

THE BARRING OF BULSTRODE.

THE

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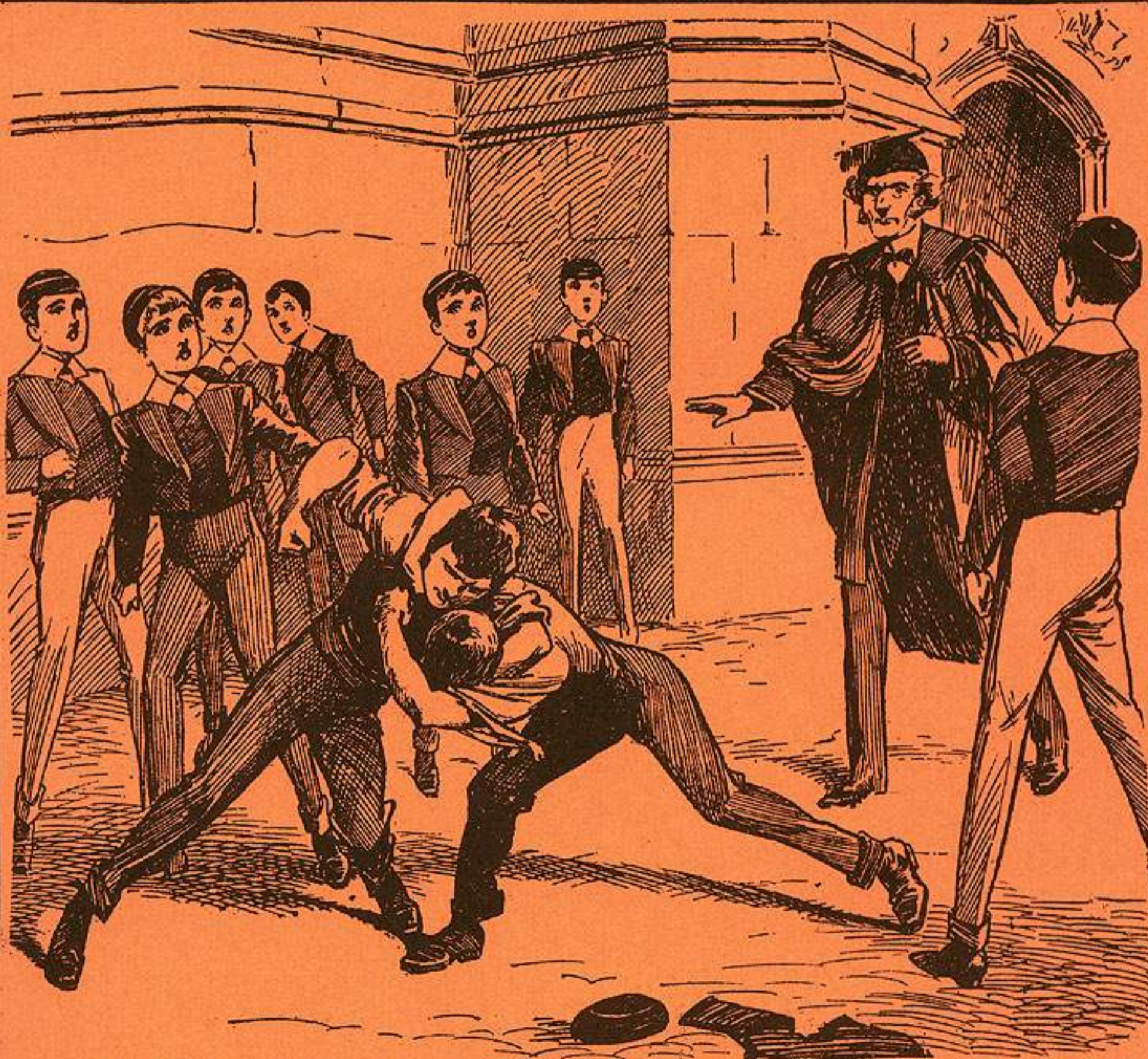
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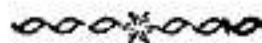
The Backing of Bulstrode



A Tale of the Chums of Greyfriars.

— BY —

FRANK RICHARDS.



THE FIRST CHAPTER. Trouble

“LOOK out for squalls!”

Frank Nugent whispered the words as the Remove entered the Form-room at Greyfriars for morning lessons.

It was a bright, sunny, summer morning, and the old worn room looked more cheerful than usual. The sunlight, streaming in at the high windows, made the varnished maps gleam on the walls. The juniors, fresh in from the wide, green Close, were mostly in cheery spirits, which became subdued as they caught sight of their Form-master's face.

Mr. Quelch, the master of the Remove, was standing by his desk. The Form-master had a somewhat severe countenance at any time. Now it was clouded over so darkly that it did not need Nugent's whispered warning to put the Remove on their guard.

There was something wrong with Quelch. So much was evident at a glance, and the juniors wondered whether there was a storm coming—and when it would burst—and upon whose devoted head.

The Form filed to their places in chilly silence.

Mr. Quelch watched them without speaking a word, but his eyes—which irreverent juniors had compared to gimlets—seemed to see right through them, as Bob Cherry observed in a confidential whisper to Harry Wharton. The next moment he repented that whisper. Mr. Quelch's voice rapped out sharply.

“Cherry!”

Bob gave a jump.

“Yes, sir.”

“You ass,” murmured Nugent, “I warned you to look out for squalls, and now you go and put your foot in it.”

“Cherry, you must not chatter here.”

“No, sir,” said Bob Cherry, greatly relieved that matters were no worse. From Mr. Quelch's tones he had expected a hundred lines at least, if not a caning. “Certainly not, sir.”

“Silence!”

The silence was unbroken this time, save by a faint rustling as the juniors took their places.

Every face was very serious now.

Mr. Quelch suffered sometimes from fits of sharp temper as most of us do, and on such occasions the Remove were wont to be very careful. But it was clearly not sharp temper that was the matter now. Bob Cherry had given the master an opening, and Mr. Quelch had not followed it up. The vials of wrath had not been poured out. Then what was the matter? Was Quelch ill?

The juniors felt that something unusual had happened, and there was a strange hush. Many of them ran over in their minds their latest delinquencies, trying to think whether those little delinquencies could possibly have come to the Form-master's ears. The Famous Four—Wharton, Cherry, Nugent, and Hurree Singh—felt the most confident of all. They had had a wonderfully clean record for the past few days, being too much occupied in cricket interests to have much time for japes of any sort. Bulstrode, the bully of the Remove, looked sullen, and a little apprehensive. Once or twice his bullying proclivities had brought down upon him scathing words from Mr. Quelch, and only the previous day the Form-master had taken him to task on the subject before the whole Remove, and given him a steady ten minutes of bitter talk—which had made Bulstrode feel the smallest and meanest worm on the face of the earth, and which he was not likely to forget for some time. Hazeldene, who was generally in trouble of some sort, looked nervous, and so did Snoop—but Snoop probably had more reason, for a day seldom passed without his doing someone an

ill turn, and he never knew which of his little meannesses might have come to light.

Most of the juniors, in fact, looked more or less apprehensive. When a thunderbolt was coming, there was no telling for certain whom it might hit.

Only one face remained quite calm and composed—that of Wun Lung, the Chinese junior. Wun Lung sat at his desk with a smile that was "child-like and bland" on his innocent features; but, considering that the little Chinese was as mischievous as a monkey, it is probable that his confident manner was not wholly genuine.

It was a silence that might have been felt—and Mr. Quelch seemed in no hurry to break it. Bulstrode thought that he was purposely keeping them in suspense, and his sullen look intensified. But Harry Wharton, looking at the Form-master's face, could discern more of sorrow than of anger there.

And Wharton wondered.

Harry Wharton was by no means a perfect character; he was a thorough boy, and frequently in trouble, but he was a little more thoughtful in some matters than his Form-fellows. He realised that Mr. Quelch had a hard task with the Remove, and he did not seek to make it harder for him, as Bulstrode and Skinner and some of the others did. And Harry was feeling concerned for Mr. Quelch at the present moment, not apprehensive for himself. He knew that something must be very wrong to make the Form-master look like that.

"My boys!"

It was not a sharp, rapping tone, when Mr. Quelch spoke at last; it was quiet, restrained, though quite clear to every ear in the room. The juniors looked at one another in wonder. Quelch was not at all himself this morning.

"My boys, there has been a very unpleasant—a very disgraceful occurrence in this school—unfortunately due to the base action of someone in this Form."

The Form thrilled a little.

If there had been a theft, and someone was to be expelled for it, Mr. Quelch could not have spoken more terribly seriously.

"The guilty boy," went on Mr. Quelch slowly, "is here—he hears me speak now. He will know to what I am alluding. I should greatly prefer not to go into details. I ask the guilty boy to step out before the class."

"My word," whispered Bulstrode, "Quelch is getting too generous. I can see somebody jumping at that offer!"

And Skinner grinned.

As a matter of fact no one stirred. The Form looked amazed, that was all. What was the crime—who was the culprit—they had no idea—with doubtless one exception.

Mr. Quelch waited a few moments, and then, in a deeper voice, he resumed.

"I appeal earnestly to the guilty boy to stand forward and admit his fault, to save this unpleasant affair from going further."

He paused again. Harry Wharton heard a faint gasp close to him, and he looked round to see Billy Bunter shaking like a leaf. The fat junior blinked at him through his big spectacles.

"Quiet, you young ass," muttered Harry.

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"Shut up!"

"But—but—but don't you think I—I had better own up? Do you think it will be a licking?" murmured Bunter.

Wharton started.

"Do you mean to say that you—"

"I—I didn't mean any harm, and—and I'm sincerely sorry—"

"Someone is whispering," said Mr. Quelch.

Bunter froze into dead silence.

"If the guilty party does not own up, it will be the worse for him," said Mr. Quelch, in a harder voice. "If I am compelled to make the matter public, he will suffer. If he comes forward now, I offer him pardon for his offence."

Bunter looked appealingly at Wharton, and the latter nodded. The fat junior scrambled out before the class. Mr. Quelch looked at him.

"Bunter!"

"Yes—ye-e-es, sir."

"You—it was you!"

"Ye-e-es, sir," stammered Billy. "I—I didn't mean any harm, sir."

"What!" thundered Mr. Quelch, "you committed this base—this mean and cowardly action—and you did not mean any harm!"

"N-n-n-no, sir! I—I didn't think it was mean and cowardly to borrow a camera, sir, and—and—and—"

"What!"

"You see, sir, I've been taking up photography lately," stammered Bunter, blinking at the Form-master. "I—I haven't a camera yet, sir. I'm expecting to get one from the Imperialist Fair Trading Co., as a reward, sir, for selling ten articles for them. I wanted to do a little practice first, sir. Ogilvy won't lend me his camera—he's a mean beast, sir—and so—"

"Is this a joke, Bunter?"

"N-n-no, sir, I didn't do it for a joke, sir. I'm sincerely sorry"

sir. I took your camera out of the dark-room just to try it, sir, and I haven't done it any harm. Ogilvy says I've spoiled the film by taking it out to examine it, but I don't suppose he knows."

"You—you have taken my camera to play with!" exclaimed Mr. Quelch, aghast.

"N-n-no, sir—to work with. I am going to put it back, of course—sir—I shouldn't have let you miss it if I could help it—"

"Bunter—"

"I'm sincerely sorry, sir—"

"You may go back to your place, Bunter. I had no idea whatever that you had taken my camera, and I was not referring to that in the least. It is quite another matter. Not another word; go to your place."

Billy Bunter gasped as he went back. Quite another matter!—the Owl of the Remove could have kicked himself, hard. He had owned up to the unheard-of impertinence of borrowing the Form-master's camera without permission—and all for nothing! It was quite another matter! It has been said that a guilty conscience needs no accuser; and Bunter had proved the truth of it. He gave Wharton a reproachful glance. The Remove had not been able to restrain a giggle at Billy Bunter's misunderstanding; but a glance from the Form-master made them serious enough again. A chilling silence fell upon the Form-room.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

An Anonymous Letter.

MR. QUELCH looked grimly over the silent Form. Every junior was on tenterhooks now.

"Very well," said the Form-master, "the culprit does not choose to own his action, and it will be left to me to find him out."

He paused once more, but there was still silence.

Mr. Quelch compressed his lips.

"Very well. Dr. Locke received a letter this morning."

"Nothing surprising in that," murmured Ogilvy, "I had a letter myself."

"Faith, and so did I," said Micky Desmond.

"This letter," resumed Mr. Quelch, in a cutting voice, "was an anonymous one. It was a letter containing abuse of a certain person, and it was not signed by the writer."

The Remove thrilled once more.

They could guess who the "certain person" was, and they understood now why Mr. Quelch was looking so disturbed that morning.

"This letter," said Mr. Quelch, "Dr. Locke showed me this morning. I have just read it. The letter was written by a boy in this Form, for the purpose of prejudicing the Head-master against a Form-master. I need not point out the uselessness and the insolence of such a proceeding. Dr. Locke is hardly likely to be influenced by an anonymous letter-writer. It is my duty to discover the writer of this letter. If any boy knows who the writer is, I appeal to him to speak up. This is not an ordinary matter—the boy who has done this is not fit for the other boys to associate with, and he should be discovered and exposed."

There was a grim silence.

Mr. Quelch's eyes roved over the class, but they sought in vain for signs of guilt in any face.

Signs enough there were of troubled and apprehensive minds, for nearly every boy in the class was very uneasy; but there was nothing definitely more than that.

"Very well," said Mr. Quelch, "the matter drops for the present."

"If you please, sir—"

said Harry Wharton.

The Form-master looked at him.

"Do you wish to speak, Wharton?"

"Yes, sir. As captain of the Form I think I ought to speak," said Harry firmly. "We have not seen this letter—"

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"I should not care to show it you."

"No, sir; but the handwriting."

"The letter is written in print, and gives no clue."

"I do not ask to see it, sir, but I think it only fair to point out that it might not have been written by a chap in the Remove. I don't want to accuse anybody, but the Form oughtn't to be condemned unheard. A fellow in the Upper Fourth, for instance, might have written the letter just as easily."

