

The Chums of Greyfriars and Cliff House.

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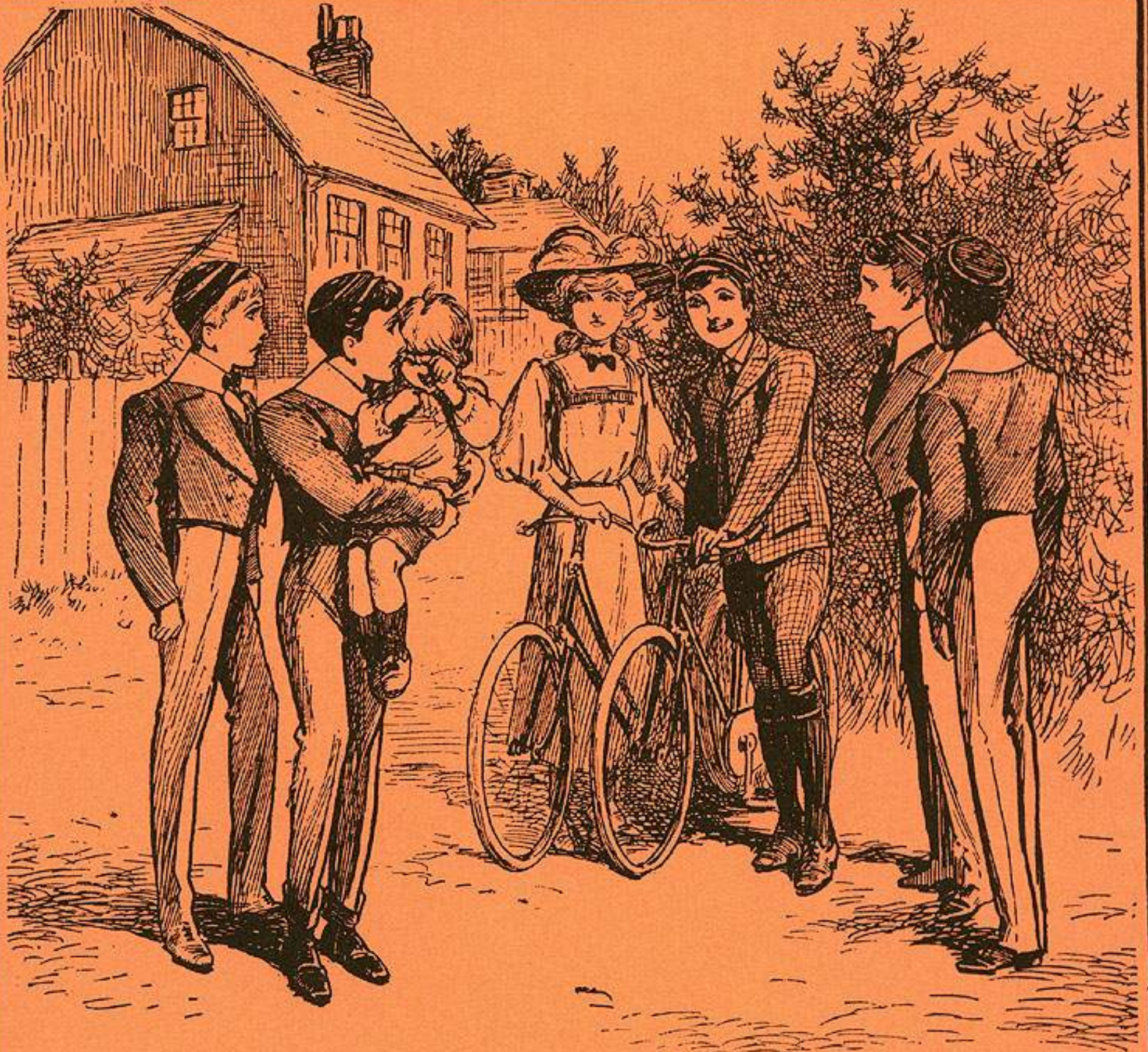
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Harry
Wharton's
Ward

A Splendid Tale of the
Greyfriars Chums,

— BY —

FRANK RICHARDS.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Harry Wharton Surprises His Chums.

HARRY WHARTON stood leaning against a tree in the Close at Greyfriars. His hands were thrust deep into his trousers' pockets, and there was a deep wrinkle in his forehead. His glance was bent upon the ground, and he was so deeply immersed in reflection that he did not hear a voice calling his name under the trees.

“Wharton!”

It was Bob Cherry's voice, but Harry did not notice it for the moment. Bob Cherry came along under the elms, and stopped as he saw his chum. He stared at Wharton in silence for some moments.

“Here he is!” he exclaimed at last. “Hallo, hallo, hallo, kid! Are you working out mathematical problems in your head, or is it the toothache?”

Wharton started, and looked up. But he did not smile.

Frank Nugent and Hurree Janset Ram Singh came along, and they also looked curiously at Wharton. The

three chums had been looking for him, for it was tea-time, and tea was ready in No. 1 Study in the Remove.

“I've found him!” said Bob Cherry. “He's making up poetry, or something. What's the matter, Harry?”

“I've had rather a shock.”

“How—when—where?”

“Look here.” Wharton had a folded magazine under his arm, and he handed it to the surprised Bob. “It's in there.”

Bob Cherry took the paper, and looked more surprised than ever. It was not the kind of paper he had expected to find Wharton reading.

“‘The Woman's Journal!’” he read out. “My only hat, have you taken to reading this kind of stuff, Harry? Going off your rocker?”

Wharton smiled.

“No. I happened to see it. I think Marjorie Hazeldene must have left it here, and I looked through it while I was waiting for tea. Then I came out here to think it over.”

“To think what over?”

“About that advertisement.”

Bob Cherry, with a perplexed brow, looked up and down the paper. He didn't see why an advertisement in a woman's paper should trouble Harry Wharton so much. Frank Nugent looked over one shoulder, and Hurree Singh over the other, and they tried to penetrate the mystery altogether.

“‘Our H.B. Corsets—a perfect fit,’” said Bob Cherry. “I dare say they'd give you a fit if you put 'em on. But I suppose you're not taking to lacing in, like Ionides, of the Sixth, are you, Harry?”

“Don't be an ass, old chap, if you can help it!”

"Free patterns for summer blouses," said Nugent, reading over Bob's shoulder—"free patterns for six W. J. coupons. Latest thing—"

"That's not it, duffer!"

"Dr. Humbourg's Hair Stain, 4s. 6d. a bottle."

"Ass!"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo, what's this?" exclaimed Bob Cherry, his expression changing. "Is this it, Harry—this about a kid?"

"Yes, that's it!"

"Read it out," said Nugent.

"It's rotten! It can't be genuine! No woman would

"Read it out."

"Here you are, then. 'Total surrender! Mother in sore straits, is willing to part with her little boy to anyone who would care to adopt. £10. Call personally, Rose Cottage, Linfield, near Friardale.'"

"My word!" said Nugent. "It's a joke, I suppose, though I'm blessed if I can see where the humour comes in."

"It's not a joke," said Wharton.

"But—but it can't be possible! A mother wouldn't part with her kid—and for ten pounds! Rot!"

"Suppose she can't feed it?"

"Oh!"

"She may be a widow, or an orphan, or something," said Bob Cherry vaguely, "or perhaps her husband is one of the unemployed. Looks to me horribly cold-blooded, though. Most women stick to a kid through thick and thin."

"The kind of mother the kid wouldn't miss," said Nugent, "if it's genuine. I hope the poor little beggar will find a good home. Blessed if it hasn't made me feel rotten. Let's go in and have tea."

Wharton did not move.

"Come on, old son. It's no good thinking about it, you know. It's rotten, but it's not a matter we can interfere in. Adopting kids is a bit out of our line."

"I've been thinking—"

"It's no good thinking about it. Let's go and have tea. My dear chap, you're not thinking of taking any steps in the matter, surely?"

"It seems to stick in my mind somehow," said Wharton slowly. "Suppose they're starving, for instance—mother and child—and she doesn't receive any offers? What might happen to them?"

"It's rotten!" said Nugent uncomfortably. "A jolly lot of rotten things go on in the world, you know, all the time; but it's no good thinking about them. It only makes you miserable for nothing."

"I know that, Frank. But—"

Wharton paused. He had been standing there alone under the trees, thinking, for a good half-hour before his chums joined him. He had formed a mental picture of a despairing mother and a child in danger of starvation, and it haunted him. Harry Wharton did not, as a rule, allow his imagination to run away with him, so to speak; but just now he could not drive that mental picture from his mind.

His chums looked at him and at one another.

"Oh, come," said Nugent uneasily, "it's no good being an ass! Look here, the woman wants ten quid for the kidlet, and I don't suppose she'd part for less, even if you offered it a good home in the study cupboard."

Wharton smiled slightly.

"You haven't got the money, or anything like it," said Bob Cherry. "Get it out of your mind, and come along!"

"I've just had a letter from my uncle."

"Well, I suppose he hasn't sent you ten quid, has he?"

"Yes; ten guineas for my new bicycle."

"Well, that's for your bicycle. I suppose you can't do without that?"

"N-no. But—"

Wharton paused again.

"It's no good," he broke out suddenly, "I can't get it out of my mind! I can't help thinking that somebody ought to take the matter up, and if nobody else does, why shouldn't we?"

"We!"

"My only hat!"

"The hatfulness is terrific!" murmured the Nabob of Bhanipur.

"Yes," said Harry Wharton resolutely. "For all we know, the kid's life may be in the balance. I'm going to look into the matter, anyway. If the case is really serious I'll make my old jigger last out another season, and blue the tin. I think any decent chap ought to be willing to do something for a kid. Anyway, it won't do any harm to look into the matter. We might as well pay a visit to Rose Cottage and see the kid."

His chums looked serious enough.

No. 67.

"THE MAGNET"
Library, No. 67.

Special!

"THE INVASION OF GREYFRIARS"

By the Pupils of
Cliff House.

NEXT
WEEK

"It's a railway journey from Friardale to Linfield," said Bob Cherry. "We shall have to get a pass."

"I'll get one from Wingate or one of the masters."

"And if we find it's a serious case, you don't mean to say that you'll take the kid, and—and bring it home to Greyfriars?"

"I don't know. We should have to be guided by circumstances, of course. But I really think we might look into the matter, and see what can be done."

"Oh, all right!"

"I say, you fellows—"

"We can stop in Friardale to get a book on 'How to Rear Healthy Babies,' said Frank Nugent; "I saw one on a bookstall there. It was only threepence, and threepence is pretty cheap for rearing healthy babies."

"I say, you fellows—"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! That's Bunter!"

Billy Bunter blinked at the chums of the Remove. There was an expression of indignation on his fat face.

"Lot of good it is a chap getting tea for you!" he growled. "The tea's cold, and the sausages ditto."

"Sorry! We'll go in at once. Nice of you to wait for us!"

Bunter sniffed.

"Catch me waiting! I wasn't going to let my grub spoil. I've finished—and I think perhaps I've eaten a little more than my whack. That was your fault, for not being there. I say, Wharton, I hear you've had a remittance from your uncle to get a new jigger."

Harry Wharton nodded. The chums were walking away towards the house now, and the fat junior trotted along to keep pace with Wharton's strides.

"Good! I suppose you're not in a hurry for the new machine for a few days?"

"No; what about it?"

"I was thinking that you might lend me a few pounds till Saturday. I would let you have it back out of a cheque I'm expecting from the Patriotic Home Work Association for some picture postcards I've been colouring for them. I say, you fellows, don't walk so fast; I can't keep running just after a meal. I say, Wharton— Well, you beasts!"

Billy Bunter halted, breathless, and the chums of the Remove, with smiling faces, strode into the House, and left him there.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

A Queer Errand.

BOB CHERRY grunted as he came into No. 1 Study in the Remove passage, and looked at the tea-table. Billy Bunter had not exaggerated when he said that he had taken more than his "whack." He had underestimated the case. When Bob Cherry, Nugent, and Hurree Singh had gone out to look for Wharton they had left a substantial tea in the study.

But Billy Bunter had worked wonders. There was a single sausage left, and half a rasher of bacon. The butter was all gone, and the jam, and the cake. There was plenty of bread, however, and some cheese. The chums looked at the table, and Harry burst into a laugh.

"It's our fault for being late," he said. "We know Bunter."

"Your fault, you mean, ass!"

"Well, my fault, if you like!"

"Punctuality is the thief of time," remarked Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh, who knew heaps of proverbs, but had most of them a little mixed.

"Well, there's plenty of bread and cheese," said Nugent. "Tuck in, before Bunter gets hungry again and comes back for it. What about getting that pass, Harry?"

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"I'll go and ask Wingate at once. Now the evenings are drawing out so much, there will be plenty of time to get to Linfield and back before dark."

And Harry, having bolted a hasty tea of bread and cheese, left his chums to finish theirs while he went in search of the captain of Greyfriars. He could generally rely upon getting a pass from Wingate, of the Sixth; but as it happened, Wingate was gone out, and Harry found his study empty. He came away again, debating in his mind whom he should ask next, and met his chums in the passage. They had their caps in their hands, ready to start.

"Got it?" asked Bob Cherry.

"No; Wingate's gone out."

"Bad luck! Suppose you ask Quelch?"

Wharton hesitated. Mr. Quelch, the master of the Remove, would give the pass, very likely, but he would want to know what it was wanted for. And he would certainly think Wharton's project a harebrained one, and might refuse permission when he knew. If he forbade the chums to go out, it would be impossible to seek in other quarters for a pass.

As it was impossible to tell exactly how Mr. Quelch would look at the matter, it was safer not to mention it to him.

"Here's the Head!" said Bob Cherry, in a whisper.

Dr. Locke was coming along the passage. He gave the juniors a pleasant smile. Harry Wharton stepped towards him, taking his courage in both hands, so to speak.

"If you please, sir—"

The Head stopped.

"Yes, Wharton. What is it?"

"May we have a pass, sir, to go down to Linfield?"

"You must ask your Form-master, my boy."

The Head walked on. The chums of the Remove looked at one another. Bob Cherry gave a low whistle.

"It can't be helped," he said. "We shall have to risk it. Come on, and let's beard old Quelch in his den."

"The beardfulness will be terrific."

"Keep it dark if you can, you chaps," said Wharton. "We shall look a precious set of asses if he knows."

"Perhaps we are a precious set of asses."

"Rats! Come on!"

Wharton tapped at Mr. Quelch's door, and the Remove-master's voice bade him enter. Mr. Quelch was deep in papers, but he looked up patiently as the juniors came softly in.

"Yes—what is it?"

"If you please, sir, we want to run over to Linfield, and we should like a pass. I was going to ask Wingate, but he's gone out, or I shouldn't have bothered you, sir."

