, and he assumed an off-hand manner as he answered.

"I tell you to bring ze 'Henriade' to me, Muffin?"

"It's six o'clock isn't it, sir?"

"Mais oui."

"You said sharp six, sir."

"Verree good, Muffin. Ze matter have slip my memory," said Monsieur Monceau heavily. "Vat is it I tell you to do viz ze book?"

"You were going to explain some passages to me, sir. You remember that—"

"Parfaitement. Let us commence," said Mossoo.

For twenty minutes Tubby Muffin endured explanations of the "Henriade." It was painful to Muffin, but it was part of the scheme. But he was very glad when he escaped at last.

When the fat Classical was gone Monsieur Monceau rose and paced the study in great disquietude.

"Zat is tree times," he murmured. "Tree times I forget in one day! Vat is it zat afflict me? Is it zat I am malade? Mon Dieu! To-morrow I goes to see ze doctair."

Tap!

"Mon Dieu! Is zat anoizzer? Come in viz you."

Townsend of the Fourth entered.

"My lines, sir!" said Towney.

"Place zem on ze table, mon garcon!" said Mossoo faintly.

Townsend did so, and retired. Topham of the Fourth passed him as he came out.

"Topham! Vat—"

"My lines, sir," said Topham innocently.

"Mon Dieu!"

Topham retired, and the study door closed.

Monsieur Monceau took out a large handkerchief, and wiped his perspiring brow. He was seriously disturbed and alarmed now. So many lapses of memory in one day would have alarmed anyone. Five juniors had been to the study, and Mossoo had not the faintest remembrance of having laid any of the various penalties on any one of them. What was he to think? His face, always sallow, was very pale now, and his eyes had a hunted look. He trembled when another knock came at his door, and he could hardly summon up the courage to utter the word "entrez."

Gower came in.

Monsieur Monceau looked at him inquiringly. Gower entered with a business-like air, as if he had come with a purpose.

"I hope I'm not late, sir," said Gower.

"Late for vat, Gower?" asked Mossoo faintly.

"You said six-thirty, sir," said Gower, with a look of surprise. "I think it's half-past six now."

"I—I told you to come to my study at six-zirty, Gower?"

"Yes, sir!"

"Ven did I tell you zat?"

"Go away viz you!" shrieked Monsieur Monceau.

"My hat!"

Hooker closed the door hurriedly. Mossoo looked so wild and excited that he was glad to go without entering the study. He hurried down the passage in some trepidation.

"What luck?" asked Peele, with a grin, meeting him at the corner of the corridor.

Hooker chuckled.

"Mad as a hatter," he said. "He didn't even ask me what I'd come for. Just yelled at me to go away!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Your turn, Flynn."

"Sure it seems too rough on the poor ould jossar," said Flynn.

"Fathead! Get on with the washing!" said Peele.

And Flynn went along to Mossoo's study and tapped. There was no answer to the tap, and the junior opened the door.

Monsieur Monceau was seated in his chair, staring straight before him with haggard eyes, the picture of mental distress. He did not even look up as Flynn looked in. Flynn closed the door hastily and hurried away.

"Well?" exclaimed Peele.

"Badad, it's a baste ye are," said Flynn. "I'm not going to have a hand in it. You've worried the ould jittleman into a fit nearly. He looks as if he's going to blub!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Peele.

"Oh, very well, sir!"

And Cyril Peele departed rejoicing, and a few minutes later a crowd of young rascals in Peele's study were chortling and chuckling over the success of their plot. Undoubtedly Mossoo had been made to sit up—very severely—and amid chuckles from his comrades, Peele laid his plans for a continuation of the scheme on the morrow.

#### The 5th Chapter. Brought to Book!

"Come in, fathead!"

Jimmy Silver called out cheerily as a knock came at the door of the end study in the Fourth Form passage. The door opened.

The Fistical Four jumped to their feet as Monsieur Monceau appeared in the doorway. Jimmy Silver crimsoned.

"Oh, sir! I—I beg your pardon!" he stammered. "I—I didn't know it was you, sir."

"Zat is all right, Sil vair."

Monsieur Monceau came into the study, and the chums of the Fourth regarded him with wonder. The French master was pale, and there was perspiration on his brow, and deep trouble in his eyes. The Fistical Four could see at a glance that the little gentleman was in a state of deep mental distress.



**ROUGH ON M. MONCEAU!** The little French master looked at Higgs hard. He did not remember giving the junior an imposition. Could it be that after all his brain was failing?

"This afternoon, sir, in class," said Gower cheerfully.

"Mon Dieu! I—I excuse you, Gower. You may go!"

"Thank you, sir!"

Lattrey came in as Gower went out. Monsieur Monceau gave him quite a hunted look.

"Vat is it, Lattrey?"

"You said six-thirty, sir."

"Go away! Go away!" exclaimed Monsieur Monceau faintly.

Lattrey stared at him.

"Excuse me, sir, I don't quite understand you," he said calmly. "Am I to come another time for the exercise?"