Mr. Quelch shook his head.

"Quite as easily, Wharton, no doubt; but he would have had no motive for doing so. This letter contains insolent references to myself, such as could only have come from a Remove boy. There is no doubt in my mind that the anonymous letter writer is in this Form. An anonymous letter was written once before at Greyfriars," went on Mr. Quelch, "as you will remember. It was written by a hot-headed lad who at least had what he considered a good motive for the dishonourable action. That boy has since left the school. This case is blacker. The writer of this letter cannot pretend to have any motive but spite and malice, which so far as I am aware were quite unprovoked on my part. It is impossible to please everyone, I suppose, but I have always done my best to make my boys like and respect me."

"And we do, sir!" exclaimed Harry. "You cannot doubt it, sir."

"Yes, rather!" cried Bob Cherry, forgetting that he was in class for a moment. "My only hat! I should like to talk to that letter-writer for two minutes!"

"I quite believe you, Wharton," said Mr. Quelch, with a slight smile, but taking no other notice of Bob Cherry's outburst. "This anonymous writer is, I hope, quite alone in the opinion he is unreasonable enough to hold of me. I am sorry to say that there is no doubt that the writer is in the Remove."

"Then we shall find him out, sir," said Harry quietly; and he sat down.

The matter dropped, and lessons began; but the anonymous letter was certainly more in the boys' minds than lessons that morning.

It had evidently caused more pain than anger in Mr. Quelch's breast, and most of the juniors were angry and indignant.

It was a stigma on the whole Form until the culprit was discovered, and when he was discovered he was likely to have a warm time at the hands of the Remove.

Harry Wharton gave Bulstrode one expressive look. He remembered the scene of the previous day, when the bully of the Form had writhed and changed colour under the lashing tongue of the Form-master. The suspicion that rose in his mind was a natural one. Bulstrode had been guilty of mean actions enough for it to be quite possible that he was guilty of this one, too. Bulstrode met his glance with one of sulky defiance.

Wharton set his lips and waited. When the class was dismissed, the chums of the Remove went out together, and Harry looked round for Bulstrode. The latter was sauntering away into the Close, with his hands in his pockets, and Harry quickened his pace to overtake him.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" murmured Bob Cherry. "What's the trouble, kid?"

"I'm going to speak to Bulstrode."

"About the letter?"

"Yes."

"But you don't know—"

"I'm going to find out."

Bob Cherry whistled softly. He went with Wharton, and so did a crowd of Removites, who read in the Form-captain's face that something was likely to happen. Bulstrode had gone under the trees, and he turned round suddenly as he heard many footsteps behind him. He looked surprised to see the crowd with Wharton.

"Hallo!" he said, with an unpleasant sneer, curling his lip.

"Are you looking for me?"

"Yes," said Harry.

"Well, here I am. Want me to captain you in a cricket match, or is it simply a testimonial?" asked the Remove bully.

The juniors grinned, but Harry Wharton's face remained as hard as a rock.

"It's about the letter."

"What letter?"

"You know well enough," said Harry angrily.

Bulstrode shrugged his shoulders. He seemed to be deliberately bent upon exasperating the young captain of the Remove, as much as possible. And Wharton's temper was not of the best. He had come into rough contact with Bulstrode too often to have much patience with him.

"How should I know?" said Bulstrode, in an airy manner. "There are lots of letters, and I don't know which one you are talking about. There are twenty-six in the alphabet—"

"Stop fooling!"

"And then you don't say whether it's a capital letter or a small letter."

"I am speaking about the anonymous letter sent to the Head," said Harry, controlling his temper with difficulty as the juniors round him chuckled.

"Oh, indeed! Are you owing up to it?"

"What!"

THE MAGNET.—71.

NEXT WEEK: "THE GREYFRIARS PHOTOGRAPHER."

"No good coming to me; you had better go to Quelch."
"Ha, ha, ha!" cackled Skinner.
"Look here," said Harry. "Enough of this rot. I want to know whether you wrote that letter or not?"

Bulstrode's eyes glittered.
"You've come to ask me whether I wrote the anonymous letter?"

"Yes."

"And you want an answer?"

"Of course I do."

"There it is, then!"

Bulstrode drove his fist fairly into Harry Wharton's face, and the junior, taken entirely by surprise, fell to the ground like a log, and lay there dazed.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Hand to Hand.

"SHAME!"

There was a moment's astonished silence after the blow, and then that shout rang out on all sides.

"Shame!"
Bulstrode glared about him fiercely. He met angry and scornful looks on all sides, and the word that stung him was shouted again in a growing volume of sound.

"Shame!"

Wharton lay on the ground, utterly dazed by the fierce blow. He had never expected a blow—and such a blow—without the slightest warning. It was a "foul" if ever there was one, and his utter unpreparedness had made it worse for him. Bulstrode had struck with savage force, and Wharton was dazed and dizzy for some minutes.

Bob Cherry had made a movement to spring upon the Remove bully; but Nugent dragged him back.

"Hold on, Bob!"

"But—"

"Leave him to Wharton."

Bob gritted his teeth.

"Right!"

He knelt beside his chum, and raised him from the ground. There was a great lump forming under Wharton's left eye, and the eye was partially closed. He looked sick and dizzy, and he staggered as he was lifted to his feet. His eyes blazed as he looked at the bully of the Remove.

"You—you coward!" he muttered.

Bulstrode flushed a dull red, but he did not reply. The hisses of the juniors were ringing in his ears.

"You coward!" said Wharton. "You wouldn't have done that so easily if I had been looking for it. Put up your fists!"

"I'll put them up willingly enough," sneered Bulstrode.

"Do you think you are going to bully me because you've licked me once? If you do you've made a big mistake. Come on!"

Nugent held Wharton's arm.

"You're not fit to tackle him now, Harry," he said quietly.

"Leave it for a bit. Your head must be ringing still."

"I don't care; I can handle him."

"Come on, then," said Bulstrode. "I'm ready."

"I wouldn't touch him," said Ogilvy. "A chap who writes an anonymous letter isn't fit for a decent fellow to fight with."

"Quite right," said Russell. "Let the cad alone."

Bulstrode's eyes blazed.

"So you've made up your minds on that point," he said thickly. "You believe that I wrote the letter to the Head."

"You haven't said that you didn't."

"And if I do say that I didn't, will you believe me?" sneered Bulstrode. "You've made up your minds on the subject without asking for any proof."

"I don't see where proof could be got," said Hazeldene. "We can't have the letter to see. But the way you answered Wharton wasn't the way of a chap who was innocent."

"I'll answer you in the same way, if you begin jawing. Vaseline! I like preaching from you, you worm! A chap who borrowed his sister's ring to give to a moneylender!"

Hazeldene flushed scarlet and stepped back. Bulstrode burst into a scoffing laugh. He faced Harry Wharton with his fists up.

"I'm ready for you, Wharton."

"I'll make you repent that blow, you cur!" said Wharton between his teeth.

No more time was wasted in words. In the midst of a ring of excited juniors the two old enemies closed in strife.

It was not the first time they had fought, by several times. At one time the advantage had been all with Bulstrode, and he had made merciless use of it. Since then training had done much for Harry, and he had licked the bully of the Remove in a stand-up fight that was still talked about among the juniors.

Besides Mark Linley, the lad from Lancashire, he was the only fellow in the Remove who could do it. Even the sturdy Bob Cherry was no match for Bulstrode.

But Wharton was not in form now. That stunning blow

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Another School Tale of Harry Wharton & Co. and the Pupils of Cliff House.

had hurt him more than he realised. His head was singing, his left eye was almost closed, and he felt dizzy. And Bulstrode who was evidently in the savagest possible temper, was an unusually dangerous opponent at that moment.

The fight was hard and fierce, and punishment was about equally balanced at first. Many times Wharton's usually careful guard was wanting, and Bulstrode's heavy fists crashed home upon his face.

There was a general exclaiming among the crowded spectators as one of the combatants was seen to fall, and it was Harry Wharton!

He went down with a heavy bump, laid on the ground by a terrible upper-cut that had caught him fairly on the point of the chin. Bulstrode stood over him with blazing eyes.

It seemed to the Remove bully almost too good to be true; but he was licking Wharton at last. There was no doubt of it, he was getting the better of the combat. His face showed the intense joy it gave him. From two or three voices came a faint cheer for Bulstrode.

"Go it, Bulstrode!" said Snoop.

Trevor, who was standing next to him, turned upon him savagely.

"What's that you're cackling about?" he demanded.

Snoop receded a little.

"I suppose I can speak if I like?" he snarled.

"No, you can't! Shut up!"

It was a little high-handed of Trevor, but Snoop did "shut up." Although Bulstrode was getting the better of the fight, feeling was strong against him among the Removes. Few of them doubted now that Bulstrode was the author of the anonymous letter. His surly defiance was not the way to convince them of his innocence, if he was innocent. And the juniors knew that the very advantage he was now gaining was due to the foul blow he had struck before the beginning of the fight.

Wharton was looking groggy as he staggered to his feet, with Bob Cherry's aid.

But his spirit was undiminished.

"Had enough?" sneered Bulstrode.

"No!"

And it was Wharton who attacked again. He seemed to be collecting himself, now, and he pressed his enemy hard.

A ringing left-hander sent Bulstrode in a heap on the grass, and this time a cheer greeted the fall.

"Bravo!"

The Remove bully scrambled up. His face was convulsed with rage. His own success was greeted with silence or hisses; Wharton's was cheered. He fully understood what it meant, and it maddened him.

Straight at Wharton he rushed, and in a moment they were gripping each other, and the fight was at the closest of close quarters.

There was a sudden shout from Morgan.

"Cave!"

But the combatants were too engaged to hear it. They fought on furiously.

"Look out!" cried Nugent. "Harry! Here's the Head!"

Harry heard him, and he relaxed his hold upon Bulstrode. But Bulstrode was too furious to hear or to heed. He simply thought Harry was slackening, and he freed his right hand and struck out.

The blow caught Harry upon the temple, and he crashed to the ground.

"Shame!"

The shout burst irrepressibly from the juniors. But the next moment there was a grim silence as the doctor's voice was heard.

"Boys!"

The Head of Greyfriars looked upon the scene with contracted brows.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER. Guilty or Not Guilty?

DR. LOCKE looked at the startled, scared juniors—at Bulstrode—and then at Wharton. Wharton had just staggered up, and he looked sick and dizzy. Bulstrode stood in an attitude of sulky defiance, his eyes on the ground. Dr. Locke looked at them earnestly.

"You two are fighting again," he said. "What does this mean? You know I do not object to a round or two with the gloves in the gymnasium. But this—this is a brutal display of prize-fighting—and in the open grounds, too. I saw you from my window."

Wharton flushed scarlet. He realised that he ought to have been a little more careful in selecting the scene of the explanation with Bulstrode.

"I am very sorry, sir."

"I am glad of that, at all events. And now—what is this dispute about?"

The juniors were silent.

THE MAGNET.—71.

NEXT
WEEK:

"THE GREYFRIARS PHOTOGRAPHER."

Another School Tale of Harry Wharton & Co.
and the Pupils of Cliff House.

"I am waiting!" said the Head icily.

Still Harry did not speak.

"Nugent, you tell me what has caused this!" said the Head.

Frank Nugent shifted uneasily.

"It's about the letter, sir."

"The letter! What letter?"

"The anonymous letter, sir. It looks to some of us as if Bulstrode wrote it, and he won't explain. That's all, sir."

"Ah!" Dr. Locke turned to the burly Remove. "Did you write the anonymous letter that reached me this morning, Bulstrode?"

Bulstrode's face set obstinately.

"Answer me!" thundered the Head.

"I have nothing to say, sir."

"Am I to take that as an admission of guilt?"

Bulstrode bit his lip.

"I don't think I ought to be asked the question, sir. It's an insult to a fellow to ask him if he wrote an anonymous letter."

"Ahem! There is certainly something in that. I do not like to think that any of my boys could be guilty of such meanness, and yet it is certain that a boy in the Remove wrote the letter. I shall discover—and the punishment of the culprit will be a severe one. Do not let me see any more of this quarrelling."

And the Head moved away.

Bulstrode cast a savage look at Harry Wharton.

"Well, do you want any more?" he asked.

"You heard what the doctor said."

"You can come behind the chapel."

"I shall not fight you now," said Wharton. "But this isn't the finish. It looks to me as if you wrote that anonymous letter, but I'm going to find out who did it; and the chap who did it is going to be shown up."

Bulstrode shrugged his shoulders.

"Find out, then!"

And he walked away.

A loud and prolonged hiss from the crowd of juniors followed him. Bulstrode looked round savagely, as if he had half a mind to charge back among the Removes, and run amok among them. But he thought better of it, and walked furiously away. The juniors hissed him till he was out of hearing.

"The cad!" said Bob Cherry. "He wrote the letter, it's as clear as daylight."

"It looks like it."

"The clearfulness is terrific!"

"Oh, it's plain enough," said Russell. "Did you notice how careful he was to avoid saying a direct 'No' when the Head asked him?"

"Yes, rather!"

"Faith, and he's as good as owned up!"

"Oh, I don't know!" said Snoop.

"Of course you don't," said Ogilvy. "You're another of the same sort. Birds of a feather. Hold your tongue!"

"But——"

"Oh, shut up!"

There were few voices raised in defence of Bulstrode. His overbearing ways had made him many enemies, and there was a general opinion that he had written the anonymous letter. Direct proof there could be none; but as Nugent remarked, the letter had certainly been written by someone, and such evidence as there was pointed to Bulstrode.

Harry Wharton walked away with his friends. He was feeling very dazed and sore. He knew that the Head's interference, in stopping the fight, had saved him from a defeat, and the thought was not pleasant. He would not have borne malice for a defeat in a fair fight at the hands of an honourable opponent. But he had not had fair play in this fight with Bulstrode.

He went to a bath-room to wash off, as far as possible, the signs of combat. There was a sound of running water in the bath-room as he reached it. A fat form was leaning over the rim of the bath, washing what looked like a photographic plate under the tap.

"What on earth——" began Harry.

Billy Bunter blinked round at him.