"Ah! Very good! What do you want to go to Linfield for?"

"To—to make a purchase, sir."

"You will be back by dark, of course?"

"Oh, yes, sir."

"Then you may go. By the way, what is it you are going so far as Linfield to purchase? I believe it is a little country place, and not so convenient for shopping as Friardale."

"We're—we're going to buy a kid, sir," said Wharton. Mr. Quelch looked interested.

"Really Wharton that is very curious, but I do not see why I should not give my permission; but you will, of course, have to obtain Dr. Locke's consent before you can keep it at Greyfriars."

The Removites stared. That Mr. Quelch thought it possible that Dr. Locke would consent to their keeping a child at Greyfriars, if they ever thought of doing so, was amazing.

"Do—do you think he would consent, sir?" stammered Wharton.

"I think it possible, if room could be found for the kid," said Mr. Quelch. "I suppose it would be quiet and tame?"

"I—I haven't seen it yet, sir."

"I should advise you not to buy it unless it is quiet. It would be advisable, if you purchase it, to get a chain at the same time."

"A—a chain, sir?"

"Yes, or it may escape, and your money would be thrown away. Of course, if you buy it, you will be prepared to take proper care of it—to see to feeding it, etc.?"

"I—I suppose so, sir."

"Then you may certainly go," said Mr. Quelch, scribbling.

"Here is a pass for four."

"Thank you very much, sir."

The four chums quitted the study. In the passage outside they stared at one another in blank astonishment.

"Blessed if I thought Quelch would take it like that," said Nugent. "He speaks as if bringing a kid to Greyfriars was an everyday matter for chaps in the Remove."

"Looks to me as if he was worried over the exam. papers, and didn't know what he was talking about," said Bob Cherry. "I can't understand it."

"The incomprehensibility is terrific."

"Well, never mind that," said Wharton. "We've got the pass, and that's sufficient. Let's get off."

They left the House. In the bright summer weather the playing-fields were crowded, and many voices called the Famous Four to the cricket-field. But they shook their

heads and passed on. There was no cricket for them just then. Near the gates a junior was mounting a bicycle. It was Hazeldene, of the Remove. He looked round at them as they came along.

"Going out? I'm just taking a spin over to Cliff House to see my sister. Where are you chaps off to?"

"Linfield—to buy a kid," said Bob Cherry cheerfully.

And leaving Hazeldene petrified with astonishment, the Famous Four went out, and strode along the lane towards the village. They reached the little country station, and took the first train for Linfield. In a quarter of an hour they stepped out at a quiet village, smaller and sleepier than Friardale. It was poorer, too, to judge by the unkept gardens of the cottages, and the listless looks of the villagers. Harry Wharton looked up and down the irregular street.

"Puzzle, find Rose Cottage," said Bob.

"I suppose the natives know," said Harry Wharton, and he touched his hat to a respectable-looking dame, and asked her to direct him to Rose Cottage. She looked at him curiously.

"It's where Mrs. Corder lives," she said. "It's at the end of the street."

"Thank you very much."

The juniors walked down the street. They went at a slow pace. As they neared their destination, the strangeness of their errand struck them more and more forcibly. After all, what could they do in the matter? If they took the child, what could they do with it? The whole thing was absurd. Yet—Harry Wharton did not pause. The others would have been quite willing to turn back, if he had suggested it; but he did not even think of doing so. It was not his way to turn back and leave a task unfinished.

"By Jove," murmured Nugent, "I—I feel an ass, you know!"

"So do I!" grunted Bob Cherry. "I believe Wharton does, too, though he won't own up."

"The assfulness of my worthy self is terrific."

"Oh, come on!" said Wharton, quickening his pace. "We're going through with it. Here's Rose Cottage!"

THE THIRD CHAPTER. Toddles!

THE juniors from Greyfriars stopped. Rose Cottage had probably deserved its name once, for there were the remains of rose-trees sprawled over the walls and the fence. But they were dead and withered, and the little garden was neglected. The windows of the cottage were broken in places; no smoke ascended from the chimney. All told of poverty and neglect, perhaps the hopelessness of despair.

The sight of the place was depressing enough to the juniors. They were silent as they went into the little porch, and Wharton knocked at the door. His knock rang with a hollow sound through the house, and it was not answered, save by its own echo. He knocked again.

There was a sound of footsteps within, and the door was opened at last. A woman with a white and emaciated face looked out at the juniors. They raised their caps as she looked at them fixedly.

"Mrs. Corder?" asked Harry.

She nodded without speaking.

"Did you—you have an advertisement in the 'Woman's Journal'?" stammered Wharton, a little confused by the pale, fixed stare and the evident want in the woman's face. "I have the advertisement here—about a child—a boy."

A look of surprise came over the pale face.

"Yes; but you—"

"We have come to see about it."

She looked at them again, and then the surprise seemed to fade out of her face, as if she were too dulled by trouble to feel any emotion for more than a few moments.

She opened the door wider, and signed to them to enter. Cap in hand, the four juniors went into the cottage.

The interior was as poor as the outside. There was some attempt at tidiness, but everything told of wretched poverty—everything but one. The exception was a child, who sat in a little chair by the window. It was a boy of three or four years, with a round, chubby face and curly hair. It was dressed very shabbily, but it did not seem to want for food, as its mother evidently did. It turned its big eyes upon the boys as they came in, but made no sound. The gloom of the cottage seemed to lie upon the child as it did upon the juniors.

"Please sit down," said the woman, in a dull, mechanical voice; and the juniors sat upon an oak settee, feeling very uneasy and disturbed.

The woman did not sit down; she remained standing, looking at them. As she did not break the silence, Wharton had to do so, and this placed him in a position not exactly

what he had wanted. He had intended to look into the matter at first, if possible, before committing himself in any way, but that was difficult now.

"I read your advertisement by chance," he said.

She nodded.

"You wish to part with a child—a boy?"

She pointed to the child in the wicker chair.

"To totally surrender him?"

Another nod.

"For ten pounds?"

Nod again.

"Why?"

"That need not be gone into" said the woman quietly.

"I must have ten pounds, and I cannot keep the child. I did not expect an answer to my advertisement from a boy. Is it possible that you intend to take the child?"

"Would you trust him to me?"

She looked at him earnestly.

"Yes."

"You would not trust him to anyone, I suppose?"

"I cannot keep him."

"But to anyone?"

"I must have ten pounds."

She spoke in the same mechanical voice, more like some machine cunningly devised to imitate the human voice than like a human being. Wharton shivered. He felt that he was in the presence of some more than common trouble, which had crushed this woman to the very dust, or else that he was speaking to an unnatural mother, from whom it would be a mercy to rescue the child. Which, he could not decide.

"Then you intend to part with him in any case?"

"Yes."

"And if you cannot?"

"I shall!"

There was no doubting her meaning. If no one took the child she would desert it. Wharton's brow grew dark. A strange, slow smile curled the woman's lips.

"Will you take him?" she said.

Harry drew a deep breath.

"Yes."

"And the money?"

Wharton laid ten sovereigns on the table. The woman counted them. She did not seem surprised by finding so much money in the possession of a lad of Wharton's age. She did not seem surprised at anything.

"Thank you! That is correct."

"And—and—and I am to take the child?"

"It is yours."

Harry rose, and walked over to the little boy. The big, blue eyes looked up at him in silence.

"Will you come with me, chappy?" he asked.

The child looked at him in silence.

"What is his name, madam?"

"Toddles—I mean, he is called Toddles."

"Will you come with me, Toddles?"

Still the same silence.

The woman opened the door again, and stood with her hand upon the latch, evidently waiting for her visitors to go. There was a feverish light in her eyes. Bob Cherry, Nugent, and Hurree Singh went to the door. Wharton hesitated; then he looked at the stony face of the woman, and hesitated no longer. He lifted the little boy in his arms, from the chair, and carried him to the door. The boy did not cry. One of his little arms curled round Wharton's neck trustfully.

Wharton stopped at the door.

"Don't you want to say good-bye to him?"

The woman's face changed. She threw her arms round the boy, and clasped him to her almost convulsively. Then for the first time the child burst into a cry—a cry that was evidently of fear and repulsion towards the white-faced woman. She released him, and stepped back.

"Go!" she said huskily. "Good-bye!"

"One moment," said Wharton. "Take the money, and keep the child. If the money will help you——"

She shook her head.

"I cannot keep him."

There was no more to be said. Wharton carried the child, crying now, out of the cottage, and the door closed behind him.

The chums of the Greyfriars Remove walked along towards the station. They were silent and troubled. The scene in the cottage had depressed them. What kind of a woman was it who had let her child go so easily? And what were they to do with the child? Harry Wharton had come to Rose Cottage with his plans yet unfixed—they had been fixed for him now.

The child was sobbing in his arms. The woman's white face had frightened it. Yet she was its mother. And how

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was it that the child seemed well-fed and cared for, while the mother was so emaciated? What did it all mean? Was it the woman's own child at all?

The matter was too mysterious to be puzzled out. And Harry had no time just then for theories. He had facts to deal with—and the child was a very real and very uncomfortable fact.

In the gloomy cottage he had seemed too oppressed to cry. In the sunlit street he found energy enough. He proved that he had a really strong and serviceable pair of lungs, and that he knew how to use them.

People came to their cottage doors to look at the child. There were murmurs from two or three indignant persons, who thought that Wharton must be hurting the boy. The chums of the Remove were glad enough to get to the station, and glad to find that there was a train due for Friardale.

"Blessed if I know how to keep him quiet," said Wharton, perplexed.

"Perhaps he wants feeding?" suggested Nugent. "Babies often do, as I know for a fact."

"Yes, but—but—but——"

"Perhaps you're not holding him right," said Bob Cherry.

"If you were to carry him a little more horizontally——"

"I was going to suggest a little more perpendicular," said Nugent.

"Oh, stuff! By holding him horizontal you get a perfectly level and even circulation of the blood——"

"How do you know?"

"It stands to reason."

"Better keep him upright, or the blood may flow into his head, and then he will have a fit. I've seen a dog have a fit, and it's beastly."

"I fancy feeding's the thing," said Wharton. "We shall have to get a feeding-bottle as soon as we get into Friardale. Have you chaps got any toffee about you?"

"There's an automatic machine here."

"Good! Get some toffee. That's bound to please him."

Bob Cherry darted away, and just as the train came in, he rushed back with a chunk of butterscotch.

"There you are, kid!" he said, presenting it to the baby.

Master Toddles looked at it, and held out a little, fat claw. The next moment smiles replaced his tears, and he was sucking the butterscotch as if for a wager. He was all smiles as the juniors carried him into the train.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Toddles is Troublesome.

THE train moved out of the station, and Wharton, who was flushed and a little tired, sat Master Toddles on the seat, leaving him to eat his toffee in peace. Bob Cherry made a clutch at the child just in time to prevent him from rolling to the floor of the carriage.

"Here, take care!" he exclaimed. "You might break the thing, you know. He wants holding tight all the time."

"I—I suppose so. Hallo! What's the matter with him now?"

Shriek, shriek, shriek!

"Great Scott! What is it?"

"What's the matter, kiddy?"

"Got a pain anywhere?"

"The painfulness must be terrific."

Shriek, shriek, shriek!

"He's choking!" exclaimed Bob Cherry, noticing that the butterscotch was no longer in the chubby hand. "He's swallowed the butter-scotch."

"Oh, dear! Oh, dear!"

Shriek, shriek, shriek!

"Up-end him—quick, and perhaps it will drop out!"

"Right-ho! Lend a hand!"

They grasped the boy and up-ended him. Strange to say, this only made the shrieks redouble in force, but they manfully persevered. The youngster's mouth was wide open, to give passage to his terrific yelling, and there was plenty of room for the butterscotch to fall out.

But it did not fall. The shrieking continued, and Wharton turned quite pale, while Nugent and Bob were crimson with their exertions. As for Hurree Janset Ram Singh, it was impossible to tell whether he was pale or red.

"Oh, dear!" gasped Wharton. "Suppose he chokes! Shall we ring the communicator, and stop the train?"

"Wait a bit. Perhaps he wants thumping on the back."

"Put a spoon down his back," said Bob quickly; "that's the thing. Quick! Has anybody got a spoon?"

They were not likely to have spoons in their pockets. No one had, and Hurree Singh's offer of a pocket-knife in lieu of a spoon was declined. Meanwhile, the yelling of Toddles had grown to be something fearful, and people were putting their heads out of the windows of the other carriages to see what was the matter.

"Thump him on the back while I hold him upside down," gasped Wharton. "That's the only thing I can think of."

"Good! That must be right."

"Here, gently does it! Not so hard."

"It may take a shock to make the butterscotch come out—"

"Yes; but you might break something. My word, how he's howling! He seems to be making more row than at the start!"

"Yes. Blessed if I can understand it."

"Hold on a tick!" exclaimed Nugent. "He can't be choking if he's making all that row, you know. If he was choking his throat would be bunged up."

"Why—why—well, you might have thought of that sooner!"

"Better turn him right side up."

The baby was reversed again. His face was very red, and he was yelling as if for a wager. Bob Cherry uttered an exclamation; the butterscotch was sticking to the child's sleeve all the time.

"Here you are! My hat! That's why he's yelling—because he's lost the butterscotch. You chaps might have thought of that."

"Give it to him and see if he will shut up."

"Here it is, ducksy," said Bob Cherry, recalling as well as he could the nursery language of his early youth. "Little chickety-chick, here's its nicey-nicey butterscotchy!"

By this time the little fat hand dashed the butterscotch away, and the yelling of Toddles continued unabated.

Wharton wiped his perspiring brow.

"What can be the matter with him?" he exclaimed.

"We've done everything we can, and it only makes him worse."

"The worsefulness is terrific!"

The juniors sat down and looked helplessly at the baby. Bob Cherry tried to tempt him with the butterscotch again, but he declined peremptorily to be tempted. He apparently only wanted to howl, and he howled.

The train clattered to a halt in Friardale Station.

"Are you going to carry him now, Bob?" asked Harry.

"I—I'm not used to carrying babies, you know," said Bob.

"You carried him a treat to the station."

"Yes, I think Wharton can handle babies about the best of the lot," said Nugent hastily. "Some fellows can, you know."

"It is a case of knackfulness," said Hurree Singh, "and our worthy chum Wharton possesses the esteemed knackfulness."

Harry Wharton groaned, and picked up the baby. Master Toddles continued to yell as Harry lifted him out of the carriage, and began to kick and struggle. Several worthy country people murmured "Shame!" And as Wharton and his chums left the station, they were followed by half a dozen village folk, all indignant.