"I—I—"

"I've got my prep to do this evening, sir," said Lattrey respectfully.

"Will it do to-morrow, then, sir?"

"I—I excuse you. I let you off. You go away at vunce viz yourself!"

exclaimed Mossoo, almost wildly.

"Oh, very well, sir!"

Lattrey, preserving an air of mild astonishment, quitted the study. Monsieur Monceau almost slammed the door after him.

Then he sank into his chair, pressing both hands to his throbbing brow.

"It is zat I go out of my mind!" he murmured. "I have no recollection—nozzing—of all zis! My brain he go!"

Tap!

Monsieur Monceau jumped.

"Go away!" he shouted.

Hooker opened the study door.

"You told me to come, sir—"

"Ye thafe of the world," said Flynn indignantly.

Peele chortled.

"I'm goin' to give him another dose!" he said. And he walked along cheerily to Mossoo's study, tapped at the door, and opened it. Mossoo looked up with a haggard brow.

"You come again, is it, Peele?" he asked.

Peele looked surprised.

"I don't understand, sir. You told me to come at seven sharp. It's a few minutes to seven now, sir!"

"Mon Dieu! You have been to my study one hour ago, Peele—"

"I, sir?" exclaimed Peele in astonishment.

"Oui, oui, oui!"

"But I haven't seen you since lessons, sir," said Peele hardily.

"I've been upstairs, sir; any fellow would tell you—"

"You did not come to me, Peele, for spelling for one quarter of an hour?" said Monsieur Monceau, feeling as if his hapless brain was turning round and round.

"Certainly not, sir. An hour ago I was helping in a rehearsal of our stage society, sir!"

"Mon Dieu! You may go, Peele!"

"Don't you feel well, sir?" asked Peele, with solicitude.

"Je suis malade. I do not feel verree well zis evening," said poor Mossoo. "Go away, mon garcon!"

"But the exercise on French verbs, sir—"

"Never mind him. Go away."

"Mes garcons," said Monsieur Monceau gently, "I have had one great shock."

"Sorry, sir!" stammered Lovell.

"You are good boys," continued Mossoo. "I have always find zat in zis study one shall speak ze troot!"

"Thank you, sir!" said Jimmy Silver, in utter wonder.

"Zere are some boys in ze Form," continued Mossoo, "who sall not always speak viz troot. But I can trust you, Sil vair."

"I—I hope so, sir!" stammered Jimmy.

The Fistical Four began to wonder whether Mossoo had been drinking. Certainly his looks and his remarks gave some ground for the suspicion.

"I have been verree mooch worry," went on Monsieur Monceau. "I do not seem to remember zings zat I say and do. I ask you, Sil vair, vezzer you shall observe zis day zat I have ze absence of ze mind."

Monsieur Monceau looked eagerly, almost haggardly, at Jimmy Silver as he asked that question.

Jimmy coughed.

"You—you have sometimes been a little absent-minded, sir," he answered, hardly knowing what to say.

"But zis day more zan ozzar days?" asked Mossoo anxiously.

"Oh, no, sir!"

"Is it, Sil vair, zat you hear me in class, tell Peele to come to my study for French spelling aftair lessons?"

Mossoo looked almost as if his life

depended on Jimmy's answer to that question.

The captain of the Fourth opened his eyes.

"No, sir," he answered.

Monsieur Monceau drew a deep, deep breath.

"If it is zat I tell him, it is zat you shall hear me!" he said.

"Of course, sir, as we were in the class," said Jimmy, in bewilderment.

"You ozzers say ze same?"

"Certainly, sir!" said Lovell & Co.

"Is it zat I tell Muffin to come to me, and bring viz him ze Henriade?"

"I didn't hear you, sir."

"You are sure of zat, Sil vair?"

"Quite sure, sir!"

Monsieur Monceau breathed more freely. The suspicion—the hope—had crossed his mind that he had been the victim of a concerted rag. Now he was becoming sure of it. The end study had rescued him, though they were not aware yet of what had happened.

"Is it zat I tell Gower and Lattrey to come to me at six-zirty of ze clock?" pursued Monsieur Monceau.

"Not that we know of, sir."

"Mon Dieu! You shall set my mind at rest!" said Monsieur Monceau. "Zoze bad boys, zey come—zey make me zink zat I am turn in ze brain! But it is all a choke—a verree vicked choke!"

"Oh!" ejaculated Jimmy Silver.

He understood now.

"I am so relief!" said Mossoo, beaming now. "I am mooch oblige to you, Sil vair! I have know zat you would tell me ze troot. Now I am relief in my mind. I vill not punish zose bad boys! You may tell zem, Sil vair, zat I know zat zey play foolish trick, and zat I forgive zem."

"Yes, sir!" gasped Jimmy.

And Monsieur Monceau quitted the end study, trotting away quite cheerfully and contentedly.

The Fistical Four looked at one another.

"So that was Peele's game!" said Jimmy Silver.