"It's all right, Wharton, I sha'n't be a minute. I'm washing my plate. As I had to own up about old Quelchy's camera, I thought I might as well be hung for a sheep as a lamb, you know, so I took a photo before I took the camera back to his room."

Wharton looked at the blurred plate curiously.

"Is that the photo?" he asked.

"Yes. You have to wash the plate under running water, you know," said Bunter, with the air of a professional giving instruction. As a matter of fact, Bunter's ideas on the subject of photography were of the vaguest, and though he had asked for information in many quarters, the net result had not been great. Fellows who dabbled in photography were willing to tell him things, but some of them told him more cock-and-bull stories than facts, and Bunter had not perception enough to

distinguish the one from the other. Added to that, his intelligence was by no means of a first-rate order, and he misunderstood half of what was told him. The jumble of more or less accurate information in his brain made him an extremely unsafe person to trust with a camera or in a dark-room.

"But have you developed it?" asked Harry.

"No, I'm going to develop it afterwards," said Bunter innocently. "You see, you take the photo first, and then you wash the plate under running water, and then you develop it in the fixing solution, so Micky Desmond told me."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I can see anything to cackle at."

"Ha, ha! Micky was pulling your leg, you young ass! You've spoiled the plate by exposing it to the light before developing and fixing it."

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Billy Bunter blinked at his plate in dismay.

"It does look rather smudgy," he confessed. "I thought, perhaps, that was due to my accidentally rubbing my fingers over it, though."

"My hat—it ought to be a beauty altogether!" laughed Wharton. "You'd better send it to 'The Daily Mirror.'"

Bunter disconsolately carried away the plate, which he had been patiently washing under the tap for the past ten minutes, and Wharton proceeded to bathe his face. But with all his care he could not remove all the signs of battle. There still remained a cut on his lip and a big lump under his left eye, and Bob Cherry grinned a little when Harry rejoined him.

"Does it look very bad?" asked Harry anxiously.

"N-no. Of course, it doesn't improve your beauty."

"I was thinking about Marjorie—we're going to see her to-morrow, and—and I don't want her to think me a brute that's always fighting."

"Oh, I dare say it will tone down by to-morrow," said Bob Cherry consolingly. "That black lump will be an art shade of blue, and—"

"Oh, rats!"

THE FIFTH CHAPTER. Barred.

THE next day one thing was very noticeable in the Remove—Bulstrode was barred! There had been no formal motion on the subject—the fellows dropped into the way of it—and it came about gradually.

At bedtime several had said good-night to him—but in the morning when the Remove rose, no one addressed a remark to Bulstrode.

Even his own chums, Stott and Skinner, were "stand-offish." Even Snoop, who as a rule toadied to Bulstrode for the sake of protection—for Snoop was as big a coward as he was a sneak—even Snoop looked the other way now.

Bulstrode was barred!

No one had proposed sending him to Coventry—the thing seemed to have come about by itself; but it was thorough enough.

Bulstrode himself did not realise it at first.

Once before he had taken an active lead in sending Mark Linley, the Lancashire lad, to Coventry. He had acted ill-naturedly, cruelly, yet unthinkingly. He had not realised how much pain he was inflicting. He was destined to learn now what a cold and bleak place "Coventry" may be.

"Jolly fine morning!" said Bulstrode, as he stepped out of bed. "Who's coming for a sprint before brekker?"

He seemed surprised at receiving no reply.

"All of you grown deaf, or lazy?" he demanded. "Are you coming for a sprint in the Close, Stotty?"

"N-n-no," stammered Stott.

"You coming, Skinny?"

"No," said Skinner.

Bulstrode stared at them. Even then he did not quite realise the truth.

"Lazy slackers!" he said. "How do you expect to play cricket? I'm going."

No one ventured any reply to that remark, and Bulstrode began to put his things on. Trevor remarked to Russell that he was going to have a run down to the Sark as soon as the gates were opened, and Bulstrode looked round.

"Good!" he said. "I'll come with you."

"No, you won't," said Trevor.

"What do you mean, Trevor?"

"I mean what I say."

"You don't want me?"

"No, I don't."

Bulstrode jumped off his bed, where he was sitting to put his boots on. He glared threateningly at Trevor.

"I suppose you're looking for a thick ear!" he said, savagely.

"Hands off!" said Trevor. "I don't want any trouble with you. I don't want to touch you!"

"What are you raving about? What's in the wind?"

"You know jolly well enough."

"I'll jolly well—"

"No, you won't," said Russell. "We know you can lick

THE MAGNET.—71.

NEXT WEEK:

"THE GREYFRIARS PHOTOGRAPHER."

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any one of us, Bulstrode, but you're not going to bully us, all the same. If you touch any fellow in the Remove, we'll pile on you and give you a Form licking. Mind, it's a Form licking, if you start any of your games, so look out."

Bulstrode simply gasped with rage.

"But—but what do you mean?" he roared. "What's it all about?"

"It's the anonymous letter you wrote to the Head," said Hazeldene. "You know well enough. You're barred."

"That's it," said Bob Cherry. "Anonymous letters are barred in this Form, and so are their writers."

"The barfulness is terrific."

Bulstrode turned to Wharton, quivering with rage.

"This is your doing!" he shouted.

Wharton looked at him coldly.

"I haven't said a word on the subject," he replied. "But I certainly don't intend to speak to you unless this matter is cleared up, and I advise all the other fellows to do the same. We've put up with your bullying and rowdyism, but writing anonymous letters is a little too thick."

"Hang you all!" shouted Bulstrode. "Do you think I want you to speak to me? You can shut up like oysters for all I care!"

Harry Wharton shrugged his shoulders.

"Then we sha'n't quarrel," he said quietly.

Bulstrode dressed himself, in a state of simmering fury. He swung out of the dormitory and slammed the door behind him. He did not come near his Form-fellows again till breakfast-time. But then it was the same. The places on either side of him at the breakfast-table were left ostentatiously empty till Mark Linley, who was a few minutes late from a morning swim in the Sark, dropped into one of them. There was a whisper from several fellows.

"Come along here, Linley."

"Move up one."

"That cad's barred."

Mark Linley did not appear to hear. He chipped his egg and ate his breakfast, and asked Bulstrode to pass him the salt, without anything in his manner to indicate that he knew the Remove bully was in Coventry.

Several fellows were only waiting for breakfast to be over to enlighten him. Mark Linley had always been on the worst possible terms with Bulstrode, ever since coming to Greyfriars. Bulstrode had taken the lead in the persecution of the "Scholarship boy." Bulstrode had been at the bottom of an attempted tarring and feathering; Bulstrode had been the prime mover in sending him to Coventry. The lad from Lancashire would have been cut by the Form now if Bulstrode could have had his way. And so no one doubted that Mark would be glad of the opportunity of repaying the Remove bully in kind.

As the Form came out after breakfast, a dozen juniors gathered round the Lancashire lad in the passage. Even fellows who did not speak to him much themselves were anxious to point out to him that Bulstrode was barred.

"Look here, Linley," said Skinner, "that cad's barred. He wrote an anonymous letter to the Head, and the Form's in a row over it."

"How do you know he wrote it?" asked Mark Linley calmly.

"Well, it looks like it."

"Is that quite enough to condemn a chap on?"

"Well, he hasn't denied it," said Hazeldene.

Mark's lip curled a little.

"Perhaps you wouldn't believe him if he did."

"Hang it all!" exclaimed Trevor, in amazement. "You're not taking sides with the rotter, are you, Linley? He's always been down on you."

"That's nothing. I know jolly well how rotten it is to be in Coventry, and I wouldn't send another chap there unless he had done something very rotten."

"Well, he has! What's rottener than writing anonymous letters?"

"Nothing. But you haven't proved it."

"Oh, there's proof enough," said Skinner. "It looks jolly black."

"It looked jolly black in my case, when you found me guilty of sneaking to Quelch, without giving me a chance," said Mark scornfully.

"But, blow it, man, it was Bulstrode himself who was the leader in that."

"I don't care. I'm not going to jump on a chap when he's down. You can do as you like."

And Mark Linley, without listening to anything further, walked away. He left the juniors with very mingled feelings in their breasts.

"Cheeky young sweep!" said Skinner.

"Oh, that's what you'd expect from a mill-lund!" sneered Snoop. "He can't be expected to follow his betters!"

"You shut up!" growled Bob Cherry. "He's worth about a million of you, any day in the week, anyhow."

"Hang it," said Trevor, "he won't dare to buck against the Form!"

But Trevor was mistaken.

Mark Linley meant what he said, and he was always a fellow of his word. That day Bulstrode was barred in the Remove-room; but there was one fellow who had always a cheery word or a nod for him. And it was Mark Linley.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Bulstrode Defies the Form.

THE mystery of the anonymous letter hung like a cloud over the Remove. Most of the Form had decided that Bulstrode was guilty, and Bulstrode was feeling it from their treatment of him. But although Bulstrode was sent to Coventry, it was impossible to denounce him to Mr. Quelch. It was not consistent with the schoolboy code of honour to give the culprit away to a master. Yet matters would not be on a satisfactory footing again till the Form-master knew who the guilty person was. Whether he was taking any steps himself to find out the truth, the juniors could not tell. He certainly observed their treatment of Bulstrode, and must have drawn his own conclusions from it. But what those conclusions were he did not show.

Harry Wharton was not feeling wholly easy in his mind. At first he had had little or no doubt of Bulstrode's guilt. But a doubt had crept in now.

Bulstrode was certainly not entitled to much consideration at his hands, but fair play was a part of Harry's nature.

When school was dismissed that day, Bulstrode went out by himself. Bully as he certainly was, Bulstrode was a very good-natured fellow when he was in a good temper, and he had never lacked friends. Now he felt the lack of them. He went into the Close with his hands in his pockets, and a sullen expression upon his face. Mark Linley was standing by the house door, and Bulstrode met his glance. He stopped.

"What's your little game?" he asked, in an unpleasant tone. Mark stared at him.

"I don't understand you," he said coldly.

"Oh, yes, you do," replied Bulstrode savagely. "You've got an axe to grind. You know the Form have sent me to Coventry, don't you?"

"They have told me so."

"Why don't you join in it?"

"I have my reasons."

"You know what it's like, you mean?"

"Yes, partly that. I am not at all sure that you wrote the anonymous letter, either."

"Thank you," said Bulstrode sneeringly. "Thank you for nothing. I suppose you think all this will blow over, and then you'll get the credit for having stood up for me, eh? You think I shall take you up."

Linley's lip curled.

"No, I do not think that. I should certainly not let you take me up, as you call it. You're not a fellow I could chum with."

"Why, you cheeky brat—"

"Oh, shut up! I am the son of a mill-worker, and you are the richest fellow in the Form—and I despise you," said Linley quietly.

"You—you despise me?"

"Yes. I don't want to be down on you now, but you force me to speak out. You have assumed airs over me because my father is a workman. I wouldn't change places with you for anything you could offer. I'd rather be a decent lad in a mill than a swaggering bully at school, and the terror of the little boys!"

Bulstrode stared at him without replying.

"That's all," said Mark. "As for speaking to you, I don't want to particularly, and you can take your choice. If you speak to me I shall answer you. I won't join in sending anybody to Coventry unless the proof's as clear as sunlight against him. But I haven't any axe to grind."

He turned and walked away. Bulstrode quickened his pace and overtook him. There was a strange expression upon the face of the burly Removite.

"I say, Linley—I'm sorry. I—I didn't mean to say that—only those rats have ragged me into a state of nerves," he said awkwardly.

"Right you are," said Linley, his face lighting up. "It's all right. I might have taken it quietly, too. I'm sorry."

Bulstrode nodded, and walked away.

He passed the Famous Four, who were going down to the junior ground with their cricket-bats, and he favoured them with a dark scowl. Bob Cherry and Nugent took no notice of him, but Harry Wharton looked a little uneasy.

"Hold on a minute," he said, "I want to speak to that chap."

"Better let him alone," said Nugent. "It will only mean another row."

"I shan't be a minute."

THE MAGNET.—71.

NEXT WEEK: "THE GREYFRIARS PHOTOGRAPHER."

Bulstrode stopped and looked round as he heard Wharton hastening after him. There was a dangerous light in his eyes.

"Well, what do you want?" he asked. "Have you come to finish that little affair we left unfinished yesterday? I'm quite ready."

"No," said Wharton, keeping his hands at his sides; "I don't want a row with you. I—"

"Perhaps you have found out that you're not such a great fighting-man as you believed," suggested Bulstrode. "You would have been licked if the Head hadn't interfered, and you know it."

Wharton shrugged his shoulders.

"Never mind that now. I want to speak about the anonymous letter. All the fellows believe that you sent it."

"Yes—you've fixed that for me."

"I have had nothing to do with it—only it looks like it. If you sent it you ought to be cut by every decent fellow in the school. I thought you sent it—and the way you've acted doesn't look innocent, Bulstrode. But—well, I'd like you to have the benefit of the doubt."

"Do you mean to say you would believe me if I denied having sent it?" asked Bulstrode, with the same unpleasant sneer on his face.

"I don't know. But you haven't denied it yet."

"And I don't mean to. You can believe that I sent it, if you choose. I don't care for your opinion. And the Form can go hang. You've taken my place here; and I detest the whole set of you," said Bulstrode bitterly. "I won't say a word."

"That isn't the way to prove your innocence, if you are innocent."

"I don't care to prove it."

"Very well; have your own way."

And Wharton rejoined his chums, with his face still troubled. Bulstrode's manner was against him, certainly; yet Wharton could not help having strong doubts on the subject. After all, a fellow who was mean enough to send an anonymous letter would be mean enough to lie about it afterwards. If Bulstrode had really written that letter, surely he would have denied point-blank any knowledge of it.

"Well, what's the verdict?" asked Bob Cherry.

"He has nothing to say."

"Oh, he's guilty, right enough."

"I don't know."

"Blessed if I understand you, Wharton. You've always been enemies, and now you're sticking up for him when he's done a mean, crawling, rotten sort of thing."

"Yes—if he did it! I mean to find out."

"How?"

"I don't know yet—I must think it out. Let's get down to the cricket."