"He's been beating it something cruel," said a worthy dame. "Look at its pore little red face. There's the marks of 'is 'ands on it yet."

"Fancy beating his little brother like that!" said another.

"'E ought to be 'orse-whipped, that's what he ought."

Wharton looked round angrily.

"It isn't my little brother!" he exclaimed. "And I haven't been beating it. Babies often howl like this. It's not hurt."

"Yah! You ought to be arrested, you ought!"

"For goodness' sake, let's get out of this!" muttered Harry desperately. "I believe this kid will turn my hair grey!"

The chums hurried on, and left the village behind, and the murmuring of angry indignation died away behind them. In the country lane there was quiet and peace, save for the endless yelling of Toddles.

Toddles seemed to have got his second wind by this time, for he was going in fine style.

Two cyclists, a boy and a girl, who were coming along the lane, slackened down, as they came nearer the Greyfriars juniors. The boys recognised Hazeldene, of the Remove, and his sister Marjorie.

Wharton turned scarlet.

Carrying a yelling child, and very flustered, troubled, and perspiring, Marjorie Hazeldene was about the last person in the world he desired to meet. There was a glimmer in the girl's eyes as she alighted.

The juniors raised their caps, looking very sheepish. Master Toddles yelled and kicked. Harry Wharton had all his work cut out to hold him.

"You seem to be in trouble," said Marjorie sweetly.

"Can I help you?"

"I—I—I don't know," said Harry helplessly. "The little wretch is yelling as if he were half-killed, but you know I haven't touched him, don't you?"

"Of course! But—but—but who is he?"

"Toddles."

"I—I mean, where did you find him? Is he a lost child?"

"I—I—I've just bought him!" explained Harry awkwardly, and colouring yet more deeply under Marjorie's blank look of amazement. "I—I don't know what's the matter with him. Perhaps he wants feeding."

"Give him to me!"

"Oh, no! It wouldn't be fair on you. I dare say he'll leave off crying presently."

Marjorie smiled.

"Perhaps I can make him leave off."

"Well, if you'd like to try—"

"Give him to me!"

Wharton, glad enough to get rid of his burden, but very concerned for Marjorie, handed Toddles over. The girl took him in her arms and nursed him, a great deal as if he had been a doll, and murmured soothing words. The juniors looked on in amazement, for the frantic yelling of Toddles ceased, and his wet face broke out into a grin.

Marjorie evidently knew more about soothing babies than Wharton did.

Harry drew a deep breath of relief. A blessed silence fell.

"Thank goodness, he's quiet at last!" gasped Harry.

And Toddles, resting comfortably in Marjorie's arms, gave a cheerful caw.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Toddles Arrives at Greyfriars.

TODDLES appeared to be quite comfortable, and had apparently no desire to change his quarters. He dug one fat claw into Marjorie's curls, and with the other he condescended at last to take the butterscotch. The juniors looked on in great admiration. They had not expected the terrible baby to be quieted so easily, and their relief was unbounded.

"Good!" said Bob Cherry. "I suppose there's a knack in doing these things?"

"The knackfulness is terrific!" murmured the Nabob of Bhanipur. "But we cannot leave the esteemed Toddles with the charming miss."

Marjorie looked up.

"What are you going to do with the baby?" she asked.

"I—I don't quite know," said Wharton. "We've taken it in charge, you see—it was all through an advertisement, really. The mother wanted ten pounds, and wanted to get rid of the kid, and she as good as said she was going to desert it if it wasn't taken off her hands. Under the circumstances—"

The girl's face softened.

"It was kind of you," she said. "But—but what can you possibly do with a baby at Greyfriars?"

"We shall have to arrange something."

"What will the masters say?"

"Well, as a matter of fact, we've got our Form-master's permission," said Harry. "We had to tell him what we were going to Linfield for, and he gave his permission. I was surprised, of course; but there it is—he knew what we were going for, and he gave his permission."

"That makes it all right about taking the kid to Greyfriars," said Nugent. "But what we're going to do with it there isn't settled yet."

"You can't keep it in the study cupboard," grinned Hazeldene.

"We shall have to keep it in the study at first," said Wharton doubtfully. "I dare say Mrs. Kebble, our house-keeper, will give us some tips."

"You had better try to get Mrs. Kebble to take charge of it, I should think," said Marjorie. "Boys don't know how to look after children."

"Oh, one can pick up these things! I believe they keep pretty quiet so long as you give 'em plenty to eat. Besides, I don't see why they shouldn't cry a bit; it exercises the lungs."

"Toddles's lungs don't want much exercising," said Nugent.

"Thanks awfully for getting him quiet!" said Harry. "I think you can give him back to me now."

He held out his arms for the baby, but Toddles clung to Marjorie, and refused to be taken away. The girl laughed.

"He doesn't want to come to you."

"But—but he must! You can't take him to Cliff House," said Wharton, in dismay.

"Perhaps he will come to me," said Bob Cherry.

"Well, try."

Bob Cherry held out his hands to Toddles, who looked at him suspiciously. Bob worked up his most agreeable smile.

"Come to his uncle, den, little chickety-chick!" he said coaxingly.

"Do away!" said Toddles.

"What on earth does he mean?" said Bob, puzzled.

"He's talking about dough now!"

Marjorie Hazeldene laughed.

"He means go away," she explained.

"Oh!"

"I'd better have a try," said Nugent. "Come to me, kid—come to your Uncle Frank! I'll get you some more butterscotch! Come on, kiddy-widdy!"

But the kiddy-widdy refused to come. He had taken a grip on Marjorie's curls for safety, and it was clear that he would not be easily dislodged.

"Shall I try with my worthy self?" asked the Nabob of Bhanipur.

"You might scare him," said Nugent. "He can't be accustomed to dark gentlemen. We don't want him to begin howling again."

"Oh, let Inky have a try!"

"I will display the most tenderful agreeableness to the esteemed Toddles."

"Go it, then!"

"Will you come to the awful embrace of my worthy self, most august and esteemed Toddles?" said the Nabob of Bhanipur softly. "Will it please you to reposefully recline in my—"

Toddles gave a howl.

Probably the Nabob's dark complexion frightened him. He kicked and howled, and Marjorie clasped and soothed him. Hurree Singh retreated.

"The esteemed Toddles does not like me, I am afraid," he remarked. "I am sorry to have restarted him upon the terrific howfulness."

Toddles howled and roared, and Marjorie nursed and soothed him, but it was a full five minutes before he was quiet again. Then it was the butterscotch that did it. Wharton rubbed his forehead in despair.

"What can we do with the young—the baby, I mean?"

"I'll carry him as far as Greyfriars," said Marjorie. "Perhaps he will come to one of you by then."

"I say, he weighs a lot, and—"

"Never mind; I can carry him!"

"I'll wheel your bike," said Hazeldene, riding slowly and wheeling his sister's machine. "My word! This is a picnic! I don't envy you chaps!"

The chaps did not envy themselves. Toddles promised to turn all their hair grey before long. He was quiet enough in Marjorie's arms, and to their joy he showed signs of going to sleep.

The butterscotch dropped from his sticky little paw into the road, and Bob Cherry picked it up. It was very sticky and dusty, but Bob carried it with him.

"We may need it again," he remarked. "Better keep this in hand till we can get some more."

The gates of Greyfriars came in sight. Marjorie stopped. Toddles was fast asleep in her arms.

"Is he really asleep?" whispered Harry.

It seemed too good to be true.

"Yes; fast asleep. If you take him carefully, he won't wake up."

"Good!"

Harry Wharton took him carefully enough. He wouldn't have had that baby wake up just then for the wealth of the Indies.

Toddles grunted in his sleep, and Wharton trembled. But he did not wake.

He seemed quite comfortable in Harry's arms. One sticky paw fastened upon Harry's collar, with a sticky contact that made him shudder. But he would have endured more than that to keep the baby quiet.

"Jolly good!" said Bob Cherry. "Hold him carefully, Harry!"

"I'm holding him carefully!"

"Oughtn't his head to be a little higher?"

"A little lower, I was thinking," said Nugent.

"He is just right," said Marjorie; and, of course, that settled it. "I shall have to run away quickly now, or I shall be late in at Cliff House, and Miss Primrose will be angry. I shall come over again as soon as I can and see if I can help you with Toddles."

"Oh, thanks!" said Harry. "I'll be so glad if you will! You seem to be able to handle the little—er—cherub better than any of us."

Marjorie laughed, and mounted her bicycle. The brother and sister pedalled off in the gathering dusk, and Wharton carried the baby in at the gates, as carefully as if he had been carrying a precious porcelain.

Gosling, the school porter, was coming out to close the gates. He stared blankly at the baby.

"Well, my heye!" he exclaimed. "This 'ere beats all! What are you doin' with that there baby, Master Wharton?"

"Carrying it!"

"Wot I says is this 'ere—you'd better take that baby back to its mother!"

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"Go and eat coke, old chap!"

And the chums of the Remove, leaving Gosling open-mouthed with amazement, walked on.

In the dusk the Close was almost deserted, and fortunately they were not observed. Harry did not want to go in at the head of an astonished crowd. He went upstairs quickly, only two or three fellows near at hand observing the baby. Those two or three fellows remained petrified, wondering whether they were dreaming.

"It's a dhrame!" said Micky Desmond. "It's a quare dhrame!"

Glad enough were the Famous Four to reach No. 1 Study. There, for a time at least, they were secure, and would have time to think and plan.

The study was lighted, and there was a smell of cooking in it. Billy Bunter had a fire going, on the fire a frying-pan, in the frying-pan sausages.

The fat junior blinked round as they came in.

"I say, you fellows—Hallo! What have you got there? What's in that parcel, Wharton?"

"A baby!" said Harry.

"Oh, don't be funny! If it's something to eat, you've come just in time. I've only got a couple of sausages for my supper." The short-sighted junior blinked at Wharton's burden. "What is it?"

"A baby. You can't eat it."

Bunter snorted, and came over towards him. When he saw that it really was a baby, he gave a jump.

"What—what—what have you brought a baby here for?"

"Going to give it a home," said Harry.

"You—you ass!"

"It's all right. You can go on cooking. I dare say Toddles will be hungry when he wakes up."

Billy Bunter blinked at him wrathfully.

"If you think you're going to give that baby my supper—"

"I am, if he wants it. I'd give him the school library, or the clock out of the tower to keep him quiet."

"But—but—but—"

"Oh, cheese it, and get on with the cooking!"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! He's waking up!"

"Now look out for squalls!"

There was a grunt from Toddles, and then a whimper. The baby was waking up!

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Toddles in the Study.

"GOO!" said Toddles.

Wharton drew a breath of relief. His majesty the baby had awakened in a good temper.

"Geo-o-o-o-o!"

"What a jolly stroke of luck!" said Bob Cherry. "He's not going to cry. Try and keep him in a good temper. Suppose you stroke him?"

"I don't suppose that would do any good."

"It does to dogs and cats."

"He isn't a dog or a cat. You can try if you like."

Bob Cherry stroked Toddles. Toddles seemed to be in a lively mood. He drove a chubby little fist into Bob Cherry's eye, and Bob gave a gasp and jumped back. He put up his hand to his eye.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors laughed loudly, and Toddles laughed, too. He evidently considered that he had performed something of an achievement. He laughed and crowed, and made another attempt to get at Bob Cherry's eye; but Bob took care to keep his distance.

"My hat!" said Bob. "The little bounder! Bunged me right in the eye!"

Bob wasn't angry at all. He seemed to look upon it as Toddles did, as an achievement. He rubbed his eye, and chuckled. Toddles chuckled, too.

Harry Wharton's brow was wrinkled in thought. A new idea had come into his mind.

"I say, does anybody know what age kids begin to walk at?" he asked.

"I walked when I was four, I remember," said Nugent.

"Three, I should think," said Bob Cherry.

"More likely two," said Billy Bunter, "or one. That kid could walk if he liked."

"He made us carry him all the way."

"That was his artfulness."

"Oh, rats!" said Nugent. "As if a little kid like that could be artful!"

"I don't know," said Wharton doubtfully. "He ought to be able to walk. Look at his legs—they're strong enough. The little beggar may be having us, you know."

"See if he can stand up."

Wharton gingerly set Toddles upon his feet.

It was pretty clear that the baby could stand up.

He stood up, as a matter of fact, and walked about the study, beginning to examine things with a great deal of interest and curiosity.

"My hat!" said Harry. "And we carried him all the way!"

"Artful little dodger."

Billy Bunter sniffed.

"I could have told you better than that," he said. "Why, I——"

"Yes, you know a lot about babies! You get on with the cooking, in case Toddles gets hungry."

"Look here, he's not going to have my supper. And you're not going to keep the little beast in this study. If you do, I shall clear out!"

"By Jove, Toddles will be an acquisition, if it clears Bunter out."

"Oh, really, Cherry——"

There was a sudden howl from Toddles. He had caught sight of the nabob's dark face again. Hurree Janset Ram Singh was smiling his most agreeable smile, in order to propitiate Toddles, but Toddles was evidently not to be propitiated. He did not like dark complexions.

Howl, howl, howl!

Harry Wharton looked alarmed.

"Hang it! This won't do! We shall have a crowd here! Shut up, Toddles!"

Shriek, shriek, shriek!

"What's the matter with him?"

"I fear it is my darkful skin that troubles the esteemed Toddles," said the Nabob of Bhanipur. "My regretfulness is great."

"I say, you fellows——"

Toddles howled, and ran to Wharton, and clung to his trousers. He was clearly in great terror of the nabob. Hurree Singh looked greatly distressed. He was the quietest and gentlest of all the fellows in the study, and he would not have hurt a mouse, and he was very fond of children. It was hard that Toddles should take exception to him in this emphatic way. But Toddles was not to be placated. He clung to Wharton's trousers, and yelled, and would not be comforted.

"My hat!" said Wharton. "What on earth——"

"I will leavefully quit the esteemed study," said Hurree Singh hurriedly. "He will perhapsfully be quiet when I have taken my esteemed departure."

"Well, if you wouldn't mind, old chap, for a bit——"

"I will departfully go at once."

And Hurree Janset Ram Singh hastily left the study.

His departure had the desired effect upon Toddles.

The shrieks ceased, and the tears dried up like an April shower, and smiles broke out upon the chubby face.

"Little bounder!" said Nugent. "That's all he wanted. Poor old Inky will have to keep out of the study while the kid's here."

Toddles tugged at Harry.

The captain of the Remove looked down at him.

"Do you want anything, Toddles?"

"Baker."

"Eh?"

"Baker," said Toddles.

"What on earth does he mean by baker?" said Harry.

"Can anybody guess?"

"Baker," said Toddles insistently. "Baker! Bupper!"