"Poor old Mossoo!"

"Awful ass to let his leg be pulled like that!" said Raby. "He's as innocent as a baby."

"But he seems to have tumbled at the finish," remarked Lovell. "Poor old duffer! He looked no end flummoxed!"

Jimmy Silver picked up a cricket-stump.

"I warned Peele what would happen if he ragged Mossoo!" he remarked. "And this isn't just a rag—it's a rotten mean trick. Come along and see Peele!"

"Hear, hear!" grinned the Co.

And they thoughtfully picked up cricket-stumps before they followed Jimmy Silver from the end study.

The Fistical Four strode along the passage to Peele's study. From that study came a sound of great merriment.

Jimmy Silver threw open the door. The merry company stared at him, still grinning. But the look on Jimmy's face made the grins die away.

"Well, what do you want?" snapped Peele uneasily.

"Just a word or two!" said Jimmy cheerily. "Mossoo's spotted your little game, and he knows you've been pulling his leg."

"Great Scott!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Oh dear!" gasped Tubby Muffin.

"Lickings all round!" growled Higgs. "You ass, Peele—"

"Not at all," said Jimmy Silver.

"Mossoo's sent you a message that he forgives you!"

"Phew!"

"But you're going to hear about it from your Uncle James!" continued Jimmy Silver calmly. "I warned you, Peele! Mossoo is under the protection of the end study! Are you ready?"

"Look here—"

"Get out!"

"You—yarooooooh!"

The Fistical Four piled in without further words. For the next five minutes pandemonium seemed to reign in Cyril Peele's study. The uproar was terrific. Four cricket-stumps, well laid on, did great execution. One by one the hapless raggers dodged out of the study and escaped, roaring, till the Fistical Four remained alone, breathless, in a dismantled study.

"I fancy," remarked Arthur Edward Lovell, "that Peele won't be so jolly funny after this!"

And Arthur Edward was right. It was the end of Peele's Plot.

#### THE END.

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A SPLENDID LONG COMPLETE TALE OF FRANK RICHARDS & Co.!



FRANK RICHARDS' FLIGHT!

By Martin Clifford

A FINE YARN OF THE CHUMS OF CEDAR CREEK.

The 1st Chapter.

The Blow Falls!

Gallop! Gallop! Miss Meadows looked from her window, in the lumber schoolhouse at Cedar Creek.

The stars were glittering down upon the Thompson Valley of British Columbia; the peaks of the distant mountains were veiled in shadow. But the gates of the backwoods school were still open, and the Canadian schoolmistress, from her window, was watching the gateway with an anxious, frowning brow.

The last Cedar Creek fellow had long gone on the trail for home, but Black Sam loafed by the gate without closing it. Four horsemen loomed up on the trail as the sound of galloping came through the dusk. They came riding in at the wide gateway—Frank Richards and Bob Lawless, Mr. Slimmey and Rancher Lawless—in silence, with grave and gloomy faces. The quartette rode up to the porch of the schoolhouse, dismounted, and hitched their horses. Miss Meadows appeared in the doorway.

Her face was troubled, and she avoided looking at Frank Richards. "Please come in!"

The burly rancher swept off his Stetson hat, and tramped into the sitting-room. His son and nephew followed him in, and then Mr. Slimmey. Mr. Slimmey closed the door. "Let's have this out, Miss Meadows!" Rancher Lawless said crisply. "Mr. Slimmey followed my son and nephew home from school, to bring Frank back here. He said that a theft had been committed, and that Frank was suspected. The whole thing seems utterly ridiculous to me. I would trust my nephew with every dollar I have in the world—as much as I would trust my own son or myself. I am certain a mistake has been made."

"I guess so!" muttered Bob Lawless indignantly. "As if Frank—"

"Please tell me exactly what has happened, Miss Meadows," said the rancher, and his manner, though civil, was rather grim.

"This morning," said Miss Meadows, "Richards was sent to my study to be caned. Mr. Slimmey sent him, and told him to wait till I came in. As it happened, I did not come in, and Richards waited here till dinner-time, when he left without my having seen him."

"That is so," said Frank, "but I—"

"Let Miss Meadows finish, Frank," said the rancher.

"Yes, uncle."

"After school this afternoon," continued Miss Meadows, "after dismissing the school, I came here to do my accounts. I found that two bills were missing—a hundred-dollar bill and a ten-dollar bill. Although I knew quite well where I had left them, I could scarcely believe that a theft had been committed, and I searched the whole desk without finding them. They had been abstracted. I remembered then that Richards had been alone in the room during the day—the only boy who had been in the room—and I sent Mr. Slimmey to bring him back at once to the school."

The rancher listened quietly. "Is that all?" he asked; and there was a tone of contempt in his voice.

"I think that is enough, Mr. Lawless," said Miss Meadows, with a flash in her eyes.

"I guess not, Frank was here alone. How long?"

"About half an hour," said Frank. "Did you go to the desk for anything?"