And in the cricket practice the chums of the Remove forgot, for the time, the anonymous letter and Bulstrode too. Bulstrode walked under the trees with his hands thrust deep into his trousers' pockets, and a sullen scowl on his face. He had always been the lord of a little set, and unaccustomed to solitude, and so his isolation cut him very deeply. Yet he had shown the surliest side of his nature to the one or two fellows who would have treated him better. Under the trees he came in sight of Snoop, who pretended not to see him, taking another path to avoid the meeting. Bulstrode gritted his teeth, and quickening his pace, caught up the cad of the Remove, and grasped him by the shoulder.

"Stop, you worm," he said, savagely.

Snoop stopped.

"Hallo!" he said. "I—I didn't see you, Bulstrode."

"Don't lie to me! You saw me right enough!"

"I—I—I—"

"You were trying to sneak away without speaking," said Bulstrode, regarding the other with a look of bitter scorn. "You—you toady! I suppose you would manage to see me next time you wanted to borrow some tin. You worm—and so even you think that I wrote the letter, eh?"

Snoop shifted uncomfortably from one foot to the other.

"N-n-no, Bulstrode. I—"

"Liar! You do!"

"No-n-no, I don't, really, Bulstrode. I—I think very likely Wharton wrote it, and is trying to put it on you," stammered Snoop.

"You lying little beast," said Bulstrode. "You know very well Wharton didn't do anything of the sort. Get out of my sight before I jump on you."

Snoop gladly enough got out of his sight. Bulstrode stood lost in gloomy reflection, till his meditations were broken in upon by a squeaky voice.

"I say—Skinner—"

Bulstrode looked round.

"Oh, is it you, Bulstrode?" said Billy Bunter, blinking at him through his glasses. "I suppose I ought not to be speaking to you, as you're sent to Coventry, but I don't believe in being hard on you. Of course, it was filthy mean to write anonymous

letters, but we all know what to expect of you. That's how I look at it. I say, Bulstrode, I've been disappointed about a postal order. Do you think you could manage to lend me five bob till to-morrow morning?"

Bulstrode looked at him grimly, without speaking.

"You shall have it back in the morning, honour bright," rattled on Billy Bunter. "My postal order may come to-night, or at the latest by first post in the morning. And, look here, Bulstrode, I know you must be feeling pretty rotten now, with all the fellows giving you the cold shoulder over that anonymous letter business. I don't mind talking to you a bit, on the quiet, you know, when the other fellows are not about. Of course, it wouldn't do to be seen talking to a chap like you. But—ow! ow! What are you up to?"

"You fat earthworm!"

"Ow! Don't shake me like that, you'll make my glasses fall off, and if they get broken you'll have to pay for them, so I tell you! Ow! ow-ow-ow!"

Billy Bunter sank gasping into the grass, and sat there, dazed and blinking, as Bulstrode walked away.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Bunter's Treat.

"JOLLY good game!" exclaimed Bob Cherry, as he came into No. 1 Study with his heavy tread, and planked his cricket bat down on the table with a crash. Bob always made his presence felt, wherever he was, and the fellow in the study underneath was always made aware of it when Bob entered No. 1 in the Remove passage. "Jolly good game, my sons. We're getting into good form."

"Yes, rather," assented Nugent. "I'm looking forward to the return match with St. Jim's. I think it won't be a draw next time."

"Rather not."

"The ratherfulness is terrific, my worthy chums."

"What are you scowling about, old fellow?" continued Bob Cherry, bringing down his hand with a Brobdingnagian slap on Harry Wharton's shoulder. Wharton jumped.

"I wasn't aware that I was scowling," he remarked.

"Well, perhaps it was a frown of poetic reverie," said Bob; "or perhaps you have a pain in your little inside. Anyway, what's the matter?"

"I've been thinking——"

"Oh, that accounts! Any brandy in the study?"

"Oh, don't be funny, Bob. You see——"

"Hot tea will do—tea forward, quick."

"Cheese it," said Harry, laughing. "I've been thinking over that anonymous letter—and about Bulstrode. It's hard on the chap if he's innocent."

"Not any harder than he was on Linley, once upon a time," said Bob Cherry. "Who's going to fill this kettle?"

"I shall have great pleasurefulness in executing the fillfulness of the worthy kettle."

"Go it, then, Inky. If any of the soot comes off on you it won't show," said Bob Cherry, handing the not-over-clean kettle to Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "Buck up! I'm as hungry as a whole family of hunters. Buzz off, my black tulip."

The Nabob of Bhanipur buzzed off with a grin. In his own country he was a great prince, and reverend councillors and bearded soldiers would have approached him with awe and humility. But in No. 1 Study at Greyfriars he was just Inky or Hurree Jampot, as fancy dictated, and he filled kettles and washed tea-cups in a way that would have smitten with horror any loyal native of Bhanipur who had seen him.

"Fire's out!" grunted Bob Cherry. "That lazy beast Bunter——"

"Oh, really, Cherry——"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo, are you there! Has your camera come yet?"

"No, it hasn't."

"Oh, rats! I want something to light the fire with."

"You're jolly well not going to use my camera to——"

"I can't, if it hasn't come. Find some wood, quick!"

"How am I to find it?" growled Billy Bunter.

"Use your head, my son. Ahem, that's rather a good joke."

"Rather," assented Nugent, "and rather old, too. Don't you start as a funny man, Bob. I was brought up on that joke."

"Buzz off, and get some wood, Bunt," said Bob Cherry, changing the subject. "Hallo, hallo, hallo, are you still thinking, Wharton?"

"Yes; I've got an idea!"

"Good. Hold on a minute, Bunter; Wharton knows where to get some wood."

"Oh, hang it!" said Harry. "I wasn't thinking about the firewood. I was thinking about that letter."

"You've got that letter on the brain, I think," said Bob Cherry, in disgust. "I'm thinking about tea. Haven't you got an inside?"

"Yes, but——"

"Then let's have tea, and think about the letter afterwards. One thing at a time, my son."

THE MAGNET.—71.

NEXT
WEEK:

"THE GREYFRIARS PHOTOGRAPHER."

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Harry laughed and assented, and the chums set to work getting tea. That was usually Bunter's task. Bunter contributed nothing in cash to the funds of the study, while he was the biggest eater there, and so it was only fair that he should contribute a little work. To do him justice, Bunter did not object to cooking; he would work hard enough at anything he liked doing. But of late he had been busy with his new hobby. He had taken up the camera, as he explained—and, as a matter of fact, he took up anybody's camera that he could lay hands on. Every amateur photographer at Greyfriars who knew Bunter's latest hobby was on his guard.

Bob Cherry took up a chopper and looked round the study with a hungry eye. Bob was rather dangerous to anything breakable. He crossed over to the shelf where reposed a white mice cage in process of construction. Nugent was making that cage; he had been making it for some weeks now, but had lately expressed dissatisfaction with his progress, and given it a rest.

"You're not going to use this cage, Frank?" Bob Cherry asked, looking round at Nugent, who was washing tea-cups in a marmalade jar.

"No; it's gone rocky," said Nugent. "I shall have to make it again."

"Good!"

Bob Cherry placed the cage on the floor, and brought down the chopper with a crash. The cage was resolved into its original elements, so to speak, at one fell swoop.

Nugent gave a yell.

"You silly ass! You've smashed it."

"Well, I couldn't light the fire with it without breaking it up."

"Eh? What? Light the fire with it!"

"Certainly. You said you were going to make it over again, so this is no good."

"You utter ass! I was going to use the same materials," hooted Nugent.

"Oh! Well, you ought to have explained that. How was I to guess. It's too late now—it's smashed, so I may as well light the fire with it," said Bob philosophically.

Nugent's feelings were too deep for reply. Bob jammed the fragments of the cage into the fire, and soon had it going. Bunter returned with a bundle of wood to find the fire roaring and the kettle boiling. But Bunter brought in several other articles—a tin of sardines, a large quantity of ham, some tongue, and a pot of jam. Bob Cherry looked at the supplies.

"You're too late with the wood," he said. "But the other things are coming in jolly handy. But what's the matter—are you standing a treat?"

"Who said the age of miracles was past?" grinned Nugent.

The fat junior blinked at them indignantly.

"Oh, really, you fellows! I don't see why I shouldn't stand a feed—I'd stand 'em much oftener, only my finances get so rocky when the postal orders come late. They come very late sometimes."

"Awfully late, I know," said Nugent, sympathetically. "All those you've had this term haven't arrived yet, have they?"

"Oh, really, Nugent! Still, I'm glad to stand a bit of a feed. I wish it could have run to more, but I got only three shillings for the pocket-knife——"

"My hat!" said Wharton. "You don't mean to say you've sold a pocket-knife to stand us a feed, Billy!"

"There was nothing else to do, Wharton. I had to get the wood for the fire, you know, and I hadn't any tin. Then I thought, as I had to raise the money, I might as well stand a bit of a feed. Of course, I shall get the pocket-knife back out of my postal-order to-morrow morning. I've sold it to Stott for three bob, and he says I can have it back any time this term for four shillings."

"Wait a minute," said Bob Cherry, feeling in his pockets, with a very grim expression on his face. "Whose pocket-knife was it you sold to Stott, Bunter?"

"The ham is splendid," said Billy, not appearing to hear. "and this tongue is simply ripping. I tasted it in the shop."

"Whose pocket-knife was it you sold?" roared Bob Cherry.

"The jam is first-rate, too. It's the same jam that Mrs. Mumble makes those jolly little tarts of, you know——"

"Whose pocket-knife?"

"And the sardines—— Ow!"

Billy Bunter broke off abruptly as Bob seized him by the shoulder and shook him with violence.

"Whose pocket-knife did you sell to Stott?" shouted Bob.

"Oh, really, Cherry——"

"I left my pocket-knife on the table here, and it's gone now. I know jolly well you hadn't one of your own."

"You—you're shaking me, and disturbing all my—my nerves, Cherry. If you make my glasses fall off, and they get broken, you'll have to pay for them, so there."

"Will you answer me?"

"I—I—I'm out of breath. Suppose I did sell your old

Another School Tale of Harry Wharton & Co. and the Pupils of Cliff House.

pocket-knife? I'm going to get it back to-morrow morning out of my postal-order."

"You—you—you— My pocket-knife!"

"I suppose you don't expect me to make money, do you?" said Bunter, jerking himself free, and blinking indignantly at Bob Cherry. "I'm not a coiner! I had to raise the tin, to— to get the wood—"

"To get a halfpenny bundle of wood!" grinned Nugent.

"Well, I thought we ought to have something to eat as well. You see—"

"Yes, I see a fat worm who will be on the treadmill one of these days," said Bob Cherry. "Give me that belt over, Nugent. I think I ought to give him a licking, as a warning. It may save him from coming to a bad end."

"Oh, really, Cherry—I—I'd rather come to a bad end!" Billy Bunter dodged behind Wharton. "I think this is jolly ungrateful, considering that I've stood you all a decent tea."

"Stood us a tea! Why, it was my money!"

"Oh, come now, Cherry; if you didn't approve of selling the knife, the money couldn't be yours. You can't have it both ways."

Bob Cherry burst into a laugh, and threw down the belt.

"You fat young ass! I only hope you won't finish up in prison, that's all."

"Oh, I'm jolly careful, you know. You fellows have rather loose ideas on some points, but my father warned me when I came to school to beware of following bad examples."

"What!"

"The whatfulness is terrific!"

"Now, don't get ratty over that, Cherry. I don't criticise you. I'm bound to do as my father told me. Of course, I understand that you mightn't be, but I'm rather particular about these things. It's my way."

Bob Cherry stared at Bunter in grim silence for some moments.

"I don't know whether you're as big a fool as you pretend to be," he said at last, "but you seem to me to be out for a big licking. Keep an eye on that belt—and hold your jaw! Savvy?"

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"Shut up!"

And the juniors had their tea—Billy Bunter beaming like a full moon over the well-spread table, with the pleasant consciousness of having taken his turn at standing a feed.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

A Bad Time for Bulstrode.

BULSTRODE jammed his hands into his pockets and strode away towards the gates of Greyfriars. He was in a savage and restless mood—ready at a moment's notice to break out into a fury. The blow had fallen upon him heavily and though his angry pride would not allow him to take a single step to set himself right in the eyes of his Form-fellows he felt it none the less keenly. He had hardened his heart against his former friends but he suffered all the same.

Near the gate Trevor and Desmond and several more Remove fellows were talking. They pointedly ignored Bulstrode as he came by. The burly Remove swung round upon them savagely.

"You cads!"

"Faith and I——"

"Shut up, Desmond!" muttered Russell.

"Sure but I——"

"Don't speak to him. He's barred."

"Begorra and it's right ye are. You can go on, Bulstrode darling, but I'm not goin' to speak to yez at all, at all."

"You ass!" growled Trevor while the others grinned.

Bulstrode glared at them.

"So you're going to keep this up?" he snarled.

No reply.

"I suppose you think I'm going to sneak round asking you to speak to me. If you do, you're jolly well mistaken."

Dead silence!

"You—you rotten cads!"

Silence!

Bulstrode quivered with rage. Any sort of ragging he could have met but this deadly silence disconcerted and baffled him.

"You—you rotters! I'll take on any two of you!" he hissed.

Trevor walked away and the others followed. They did not look at Bulstrode.

The big Remove stood looking after them, his hands clenching and unclenching. He was inclined to rush at them and tackle them then and there—the half-dozen of them. Several Upper Fourth fellows were standing near and they

looked curiously at Bulstrode. They had noticed during the last day or two that something was "up" in the Remove but they did not know what it was. Temple, Dabney & Co. exchanged glances and came over towards Bulstrode. He swung round and glared at them.

"Nice cheerful face isn't it?" said Temple. "A thing of beauty and a joy for ever—I don't think!"

"Oh rather!" said Dabney.

"The kids are quarrelling among their little selves" said Fry, shaking his head. "I really think it's about time we waded in and gave the Remove a Form licking. They have needed it badly all the term."

Bulstrode only glared and turned away. The Upper Fourth-formers were surprised. They had expected an outburst and they could not understand it at all. The bully of the Remove strode out of the gates.

Temple gave an expressive whistle.

"Something wrong with his lordship" he remarked.