"My only hat! Baker! Bupper! Bupper sounds like a German word! The kid can't be talking German!"

"Baker! Bupper!" shrieked Toddles.

Wharton rubbed his forehead. Toddles was getting near crying again, and if he once started, there was no telling when he would stop. But what he meant by baker and bupper was more than the chums of the Remove could guess. Bupper might be a German word, but it certainly wasn't an English one. Nugent dragged out a German dictionary and looked for it; but it wasn't there.

"Baker!" roared Toddles. "Bupper!"

"Perhaps he's hungry! Try the butterscotch! Quick, he's just going to begin yelling!"

"Where's that butterscotch?"

"I brought it in," said Bob Cherry, looking round hurriedly. "I think I put it down somewhere—on a chair, I think. Yes, that chair Bunter's sitting on."

"Get up, Bunter."

"Oh, really——"

"Get up, quick! Yes, there it is, sticking to Bunter."

"Oh, really, you fellows——"

"I really think you might be more careful, Bunter. Yank it off him, Bob!"

"Baker!" roared Toddles. "Boo-hoo! Bupper!"

"It won't come off! Bunter's stuck to it! Fat little beast! Try the kid with some grub—quick! There's some in the cupboard!"

Nugent tore the cupboard door open hastily.

"There's only bread-and-butter here—Bunter's taken care of that."

"Butter!" exclaimed Harry, a light breaking in upon him. "Perhaps he means butter when he says bupper. Try him."

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"But what can he mean by baker?"

"Why, bread, of course!" exclaimed Harry, pursuing the same line of thought. "See, a baker is the chap who brings bread, and kids get these things mixed. Let's try him with bread-and-butter."

Wharton was right.

Toddles seized upon the bread-and-butter with perfect satisfaction, and the threatened storm was averted.

"Good!" said Wharton. "We're getting on. There ought to be a dictionary made up of baby lingo. Hallo, he's talking again!"

"Dink!" said Toddles.

"Dink! Perhaps that means something to drink."

"I shouldn't wonder. Is there any milk?"

"Yes, there was some——"

"I finished that up," said Bunter. "You see——"

"Yes, I see a fat cormorant. There's some condensed milk, I think——"

"No, there isn't; I finished that up——"

"I've a jolly good mind to finish you up!" roared Bob Cherry, shaking the fat junior by the collar. "What do you mean by giving us all this trouble in bringing up a family of one?"

"Ow! Oh, really—ow! Don't shake me like that! If you make my spectacles fall off, and they break, you'll have to pay for them, so—— Ow! Wow!"

"I'll go and see if I can borrow some milk," said Bob Cherry, and he pitched Bunter into the armchair, and rushed from the study.

"Dink!" roared Toddles.

"Quiet, old chap. You shall have your dink in a tick."

"Dink! Toddles thirsty!"

"Half a mo'! It's all right. Here, try him with one of those sausages, it may keep him quiet."

"Look here, you fellows—— I say, here, hold on——"

Wharton pushed the indignant and protesting Bunter back into the armchair, with a bump that almost winded him, and one of the fried sausages was proffered to Toddles. Toddles started on it with avidity. He seemed to be hungry, and he liked sausages. He finished that one in next to no time, and held out a greasy, chubby hand, with a greasy grin on his shiny face.

"Toddles want more."

"I say, you fellows, this is beastly of you. I'm awfully hungry, and now there will be only one sausage left for me."

"Your mistake," said Wharton. "There won't be any. Here you are, Toddles."

"Stop! I—I say——"

"Oh, ring off!"

Billy Bunter was bumped into the chair again. Toddles finished the second sausage, strewing some of the fragments of it over his clothes and the floor. Then he again announced the fact that he was "dirty."

Harry opened the door to look for Bob. The latter was tearing back along the passage with a jug of milk, spilling it at every step.

"Here you are, kid!"

Harry took the jug, and carried it to Toddles. Toddles insisted upon taking it in his own little hands to drink, and at the second gulp he, of course, upset it, and for a moment he swam in milk. The jug went to the floor with a crash, and smashed into a dozen pieces.

"Phew!"

"Ow!" roared Toddles. "Ow! Boo-hoo!"

The study door was flung open again violently, and Bulstrode, the bully of the Remove, burst in. His face was aflame with rage.

"Where's my milk?" he roared.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Mr. Quelch Thinks the Price Too High!

HARRY WHARTON looked round. Bulstrode was almost stuttering with fury, and he had his mouth open, and his clenched fists sawing the air.

"Where's my milk?"

"Eh? What milk? What are you talking about?"

"You see——" began Bob Cherry.

"That—that beast," roared Bulstrode, pointing to Cherry, "that beast rushed into my study, where I've got some fellows to tea and collared the jug of milk off the table, and rushed off with it."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Nugent.

"You see, I hadn't time to explain," said Bob Cherry. "I'm sorry to interrupt any chap's little tea-party; but when a fellow has a baby to bring up, he's allowed some relaxation of the rules. Toddles couldn't wait."

"What—what are you doing with a baby here?" gasped Bulstrode, his fury changing to amazement as he looked at

Toddles, who was beginning to whimper. "Is this the latest? Where's my milk?"

"You can see it."

"You—you've smashed my jug! You rotters! You'll have to pay for it—"

"Oh, rats; of course we'll pay for it! And the milk, too! We wanted some milk for Toddles, and we had to have it."

"You're not going to have mine! You—you silly beasts, what have you brought a baby into the school for? You—you—"

"Oh, cheese it; you're frightening the baby!"

"Blow the baby! I say—"

"Boo-hoo!" roared Toddles. "Ugly man! Do away!"

"You hear that, Bulstrode? Get out! Toddles can't stand ugly faces, he says so himself."

"Do away! Boo-hoo!"

"I'll jolly well—"

"Out you go!" said Wharton. "We'll pay for the damage; but if you don't clear, you'll get some damage that can't be paid for. Outside!"

"I won't! I—"

"Chuck him out!"

The chums of the Remove collared Bulstrode, and hustled him through the doorway. He sat down in the passage with some violence. He was up again in a moment, and charging like a mad bull into the study.

But he found three athletic fellows ready for him. They collared him again, and carried him out, and he went down the passage with three active boots behind him to help him on.

The chums of the Remove re-entered their study; this time Bulstrode did not follow them. The bully of the Lower Fourth had had enough just then.

Toddles quieted down when Bulstrode was gone. Fortunately, the amount of milk he had consumed had satisfied him for the time. He was in a shocking state between milk and butter, and sausage-fat, and tears, and the dust of the road, and it was clear to the chums that the next important step was to wash him.

"Quelch is bound to feel a bit curious about it," Harry Wharton remarked, "as he knew we were going to get a kid here; he may come along to see it at any moment. We don't want him to think we keep it in a filthy state."

"N-no! I say; Quelch can't have thought that we were going to keep it in the study, though. It would be impossible for long."

"Oh, I dare say later we could arrange with some woman in the village to nurse it!" said Harry. "At present it will have to stop here. Quelch must have known that. It's amazing his giving his permission at all; but a jolly lucky thing for us. I should have brought the kid here, anyway; but Quelch's permission sees us through. Where shall we wash it?"

"Well, a bath-room would be about the place."

"I don't know; if he yelled, everybody would hear him down there."

"What about the dorm.?"

"We should have a crowd round us."

"True. We can get a footbath in here, and a can of hot water, and some soap and things," said Nugent. "If we make a slop, Bunter can clean it up."

"Oh, really, Nugent—"

"Shall we want any soda?" asked Bob Cherry dubiously. "I wouldn't mind going and borrowing some of Mrs. Kebble."

"I—I don't know. Better have some, perhaps. You go and get some soda, and I'll get the footbath, and Bunter can go and fetch soap and towels and a sponge from the dorm. You look after Toddles, Bob."

"Right you are!"

"I say, you fellows—"

"You do as you're told, Billy!"

And Bunter discontentedly obeyed. Harry Wharton left his chums in search of a footbath, and met Mr. Quelch in the passage. The Remove-master signed to him to stop.

"Ah, I see, you are back, Wharton!" he said.

"Yes, sir."

"And the kid—did you purchase it?"

"Yes, sir. I've brought it to Greyfriars."

"Good! I like to see my boys fond of pets," said Mr. Quelch. "If the Head does not give his permission for it to be kept in the school, you can get someone at Friardale to take care of it."

"Yes, sir. I was thinking that I should have to arrange with someone in Friardale, anyway, as it would be too much trouble in the study."

"In the study!" Mr. Quelch laughed. "You could hardly keep it in the study, Wharton."

"No, sir; so I was thinking."

"And you are quite satisfied with your purchase?"

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"Yes, sir—in a way."

"You seem rather doubtful about it. I hope you have not given too much, Wharton? What did you pay?"

"Ten pounds, sir."

Mr. Quelch gave a jump.

"Ten pounds! You paid ten pounds for a kid!"

"Yes, sir; that was the price advertised."

"Absurd! I do not know how the prices go, but I am certain that ten pounds is excessive—extortionate."

"Well, sir, the woman wanted ten pounds specially, and—"

"That may be so, but—"

"You see, it was her own, sir."

"Of course it was her own, or she could not have sold it, I presume," said Mr. Quelch, looking puzzled. "I am afraid you have been swindled, Wharton. As it was a woman, however, we will charitably suppose that she did not know the value of what she sold, to charge you such a sum. It was preposterous. But I must look into the matter. This absurd bargain cannot be allowed to stand. Who is the woman, and where does she live?"

"Mrs. Corder, sir, at Rose Cottage, Linfield," said Harry reluctantly; "but—but I hope you won't interfere, sir. She seemed to be in desperate need of money, and—"

"Well, well, we will see, Wharton. I approve of your kindness of heart towards one in distress, but I cannot allow you to be imposed upon. But we will see."

And Mr. Quelch, with a friendly nod, walked on. Wharton went his way, feeling somewhat puzzled. The Form master seemed to regard the purchase of a child as quite an ordinary matter, and to be surprised only by the large sum asked for it. It seemed to Harry that there was a misunderstanding somewhere, though he could not see where.

However, the immediate business was to get Master Toddles washed, and so Harry dismissed the matter from his mind for the present. He secured the footbath, and a can of hot water, and carried them to the study, where Master Toddles eyed them with great suspicion and no sort of liking. He seemed to know by instinct what those preparations meant.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

Bunter Does Not Get the Feeding Bottle!

WHARTON plumped down the bath, and began to pour the steaming water into it. Bob Cherry came in with a packet of soda, and Billy Bunter returned laden with soap and towels. Bunter was looking discontented. His supper was gone, and he was working—two deep causes for dissatisfaction. But nobody was inclined to take any notice just then of Billy Bunter. There was a matter more important in hand. Master Toddles was eyeing the bath, and the soap, and the steaming water, and the expression of his face showed that he was ready to yell at a moment's notice.

"How much of this shall I put in?" asked Bob Cherry doubtfully, as he held the packet of soda over the bath.

"Hum! Couldn't you get that from Mrs. Kebble?"

"Well, I told her we were going to wash something, and asked her how much soda to put in, and she said it was according to the amount required by the article we were going to wash," said Bob Cherry, in great disgust. "That's just like a woman. Of course, I couldn't let on that it was a kid."

"Of course not. We shall have to proceed by guesswork. If Nugent had got that book about babies—"

"Well, I forgot; we had a crowd round us in Friardale, you know," said Nugent. "There's a cookery-book here. I suppose there wouldn't be anything about washing babies in that."

"I don't suppose so. Look here, shove in half the soda and chance it."

"Right you are."

Bob Cherry shot a stream of soda into the bath. Wharton assumed his most coaxing expression and turned to Toddles.

"Toddles, my son; come here, ducky."

"Do away," said Toddles.

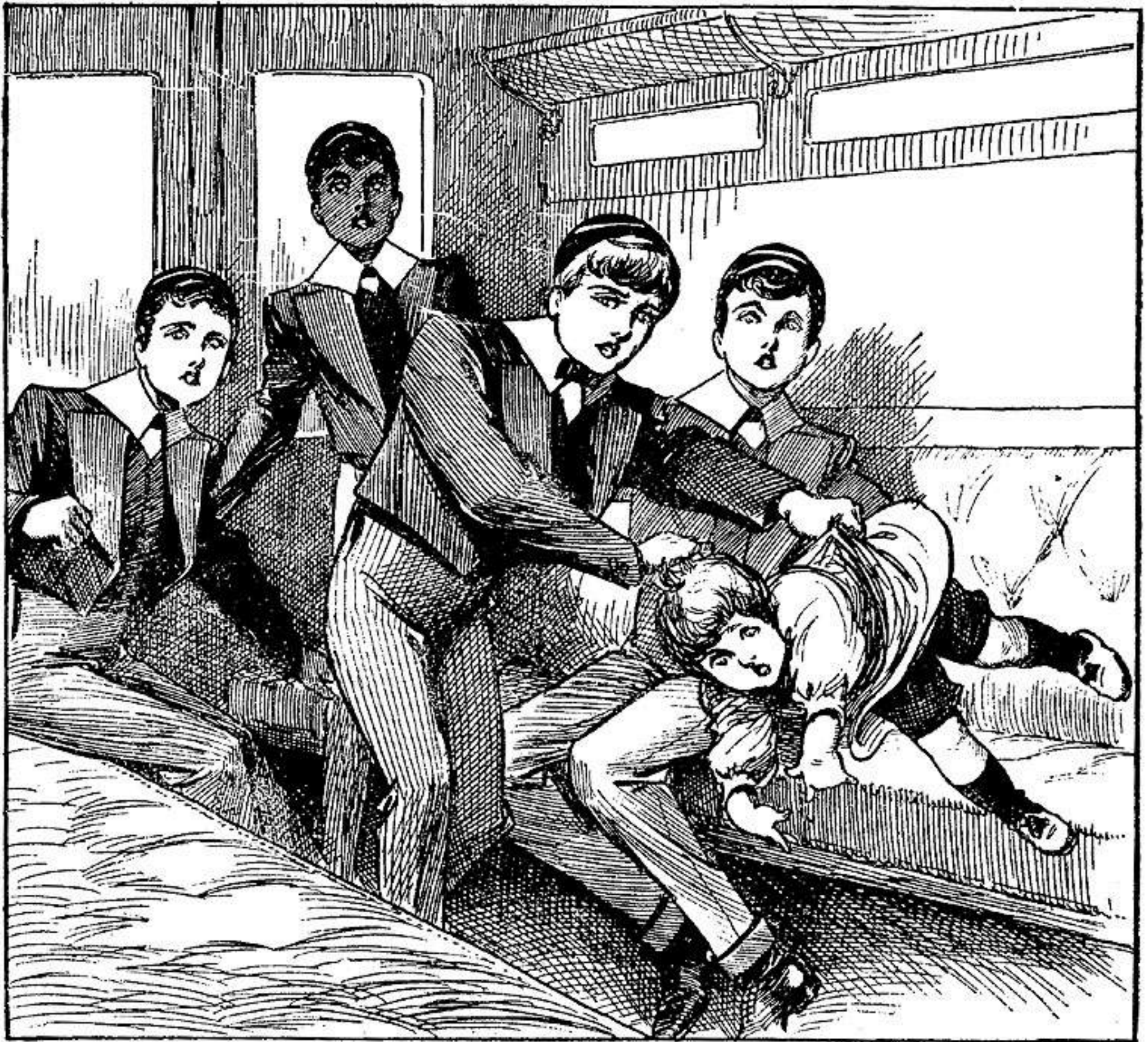
"I want to wash you—make you nice and clean, you know."