"I picked up a magazine that was lying on the desk to read while I was waiting for Miss Meadows."

"You did not touch the desk?"

"I leaned on it while I was reading."

"You did not touch anything but the magazine that was about the desk?"

"Nothing," said Frank.

"I fully believe you, my boy," said Mr. Lawless. "I have not the slightest doubt that you have spoken the exact truth. Miss Meadows, I guess I am simply astonished that you should accuse my nephew on flimsy grounds like this. Anybody might have come into this room and taken the bills. You might have lost them."

"I remember perfectly well placing the bills in a certain drawer," said Miss Meadows calmly.

"Admitting that they have been stolen, there are no grounds for suspecting my nephew, simply because he happened to be in the room for a time."

"No other boy entered the room, so far as can be ascertained," said the schoolmistress. "The pupils are not allowed to enter this room, excepting on order. Richards was the only boy who had the opportunity for abstracting the bills."

"Nonsense!" rapped out the rancher. "You say he was here during the morning. You missed the bills later than afternoon school. All through the afternoon, then—"

"Let me be more explicit," said Miss Meadows quietly. "After dinner I came to this room to rest until lessons recommenced. When I left it to take my class, I locked my desk. It is generally kept locked, only this morning I was called suddenly into the kitchen by Dinah, and left hurriedly. The desk remained locked till I went to it this evening. The theft was, therefore, committed before dinner, and during the short space of time that the desk remained unlocked. For practically the whole of that time Richards was alone in the room."

"Oh!" muttered the rancher, rather taken aback.

"I was at the desk up to a few minutes past twelve, when Dinah called to me," said Miss Meadows. "Mr. Slimmey, at what time did you send Richards in?"

"Probably about ten minutes past twelve," said Mr. Slimmey.

"Then the room was vacant only for a few minutes!" said Mr. Lawless, tugging at his tawny moustache.

"Precisely! Richards left a few minutes before dinner, and it was again vacant till I came in after dinner. Richards was here practically the whole time that the desk was open."

The rancher looked at his nephew. Frank Richards met his glance steadily.

The accusation was evidently more serious than the rancher had supposed at first. But his faith in his nephew did not falter.

"I guess you'll admit, at least, that there was some time, though a short

time, in which someone else may have entered the room and found the desk open, Miss Meadows," said the rancher, after a pause.

"That is true. There is a possibility that Richards is innocent, and if it should prove so, no one would be more pleased than I," said Miss Meadows. "This has been a very painful shock to me; I have always had the highest opinion of Richards. I sent Mr. Slimmey after him instantly I missed the bills and failed to find them anywhere, in the belief that if he had taken them, he would take them with him when he left school. I hoped that he would be brought back before he had had time to conceal them at home, and that they would be found upon him—if he had them."

The rancher's face cleared.

"I guess that's all right," he said. "Frank came back at once when Mr. Slimmey came up—he has not been in the ranch since he rode home—and he not been alone at all. If he had the bills on him when he left school, he has them on him now."

"That was my supposition," said Miss Meadows. "If the bills are not found on Richards, I shall not adjudge him guilty, though the evidence is very strong against him. He may, of course, have thrown the bills away on learning that he was suspected—"

"I have kept him under observation during our return here, Miss Meadows," said Mr. Slimmey mildly. "He has not done so in my presence."

"Very good. But he saw you, I suppose, following him?"

"True."

"Did you observe whether he threw anything away before you overtook him?"

Mr. Slimmey hesitated.

"I did not see anything of the kind," he answered. "But, as a matter of fact, these boys did not stop when I called to them. They rode on faster, and I was compelled to follow them nearly as far as the Lawless Ranch."

Sharp suspicion came into Miss Meadows' face at once, and Mr. Lawless looked a little uneasy.

"Why did you not stop, Richards,

when you knew that Mr. Slimmey wanted you?" exclaimed the schoolmistress.

Frank coloured.

"I—I—" he stammered. "It was my idea," broke in Bob Lawless. "I guessed we'd give Mr. Slimmey a run, just for a lark. I suggested it."

"A very thoughtless act!" said Miss Meadows coldly. "It is very unfortunate that Richards should have run away in this manner, when he was wanted to answer such a charge. During his flight he had ample opportunity, I conclude, of throwing away the bills, for if he had them he must have known what Mr. Slimmey was following him for."

Frank bit his lip hard. That harmless "lark" on Mr. Slimmey was likely to cost him dear.

"If the bills are not found on Richards, the suspicion remains that he threw them away on finding himself suspected," said Miss Meadows. "But on mere suspicion, however strong, I shall not condemn him. At all events, if a search does not reveal the stolen bills in his pockets, it is a point in his favour, for what it is worth. You have no objection to your nephew being searched in your presence, Mr. Lawless?"

"I demand it!" grunted the rancher.

"Very good. Perhaps you will be kind enough to turn out the boy's pockets yourself?"

"Sure!" Mr. Lawless signed to his nephew to approach. Frank Richards came up cheerfully enough.