"Oh rather!"

"Let's follow and cheer him up" suggested Fry with a grin. But Temple shook his head.

"Let him alone! He looks as if he was having a bad time, somehow."

Bulstrode was having a bad time. He strode out of the gates, his hands in his pockets his eyes on the ground. He almost ran into three Removes who were coming towards the school from the village. They were Ogilvy, Morgan and Skinner. They stopped quickly back, as if his touch were contamination, and that seemed to give the finishing touch to Bulstrode's rage.

He turned upon them like a tiger.

"Put up your hands!" he shouted.

"Oh, rats!" said Ogilvy. "Come on, chaps."

Bulstrode planted himself in their path.

"I've had enough of this," he said between his teeth. "Put up your hands!"

"Oh, ring off," said Skinner. "We know you can lick any one of us—but your bullying days are over. If you don't keep to yourself, we'll chuck you into the ditch. Do you think you're going to bully us into speaking to an anonymous letter writer?"

"Don't talk to him," said Ogilvy.

Bulstrode struck out furiously. Ogilvy reeled back from a savage drive in the face. His blood was up, and he sprang at Bulstrode—but the lad from the Highlands, strong as he was, was no match for the burly Remove. He went down into the road with a bump. He was up again in a twinkling, and the three juniors fastened on Bulstrode. He was whirled off his feet, and sent with a crash into the ditch that bordered the road.

Fortunately for Bulstrode, the ditch was a dry one. But it was deep, and choked with bracken and fern, and there was a deposit of yellow ooze at the bottom. Into that the Remove plumped, and the others walked on and left him there. Bulstrode scrambled up, with scratched hands and face, and his clothes caked with mud in three or four places.

By the time he struggled out into the road, the juniors had gone in. Bulstrode ground his teeth helplessly.

His great strength had given him a power over the Form, and he had not scrupled to use it. But his day was evidently over. The Remove wanted to let him alone—and if he tried his old tactics they did not hesitate to use force. Two or three could always stop any bullying by combining against him. They had a bond of union in their agreement to bar him. Force would not serve him now.

Sore and sulky, and simmering with rage, Bulstrode walked on down the road, and plunged into the wood. Through the wood a footpath ran down to the shore by the walls of Cliff House. Bulstrode followed the footpath, and the wide blue sea suddenly burst upon his vision through openings in the trees. He strode on to the shore, and flung himself down in the shadow of a rock. There, with a savage, sullen gaze bent upon the rolling sea, he tried to think the situation out.

"Hang it!" he broke out at last. "What shall I do?"

He looked up the next moment; there was a soft footstep on the sand. Bulstrode started as he caught the glance of Marjorie Hazeldene. The girl had just come round the big rock, and came upon the Greyfriars junior unexpectedly.

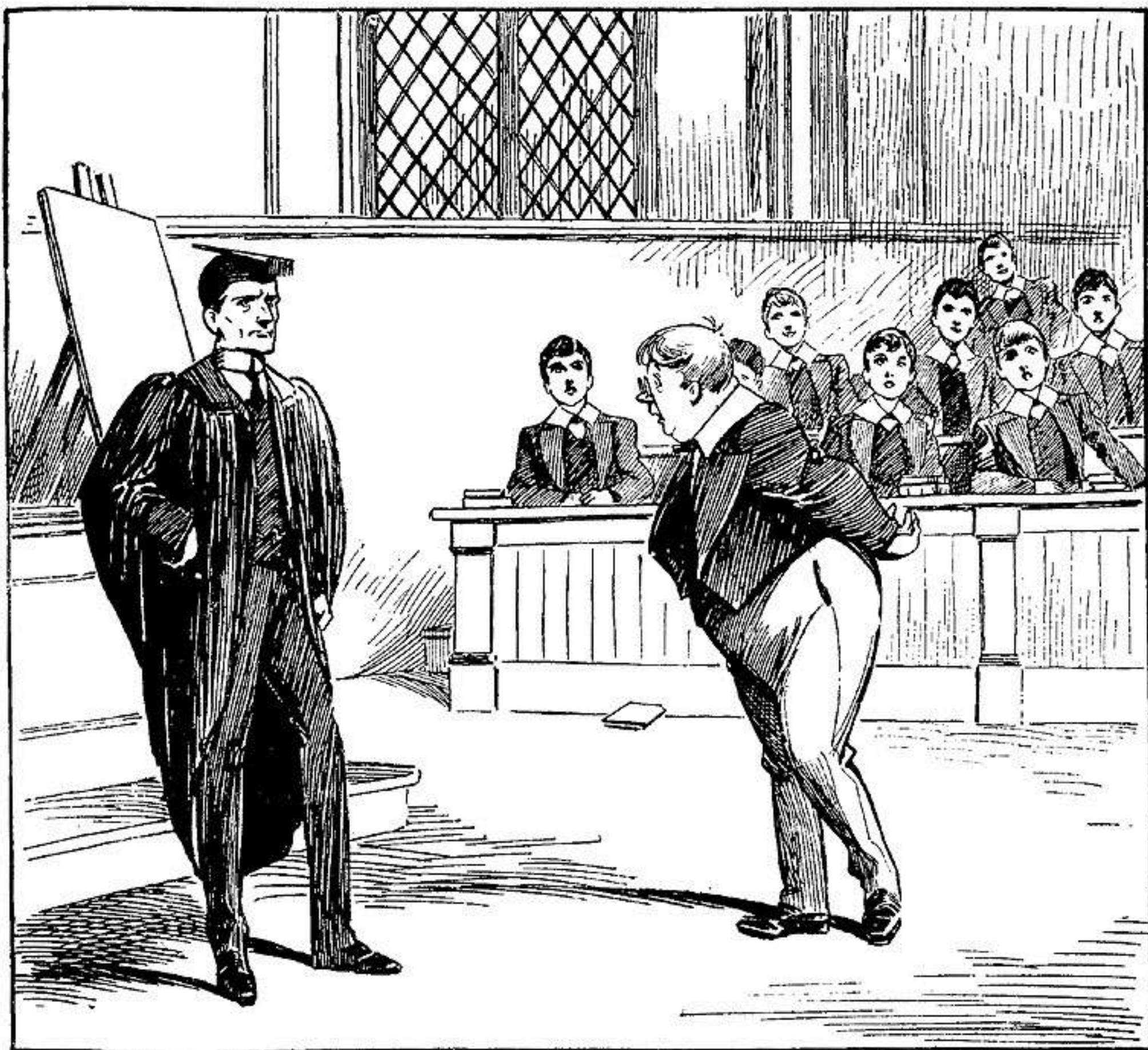
Bulstrode rose awkwardly, and raised his cap.

Marjorie gave him a nod and a smile. She did not like Bulstrode; she had seen too much of the unpleasant side of his character. But, as she looked at his face now, she saw the lines of trouble deeply engraved there. Marjorie's heart was very tender, and it softened.

"I—I hope I didn't startle you, Miss Hazeldene."

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"You have taken my camera to play with!" exclaimed Mr. Quelch, aghast. "N-n-no, sir; to work with. I am going to put it back, of course, sir. I shouldn't have let you miss it if I could help it."

Marjorie laughed.

"You did—a little. I did not know anyone was here."

Her eyes were on his face. Bulstrode knew that the girl read there that he was in trouble, and that she was sympathetic. It crossed his mind how pleasant it would be if he could confide in Marjorie. But he dismissed the thought at once. Marjorie gave him a pleasant nod and walked on, a thoughtful shade upon her face. Bulstrode looked after her till she disappeared among the rocks.

"Hang it," he muttered, "she must have heard what I said! I wish she were my sister instead of that cad Hazeldene's. Hum!"

And as the thought came into his mind, there was a more amiable expression upon Bulstrode's face than was usually seen there.

THE NINTH CHAPTER. A Friend for Bulstrode.

"MARJORIE hasn't come yet," Bob Cherry remarked, as he poured out a third cup of tea—of a liquid, at least—from the tea-pot. The allowance of tea was short, as the study had nearly run out of it, and a single spoonful had had to suffice to make tea for five. The third and fourth additions of hot water to the pot, therefore, made the refreshing beverage a little weak.

THE MAGNET.—71.

But, as Bob Cherry cheerfully pointed out, that was really all the better. Tea was bad for the nerves, so the weaker you had it, the better it was for you. And certainly Bob Cherry's third cup was not likely to damage his nerves by its strength.

"No," said Harry. "I understood she was coming over on her bicycle to see Hazeldene. But—"

Tap!

Bob Cherry knew that gentle tap. He jumped up in such a hurry that his knees caught the table and made that jump too, and rushed to the door. He was careless of the fact that his cup of tea had been upset by the shock into Billy Bunter's plate of toast and sardines. Bunter sat almost speechless with wrath, staring at it.

Bob Cherry dragged the door open.

A charming face under a charming hat looked into the study. The juniors were all on their feet in a moment to greet Marjorie Hazeldene.

"Just in time for tea!" exclaimed Nugent, too excited by the visit to remember what kind of tea was in the pot, and that there was no more in the study. The solid portion of the tea, too, was nearly gone. Bunter was finishing the sardines, and there was only a suspicion of stickiness left in the jumpot.

But Marjorie shook her head.

"Oh, no, thank you; I had tea at Cliff House."

"Just a cup of tea, though," urged Nugent. "You must need a little tea after a bike ride, you know."

Bob Cherry looked daggers at him, but Nugent did not understand. He flourished the tea-pot.

"I say, Miss Hazeldene, you must really have a cup of tea. We've got a clean cup, too."

Marjorie smiled and nodded, as if that last inducement was really too much for her.

"Very well, thank you; just a little one."

"What ho! Hand over that cup, Inky."

"The handfulness is great, my worthy chum."

Nugent proceeded to pour out the tea. He started a little as he saw the fluid that came from the spout of the tea-pot. It was absolutely colourless.

"Do you—or—do you like your tea weak?" he stammered.

"Oh yes, please."

"Shove the kettle on," whispered Wharton. "Make some more."

"Can't," muttered Bob, in reply. "There isn't any."

"Oh!"

"I'm afraid this is rather weak," said Nugent. "It wouldn't take five minutes to make a fresh pot, Marjorie."

"Oh, you frabjous ass!" murmured Bob Cherry. "And he saw me chuck the canister away himself when I put the last in. The frabjous, burbling ass!"

"Oh no, thanks," said Marjorie. "This will do—beautifully."

Nugent hastily added milk, so that the true colour of the tea should not be too apparent, and passed the sugar-basin to Marjorie. The girl sat down and sipped the tea—and sipped again.

"You mustn't mind if I don't finish it," she said, with a bright smile. "I've had tea, you know."

"I'm afraid it's rather weak. I really wish you would let me make you a fresh pot," said Nugent, fatuously.

"Oh no, not at all." Marjorie rose to her feet. "I've been talking so long to Hazel, that I can't stay a minute. The porter will be locking the gates."

"Then we'll come down to the gate with you, anyway. Where's your machine?"

"Hazel put it in the bicycle-shed."

"I'll get it," said Bob Cherry, hastily, and he rushed off. Nugent looked after him rather grimly. Marjorie followed more slowly with the juniors. Bunter remained in the study, finishing up whatever was left on the table that was eatable.

Wharton noticed that the girl's face was unusually serious as they crossed the Close. Marjorie turned to him suddenly.

"I really came to your study because I wanted to speak to you, Harry." Nugent and Hurree Singh dropped a little behind.

"Of course, you know about Bulstrode?"

"Bulstrode!" said Harry in surprise.

"Yes; I met him on the shore about an hour ago, and he seemed to me to be in great trouble of some sort. I felt sorry for him. I asked Hazel about him just now, and he told me that Bulstrode had been sent to Coventry for writing an anonymous letter."

"That's it."

"My brother seems to have no doubt about it," said Marjorie slowly, "but—but is it quite certain that Bulstrode did it, Harry?"

Wharton's face clouded a little.

"I don't know," he said. "It looks pretty black against him. Quelch had been ragging him only the day before, about his bullying a kid, you know. Bulstrode bears malice; he can't get over a jaw like the other chaps. Then this letter was written to the Head. We haven't seen it—but it's a letter abusing Quelch in some way, and Quelch says he is certain it was written by a boy in our Form. The fellows all think it was Bulstrode."

"But you?"

"Well, I don't know what to think. Bulstrode has gone the worst possible way to work if he wants to clear himself. He seems to think that he can carry the matter off by bullying and bravado, and the Form isn't likely to stand that—from him."

"I don't think he did it, Harry."

"No!" said Wharton in astonishment, "but—"

"He isn't that sort of boy, I think, Harry. I know he is not a nice boy, but though he has done mean things, I should never have thought him mean enough for an action like this. Writing an anonymous letter is the act of a weak and cowardly nature—and Bulstrode's isn't that."

"I was thinking something of the sort myself, Marjorie. But the whole Form has made up its mind on the subject. I thought I might look into it, though."

"I think you ought to, Harry—as captain of the Form. It must be terrible for Bulstrode if he is really innocent. And I cannot help thinking that there are boys in the Remove who are more likely to have written that letter."

Wharton nodded thoughtfully.

"That's true enough, but they are all down upon him. A fellow like Snoop would be about the likeliest, I should say, after the mean trick he played on Linley, but he has been as loud as any in denouncing Bulstrode lately."

"The guilty boy might do that to divert suspicion from himself."

THE MAGNET.—71.

NEXT
WEEK:

"THE GREYFRIARS PHOTOGRAPHER."

"By Jove; he might!"

"It is horrid to suspect any boy of being so mean," said Marjorie. "But it ought to be made clear who is guilty. I felt very sorry for Bulstrode."

Harry Wharton laughed.

"I've been feeling rather sorry for the brute myself," he said; "but he's such a surly beast you don't know how to take him." Wharton checked himself abruptly; it came strangely into his mind at that moment that he had been described in those very words himself, in his first days at Greyfriars. He coloured a little. "I'll look into it, Marjorie," he said, hurriedly, "I'll do my best to clear the matter up."