"Toddles won't."

"But Toddles must! Nice wash," said Bob Cherry persuasively. "Nicee washee for little kiddy. Come on kiddy-widdy."

"Toddles dirsty."

"Oh, dear, he's thirsty again! Look here, Nugent, you cut off to the school-shop, and see if you can get him a feeding-bottle. That's what he wants. We can't afford to have a jug smashed every time he wets his whistle."



"He's choking!" exclaimed Bob Cherry, noticing that the butter-scotch was no longer in Toddles' chubby hand. "He's swallowed the butter-scotch!"

"Rather not!" said Bob. "That jug was Bulstrode's; but the next one might be ours."

"I say, I don't believe Mrs. Mimble sells feeding-bottles," Nugent murmured. "It stands to reason there's no demand for feeding-bottles at Greyfriars."

"They sell 'em at the tuck shop in the village, so Mrs. Mimble ought to sell 'em here. Anyway, she must have some in the family, as she has children. Go and beg, buy, or borrow one."

"I shall look an awful ass, asking for a feeding-bottle."

"Never mind; it's all for the good of the cause." Wharton was rolling up his sleeves, having taken his jacket off. "Toddles will yell as soon as I begin to wash him, I can see it in his eye."

"Let Bunter go, then."

"No fear," said Billy Bunter, edging towards the door. "You can fetch your own feeding-bottles. Mind, I object to that kid being in the study at all, and if there's a row I wash my hands of it."

"Well, a wash will do 'em good, anyway," said Bob Cherry, looking at Bunter's fat paws, which certainly weren't in the most spick-and-span state. "Look here, I suppose you're hungry, Bunter; you've only eaten twice as much as was good for you to-day."

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"Go and get that feeding-bottle, and take this bob, and stand yourself something to eat."

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"Now you're talking."

"And buck up," said Wharton. "It's no good beginning to wash Toddles till we've got the feeding-bottle. I can see he's going to yell. Bring it as quick as you can, and mind it's full of milk. This will pay for it."

"It's all right; I'll be back in a jiffy."

And Billy Bunter hurried off, with a coin in each hand. There was a delighted grin on his fat face. The chums of the Remove waited for him to return, but ten minutes ticked away and he did not reappear.

Wharton sniffed impatiently.

"Where the dickens has that young bounder got to?"

"My hat! Suppose he's blueing all the tin, and not getting the feeding-bottle at all!" exclaimed Nugent, struck by a sudden thought. "Go after him, Bob, and if he's not getting it, you get it."

"I'm looking after Toddles," said Bob Cherry. "You cut after him, Frank."

Harry Wharton laughed.

"One of you ought to go, quick. It was you forgot to get the book on babies, Frank, so you ought to go and get the feeding-bottle. If we had some first-hand information about washing babies, we might be able to do without the bottle."

"Oh, all right!" said Nugent.

He reluctantly left the study. He reached the little shop, kept within the walls of Greyfriars by Mrs. Mimble, the

gardener's wife. There was quite a crowd of juniors in the shop, and most of them were gathered round Billy Bunter, who was standing at the counter consuming tarts and ginger-beer at a great rate. The juniors were grinning and chuckling, evidently having heard something amusing from Bunter.

Nugent clapped his hand upon the fat junior's shoulder, so suddenly that a glass of ginger-beer went the wrong way, and Bunter began to cough and choke.

"Groo—grough—gerrooooooh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Thump him on the back!"

"Faith, and it's chokin' he is intirely."

"Groo! Gerroooh! Oh, really, Skinner— Groo! Guff-fuff! Groo!"

"It's all right, Billy," said Nugent. "I was coming to see where you were."

"Is it all right, you—you beast?" spluttered Bunter. "I'm—groo—chock-chock-choking! I—I—groo—grough!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I can see anything to cackle at. I'm groo—groo!"

"Where's that tin?" demanded Nugent. "We sent you to buy something, and—"

"I—I'm afraid there isn't any tin left," stammered Bunter. "You see, I felt so faint after bringing those things down from the dorm., that I felt I must have a snack at once. And—and I think the money's all gone."

"You young embezzler—"

"Oh, really Nugent! Of course, this is simply a loan. I shall repay every penny out of the first three pounds I receive from the Patriotic Home Work Association—"

"Oh, ring off!"

"Besides, Mrs. Mimble doesn't sell feed—"

"Shush, you ass!" said Nugent hurriedly. But a roar of laughter from the juniors showed that they already knew all about it.

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Skinner. "They want feeding-bottles in No. 1 Study now. Wharton's taken to a feeding-bottle."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Silly asses!" growled Nugent, with a very red face. "It's for the kid."

"What kid?"

"Do you mean to say Bunter was telling the truth about a kid?"

"Faith, and I saw it meself, darlings."

"How long have you been the father of a family, Nugent?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, shut up!" grunted Nugent. "You make me tired. I say, Mrs. Mimble, can you sell me or lead me a feeding-bottle?"

Mrs. Mimble almost fell upon the floor.

"A—a—a feeding-bottle, Master Nugent?"

"Yes—quick!"

"I—I think there is one in the house," stammered the good dame. "But—but—"

"We're looking after a kid, for—for somebody, for a bit," explained Nugent, with a crimson face. "We want a feeding-bottle to keep it quiet."

"Bless my soul!"

"Will you lend me one?"

"Ye-e-es, certainly," stammered Mrs. Mimble. "I will look for it at once. I am sure I have one somewhere."

And she went into her little parlour. She was gone for five minutes, and during that five minutes Nugent endured a martyrdom. Every fellow in the shop had some remark, more or less humorous, to make, and there was a continual cackle of laughter. Temple, Dabney & Co. of the Upper Fourth come in, and were immediately informed what was the matter, and they joined cheerily in the chipping. Temple proposed a visit in state to No. 1 Study to see the new arrival, and the idea was taken up with enthusiasm. Nugent glared at his tormentors.

"You'd better not do anything of the sort!" he exclaimed. "If any silly asses come nosing round No. 1 Study, they will get hurt."

"Oh, we'll come!" grinned Temple. "Quite an informal visit, of course. You needn't have any cakes or ale."

"Oh, rather!" chuckled Dabney.

"It's a bit piggish not to invite us to the christening, anyway," said Fry. "I don't see why we should be left out."

"You utter ass! The kid's over three years old."

"Ha, ha, ha! Where did you get him? Did it come by post?"

"Or did you win him in a raffle?" asked Ogilvy.

"Oh, go and eat coke!"

"Fancy No. 1 Study taking to baby-farming!" said Skinner. "They'll come under the new law, you know. There'll be an inspector come round—"

No. 67.

"THE MAGNET"
Library, No. 67.

Special!

"THE INVASION OF GREYFRIARS"

By the Pupils of
Cliff House.

**NEXT
WEEK**

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"How long is that bottle going to be, Mrs. Mimble?" bawled Nugent.

"Here it is, Master Nugent," said the dame, re-entering the shop. "I've filled it full of milk for you. I suppose you know how to use it? You put the end—here—in your mouth, and—"

"I'm not going to use it!" roared Nugent, while the juniors shrieked.

"I was only showing you—"

"That's all right. Thanks!"

Nugent grabbed the feeding-bottle and fled. And after him went a crowd of juniors, determined to see the latest addition to No. 1 Study.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

Wharton gets on with the Washing.

NUGENT hurried across the Close, leaving the crowd of juniors behind. The feeding-bottle was in his hand, and his face looked as if nearly all the blood in his body had been pumped into it. As he passed under the shadow of the trees, he paused for a moment with a sudden start. From the shadows a white face was looking at him—a face half hidden by a shawl—but a face he knew.

It was the face of the woman at Linfield—the woman who had sold the child to the Greyfriars juniors.

Nugent gave a sharp cry, and stepped towards the apparition. It vanished into the shadows—and he ran on, but saw no one. The woman, if she was there, had disappeared. Nugent paused and looked round him in bewilderment. The other fellows were overtaking him now.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Skinner. "Have you dropped the feeding-bottle?"

"Did you see someone about here, you chaps?" asked Nugent, without heeding the question. "A woman?"

"No; there wasn't one here."

Nugent hastened on, feeling that he must have been mistaken. It was impossible for the woman of Linfield to be within the walls of Greyfriars. It was fancy that had made him see that pale face in the dim shadows of the Greyfriars elms.

The juniors were at his heels as he hurried up to No. 1 Study. Nugent went in, and politely slammed the door in their faces.

"You've been a jolly long time," said Wharton, looking up.

He had Toddles on his knee, and was showing him his watch to keep him amused. Toddles appeared to be greatly interested in the watch. He wanted to poke a chubby little finger into the works, but Wharton drew the line at that.

"Well, I've got it!" gasped Nugent. "And a nice time I've had. There's a lot of Yahoos outside the study now, wanting to see Toddles."

"Let 'em stay there."

"Ye-es," said Nugent doubtfully; "if they will."

"Now then, Toddles, chappy, we must get his little coat off," said Harry persuasively. "Toddles must have a nice wash."

"Toddles want tick-tick."

"Give him the watch to play with while he's having his bath," said Bob Cherry. "It will keep him quiet."

"What about the watch? Give him the feeding-bottle."

"Here you are, Toddles."

Toddles took the feeding-bottle in his chubby little hands and looked at it. Nugent put the bulb into his mouth, and Toddles promptly ejected it again. Then he suddenly let the bottle drop on the floor, and there was a smash and a spurting of milk.

"Phew!"

Toddles crowed, evidently under the impression that he had done something very clever. The juniors looked at the broken bottle in dismay.

"My hat! You were an ass to give it to him, Frank."

"Why, you told me to."

"Yes, but you should have held it as well. The little bouncer breaks up everything. Now we sha'n't be able to keep him quiet."

"Perhaps he's too old for a feeding-bottle," said Bob Cherry dubiously. "Do you chaps know at what age they give it up?"

"Haven't the faintest idea."

The study door opened, and Skinner looked in.

"What do you want?" roared Nugent.

"Please I've come to see the baby."

Nugent took a stride towards the door, and Skinner promptly vanished. There was a sound of joyous chuckling in the passage.

"Here, let's get on with the washing," said Harry desperately. "We've got our prep. to do to-night, and the time's getting on. The nurse who's had to look after Toddles up to now didn't have a sinecure, I think. Now then, Toddy."

"Toddles want tick-tick."
"You can't have the tick-tick. Toddles is going to have a wash."

"Toddles won't!" roared the cheerful infant. "Toddles want tick-tick!"

"Here, give him my watch," said Bob Cherry. "It's only a nine-and-six gun-metal one, and it won't cost so much to replace as your gold ticker. I'd give a shopful of watches to keep him from howling."

Toddles was certainly not a judge of metals, for he was as pleased with Bob Cherry's big gunmetal watch as with Harry's gold timekeeper. He made Bob open it for him, and he began investigating the works with his forefinger, and was so interested in the new pursuit that he allowed his upper garments to be removed without a struggle.

"I suppose we'd better wash him all over whilst we're about it?" said Harry dubiously.

"Oh, yes, rather; it will save time to-morrow."
"I believe he'll howl as soon as I put him in the water."

"Shove him in all of a sudden before he has time to yell."

"Good!"
Harry stripped off the rest of Toddles' garments, and the boy was plumped into the bath. For a moment he was too surprised for action. Then a terrific yell burst from him that rang along the Remove passage. It was followed by another and another.

"My hat!" exclaimed Harry, stopping his ears.
The door was flung open.

"Look here, are you chaps illtreating your children?" exclaimed Skinner. "Blessed if I don't wire to the S.P.C.C. if you don't treat him better."

"Get out!"
"I can't stand by and see cruelty to children. Come in, you chaps, and see the baby-farmers at work. Isn't it shocking?"

"Horrible!" said Stett. "Wharton's got the tin to adopt this unfortunate child, and now he's going to drown it in a bath. Awful!"

"Better call in the police."
"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Down with the baby-farmers!"
"Ha, ha, ha!"

Wharton dipped the sponge into the bath, and suddenly swung and squeezed it towards the visitors. There was a yell from the Removites as the water drenched over them. Harry sopped the sponge again, but the jokers did not wait for a second dose. They scrambled out of the study in next to no time.

"Lock the door, Frank!"

The door was locked, and the jokers of the Remove continued their remarks through the keyhole, but with Toddles yelling, it was impossible to hear what they said. Wharton, very red and flustered, began to wash Toddles. Toddles resisted tooth and nail. Whether he disliked washing, as was probable, or disliked Wharton's methods, as was still more likely, it was certain that he didn't intend to have that bath if he could help it.

But Wharton was determined. He was going to wash Toddles or know the reason why, and in spite of yelling and kicking and splashing, washed Toddles was!

Harry was in a far from enviable state by that time. He was splashed from head to foot, and so were Nugent and Bob Cherry, who loyally tried to help him. So was nearly everything in the study.

Soap having been liberally plastered all over Toddles, the next thing was to wash it off, and that having been done, Wharton lifted the boy out of the bath, and wrapped towels round him. Toddles was still fighting valiantly.

"My hat!" gasped Bob Cherry. "If it's as much trouble as this to wash him every time, I'm not surprised that his people don't want to keep him."

"I'd—I'd part with him under ten pounds," said Wharton. "Keep still, you little bounder! I'm not going to hurt you!"

"Quiet, little chickity-chick," said Bob Cherry. "Don't make a rowy-wow, kiddy-widdy."

"Yah!" roared Toddles. "Yow! Groo! Boo-hoo! Yow!"

"My only Aunt Selina! What lungs!"
"Boo-hoo! Yow!"

There was a sharp knock at the door, and the conversation at the keyhole ceased. An authoritative voice was heard:

"Open this door!"
"Wingate!" gasped Nugent.

There was no resisting the authority of Wingate, head prefect and captain of the school. Nugent unlocked the door, and Wingate strode in with a very angry face.