"I'm ready, uncle."

"You've acted foolishly, Frank," said the rancher. "You should not have played that trick on your master. It was disrespectful, and until the stolen bills are found it will lead to suspicion resting upon you. Not in my mind—I know you are straight—but others will suspect. But, at all events, I guess we shall soon prove that you haven't the bills about you. Turn out your pockets, my boy."

Frank Richards obeyed at once. From one of the jacket-pockets he turned out several old letters, and some crumpled manuscript. The rancher took them and sorted them out, and gave rather a start as he held up a ten-dollar bill.

"This is yours, I suppose?" he said, rather haltingly.

Frank stared at it.

"I—I—" he began.

"You had a ten-dollar bill, Franky," said Bob eagerly. "You remember Mr. Isaacs paid you ten dollars the other day? Yen Chin wanted to bag it off you—"

"I—I paid that ten dollars into the bank," said Frank. "This—this bill doesn't belong to me."

"What?" exclaimed the rancher. "Kindly hand it to me, Mr. Lawless," said Miss Meadows icily. "I have the numbers of the missing bills here."

The rancher silently laid it on the desk. Miss Meadows glanced at it, and referred to her account-book. Her face hardened as she looked up. "The numbers are the same!" she said.

"Then—" stammered the rancher.

"That is one of the bills. The other, no doubt, is still in Frank Richards' pockets."

The 2nd Chapter.

Guilty!

Frank Richards stood dumb-founded.

He wondered for some moments whether he was dreaming.

That he had not had a ten-dollar bill in his possession he knew; yet here was a ten-dollar bill turned out of his pocket from among the old papers there.

Bob Lawless stared at him, his jaw dropping.

The impossible had happened! Rancher Lawless' bronzed face was hard and grim now. His faith in his nephew had been complete. But this discovery shattered it at a blow.

Frank read his sentence in his uncle's eyes, and his face became almost haggard.

"Frank!" breathed Bob Lawless. The rancher signed to him sternly to be silent. He fixed a cold, steady look on Frank's pale face.

"You may as well hand over the other bill now," he said.

"The—the other bill!" stammered Frank.

"The hundred-dollar bill."

"I—I haven't—"

"Did you throw it away?"

"No, I—"

"Mr. Slimmey, perhaps you will finish searching this boy," said the rancher, with a look of disgust. "I do not care to touch him."

"Kindly do so, Mr. Slimmey!" said Miss Meadows.

The young master reluctantly assented. Frank Richards stood like a statue while he was searched. After what had happened he would not have been surprised if the hundred-dollar bill, too, had been found upon him. Nothing would have surprised him now.

But it was not found. That did not count in Frank's favour, however. One of the stolen bills had been found, and the natural conclusion was that he had thrown the larger one away when he was pursued, and had had no opportunity of getting rid of the smaller one unobserved.

"It—it is not here!" mumbled Mr. Slimmey, who was feeling extremely upset and uncomfortable.

"Of course it isn't there!" exclaimed Bob. "Frank never touched it, and—"

"Silence!" thundered the rancher. "Father!"

"Silence!"

The rancher turned to Miss Meadows.

Frank stood dumb. His wits seemed to have forsaken him. He still felt as if in the grip of some horrid nightmare.

"Miss Meadows, my nephew has robbed you of one hundred and ten dollars," said Mr. Lawless. "The ten dollars have been recovered. I shall return the rest."

He took out his pocket-book, and laid a hundred-dollar bill on the school-mistress' desk.

"I am responsible for this wretched boy. You cannot, I suppose, allow him to remain at Cedar Creek after this. The parents of the other boys would naturally object. I must consider what is to be done with him. For the present I shall take him home to the ranch. I can only apologise for the trouble that has been given you."

"I am sorry for this, Mr. Lawless!" faltered Miss Meadows.

"There is no fault on your side," said the rancher. "The boy has, I suppose, some kink in his nature that I have never suspected. Heaven knows what I shall do with him—a boy who cannot be trusted not to steal!"

Frank's eyes blazed. "Uncle!"

"You need not speak," said the rancher. "Get to your horse."

"I must speak—I will speak!" exclaimed Frank, his words coming in a torrent now. "I never touched Miss Meadows' bank bills—"

"Silence!"

"How—how it came into my pocket I don't know—"

Frank's voice faltered and broke. The absurdity of the statement struck him even while he uttered it.

"Lying, I suppose, is own brother to theft," said the rancher bitterly. "But I guess you don't expect me to believe your untruths, Richards. You had better say no more."

"I tell you, uncle—"

"Hold your tongue, and get to your horse!" exclaimed the rancher gruffly.

Bob Lawless caught Frank's arm, and led him out of the room. It was evidently useless to say more then. It only added fuel to the rancher's anger.

The rancher followed his son and nephew out.

As they came to their horses, Frank stole a look at his uncle's face. That bronzed face, usually so genial and kindly, was hard as iron now. In silence the unhappy boy mounted his horse.