Bob Cherry came running up with the bicycle. He ran it into Nugent behind the knees in the dusk, and Nugent sat down suddenly. Harry Wharton lighted the lamp, and held the machine for Marjorie to mount. Bob Cherry had another machine in his other hand, and he lighted the lamp on that also. It was Wharton's bicycle, but it was evidently not for Wharton to use.

"Hazel is riding back with me," said Marjorie, with a smile.

"He has permission."

"The roads aren't very safe," said Bob Cherry. "There was a tramp locked up the other day for—for stealing pigeons. I shouldn't like you or your brother to come to any harm, you know. I'd better come, and then I can look after Hazeldene on the way back."

"Thank you," said Hazeldene, as he wheeled his machine up. "I can look after myself all right."

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Is that you, old chap?" said Bob Cherry, quite affectionately, though, as a rule, he was not fond of Hazeldene. "We'll have a jolly spin back."

"Oh, rats!" said Hazeldene.

"Or, I'll tell you what," said Bob, with the same heartiness, "I'll see Miss Hazeldene back to Cliff House, and you needn't bother to come out at all."

"More rats."

They wheeled their machines out of the gate. Gosling had come out to lock up, and Wingate of the Sixth came in just in time. He stopped and lifted his cap to Marjorie.

"You kids going out?"

"I am," said Hazeldene. "I've got a pass from Mr. Quelch."

"And you, Cherry?"

"Nice warm evening, isn't it?" said Bob Cherry, trying to wheel his machine past Wingate without answering the question. The big Sixth-Former caught him by the shoulder.

"Have you a pass, Cherry?"

"A—a pass! Can't you give me one, Wingate?"

"Then you haven't one?"

"Well—no—not exactly."

"You young rascal! Go in."

"Oh, Wingate!"

The distress in Bob Cherry's face was so keen that the Greyfriars captain melted. He wrote on a leaf of his pocket-book and tore it out.

"Mind, back in half-an-hour," he said.

"Oh, thanks, Wingate. You are a sport!"

"Oh, get off."

And the three cyclists disappeared in the dusk.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

The Investigators.

MR. QUELCH was sitting in his study by the open window. The sunset was changing to deep dusk, and the windows of the old school were beginning to sparkle with lights. Mr. Quelch's study was so fortunately placed as to get the last of the daylight, and he still sat there with a book in his hand. But the hand holding the book had fallen upon his knee. He was not reading. A shadow was upon his face—a shadow of painful thought.

He started out of his reverie as a knock came at the door of the study.

"Come in," he said, quietly.

He looked a little surprised as three juniors presented themselves. Harry Wharton came in first, and then Nugent, and Hurree Janset Ram Singh brought up the rear, with an unusually serious expression upon his dusky face.

"Well, my boys," said the Form-master, in a kindly tone.

"Can I do anything for you?"

"Yes, sir. We—" Wharton hesitated, and then plunged boldly into the matter. "It's about the anonymous letter, sir."

The Form-master's face clouded over.

"Have you come to tell me that you have discovered the writer of it, Wharton?"

"No, sir, but that's what we want to do. The Form suspects one fellow, but I have my doubts. It's important to get it cleared up, sir."

"That is very true."

"We want to do so if possible, sir."

"So we thought you wouldn't mind letting us see the letter

sir," said Nugent, taking up the tale. "We think we might be able to tell something from the fist, sir—ahem, I mean the handwriting."

"The tollfulness would be great, esteemed teacher sahib."

Mr. Quelch wrinkled his brows slightly.

"There is no real reason why you should not see the letter," he said, after a pause. "There may be something in your suggestion. I know the hand of every boy in the Form; but this is written in print letters. You may be able to see more in it than I can, from your more intimate knowledge of the habits of your Form-fellows."

"That's what I thought, sir."

"You may have the letter. Return it to me later."

Mr. Quelch took a letter from a drawer in his table and handed it to Wharton.

"Thank you very much, sir."

The juniors retired from the study. Straight to their own quarters they went, where they found the gas lighted, and the fire going, and Billy Bunter roasting chestnuts. Nugent took the fat junior by one of his fat ears.

"Travel!" he said.

"Oh, really, Nugent! I'm not going to be turned out of my own study in this way."

Wharton tossed the fat junior a sixpence.

"Go and eat tarts," he said, laughing.

"Of course, that alters matters. Will you have this sixpence back out of my postal order to-morrow morning, Wharton, or out of my first cheque for photographs supplied to the illustrated papers?"

"Whichever you like, Billy; or you can leave it to me in your will. It's just the same, and I'm not particular."

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

Nugent pushed the fat junior out into the passage and locked the door.

"Now to business," he remarked.

"Right-ho! Here's the letter."

Wharton laid the letter on the table. The three juniors looked at it eagerly enough. This was the anonymous letter that had caused so much trouble; but would it give them a clue to the writer?

The letter was written upon common notepaper, without a heading of any sort. The writing was in Roman capitals, evidently for the purpose of thoroughly disguising the identity of the writer.

The letters were rough, crude, but easily readable, and the whole communication ran as follows:

"DEAR SIR,—WHY DON'T YOU GET A NEW MASTER FOR THE REMOVE? WE'VE HAD ENOUGH OF QUELCH. HE IS A ROTTER! NOBODY LIKES HIM, AND THE FORM WOULD BE GLAD TO GET RID OF HIM. IT IS ALL ROTTEN FAVOURITISM IN THE REMOVE.

YOURS FAITHFULLY,
DISGUSTED."

P.S.—GET A NEW FORM-MASTER."

Harry Wharton turned pale with anger as he read this precious effusion.

"The cad!" he said. "It's all untrue. We all like Quelch—all the decent fellows in the Form, at all events."

"Yes, rather!" agreed Nugent. "He does drive a little hard at times; but, hang it all, the Remove would walk over him if he didn't. I thought we were all sportsmen, and could take a little roughness along with the day's work."

"The cadfulness of this esteemed skunk is terrific," remarked the Nabob of Bhanipur, with a gesture of disgust towards the letter. "I should have great pleasurefulness in getting within the lengthfulness of the arm and his honourable nose."

Wharton's eyes were glittering.

"The fellow is some cad whom Quelch has been down upon," he remarked. "Quelch sometimes lets his tongue go, as he did with Bulstrode the other day, and then he says things! His little jaw about bullying and caddishness has touched this chap on the raw, I suppose."

"Do you think it's Bulstrode?"

Wharton shook his head.

"I can't think so. Bulstrode would be sulky in class and rude to Quelch, but I can't imagine him sitting down in his study to labour through this. It must have taken some time. And then, too, Bulstrode is a bully; but he's got pluck, and, as a rule, he hasn't been afraid to face the music after anything he's done. But this rotter must have spent a long time in covering up his tracks."

Nugent wrinkled his brows.

"But then—who?"

"That's what we've got to find out. It's a fellow in the Lower Fourth, but that gives us nearly forty to choose from, including ourselves." Wharton laughed. "But I think we could make up a list of half a dozen at most who could be mean enough to do a thing like this—perhaps only three or four."

"Good. If we made a list of possible guilty parties we could investigate all in turn, and perhaps hit on the right one that way."

"It's a bit rough on a chap to include his name in such a list," Wharton said slowly. "But we shall keep it to ourselves, and say nothing about it. We must get at the truth; the Form's under a cloud till the matter's cleared up. Now, I can

THE MAGNET.—71.

NEXT WEEK: "THE GREYFRIARS PHOTOGRAPHER."

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think of only three fellows who could possibly have done it—Snoop, Stott, and Skinner."

"What price Bunter?"

"Well, he might have been put up to doing it, but he's such an ass he would have let it out to us, and he hasn't."

"True! We have three on the list, then, though I can hardly think Skinner would do it. Snoop's the likeliest. You remember the caddish trick he played in Linley's case—sneaked to the Form-master, and threw the blame on Linley, and let him be sent to Coventry. A fellow who would do that would write an anonymous letter."

Wharton nodded.

"Very likely. But we'll keep an open mind on the subject, and not forget the possibility that it's Bulstrode all the time."

"How are you going to begin?"

"Well, I haven't studied the methods of Sherlock Holmes or Sexton Blake," said Harry, smiling. "But I suppose we had better begin by studying what evidence there is."

"The letter doesn't tell us much, except that the cad's in the Remove."

"True! But there's the envelope."

"Ah! I forgot that."

Wharton turned the envelope over in his hands. It was of the same common paper as the letter, and was addressed to the Head of Greyfriars in the same print letters that the communication was written in. Wharton could imagine the surprise it had caused Dr. Locke to receive a letter addressed in such a way.

"The postmark is Wednesday night," he remarked. "I should say it was posted in the school-box, and taken to the village with the other letters by the postman, and, as we know, it was delivered here Thursday morning. There's a five o'clock collection at the school postbox, and a nine collection. The letter might have been posted anywhere between five and nine."

"A jolly wide margin."

"The marginfulness is terrific," said Hurreo Singh. "I remember that our honourable chum Cherry posted a letter at a quarter to nine that esteemed evening."

"Good!" exclaimed Wharton.

Nugent stared.

"You don't think Bob—"

"Ass! He went to the postbox late. Now it stands to reason that the cad who sent the anonymous letter would leave it till after dark before posting it, so as not to be seen near the pillar-box. Bob may have seen him."

"Yes, by Jove!" said Nugent, with interest. "It gets dark jolly late now, and there isn't much interval between dark and the collection at the school-box. I wish Bob would come back and we could ask—"

Bump!

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" roared a voice through the keyhole. "What's the blessed door locked for?"

"Talk of angels," grinned Nugent, as he rose and unlocked the door. "It was to keep silly duffers out, Bob; but we make an exception in your favour. Did Marjorie get home all right?"

"Of course she did," said Bob. "It was a lovely ride. I had a scorch back from Cliff House, and nearly fagged Hazeldeno off his bike. Ha, ha, ha!"

"You posted a letter the other night, Bob?"

"Yes, I believe I have done such things—"

"Don't be funny; we're investigating. You posted a letter about a quarter to nine on Wednesday evening."

"Yes; I cut down there before the collection went. What about it?"

"Did you see anybody hanging about the pillar-box—anybody who had posted a letter, or was going to or fro?"

"Yes; a chap was posting a letter just as I got there."

"Who was it?"

"Bulstrode!"

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER

Bulstrode Cuts Up Rusty.

THE investigators looked at one another blankly.

They had undertaken the investigation with the idea of proving Bulstrode's innocence, if possible, and the only result had been to make the case blacker against him.

Bob Cherry stared at them in amazement.

"What on earth's the matter?" he exclaimed. "Why shouldn't Bulstrode post a letter if he wants to?"

Harry Wharton explained, and Bob's face became grave as he listened. He gave a long, low whistle.

"My hat! It looks rotten for him. Still, it may mean nothing," he remarked. "It's curious that Bulstrode should be posting a letter then, but then he writes a good many. It's probably only a coincidence."

"You saw no one else?"

"No one."

"If it's a coincidence it proves nothing," said Wharton

slowly. "But it closes that line of inquiry. What's the next move?"

The juniors shook their heads hopelessly. They had hoped for the moment, but Bob Cherry's reply had, as Wharton said, closed inquiry in that direction. There was evidence enough against Bulstrode already, and they wanted evidence against somebody else.

Nugent drummed his hands on the table, thinking. He looked at the letter again, and spoke abruptly:

"Don't you think it's likely that the cad who wrote that may have practised that kind of lettering a bit before he wrote the letter? I shouldn't wonder if he made two or three trials before finally writing the letter. He would want to satisfy himself that his hand was unrecognisable in it, and——"

Wharton's face brightened.

"It's possible—quite possible."

"But he would chuck the stuff into the fire, surely, when he had finished," said Bob Cherry. "He wouldn't be idiot enough to leave it in existence."

"But there are very few study fires going at this time of the year," said Nugent quickly. "The letter was almost certainly written after teatime, too, to be posted late. There mightn't have been a fire handy. He might just tear up the paper and chuck it away—into the grate or the waste-paper basket."

"Last Wednesday!" said Bob. "There wouldn't be much left of it now."

"I don't know," said Harry. "The boys' maid isn't always thorough, you know. I know our waste-paper basket sometimes fills up for a week before it's emptied, and overflows over the carpet."

"True enough."

"It's worth looking into, anyway. We'll see Bulstrode first, though. I couldn't go nosing into a fellow's study without letting him know. If Bulstrode refuses permission, we shall know what to think, and we shall be justified in calling in Wingate into the matter."

"And if we draw his waste-paper basket blank?"

"We'll go next to Snoop's."

"Good! I——"

Bob Cherry broke off suddenly and ran to the door. There had been a slight rattle of the handle, as if someone, listening at the keyhole, had knocked his head accidentally against it. Bob Cherry dragged the door open, and looked out into the passage.

The passage was dimly lit. There was no one in sight; if someone had been listening at the door, he had vanished in remarkably quick time. Bob Cherry heard a footstep. He looked along the passage again, and saw Wun Lung, the Chinese junior, advancing from the direction of the box-room. But it could not have been Wun Lung at the door; the Chinese was no eavesdropper; and besides, he would not have shown himself there.

Bob stepped back into the study.

"Anybody there?" asked Harry.

"No. But I'm almost certain someone was listening. Somebody has got scent of the fact that we're looking into the matter."

"We were seen to go into Mr. Quelch's study, I suppose." Wharton's brow darkened. "It might have been any curious cad—very likely Bunter. He'll have eaten his tarts by this time, and I know he was curious to learn why we turned him out of the study."

"Of course; I didn't think of Bunter. It was our prize porpoise, of course. We may as well get to business; no need to lose time, especially if Bunter knows anything about the matter."

"Come on, then."

The four juniors went in search of Bulstrode. They found him in the junior common-room.

The burly Removite was sitting by himself, his legs stretched out and his hands in his pockets, and a sullen scowl on his face.

There was a wide space round him; no one cared to be a near neighbour of the junior who was "barred."

He looked up sullenly as Harry Wharton came up with his friends. The other fellows looked on from a distance.

"I want to speak to you, Bulstrode," said Harry, "and I want you to understand, first of all, that I speak as a friend."

An ugly sneer came over Bulstrode's face.

"What's the little game?"

Wharton bit his lip to keep back the hot words that rose. What was the use of trying to help a fellow like this? But he had marked out a path for himself, and he meant to follow it.