No. 67.

Special!

"THE INVASION OF GREYFRIARS"

11

EVERY TUESDAY, The "Magnet" LIBRARY. ONE HALF-PENNY.

"What's all this row about here? Why—what—who—how—"

"It's all right—"

"What's that—a baby?"

"Did you think it was a white rabbit?" demanded Wharton, too worried and excited to be as respectful as usual to the head of the Sixth.

"Wharton! What are you doing with a baby in this study?"

"Drying it."
"I mean what have you been doing?"

"Washing it."
"Take care, Wharton. I must know about this. Where did you get that baby from?"

"We're taking care of it for a bit," said Harry Wharton. "We're not exactly enjoying ourselves over the job, and so you needn't jump on us. We wouldn't have taken it on if we could have helped it."

"But—but—but—"

"Mother poor—going to desert it—we took it provisionally," said Wharton laconically, as he towelled away at the yelling Toddles.

"But—but—but how dare you bring a baby into a junior study?" roared Wingate. "Are you mad?"

"Well, I think I must have been now," admitted Wharton. "I believe half my hair's gone grey. He's a nice little chap in some ways, but in others—"

"You—you've brought a baby here," said Wingate, seemingly dazed. "You must be mad! What do you expect the masters to say?"

"We had Mr. Quelch's permission."
"You—you had his permission? Impossible!"

Wharton shrugged his shoulders.

"I don't mean to say that I doubt your word, Wharton," said Wingate hastily, "but there must be some mistake. Mr. Quelch could never have given his permission knowingly for such a harebrained, idiotic thing."

"I asked him, and I told him after the kid was here. It's all right in that direction, though I admit I was a little bit surprised myself at Mr. Quelch taking it so easily. You can ask him if you like."

"He is gone out at present, but I shall certainly speak to him when he comes in," said Wingate. "I don't understand this. As for that kid—"

"It's all right; he'll be quiet presently."
"For goodness' sake get him quiet as soon as you can."

And the captain of Greyfriars hurriedly left the study and closed the door.

The chums, very red and flustered, exchanged glances.

"We've got a handful, and no mistake!" murmured Nugent.

They had! All the time Wharton was towelling him, Toddles was shrieking and struggling. But it was over at last, and he was dressed again. Then, doubtless, he felt all the better for his bath, for the shrieks died away, and a grin appeared on the wet face.

"Thank goodness!" said Bob Cherry, with a gasp of relief. "I've heard people say that silence is golden, but I never realised how golden it was before."

"See if you can get him to sleep, Bob."

"Well, I suppose you've done your whack," said Bob; and he took the now quiet Toddles from Harry, and rocked him in his arms.

"Mind his head," exclaimed Nugent; "you nearly banged it against the table that time!"

"Hush-a-bye!" said Bob. "Go to sleep, my little piccaninny. I wish I could remember some giddy nursery song. Can you think of one, Nugent?"

"No, I can't."
"I—I think I'll go and change my clothes," said Harry.

"Try to get him to sleep, Bob, and we can leave him here in the armchair while we get our prep. done in somebody else's study."

"Good! I'll manage it."

Wharton was soaked from head to foot. He and Nugent carried the bath of water away—and managed to slop a lot of it over the legs of a crowd of grinning juniors in the passage—and then they changed their things. Meanwhile, Bob Cherry essayed the difficult task of getting Toddles to sleep.

ANSWERS

By the Pupils of
Cliff House.

NEXT
WEEK.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

Where is Toddles?

BOB CHERRY sat in the study armchair with Toddles on his knees. Toddles was quiet, and Bob would have made any sacrifice to keep him so. Bob was too preoccupied to see the grinning faces that were looking in at the door.

"Sing," said Toddles—"oo sing to Toddles."

"What the dickens can I sing to him?" murmured Bob Cherry. "What's the matter with England? is too grown-up for him. 'Bill Bailey' wouldn't do, either. I wish I could remember some giddy nursery song. Lemme see—"

"Oo sing to Toddles."

"Lemme see!" Bob Cherry made desperate efforts to remember some song of his early youth. "It's all right. Don't cry, for goodness' sake! I'll sing." And Bob commenced in a curious falsetto:

"There was a little woman, as I've heard tell,
She went to market her eggs for to sell,
She went to market—to—er—market—"

There Bob stopped. There was a shriek of laughter from the passage, and Bob turned his head, with a very flushed face, to see a crowd of grinning faces at the door.

"Ha, ha, ha!" shrieked Skinner. "There was a little woman, as I've heard tell—"

"She went to market," sobbed Stott, "'her eggs for to sell.'"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, my hat! Go it, Cherry!"

"Second lap, old man!"

"On the ball!"

"Get out!" roared Bob Cherry. "You rotters! I'll come and wipe up the passage with you if you don't clear!"

"Ha, ha, ha! Sing on, sweet bird!"

"Quand tu chantes," giggled Temple, who was very proud of his French—"quand tu chantes, bercece le soir—"

"Get out!"

"Go it, Bobby! Get on with the washing!"

"Oo sing to Toddles. Tell Toddles 'tory.'"

Bob Cherry rose and picked up the poker. The crowd in the doorway vanished. Bob locked the door, and sat down with Toddles again. There was a threatening cloud on Toddles' face, and Bob hastened to avert it by telling the required story.

"Oo tell Toddles 'tory," said the cheerful infant, "den Toddles do seep."

"I wish you would go to sleep, you young beggar!" murmured Bob Cherry. "Fancy my allowing myself to be let in for this!"

"Tell Toddles a 'tory.'"

"Lemme see! Once upon a time—" Bob paused, and Toddles prepared to listen with the keenest possible attention. "Once upon a time there lived a certain man who—who—who—lived at that time. You understand?"

"Es."

"This man had a—a gun—I mean he had a son, and—and his son was a boy. He—he was the boy's father."

"Es."

"There was another chap at the same time who had a son," said Bob Cherry, racking his brains for invention. "His son was named—"

"No," said Toddles.

"Eh! What do you mean?"

"Odder man had a dirl."

Bob Cherry scratched his head.

"The other man had a girl, had he? Look here, who's telling this story, kid—you or I?"

"Odder man had dirl," repeated Toddles firmly. He had evidently got Bob Cherry's story mixed up with some story previously related to him, and he was convinced that Bob was wrong, and that the other man indeed had a daughter, and not a son.

"Well, just as you like," said Bob Cherry. "The other man had a girl, who was named Jack—I mean Sally."

Toddles shook his head vigorously.

"Dirl's name was Jane," he said.

"Perhaps you'd better tell the story," suggested Bob.

"Do on," said Toddles imperatively, "tell 'tory."

"Well, this girl's name was Jane, and—and—and she was—was a girl. She used to play at butterscotch—I mean at hopscotch—with the—the other chap."

"Toddles seepy."

"Thank goodness for that!"

"Sing Toddles seep."

"Oh, dear! Go to sleep, my little piccaninny, underneath No. 67."

"THE MAGNET"
Library, No. 67.

Special! "THE INVASION OF GREYFRIARS" By the Pupils of Cliff House. **NEXT WEEK**

de silver southern moon," chanted Bob Cherry softly, heedless of a giggle at the keyhole. "Hush-a-by, baby, on the tree-top, when the bough breaks down you will flop. My only summer hat, he's asleep! Thank goodness!"

Toddles was fast asleep.

Bob Cherry laid him softly in the armchair, with his head on a cushion, and covered a jacket over him. He looked round the study. The fire was out, so there was no danger in leaving Toddles there. He unlocked the door and went quietly out.

"Now, you chaps, you've had your fun, and you can clear," he said. "The kid's asleep, and he oughtn't to be woke up."

"Faith, and ye're right! Is it a nursery-maid ye're going to be when ye're grown up, Bobby darling?"

"Clear off, all of you!"

The juniors chuckled and cleared off. Bob Cherry went in search of his chums. Glad enough were Wharton and Nugent to hear that the child was fast asleep. The evening was growing old, and they had little time to get their preparation done before bedtime.

"I'll take just a peep at Toddles, and get the books out of the study," said Harry. "We'll do our prep. in Linley's study; he won't mind."

Linley, the Lancashire lad, was alone in his study when the chums arrived there. His study-mates, Russell and Lacy and the Chinese boy, Wun Lung, were downstairs. He greeted the Removites with his usual cheerful smile, and willingly gave up his table. Hurree Singh joined his chums in Linley's study, and the preparation went on peacefully. There was no sound from Toddles.

"We should hear him in this study if he cried," Wharton remarked. "It's all right; he hasn't made a sound so far."

"I'll go and have a look at him for you, if you like," said Mark Linley. "I've done my prep. long ago."

"Thanks, you might, if you don't mind."

Linley nodded, and went up the Remove passage. He came back in a couple of minutes with a serious face.

"The kid's not in your study!"

"What!" Harry jumped up.

"He's not there."

"Great Scott!"

Leaving the unfinished prep., the Famous Four dashed along the passage, and rushed hastily into No. 1 Study.

Linley's news was true—Toddles was gone!

There was a deep indentation in the armchair where his plump form had reposed, and the jacket that had covered him was lying on the hearthrug. The chair was still warm, as if he had been lately there.

But Toddles had vanished!

The chums of the Remove stared at the empty armchair, stared round the study, and stared at one another blankly.

It was pretty clear that Toddles had woke up, and finding himself alone, had wandered out of the study.

No doubt he had commenced a tour of investigation, and whither it might have led him the juniors could only surmise.

"Well, he's gone!" said Bob Cherry.

"The gonefulness is terrific."

"The little boulder!" said Harry Wharton, vexed and perplexed. "I naturally thought that he would begin to yell as soon as he woke up. He led us to expect it. Now, where can he be?"

"We'd better look, and jolly sharp. If he rolled downstairs he might break some of his bones, you know."

"And if he got into a master's study—"

"Come on!" said Wharton abruptly. "Lend a hand, will you, Linley?"

"Yes, certainly."

They hurried out in search of Toddles. Preparation had to be left—it might mean an argument with Mr. Quelch in the morning—but Toddles had to be found.

Where was Toddles?

The Greyfriars juniors had done some boy scouting in their time, and they might have been able to track Toddles through a wood, but to track him down stone passages, over worn linoleum, and down carpeted stairs, was a task that might have baffled Buffalo Bill. Bob Cherry uttered an exclamation as he caught sight of a little shoe lying on the stairs.

"He's been this way!"

"He's gone downstairs," said Wharton. "Well, he can't have fallen, or we should have heard something of it."

"The hearfulness would have been terrific."

They went downstairs. They separated in the lower passages, to look in various directions for the missing youngster. Harry Wharton went in the direction of the Head's study. The door of that sacred apartment was open, and the light streaming out into the passage, and it was quite possible that Toddles, in the course of his explorations, might have arrived there. If so, it was Wharton's business to recapture him before the Head came back. The

open door showed that Dr. Locke had left his room for something.

The sound of a childish chuckle in the room confirmed Wharton's fears as he hurried towards the open door. He looked in, and gave a start.

Toddles was there!

He had clambered upon the chair at the doctor's writing-table, and was busily engaged now in emptying the inkpot over a heap of papers. He was too deeply engrossed in this important task to see Wharton's horrified face at the door.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER

Toddles' Mother.

"TODDLES!"

Wharton almost whispered the word. The child did not look up. He emptied out the last drop of ink, and let the inkpot fall to the floor. There was a cracking of glass.

"Toddles!"

Harry did not want to enter the study. He had no desire for the Head to find him there with Toddles if he came back suddenly. But Toddles evidently did not intend to come to the door. He looked at Harry and chuckled, and began sweeping the inky papers off the desk to the floor.

Harry ran into the room, and picked him off the chair.

"Come on, Toddy, old boy!"

"Yow! Toddles won't! Do away! Booh!"

"My dear kid, you must come! I—"

Toddles kicked and screamed.

"Bless my soul! What is this?"

Two forms in gowns had suddenly appeared at the open door of the study. Dr. Locke and Mr. Quelch looked in, in blank amazement.

Wharton, with the kicking child in his arms, stood looking at them, dumbfounded. He had entered the Head's study without permission, and he thought of the ruined papers lying on the floor. Fortunately, Toddles seemed a little awed by the aspect of the two masters, and he ceased to kick, and became silent, looking at the Head curiously with his big, round eyes.

"Wharton, what does this mean?"

"I—I—I—"

"Explain yourself at once! What are you doing in my study, and where did that child come from? Explain yourself."

"I—I came to fetch him, sir. He—he was pouring the ink over the papers, and I thought I'd stop him, sir. That's why I came in."

"Ah, I see! Fortunately, they are only old examination papers I had taken out for reference," said the Head; and Wharton felt a weight lifted from his mind. "It was very right of you, Wharton, to stop him; he might have done serious damage. I am sorry I spoke sharply. But—but where did the child come from? I have never seen it before. Whose is it?"

"It's mine, sir," said Wharton. "I—I—I mean, I bought it."

The Head almost jumped.

"You—you bought it, Wharton?"

"Yes, sir."

The Head closed the door, and crossed to his desk and sat down. There was a portentous frown upon his face. Mr. Quelch was looking blankly amazed. Wharton drew a deep breath; he felt that the crucial moment was coming.

"Now, Wharton," said the Head quietly, "kindly explain yourself. What do you mean by saying that you bought that child?"

Wharton, with a beating heart, but calmly and quietly, told of the journey to Linfield. The Head listened with a set brow.

"Wharton, I suppose I ought to commend so much kindness of heart, but—but to venture to bring a child into the school without asking permission, even—"

"I asked Mr. Quelch, sir. He will tell you so."

The Remove-master stared.

"You asked me, Wharton? That you certainly did not!"

Wharton started in his turn.

"Yes, sir; don't you remember?"

"I certainly do not remember your asking permission to bring a child into the school," exclaimed the Remove-master. "The whole affair is—is amazing, but I must say that that statement is the most amazing of all. I need not assure Dr. Locke that if you had asked my permission, I should have refused it instantly."

Wharton flushed scarlet.

"But you did give permission, sir."

"Wharton!"

"You did, sir; and when I told you he was here, you didn't say anything against it."

"You told me the child was here?"

"Yes, sir."

"You must be dreaming!" said Mr. Quelch, in wonder. "I know you never speak falsely, Wharton, so I can only conclude that you are under a most amazing delusion."

Special I

"THE INVASION OF GREYFRIARS"

By the Pupils of
Cliff House.

**NEXT
WEEK.**

EVERY TUESDAY, The "Magnet" LIBRARY. ONE HALFPENNY.

"One moment," said Dr. Locke; "there is some misunderstanding. When did you tell Mr. Quelch about this child, Wharton, and ask his permission?"