They rode out at the gates of Cedar Creek, and Black Sam shut the heavy wooden gates after them. The thud of the closing gate struck upon Frank Richards' heart. It had closed behind him for ever—his days at the backwoods school were over—his schooldays in the Canadian West had closed, in disgrace and shame.

He choked back a sob.

In silence, the three rode down the trail, under the shadowy trees, and not a word was spoken before they reached Lawless Ranch.

The 3rd Chapter.

Condemned!

Frank Richards sat in his room at the Lawless Ranch, alone.

He had eaten no supper; he could not eat. The blow that had fallen upon him seemed to have numbed his faculties; it left him with a curious sense of unreality.

What did Bob believe? What would Beauclere believe, when he heard? Would even his own chums condemn him? Bob, when Frank had last seen him, had looked utterly miserable—that was all. But surely his faith in his chum was not destroyed! Frank did not wonder why Bob did not come to him in his solitude. He knew that the rancher had bidden his son keep away from the room.

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Whatever Bob might believe, there was no doubt in the rancher's mind. And in proportion to his faith in his nephew, while he trusted him, was now his anger and scorn.

Frank groaned aloud as he thought of it. What was it the future held for him?

He was dependent on his uncle. What he had earned by writing for the "Thompson Press" was little more than pocket-money. By his uncle's advice he had saved it in the Thompson bank; he had two hundred dollars there. Never for a moment had he felt his dependence. Mr. Lawless had taken his sister's son into his home, and to his heart, with generous kindness. In the ranch, Frank and Bob shared alike, and no distinction was made between them. But all that was changed now. Now that his uncle believed him a thief, he could not remain under that roof—to eat another morsel there would choke him. He had to go.

Where was he to go?

His father was in India, many a long thousand miles away. Frank prayed that he should never hear of this. His young sister was at school in England. To neither of them could he go. But to remain at the ranch was impossible.

There was a gentle tap at the door, and Frank looked round quickly. He hoped to see Bob.

But it was Mrs. Lawless who came in.

Frank rose to his feet, with a hot flush in his pale cheeks.

"Auntie!" he muttered.

"My dear Frank," Mrs. Lawless spoke gently, softly, and she kissed the boy on his burning forehead. "It is not true, is it, Frank?"

"No!" said Frank huskily.

"On your word, Frank?"

"On my word, auntie."

"I believe you," said Mrs. Lawless gently. "My brother's son is not a thief. But, dear Frank, you must not blame your uncle for believing it. Can you account for the bill being in your pocket?"

"No!" groaned Frank.

Mrs. Lawless looked at him searchingly. Woman's instinct, so often right when man's reasoning is wrong, told her that the boy was innocent; the proof against him was unanswerable, but she felt that he was guiltless.

"But I believe you, Frank," she said, after a pause. "You have been wronged. How, and by whom, I cannot even imagine. But if my brother should hear of this, he shall hear, too, that I believe in you, my poor boy."

"Thank you, auntie," said Frank, with a break in his voice. "What does Bob think?"

"He believes in you, too," said Mrs. Lawless quietly. "He cannot think evil of you, any more than I can."

"Thank Heaven for that!" muttered Frank. "Beauclerc will believe in me, I feel sure."

"Your uncle wishes to see you now," said Mrs. Lawless. "You must listen to him with patience, Frank; remember that everything is against you, and a judge and jury would believe you guilty on such evidence. When—if the truth is found out, my husband will be the first to do you justice."

"I don't blame him," groaned Frank. "What could he believe when he found the stolen bill in my pocket himself? I—I think he might have trusted me more, but—but he must have thought it was proof positive. I—I sha'n't forget how much I owe my uncle. He has always been kind, until now. Does he want me to go down?"

"Yes, Frank. Go now."

Mrs. Lawless, with tears in her eyes, kissed her nephew again, and Frank felt a sense of comfort as he went. There were some, at least, who believed in him still; some whose faith in him was not to be shaken by the most irrefutable evidence.

At the bottom of the stairs, Bob was waiting. He started forward and caught Frank by the arm.

"Remember I'm sticking to you, old chap!" Bob whispered huskily. "I don't believe a word of it—not a pesky word! I know you never did it, Frank." Bob's voice was shaking. "I don't know how it happened; but you never did it; I know you never did—"

Frank pressed his hand in silence; his heart was too full for words just then.

He passed into the dining-room of the ranch, where his uncle was awaiting him.

Rancher Lawless stood with his back to the crackling log fire, his hands crossed behind him. His bronzed face was hard as iron; his eyes glinted as hard as steel. Every trace of kindness was gone from

the rancher's usually kindly face. He looked like a stern judge, before him a criminal waiting for sentence. The baseness of the crime that had been committed rooted out every vestige of sympathy for his unhappy nephew.

Frank came in quietly, but he raised his head proudly, and looked at his uncle. He was adjudged guilty; but he was innocent, and his pride rose up strongly against injustice.