"Be reasonable, Bulstrode. I repeat that I want to help you. I don't think you sent that anonymous letter."

"Thank you," said Bulstrode sneeringly. "That's very gratifying, but it comes rather late in the day, after setting the Form against me."

"Oh, what's the good of bothering about the brute?" exclaimed Bob Cherry impatiently. "Let him rip! Come on."

"Look here, Bulstrode, we've taken this matter up to sift

THE MAGNET.—71.

NEXT WEEK: "THE GREYFRIARS PHOTOGRAPHER."

it, and if you're innocent, we want you to help," said Wharton:

"Don't you understand that?"

"I don't want any assistance from you."

"Listen to this. We've got what we consider a clue. Have you any objection to a search being made of your study?"

Bulstrode's face flamed.

"Yes, I have. If you come searching my study, I'll throw you out."

"It's for your own sake."

"Oh, don't give me any humbug."

Wharton's face set hard.

"Very well. Your study's going to be searched, whether you like it or not. Will you keep watch on the study, you chaps, and see that nothing's meddled with there, while I go and speak to Wingate?"

"What ho!"

Bulstrode rose to his feet.

"I'm going to my study now," he said. "Anybody who pokes his nose in there will go out on his neck!"

He strode away. Bob Cherry, Nugent, and Hurree Singh followed him, and reached the study at the same time. There was no doubt in their minds now as to Bulstrode's guilt, and they were determined that he should not have an uninterrupted minute in the study to get rid of any possible traces.

"Get out of my study!" roared Bulstrode, as they followed him into the room.

"Nice evening, ain't it?" said Bob Cherry.

"Will you get out?"

"Jolly good weather for the time of year, too."

"Are you going?"

"But I shouldn't be surprised at a shower in the morning."

Bulstrode ground his teeth. Without speaking again, he rushed at Bob Cherry. The three juniors grasped him and rolled him over on the carpet. His head struck a waste-paper basket near the table, and sent it rolling. It was crammed with old papers and exercise sheets. Bob sat on Bulstrode's chest, and Nugent on his legs.

"Now you'll wait till Wharton comes," said Bob cheerfully.

And Bulstrode, pinned down helplessly, had to wait.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

An Amazing Denouement!

WINGATE, the captain of Greyfriars, strode into the study a few minutes later, with Harry Wharton. There was a very stern expression upon the big Sixth-Former's face. He looked at the prostrate Bulstrode, gasping with rage under the weight of the two juniors, and signed to them to let him rise. Bulstrode staggered to his feet, dusty and furious.

"Wharton has told me how this matter stands, Bulstrode," said Wingate sternly. "You have refused to have a search of your study, and have tried to keep these fellows out of it by force."

"I won't have my room searched."

"Why not?"

"Do you think I'm going to be watched and searched like a thief?" said Bulstrode, choking with rage. "You all believe I wrote that caddish letter. Well, believe it, then. I don't care. I won't take a step to prove I'm innocent. I won't be searched like a thief. This is my room; get out of it."

"At any other time, Bulstrode, I should give you the licking of your life for speaking to the captain in that way," said Wingate quietly. "But I can make allowances for the state of your feelings. If you are innocent, I'm sorry for you; but this wilful pigheadedness is the worst possible thing for you. You've got to give what assistance you can towards clearing up a disgraceful matter. Mind, you're dealing with the head of the Sixth now, and I'm not going to stand any nonsense. Stand where you are while I turn out this rubbish!"

Bulstrode was white with rage; but there was no arguing with the captain of the school. He stood, biting his lips and casting furious glances at Harry Wharton, while Wingate picked up the waste-paper basket and placed it on the table.

"When was this cleared out last, Bulstrode?" he asked.

"I don't know."

"Was it cleared out to-day or yesterday?"

"No; not since Sunday, anyway."

"It looks like it," said Wingate.

He dragged the crammed masses of rubbish out of the waste-paper basket. Suddenly he gave a sharp cry.

"What's this?"

He held up in the gaslight a sheet of exercise paper, scribbled over in Roman capitals. The sheet had been crumpled; he smoothed it out.

The chums of the Remove looked at it, and so did Bulstrode. The latter went white as a sheet. For this is what was scribbled on the paper:

"WHY DON'T YOU GET A NEW MASTER——"

"My hat!" said Bob Cherry, "it's plain enough. That was written for practice, before the rotten cad wrote the letter."

"The plainfulness is terrific."

Wingate fixed his eyes upon Bulstrode.

"What have you to say to that, Bulstrode?" he demanded sternly.

"It's—it's a conspiracy!" stammered Bulstrode. "I never wrote that. It's been placed there to ruin me! It's a plant; Wharton must have put it there."

Harry went scarlet; but Wingate made him a sign to be silent.

"You can hardly expect me to believe such an accusation against Wharton, Bulstrode. These other fellows would have to be in it, and it is simply absurd to suppose that the four juniors with the best characters in the school would join in such a plot. Don't be a fool."

"I don't care! I never wrote that paper."

"You see what it is; the same writing used in the anonymous letter has been practised here. The letter was written in this study."

"Hazeldene may have done it."

"You cad!" broke out Wharton. "Hazeldene never wrote that letter, and you know it."

Bulstrode gritted his teeth.

"I did not write it. I never saw that paper before."

"Fetch Hazeldene here," said Wingate.

Nugent hurried from the study, and in a few minutes he returned with Hazeldene, who looked very startled and uneasy. Wingate held the paper out to him, so suddenly that it was impossible for him to be on his guard.

"Have you seen that before, Hazeldene?"

The junior shook his head. The strange writing evidently puzzled, but did not alarm, him. He was amazed.

"No, Wingate."

"Look at it again. It is a fragment of a rough draft of the anonymous letter sent to the Head."

Hazeldene changed colour.

"Wingate, you don't think I—"

"No, I don't," said Wingate grimly. "You would have given it away at once. But—"

"I say," broke in Hazeldene, "there's some mistake here. You say this is part of a rough draft of the anonymous letter?"

"Yes."

"But the anonymous letter was written at least two days ago; this was written to-day, and lately, or I'm much mistaken."

"What!"

Wingate looked at the fragment again. He had not noticed it at first, but it was undoubtedly true. The writing on the fragment was fresh—the ink unfaded; it was evidently the work of a later time than the anonymous letter. In all probability, it had not been written an hour!

"My hat!" said Wingate.

"I told you so!" screamed Bulstrode. "Didn't I say they wrote it to plant the letter on me? They put the thing here, and then pretended to come and find it."

The chums of the Remove were utterly aghast. There was no foundation, of course, for Bulstrode's wild accusation; but at the same time there was no doubt that the fragment had been recently written. It was not a draft of the anonymous letter. Yet the wording, as far as it went, was the same.

The captain of Greyfriars looked grimly at the Famous Four.

"This is very strange," he said. "It is certainly a plant, as Bulstrode calls it. This paper has been put here lately, to make his guilt seem clear. Who did it?"

Before anyone could speak, there was a sudden bump at the door. Bump! bump! bump! again, and Wingate threw open the door with angry impatience. Two forms, locked in a close embrace, rolled into the room, and then Wun Lung sprang to his feet. The other remained gasping on the carpet—it was Snoop, of the Remove!

Wingate stared at them angrily.

"What does this mean?"

The little Celestial grinned.

"Me teller. Me knower."

"You know what, you young duffer?"

"Me knower bouter anonymous letter."

"What! You know who wrote it?"

"Me knower."

"Who was it?" cried three or four voices.

"Snooper!"

"Snoop!"

"It wasn't!" gasped Snoop, struggling to his feet. "It's a lie! I never saw it! I don't know anything about it."

He was sidling towards the door, but Wingate hurled him back. Snoop sank into a chair, trembling in every limb, and with a face like chalk.

"Now, Wun Lung, tell us what you know—quick!"

"Me come down from boxloom," explained the little Chinese.

"Me see Snooper listen at dool No. 1 Study."

Bob Cherry uttered an exclamation.

"Ah, it was Snoop, then!"

"It was Snooper. Me tinkee he up to some tick—Snooper great letter. Me follow him. Snooper go to study. He look verry whitee bouter face, verry flightened. Me tinkee muchee. Me lookee through keyhole—Snooper write something on paper—den he come out. Me buzz off loud colner. THE MAGNET.—71.

NEXT
WEEK:

"THE GREYFRIARS PHOTOGRAPHER."

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Snooper lookee dis way—dat way—no see Wun Lung. Den he go to Bulstrode's study."

"Here?"

"Yes," grinned Wun Lung. "Me follow—me watch. Me see him puttee paper in waste-paper basket. What you tinkee?"

"It's a lie!" gasped Snoop hoarsely.

"Aftel he whitee letter, he blotee on blottee-paper," said Wun Lung. "P'aps you findee malkee on blottee paper. What you tinkee?"

Snoop staggered to his feet. But Wingate barred his way to the door.

"No, you're not going to get a chance at that blotting-paper," he said. "Don't trouble to tell any lies, Snoop. You wrote this to plant the anonymous letter on Bulstrode. You knew that Wharton was coming to search the waste-paper basket in this study, and you planted this ready for him. You wanted to make Bulstrode out guilty. Why? To cover up your own tracks, I suppose."

Snoop sank into the chair again, and burst into wretched tears. He was caught in his own trap, and there was no use in further falsehood. He was at the end of his lies; and now, in response to Wingate's merciless questions, the wretched story came out. He had seen Wharton go to Mr. Quelch's study; he had listened at Wharton's door, and learned the proposed line of investigation. His fears had been aroused; and in deadly terror lest Wharton should discover something that would reveal his guilt, he had resolved to turn the present suspicion against Bulstrode to a certainty. He had had no idea that the cunning little Chinese was on his track. Wun Lung had not known all that was passing; but he had known enough to act, and he had collared Snoop and bundled him into the study to answer for his misdeeds. Snoop was answering for them now; he looked a wreck, and even Bulstrode pitied him. Wingate lifted him from his chair with an iron hand on his collar.

"You will come with me to Mr. Quelch," he said. "Bulstrode, you are cleared, and I congratulate you; but you owe it all to Harry Wharton and Wun Lung, and nothing of it to yourself. Come with me, Snoop."

He left the study with the wretched Snoop. There was a curious expression upon Bulstrode's face. For some moments there was a grim silence; then the burly Removite held out his hand to Wharton.

"I'm obliged to you," he said, with an effort, "and I'm sorry for what I said just now. I suppose I've played the giddy ox over this matter."

Wharton gave him a handshake.

"It's all right," he said. "I'm jolly glad it's cleared up; but most of the credit is due to Wun Lung. I don't know how it might have ended but for him."

"Velly plenty allee light," grinned Wun Lung.

Meanwhile, Wingate had marched Snoop into the Remove-master's study. Mr. Quelch listened quietly to his explanation, and then the culprit was left alone with the Form-master. The anonymous letter lay on the table; Snoop's eyes wandered from it to Mr. Quelch's face, almost glazed with fear.

"Snoop!" The Form-master's voice was very quiet; there was none of the anger the wretched boy had expected. "Dr. Locke has left this matter entirely in my hands, to deal with the culprit as I think fit. You know what you have done; you know that to be expelled would hardly be a sufficient punishment for so much baseness."

Snoop licked his dry lips.

"Oh, sir, I—I—I—"

"I have always tried to be just and fair to my Form," went on Mr. Quelch. "I have tried to make the boys like and respect me. I believe most of them do. You have made a brutal and utterly unprovoked attack upon me, in the meanest possible way, by writing an anonymous letter. What have you to say?"

What could he have to say? He said nothing, but stood looking at the grave face of the Form-master with wide, fearful eyes.

"Your punishment is in my hands," went on Mr. Quelch. "I am glad of that, because it enables me to give you a chance—a chance to become better, to learn to act like a decent English lad. You may go."

"But—but—"

"I pardon you," said Mr. Quelch. He took up the anonymous letter, and tore it across and across again, and threw it down. "The matter is ended. I hope you will come to have a better opinion of me in the future, and, at all events, learn to act more decently. You may go."

And Snoop went.

THE END.

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

The Opening Chapters of a Grand Story.



A Splendid Tale of Life in the British Army.

A BRIEF RESUME OF THE FIRST CHAPTERS.

Ronald Chenys, a cadet in his last term at Sandhurst, is falsely accused of cheating in an exam., so one night, packing up a few necessaries, he leaves Sandhurst with his dog Rough. He walks to London, enlists in the Royal North Wessex Regiment under the name of Chester, and is sent down as one of a draft of recruits for that regiment to Woolchester. Arrived there the rookies are taken charge of by two old soldiers, known as Mouldy Mills and Hookey Walker, who are deputed to explain their new duties. First thing in the morning there were the beds to be run back, blankets and sheets to be folded to regimental pattern, and the floor to be swept down, before the morning sluice-down could be thought of.

(Now go on with the story.)

Sergeant Bagot and Foxey Williams.

Augustus performed his share of these monial duties with a sinking heart. Now that the first flush of anger had died away, his craven blood began to run cold at the prospect awaiting him.

From his experience over night he had a shrewd idea that the fate of Mouldy's victims was probably exaggerated; but, nevertheless, he could not assure himself that such dark deeds might not happen in secret in this mysterious world in which, in an unlucky moment, he had set foot.

Ronald had taken the precaution to include a towel in his modest bundle of belongings, and, under Hookey's guidance, he and Tony Truscott made their way to the "ablution-room."

Here some fifty basins, set in long, slate slabs, were thoughtfully provided for the needs of some seven hundred men, and the line of candidates for cold water stretched far out of the door.

When Tony did finally get his turn at a bowl, the next soldier behind him cursed him roundly for daintiness and wasting time by emptying away the muddy fluid in which half a dozen men had already washed.

Ronald, meantime, had made a welcome discovery, in the shape of a row of concrete baths, which, as they were only supplied with cold water, were not in great demand.

Many an admiring glance was cast in his direction as he stripped for the plunge, and many an old soldier, accustomed in the ordinary way to look upon a recruit with lordly contempt, asked who this young Goliath might be who had joined the Wessex.