"It was about tea-time, sir. I asked him for a pass to go to Linfield to get the youngster."

"What, Wharton? Take care what you say. You asked me for a pass to go to Linfield to buy a kid."

"Yes, sir; this is the kid."

"That—that is the kid!" said Mr. Quelch dazedly. "That is a human being. What do you mean by saying that it is a kid?"

Wharton stared at him, and then, as the truth of the absurd mistake burst upon him, he could not restrain a chuckle.

"Oh, sir, I—I—"

"You told me," said Mr. Quelch sternly, "that you wished to purchase a kid. I of course thought you were referring to a young goat, which you wished to keep as a pet at Greyfriars. When I met you in the passage, and you told me you had given ten pounds for the kid, I—"

"Ha, ha! I'm sorry, sir, but—but it is funny! When I said kid, I meant this kind of kid, sir, not a young goat."

Dr. Locke was coughing violently. Mr. Quelch turned to him somewhat excitedly.

"You see, sir! You will recognise that it was impossible for me to guess that Wharton intended to bring a child to Greyfriars! I naturally concluded that he was going to buy an animal pet, which I thought it probable you would allow him to keep at the school."

The doctor wiped his glasses.

"Ha, ha, ha— I mean, yes, indeed, Mr. Quelch! It is perfectly clear! A—ha, ha!—excuse me—a most absurd mistake! I am sure Wharton acted in perfect good faith in the matter."

Mr. Quelch sniffed a little.

"I suppose so, sir. But I may say that he was stupid. The absurdity of supposing that I should allow him to bring a child into the school!"

"Well, I was a little surprised, sir!"

"I should imagine so!" said Mr. Quelch emphatically—"I should imagine so! However, now that matter is settled, it remains to be decided what is to be done with the child."

"Toddles seepy."

The Head smiled.

"Yes, it will be impossible for the child to remain here," he said. "I must say, Wharton, that you and your friends have been—er—extremely quixotic in this matter, and—ah—deserving of punishment. However, I will excuse your absurd actions on account of your good motives. At the same time, something must be done with the child—" He broke off as there was a rap at the door. "Dear me! Come in!"

The door opened, and Gosling, the porter, appeared. He had a tight grip upon the arm of a white-faced, poorly-clad woman, who was trembling with affright, and whose eyes were wet with tears. Harry started as he saw her—he recognised the woman of Linfield.

Dr. Locke rose to his feet.

"Dear me! What is this—what does this mean?"

"Skuse me, sir!" said Gosling importantly. "'Skuse me, Mr. Quelch, sir! I found this—this pusson, sir, a-loiterin' in the Close, sir, and she refused to give no account of 'erself, sir. Frequenting with felonious intent, sir, that's wot it is. Wot I says is this 'ere, will you telephone for the police, sir?"

"Oh, let me go!" gasped the woman. "Indeed, sir—indeed I am no thief! I—I came to—to— Oh, pity me!"

"That's it!" said Gosling. "That's all the account she gives of 'erself! Wot I says is this 'ere—"

"You may go, Gosling!"

Gosling started.

"Ain't you goin' to telephone for the police, sir?"

"Certainly not! You may go!"

Gosling growled under his breath, but the Head's tone was sharp, and he dared not linger. He went out and closed the door. Mr. Quelch quietly placed a chair for the woman, who sank into it, weeping.

"Now, my poor creature, explain yourself," said the Head quietly. "I am quite sure, from your appearance, that you are no thief. But what are you doing in the school?"

"Oh, sir, I am sorry; but—but—but I couldn't go without seeing him once more!"

The Head looked puzzled.

"Seeing whom?"

"My child."

"It is Toddles's mother, sir," said Harry Wharton.

"Oh, I understand!" Both the doctor and the Remove-master looked hard at the weeping woman. "It appears,"

said the Head severely, "that you parted with this child for a sum of money—"

"Yes, sir," said the woman, with a sob.

"And yet you wish to see him again!"

"You—you don't know all, sir." She checked her tears. "I didn't know what to do, sir, when I put that advertisement in the paper—the advertisement this young gentleman saw, bless his kind heart! My husband has been away for two years in Australia, sir. He used to send me money that I kept my boy at school with; but now he's had an accident in a mine at Broken Hill, and he's laid up and helpless.

"Just at the same time my child was sent home to me from the school, because the fees had not been paid for some time. He had always had enough to eat, at least, there; but he came to me, who had nothing. What could I do? I wanted the money to pay my fare out to my husband, sir. I wanted to nurse him there. And I couldn't take the child. I had no money. But I was crazy to think that I could leave him behind!

"I—I let this young gentleman take him, and then—then I felt that I couldn't leave him. I—I thought I'd just come to take a look at him, and—and I don't know what I meant. Perhaps I should have taken him, though I couldn't return the lad his money. I don't know what I should have done. I've walked all the way from Linfield; but—but your porter was wrong in thinking I wished to steal anything, sir. I only came in to see Toddles once more before I—I went away."

The Head blew his nose violently.

"My poor soul, I—I really—" He paused. "It would be impossible, in any case, for the child to remain at Greyfriars."

"Toddles scopy."

The woman held out her arms. Wharton placed the boy there. She clasped him to her bosom, and Toddles contentedly went to sleep there.

Dr. Locke and the Remove-master exchanged glances.

"I—I really cannot think what should be done!" murmured the Head. "My dear woman, I—I think perhaps we can help you. Perhaps some money can be found to enable

you to go out to your husband, and to take the child with you."

"Oh, sir!"

"We will see. In fact, I—I think I can promise as much," said the Head. "It is a very hard case, and—and I think something should be done. Mr. Quelch, I think we shall be able to arrange this." And the Head coughed again. Mr. Quelch nodded.

"Yes, sir; I quite approve of the idea."

"Very good! I will—er—ask Mrs. Locke to look after this poor woman for the present. You may go, Wharton."

Harry Wharton left the study.

His friends were waiting for him in the passage, and they were eager to know what had happened. Wharton explained, and there was satisfaction on every face.

"The Head's a brick!" said Bob Cherry emphatically—"a real brick! The kid will be all right now. He's a jolly little chap, but I can't say I shall be sorry to have him out of No. 1 Study."

"Same here," said Nugent. "I've had enough of buying feeding-bottles and things!"

"And I must say I've had enough of bathing infants," said Wharton. "I'm jolly glad Toddles is going with his mother."

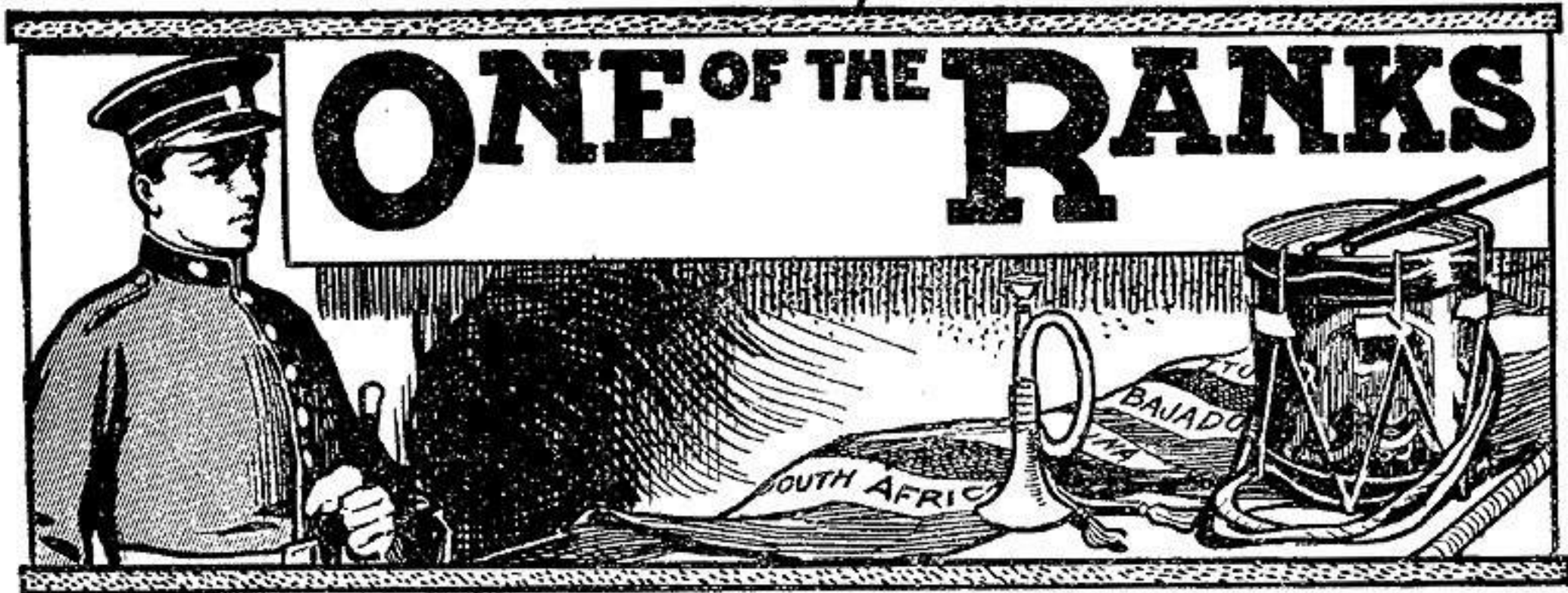
"The gladfulness is terrific. I shall now be able to re-enter my esteemed quarters again," murmured the Nabob of Bhanipur. "The esteemed Toddles is very charming, but his presence in the study causes the excludfulness of my worthy self."

The next morning Toddles and his mother left Greyfriars. The juniors did not know the details, but they knew that Mrs. Gorder was going out to join her husband, and taking the child with her. Marjorie called later in the day to see how Toddles was getting on, but she came too late to see the pet of Greyfriars.

THE END.

(Another splendid tale of the boys of Greyfriars and the pupils of Cliff House next Tuesday, entitled "The Invasion of Greyfriars." Order your copy of *The "Magnet" Library* in advance. Price One Halfpenny.)

The Opening Chapters of a Grand Story.



A Splendid Tale of Life in the British Army.

A BRIEF RESUMÉ OF THE FIRST CHAPTERS.

Ronald Chenys, a cadet in his last term at Sandhurst, is ACCUSED OF CHEATING

in an exam., the professor in charge finding a paper of his skeleton notes on the floor by his desk. He is sent to his room under arrest, pending his

EXPULSION.

On going to his desk, where he had put his skeleton notes, Ronald finds it has been forced. Private Slaney, the soldier-servant of Ian Chenys, Ronald's half-brother, comes to Ronald, and, showing him the half of one of Ian's cuff-links, says he found it in Ronald's room, and offers to sell this proof of Ian's guilt. Ronald kicks the black-mailing Slaney out of the room, and, packing up a few necessaries, leaves Sandhurst that night with his dog Rough. He walks to London, where he falls in with Colour-Sergeant Duffy, of the Royal North Wessex Regiment, who conducts him to St. George's Barracks for enlistment. Ronald tells the sergeant that he has failed at Sandhurst, but is determined to be a soldier nevertheless.

(Now go on with the story.)

"You've Passed!"

"That's well said, young 'un," cried Duffy, "and I wish you luck! There's no need, I can see, to gammon you with yarns about the glories of a soldier's life, and you'd only think me a fool if I tried."

"But there's good scope, all the same, in the rank and file for smart young chaps of your stamp—chaps who'll knuckle down to the life and win their way. You'll find it a rough life, and it may take a lot of sticking, after what you've been used to; but set your teeth and hang on. Keep steady and straight, and there's no knowing how high you may go. As for Sandhurst—"

Duffy hesitated awkwardly, but, catching Ronald's eye, he judged that he need have no hesitation in having his say.

"A gentleman ranker," he began again, approaching the tender point in another way, "is a gentleman because he can't help it. His chummies in the barrack-room will see that soon enough, but they prefer to find it out for themselves. As for Sandhurst—take my advice and say nothing about it."

No. 67.

"THE MAGNET" Library, No. 67.

Special!

"THE INVASION OF GREYFRIARS" By the Pupils of Cliff House.

NEXT WEEK

"That's just my wish," answered Ronald.
 "Then I've given no offence," said the colour-sergeant.
 "Not one bit. Honestly, nothing will please me better than to start life as plain Tommy Atkins, and remain such to the end of my service."
 "Then come on and start now," said Duffy, picking up one of a score of blue printed forms scattered along a wall-desk which ran round two sides of the room.

There are twelve questions which an intending recruit has to answer in the Form of Attestation, and they range from his name and place of birth, to a demand to know whether he has ever been in prison.

To the first Ronald wrote Ronald Chester, and thus added himself to the legion which, for reasons best known to itself, elects to serve its country under names not to be found on its birth-certificates.

Ronald's reason was a good one. The ancient name he bore had been smirched, through no fault of his own, and until the stain could be removed he determined to lay it by and sail under plainer colours.

"That's all right, then," said the recruiting-sergeant, as Ronald signed his new name to the document and handed it over. "Now, if you follow me, I'll show you where you have got to take your tub, and then you'll have to go before the doctor."

Crossing the square they entered one of the barrack-buildings opposite, and Ronald found himself in a long, old-fashioned room set out with rows of forms. This was the receiving-room. It was really not unlike a village school, with the scholars all away. So Ronald thought as he helped himself to a seat.

It was early yet. The business of the day had scarcely commenced, and the only other occupant of the room was a man in civilian clothes, busily writing at a table.

With a cheery nod Duffy withdrew.
 "Now then, come along there, you!"
 Ronald turned, to see a thin young man in a blue uniform of sorts, glaring at him through a doorway. He looked snappy and red-eyed, and he held a skimpy, blue bundle in his hands.

"Here, take this," he said peevishly. "An' just 'urry up about it!"

"Hurry up what?" asked Ronald, catching the bundle.
 "'Urry and get undressed, o' course!" snapped the attendant. "Didn't they tell you you'd got to have a bath? Look sharp!"

Ronald was nothing loth. Two days on the road, and two nights spent in hayricks and ditches, made the prospect of a tub enticing. He was not long in getting out of his dusty clothes, and leaving these, together with his modest bundle, in the attendant's charge, he donned his blue bath-gown, and was told that he would find the baths at the "other end, along the passage to the right."

And very excellent baths they were, too. Far different from the tubs of filthy, cold water which did similar duty in the old days of St. George's.

A good rub down, and then back into his blue gown again, and away to pass the doctor. This officer of the Royal Army Medical Corps received him with an approving grunt. It was not always that he had such a fine, clean-run specimen of young manhood sent for his inspection.

Ronald's examination was none the less severe on this account, though not more searching than the one he had had to pass for entrance into Sandhurst.