The rancher's hard eyes fixed on him.

"I have been thinking over this matter, Richards," he said coldly. It was no longer "Frank." "You cannot continue at Cedar Creek. Even if it were permitted, you can scarcely wish to face your school-fellows again, when they know what you have done."

"What I am supposed to have done, uncle," said Frank steadily.

The rancher made a gesture of impatience.

"We will not go into that," he said. "I do not choose to bandy words with you, and listen to abominable falsehoods. You cannot remain at Cedar Creek. Neither can you continue to associate with my son. I believe that Bob's character is too strong to be easily contaminated even by bad associations, but it is my duty not to expose him to the risk. You will have expected this, I guess."

"If you believe me guilty, you

be severe, may be the saving of you. I cannot send you to your father—you cannot go to India, neither would it be possible, I think, for your father to receive you on an Indian plantation. I accepted you in trust, and I am prepared to fulfil that trust. I had hoped that, as you grew up, you would take kindly to our Canadian life—that you would live on the ranch, and become a rancher yourself later. But that is impossible now—by your own act. I am explaining all this to you, Richards, so that you will understand that the decision I have come to is the only possible one."

Frank smiled faintly.

"What is it, uncle?" he asked.

"There is a school in Vancouver to which you can be sent," said the rancher. "Your education will be continued there, perhaps more completely than at the backwoods school. The master is known to me personally. He has had a great deal of success with the sons of emigrants of a low character—people who have not learned to live up to Anglo-Saxon standards—Poles and Slovaks, and so forth. He has turned many of them into decent citizens. He is a conscientious man, and will, I guess, take you in charge, and do all that can be done for you. You will be under a strict but kindly rule. I do not pretend that your life will be like it has been hitherto—but for that you have only yourself to thank!"

He paused a moment.

Frank drew a deep breath.

"That is not all, uncle," he said. "I must speak now. I shall not go to the school at Vancouver!"

"What?"

"So long as you believe me guilty," said Frank, a flash in his eyes, "I will accept nothing more at your hands. You shall not pay one dollar for me at Vancouver, or anywhere else; I will taste no food in this house while I remain. So long as you trusted me, I could accept your kindness with gratitude; I cannot accept it any longer. I am going away—"

"And where are you going?" rapped out the rancher.

"I don't know—yet. But I'm strong, and I'm not idle; there's plenty of work in Canada for a fellow willing to work," said Frank bravely. "I'm going somewhere where I'm not known, where this horrible disgrace can't follow me—and unless my innocence is proved, I shall never set foot in the Thompson Valley again!"

Mr. Lawless compressed his lips.

"You forget one thing," he said.

"Your father placed you in my keeping, and I have my duty to do. I cannot and shall not allow you to go away on your own responsibility, to go from bad to worse, and to fall into even more serious faults than you have already committed. My decision is taken; you will mount and ride with me in the morning. Till then, you will remain in your room. You may go now."

come. No more rides up the school trail with his chums in the morning sunshine, no more merry skating on the creek, no more gallops on the rolling prairie! All that was over for him. Before the sun rose he had to be far away.

Some day the rancher would know that he had done him an injustice. Till then, he should never see his nephew again. What the future held for him Frank could not guess—and he gave little thought to that. His heart was too heavy for speculations on the hidden future.

He turned from the window at last. The silence of the night was unbroken, save by the faint lowing of steers in the distance. By the light of the stars, Frank made his simple preparations for departure.

He scribbled a note in pencil, and pinned it to the table, where it would be found in the morning. Then he packed his wallet, with the few things that it was necessary to take, and which he felt justified in taking. Of money he had a few dollars. In the bank at Thompson two hundred dollars stood to his credit—his earnings as a schoolboy author. But he was to be far away before the bank opened in the morning. He hardly thought of it now.

He slung the wallet over his shoulders and put on his hat. He gave a last look round the silent room. Bob's lasso lay on the table. He had already noted it, and decided to use it for leaving the ranch. He could not go by the door downstairs without noise—and it was necessary to go in silence. He uncoiled the lasso, fastened one end securely to the bed, and dropped the other from the window.

Quietly and calmly he slipped from the window, and slung himself down the rope to the ground.

He stood for a moment or two, listening.

There was no light about the ranch—no sound there. All within were sleeping. But from the bunk-house occupied by the cattlemen a light gleamed out into the dusky night.

Frank carefully avoided the bunk-house as he trod softly away in the grass.

He followed the trail across the plain, and breathed more freely when the ranch-house was left well behind.

Before him lay the plain, wide and vast, uncertain in the starlight. The sound of hoofs came to his ears, and he stopped, and stood close in the shadow of a lone tree. Two horsemen came riding towards the ranch at a trot—two cowboys on a night round. They were chatting as they rode, and he recognised the deep tones of Billy Cook, the foreman of the ranch. He thought he caught the mention of his own name, and hidden in shadow as he was, his cheeks flushed scarlet. The ranchmen knew, then—his supposed shame would be the talk of the ranch on the morrow, as it would be the talk of the backwoods school! He could not be gone too soon—or too far!

The horsemen jingled by, without seeing the slight form that stood close in the tree's shadow. They disappeared in the direction of the ranch.

Frank Richards stepped out of the shadow and trod the trail again—over rugged prairie, through long, tough grass. He seemed insensible to fatigue.

He was far from the ranch now—beyond the bounds of the extensive ranch-lands that belonged to his uncle. In the hazy distance far ahead lay the camp of Silver Creek, where he hoped to get a lift in the post-wagon to carry him farther yet. Over the mountain-tops to the east came a faint rosy flush. It cleared and grew redder as a new day dawned upon the west.

He was weary now. But he tramped on mechanically. He knew that he would be pursued and sought—that swift horsemen would be riding on his track as soon as the new day revealed that he was gone. Weary, but resolute, he tramped on, while the sun rose higher over the mountains, and the birds began to chirp in the thickets, and the cicadas hummed in the long grass.

He stopped at last, by a clump of trees on the slope of a hillside. He would gladly have gone on—but his limbs ached with fatigue. He turned into the trees, and in the most secluded spot he threw himself down in the thickets to rest. His eyes closed almost instantly, and he slept as soundly and peacefully as in his room at the ranch, while overhead the sun climbed higher and higher, and the green prairies woke to a new day.

THE END.

(Look out for "The Hunted School-boy," a fine, long, complete tale of Frank Richards in next Monday's BOYS' FRIEND.)



### THE BLOW FALLS!

Frank Richards stared at the ten-dollar bill in amazement. How had it come to be found in his pocket? It was as if in a dream that he saw himself condemned in the eyes of those around him!

will naturally not want me to see Bob any more," said Frank wearily. "I don't wonder at that."

"The question remains, what is to be done with you?" said the rancher. "When my brother-in-law fell upon evil times, he sent you out here to me, knowing that I would give his son a cordial reception, and treat him as my own boy. I have tried to do so. I think you cannot say that any neglect on my part has led you to what you have come to."

"You have always been kindness itself," said Frank. "I shall not forget that wherever I go."

"The difficult question is, where shall you go?" said the rancher. "It is impossible for you to remain at the ranch. You can see that?"

"Yes."

"You have relatives in England, but I cannot send you to them, at least not without communications, which would take too long a time. I should have to tell them, too, the whole facts, and I guess they would be as unwilling to receive you as I am to keep you here."

Frank shivered.

"I have a right to ask you, uncle, at least, that nothing of this shall be said to my relations at home," he said. "I hope the truth will come out some day!"

"Enough of that! I shall inform no one of what has happened, unless I am compelled to," said the rancher. "I do not wish to brand you so early in life. You will suffer for what you have done, and the lesson, which will

Frank did not speak; but his heart was throbbing.

"You will remain one year in Vancouver," continued Mr. Lawless. "After that period, if the school-master's report of you is favourable, I shall allow you to return here; and what has happened shall be forgotten and forgiven. You shall have every chance to make up for your fault. Keep on the straight path, and I shall always be your friend. Keep straight, that is all. And after your year of probation is over, your life shall be resumed where it left off here—and I shall trust you as before, and hope for the best."

Frank was still silent.

"You will realise, Richards, that you are being treated with leniency," said the rancher.

"If I were guilty, uncle, I should think so," said Frank. "I could only thank you for your kindness. If I were guilty, I ought to be sent to prison; and you are only offering to send me to a reformatory."

The rancher knitted his brows.

"The school is not a reformatory, Richards. It is necessarily somewhat of the character of one. But that is the only school to which I should be justified in sending you, after what you have done."

"I know you mean to be kind," said Frank. "But—"

"You will be prepared to start tomorrow morning, an hour after dawn," said Mr. Lawless. "I shall take you to Vancouver myself. That is all, Richards!"

"Uncle! I—"

"That will do!"

The rancher raised his hand and pointed to the door. Without another word, Frank Richards quitted the room.

### The 4th Chapter.

#### Frank's Flight!

Night on the ranch!

The stars glimmered in the sky; away in the far distance the snow on the summits of the mountains showed in a dim white line. In the Lawless ranch-house all was silent. Frank Richards stood at his window, and looked out into the clear, cold night.

It was his last night at the ranch.

He was alone in the room; Bob had been forbidden there. His light was extinguished; but the clear starlight glimmered into the room. Long had the boy stood at the open window, looking out on the wide grasslands under the stars.

Frank's mind was made up.

If he had had any hope by remaining to clear up the mystery of what had happened at the backwoods school, that hope was frustrated by his uncle's decision. On the morrow he was to ride with the rancher on the southern trail, down to the railway, on his way to Vancouver. That was inevitable if he remained at the Lawless Ranch until the morning sun gleamed over the Rocky Mountains.

He had to go!

His life had been happy at the ranch—how happy he had never realised till now at last the end had