After hopping and bending, breathing and stretching, and being prodded and sounded from head to heel, he was told to get back into his bath-robe and go.

"You've passed," said the officer curtly, as he moved to the door.

In five minutes Ronald was dressed and out in the square, where he found the colour-sergeant waiting him anxiously.

New Chums—A Pair of Beauties—Ronald Has a Rough and Tumble.

"Passed, eh?" exclaimed Colour-Sergeant Duffy, whom he found awaiting him outside. "Well, I hadn't much doubt about you going through all right. Now you'll have to wait until there's a batch ready to be sworn in, and then you'll be a full-blown recruit. But first I'll show you round the quarters, and then I must be off back to duty. This place in here is the canteen, where you can dine for tuppence, and bust yourself for a bob."

Ronald regarded this institution with becoming awe. It was not unlike an ordinary coffee-shop, with rows of small tables and a bar at one side where food was served.

At one end was a patent target-machine, to which an ordinary Service rifle was attached for the amusement of budding marksmen.

In another building he was introduced to the recreation-room, where a number of lads, already enlisted, were wiling away the time playing bagatelle, or lounging in well-worn armchairs reading the papers.

No. 67.

Altogether the lot of the new "rookie" at St. George's Barracks is pleasant enough. There are no drills and no duties, for the only trained soldiers are the guard, sent daily from one of the London barracks. So that the young Tommy Atkins for the few hours or days he is quartered there, while waiting for a draft to be made up for his regimental depot, leads the life of a gentleman of leisure.

He is free to loaf all day and spend his money as he pleases, for he draws his pay from the hour he enlists. A little later he wakes up to the fact that a soldier's life is not all beer and skittles, and if he is a wise man he will realise that this is a good thing, too.

Willy-nilly, the Army is going to make a man of him. If he submits with a cheerful heart, so much the easier for him, but if he sets his back up and tries to kick, his way is going to be uncommonly hard.

Born a soldier's son, and living all his life shoulder to shoulder with Tommy Atkins, Ronald was interested to see what the rough material was like from which the British soldier, clean, well set up, alert and active in mind and body, was made.

At the bagatelle-board, smoking rank "fags," and accompanying each stroke with a raw, senseless oath, were two young roughs of the London alleys. They were each about nineteen, and looked as hard as bags of nails.

Their opponents were lads who might have been respectable artisans out of a job. They were having a tough time of it with the two hooligans, but were keeping their tongues between their teeth and paying up their losses with the best possible grace.

One young fellow, with a lump on his jaw and a bad limp from a kick on the ankle, had already demonstrated to their satisfaction and his own that these two Cockney bruisers were best left unruffled.

"Hit one, fight both," was their motto, and they were prepared to back it with fist, belt, and boot.

In an armchair, frayed and greasy with the rubbing of many heads, sat another youngster of eighteen, gazing out miserably on the barrack-square. He looked well set up, but slender, and there was something about his face which marked him at once in his coarse, loutish surroundings.

"That's the chap," murmured Colour-Sergeant Duffy, jerking his thumb in that direction.

"Whom do you mean?"
 "The lad the old gal's cryin' about. 'Listed him yesterday. He's going with your draft to the Wessex. By the way, you're due to march out at three o'clock, so you won't be kicking your heels long in this place."

"Those two beauties over there"—pointing out the brace of Cockneys—"are for our lot, too, and by the look of 'em they're going to be a pretty tough handful before we've done with 'em. It's a good thing for them, p'raps, and for you, too, that you're going straight to the battalion instead of to the depot."

This was certainly good news to Ronald, for the depot to which recruits are almost invariably sent, means six months of weary drill and preliminary mothering. By joining their battalion direct they would escape this, and start real soldiering from the commencement.

Moreover, they would only do three months' recruit-drill instead of nine, for the half-fledged soldiers from the depot are always treated to a further three months' hard training "on the square" before they are passed into the ranks.

"You see," said Duffy, in explanation to this stroke of good luck, "the regiment's up to full strength now, and it's no good sending you few odd chaps to the depot alone, so they're bunging you straight into the second battalion, at Dunchester. You'll find it come a bit harder, p'raps, but that won't hurt a chap like you."

Ronald flushed a shade under this compliment.
 "Well, so long for the present," said Duffy. "Don't forget to parade at twelve to be 'sworn in,' and I'll see you again at three when you march off."

The colour-sergeant strode off, and Ronald turned round to take stock of the group watching the bagatelle players. They were, for the most part, hobbledchoy out-of-works, with long-peaked caps pulled well down over their restless eyes, and knotted handkerchiefs of dingy hues encircling their not-over-clean necks.

All seemed a little subdued by their surroundings, though occasionally some extra brazen piece of sharp practice on the part of the two Cockney hooligans would draw a hoarse laugh of half admiration.

The game was won at last, apparently to the equal satisfaction of both sides. For the handicap of having the cue jogged just as one is about to take a stroke, and the bagatelle-board badly tilted by your opponent whenever the ball threatens to roll into a cup, is apt to be oppressive.

The losers might have been inclined to resent these

pleasantries if they had not witnessed the fate of the young man now nursing a swollen jaw and contused ankle.

In the light of his experience they played out the game 'n dogged silence, and flung their cues down with a crash to signify "Enough!"

"'Allo, 'allo! You ain't gettin' narsty about it, are yer?" demanded one of the roughs, with an ugly laugh. "Come on, and 'ave just one more, and no larks this time. Oh, you won't, won't yer? Well, you blessed well pay up then, and no 'ank about it! That's right, and a good job you've done it!"—as a few halfpennies were flung to them in disgust. "Now then, next gentleman, please! Anyone want to try their luck for a tizzie agin the champion bagatellites of the British Army?"

This challenge was received with diplomatic laughter, but there were no takers.

"'Ow about old Waterworks in the armchair over there?" said one. "Pr'aps 'e'd like to come an' take a 'and with a cue? Arst 'im, George."

"Garn, 'im!" retorted George, with withering contempt. "'E's still cryin' 'is peepers out for 'is mummy. Saw the old geezer get chucked out by the corporal just now. Tryin' to get in after 'er limpin' little, lopsided lamb. Look at 'im now! Ain't 'e a picture?"

The youngster in the armchair by the window had risen bolt upright under these insults at his poor mother. He stood with fists clenched and eyes blazing with white-hot fury, and the blood flowing and ebbing in a crimson tide beneath his fair skin.

The two hooligans viewed him with a challenging grin of contempt, and now that bagatelle was played out, seemed bent on goading him on to share the fate of their former victim.

"I'd just like to see my old woman come arter me like that; I'd learn 'er better!" sneered George, with a coarse oath.

"I can quite believe that," said a quiet voice at his elbow, which made him swing round.

He found himself scowling up into a pair of steady, hard, grey eyes, which surveyed him with cold contempt.

"'Allo?" he jeered, half taken aback for the instant. "Just look 'ere, Alf, at what's blown in whilst we wasn't lookin'!"

"Somethin' wot's crawled out of the dustbin, ain't it?" suggested Alf. "Thought there was a smell of old gorgonzola about the room. Tread on it, George, and kill it. It won't bite yer!"

There was a roar of laughter at this piece of coarse bludgeoning, but Ronald's eyes never wavered a hair's breadth.

The Chenys temper isn't a thing to be unshackled in a hurry. Once loose, there is no knowing where it is going to stop. So Ronald bit hard on his wrath, and kept his clenched fists in his pockets. He had no wish, anyway, to start his new career with a barrack brawl before he was even enlisted.

"Well, Features," demanded George, beginning to bridle under Ronald's galling gaze, "wot are yer lookin' for? Trouble?"

"Perhaps," was the steady answer. "But I don't see any."

"Oh, you don't, don't yer?" snarled the rough, firing up, and beginning to crawl out of his ragged jacket. "Just 'old on fer 'arf a tick, an' I'll shove a fistful right under yer eyes. We'll teach 'im to get pushin' 'is way into other people's business, won't we, Alf?"

Alf thoroughly endorsed this threat, and flung chairs clear of the scene of action with terrible bravado.

"Look here, this is my quarrel," said the youth they had dubbed "Waterworks" suddenly. But there was a shake in his voice which showed that he fully realised the odds against him.

The appearance of the two

blackguards, rolling up their shirtsleeves and unwinding Belcher neckerchiefs ready for the fray, might well have struck cold dread into a bigger and brawnier man, even though he quivered under the base and wanton insults which had just been flung.

"This is my quarrel," gasped Waterworks again bravely. "You mustn't be let in for this."

Ronald had not time to push him aside to avoid the catapultlike rush, which he could see George was meditating and masking under the elaborate tucking-up of his shirt-sleeves.

Suddenly, with a whiplike lash of his left fist, George smote the youngster clean between the eyes. Back he recoiled against the wall, driven by the sheer impetus of the blow, then down he went like a doubled-up sack.

A choking cry, half of wonder, half of scorn, greeted this treacherous onslaught. George had sprung back with the light footwork of a skilled boxer, and now stood with lowered fists, and lips muttering lurid curses, gazing at his handiwork.

It was a clean blow, clean as a die, and fast as the kick of a racehorse, and he was proud of it. With luck he would settle his other opponent with equal cunning and swiftness.

He was hoping that Ronald might avail himself of his apparent lack of vigilance to attempt to strip off his jacket.

George's intention, then, was to catch him in the middle of this operation; a favourite moment of attack with him, for, with a foe's arms entangled in the sleeves, much smart work can be put in, and, indeed, quite enough to finish the fight before it is begun.

Ronald, however, was too old a hand to be thus caught napping. By the time George had realised this, and Alf had wound the end of his brass-mounted belt round his fist ready for a swiping cut at the first opportunity, their brave opponent was on guard ready for battle.

Ronald knew that he was in for an exceptionally tough and vicious tussle, and he was prepared to sell his head dearly. He was fully aware, though, that he was making a precious bad beginning in his new career.

Still, if only for the sake of the weeping woman at the gate, this boy stretched senseless along the wainscoting must be avenged.

For five heart-beats there was stillness in the room. Then, like the bursting of a squall, the two hooligans leapt simultaneously at Ronald's throat.

The great brass belt-buckle was the thing he feared. He saw it glint, and heard it hum through the air, even as

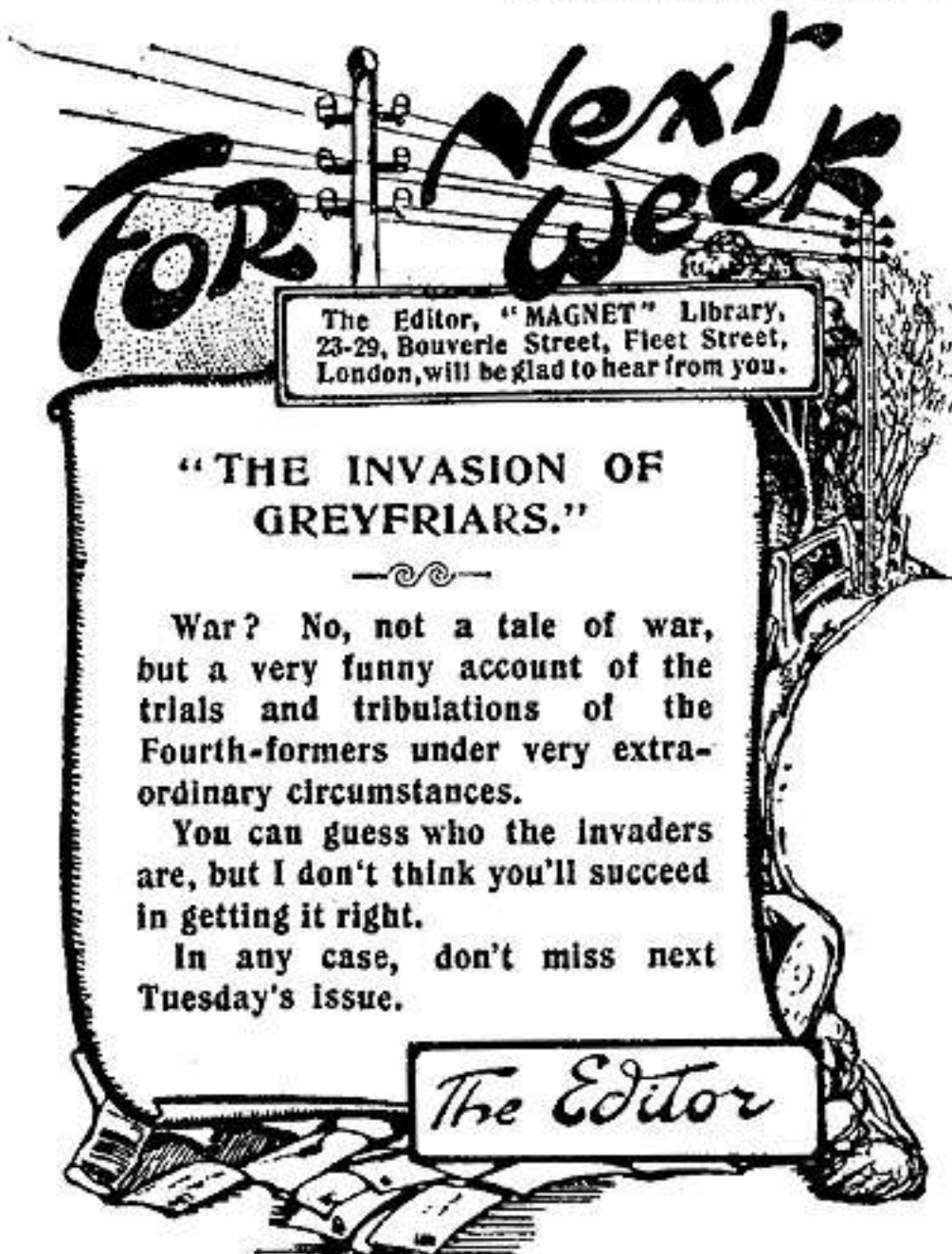
George butted at him head downwards. In another twinkling he would have been cut down as senseless as poor Waterworks beside him, but he dodged the four-ounce buckle, and heard it crunch and star the plaster behind him.

At the same instant he lunged upwards with his knee, and countered the bullet-head now almost in his stomach with a thud like a pile-driver. A left hook on the ruffian's jaw assisted to divert his charge, and sent him crashing, bewildered, and half stunned into the empty grate.

Then Alf, half over-balanced by the force of his own blow, half stumbling over his fallen pal, drove his muzzle straight on to Ronald's right fist, and he went down, too.

Just then the door opened. A tall, soldierly gentleman in mufti entered, accompanied by a sergeant, and stood surveying the scene with angry amazement.

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