Breakfast not being until a quarter to eight, the time was employed under the direction of Corporal Kedge in instruction in the martial arts of blackleading stoves and trestle legs, scrubbing tables and floors, and blanket-drill.

The silent disgust of Augustus at being asked to perform this "slavery's work" was not lost on Mouldy, and he took a fiendish delight in putting him to all the dirtiest jobs he could find.

Ronald, however, turned to with a will, scrubbing and scouring with an energy which made both George and Alf open their piggy eyes with astonishment.

Not that the two Whitechapel toughs were allowing the embers of their hate to cool. They were of the breed that neither forgives nor forgets. They "had it in" for this young toff, and by fair means or foul they were determined to get even with him.

THE MAGNET.—71.

NEXT
WEEK:

"THE GREYFRIARS PHOTOGRAPHER."

Another School Tale of Harry Wharton & Co.
and the Pupils of Cliff House.

They could not get it out of their heads that it was through him that their dash for liberty was frustrated, and for this supposed treachery Ronald Chester was to be "put through it" in due course.

But George and Alf were in no hurry; their chance would come in good time.

At the bugle's call, "Come to the cook-house door, boys!" Hookey and Ronald were ordered away to draw the room's rations of coffee and bread, which is the official breakfast of the soldier.

Later on, when they joined their company, the small contribution levied on their weekly pay by their colour-sergeant would secure the addition of a herring or a rasher of bacon; but at present it was a case of "slingers"—that is, bread dipped in the mysterious liquid masquerading as coffee.

After a second clean up, the squad was ordered to parade at the orderly-room, where Sergeant-Major Tozer rattled in some excellent words of advice as to their new career, and then called them to attention for inspection by the colonel, who had strolled in.

Colonel Conger turned out to be a peppery little gentleman, who reminded Ronald forcibly of a ruffled cockatoo.

He banged off a brief address, and turned them over to the adjutant, who told them off to their companies, and consigned them to the charge of their respective colour-sergeants.

"B" Company, being below their proper strength, came in for the larger share of the draft, and thus Ronald, Tony Truscott, Augustus Smythe, George and Alf, found themselves being marched off in charge of a red-faced man, whose sleeve bore the three chevrons, surmounted by a crown, which showed him to be the colour-sergeant, or chief non-commissioned officer, of his company.

The first hour's drill being already over, the barrack-room was crowded with their new comrades when they arrived. A pretty tough mob Ronald thought them, as he saw them sprawling on the forms or sitting on their heels.

"B" Company, as a matter of fact, were the hard nuts of the battalion. They had earned the unsavoury reputation by hard swearing, hard drinking, and hard fighting among themselves, and, most hopeless thing of all, they were proud of it.

A strong man, backed by good subalterns and determined non-com.'s, might have taken it by the scruff and shaken it back into a proper sense or respect for itself and its regiment; but this necessary combination, as Ronald was soon to find out, was lacking.

Colour-Sergeant Jones, on whom most depended, was a smart drill and a good fellow, but weak, without grip of the instinct or capacity to mould or lead.

"I have brought you a new batch of recruits, you men," he said, as he led the way into the room. "They're fresh from St. George's, and have not been through the training depot, so there is more reason for you making them welcome. Teach them to soldier, so that they will be a credit to 'B' Company and the battalion. Private Mills, you will take charge of Private Smythe!"

"Only too 'appy, colour-sergeant!" said Mouldy, rubbing the back of his knees, where the coal-box had nipped them, and shooting a malicious glance at Augustus.

"Walker, you take Chester here! Murphy, look after

Truscott, and Johnson and Jarvis, take Cobb and Shepherd!"—indicating George and Alf.

The five old "steadies" having claimed their charges, Colour-Sergeant Jones turned to Ronald.

"Come to my bunk in half an hour, Chester, after you're settled here," he said quietly; "I want a word with you!"

"Ho! That's it, is it?" sneered a voice, as soon as the door had shut behind him. "Some of you 'ave been toadying up to the blessed 'Flag' already—eh? A-lickin' 'is boots before you've been in the regiment five minutes!"

Ronald turned his eyes in the direction of the speaker, who sat on the next cot but one from him.

He was a short, sallow-skinned man, narrow-chested and crafty-eyed. Evidently he had overheard the colour-sergeant's words.

"Are you referring to me?" inquired Ronald calmly.

"Ho! No; I ain't referring to no one, of course! I'm only talking to myself—I don't think!"

"What do you mean by that?"

"What I say!" answered Foxey Williams, with a sudden snarl, which revealed a row of uneven teeth.

A second glance at Ronald's stalwart proportions had made him wish that he had not been so hasty in speaking.

Ronald's first impulse was to cuff the little man's ears for his impertinence, but Hookey's restraining hand made him think better of it.

"Don't take any heed of Foxey," said Hookey. "He don't mean no harm!"

"Ho! Don't he?" sneered Foxey, with a forced swagger. "That depends! What say you, chums? We don't want no worms in No. 4 Section, do we?"

Before Foxey had well got the words out of his throat, Ronald had him by the collar of his tunic, and had jerked him from the bed on to the floor. At that instant the door flew open, and a short, stocky sergeant blustered into the room.

"Hallo! What's all this about?" he roared, in a blaze of fury, marching up to Ronald. "Take your hand off that man, you long, lumping lout—d'ye hear?—or, strike me sideways, I'll clap you in the clink in two shakes!"

"This man insulted me!" replied Ronald, releasing Foxey, who promptly rolled on to the floor, as though he were suffering acute pain.

"Insulted you!" sneered Sergeant Bagot, in blistering scorn. "Hang your impudence, and who may you be, I'd like to know, to give yourself airs?"

"My name is Chester, if you mean that," answered Ronald very quietly.

"No; I don't mean that, you saucy young ruffian! I shall hear more than enough of your name before I'm through with you, I can see! I want to know if you're a dook or an earl, that you can't be in the company of decent men for five minutes without man-handling the first chap that speaks to you!"

"Oh, you're that sort?" thought Ronald to himself. "One of the loud-mouthed, bullying breed! Afraid of the men you're supposed to command, and ever anxious to curry favour with them!"

"Keep your eyes off me, you mutinous sweep!" bellowed Sergeant Bagot, detecting the glimmer of contempt in Ronald's eyes. "Come any of that game here, and, by thunder, you'll find yourself in the wrong box! There's a good deal too much swank and starch about you, I can see; and we'll have to set about getting rid of some of it! Just lay to that, you second-hand specimen of an unemployed shop-walker!"

Augustus Smythe ventured on a mild snigger at hearing Ronald, the toff, taken down in this summary fashion.

Bagot wheeled round upon him in a flash.

"And you, you half-baked mud-pie of a man," he sneered, "you've got a plucky lot to laugh at, haven't you? What might your name be?"

"Smythe—Augustus S-m-y-t-h-e!" bleated this fresh victim, in terror.

"Augustus what?" roared the sergeant.

"Smythe, sir—Smythe!"

"Smythe!" sneered Bagot, in an ecstasy of derision. "Dash my buttons! What's the regiment coming to? It ain't De Smythe, or Von Smythe, or Viscount Smythe—eh? Great jumping Jupiter, if ever I catch you calling yourself Smythe again, I'll shove you in the guard-room. Smith's your name, and a thundering too good a one for you, you blockhead!"

Sergeant Bagot, having exhausted all his immediate stock of vituperation, contented himself with merely a contemptuous survey of the rest of the draft, and then with a final scowl at Ronald, and a knowing grin at the rest of the group, he stalked out of the room.

If he had one pet aversion it was the gentleman ranker, and there were unmistakable signs of breed and blood in every line of this latest-joined recruit.

Nothing appealed to Bagot's blatant and cruel instincts so much as to search out the finer feelings of a victim and trample on them.

THE MAGNET.—71.

Fine feelings were not a marked characteristic of No. 4 Section in consequence, and the few that ever possessed them learned to get rid of them as soon as possible.

Private Chester, therefore, promised rare sport, and the sergeant looked forward to the enjoyment of it with keen zest.

A snigger of derisive laughter went up as the door closed on his heel; but Ronald, though pale with suppressed anger, forced himself to ignore it. After all, when the commander of the section set such an example, what more could be expected of the men?

"Let that be a lesson to yer to keep yer 'ands off yer betters!" snarled Foxey, with a spiteful snap of his pecky jaws. "You've got two chaps acrosst yer tracks now—Sergeant Bagot and Private Foxey Williams—and which of them is the worstest you'll find out, p'r'aps, before long! But the odds are on Foxey. Arst them as knows, and they will soon tell yer. He ain't big, and 'e ain't as strong as a ox, p'r'aps, but 'e never let no bloke handle him without gettin' 'is own back, double quick and double strong! Arst them as knows agin! Yus!"

But Ronald had turned on his heel with a cluck of contempt and disgust. Still, Foxey was right. To have made two enemies in five minutes was bad enough; but when one was the sergeant of his own section—the one man who could make his life a horror if he chose—the prospect was alarming.

Foxey he did not care two straws about, though doubtless he was the leader of a powerful clique, likely to flourish in a section commanded by a time-serving bully such as Bagot undoubtedly was.

No decent sergeant would have railed at a recruit as he had done, even under such circumstances.

Fortunately for Ronald, the notes of the bugle put an end to the intolerable tension of the scene. The call summoned the men to get ready to fall in for the next hour's drill, and No. 4 Section received the warning with a volley of curses.

One by one they reached for their rifles, buckled their belts, and clattered out and down the staircase.

But Foxey's voice sounded shrill to the end, growing more and more valiant in threat and foul in epithet, as he put a greater distance between himself and the tall figure standing silently glaring out of the window.

Dead and Buried!

"It's a pity about Sergeant Bagot," said Hookey, who, as orderly-man, was left behind. He stuffed a piece of coarse shag on top of the dottle already in his canteen clay, lit it, and sat down on Ronald's cot. "Bagot can be a puffick brute when he likes!"

"Well, it wasn't my fault, was it?" asked Ronald bitterly. "I wasn't going to stand still while a little beast like that accused me of licking the boots of my superiors. If he gives me any more of his lip, though, I'll wring his neck!"

"And good luck to yer! But I wasn't thinking of Foxey, though he's a polecat, and as nasty a handful as you may find! You could smash him to a jelly easy enough, but watch out fer yerself when he comes to get his own back. He'll wait a month of Sundays to bite yer in the back, and it ain't what you'd call a clean bite, either!"

"But Bagot's the bloke as will give you trouble, once you're on his black books. Keep off 'em if you can. Don't ever give him 'alf a chance, and if he tries to make one fer himself, keep a face like a turnip, and take all he gives you. He'll get sick of it in time."

Hookey, it was plain to see, agreed that he had made a bad start. In due time Ronald presented himself at the Flag's bunk, and was welcomed in. The bunk was a small, prison-like apartment just outside the door of the men's room. Here the Flag had his bed-cot, and a table on which to keep the multitudinous forms and "states" which come within the duty of a colour-sergeant.

The Flag talked kindly to Ronald of the new life before him, and touched briefly on prospects of promotion. He recognised in the steady eye and strong, purposeful chin the man born to command, and none knew better than he how badly such were needed in the ranks of B company.

Therefore, he gently urged that Ronald should set his heart on promotion at the outset. Ronald heard him with

ANSWERS

Wry smile. With Bagot arrayed against him he knew that it would be many a weary year before he mounted his first stripe.

Still, he promised to do his best and enter himself at once for the school certificates necessary for non-commissioned rank.

"Very well," said the Flag, as Ronald turned to go, "send Truscott to me now. I'll see them all in turn."

Ronald felt that it was a thousand pities he had not announced that intention before, and so saved him from disaster.

Still savage with the ill-luck which seemed to dog his footsteps, Ronald handed over his message, and got permission to take a turn in the fresh air.

He had not seen Rough since breakfast-time, and he set out on a tour of the busy barrack-square in search of his four-footed chum.

He found the terrier in the midst of a group of laughing tommies, receiving his first lesson in drill. His back was to the guard-room door. A Broderick cap was stuck jauntily on the side of his head, and a wooden gun reposed between his two paws.

At his master's appearance all Rough's notions of discipline were scattered to the winds, and he was soon leaping up at Ronald in an ecstasy of doggy delight.

Not wishing to attract too much attention to his canine friend, Ronald turned into a sunny, sheltered corner, between two barrack blocks, and took a seat on an upturned bucket.

From here he got a good view of the square and the scurrying squads, wheeling, forming, kneeling, advancing to the short, sharp-clipped words of command of the drill-instructor.

The bustle and din did him good. That afternoon—thank Heaven!—he, too, would be sweating on that gravel-path, "foot-slogging" his way once again through the A B C of recruit drill.

The prospect should have been dreary enough, but in his present mood he positively welcomed it. He ached to be doing something—anything, so that he might forget.

All this time Rough was looking at him expectantly, wagging his stubby tail as if trying to signal some message in a canine code of his own.

Ronald was so obviously in the dumps, however, that he soon ceased his flag-wagging efforts, and came forward to rest his wiry muzzle on his master's knees.

"Good old Rough!" said Ronald affectionately. "I see you've been luckier, and, perhaps, wiser than I. You've been making friends, while I have scarcely done more than make enemies. Yes, my luck seems out altogether. I've bungled it steadily from the start."

Rough's only answer was to scrub his stumpy tail backwards and forwards in the dust, and whimper, as much as to say, "Oh, look here, old chap, for goodness' sake don't begin to talk like that! Look at me! I'm not down-hearted!"

Ronald seemed to catch his meaning, for he burst into a cheery laugh.

"Quite right, old boy!" he cried. "I ought to know better than to be talking rot like this. What's the use of grousing, anyway? Hallo, what the dickens was that? A prehistoric wasp, or what?"

Something had fluttered against his cheek as he had leant his back against the wall. An open window was immediately above his head. It belonged to some barrack-room evidently, for on the ledge were arranged freshly pipeclayed belts, drying in the draught.

These had been spread on an open newspaper, and it was this which had lifted in the breeze and touched his cheek.

He looked up at it idly, and a headline in bold black type caught his eye. It read as follows:

"DISGRACE LEADS TO DEATH.

"The body of the young man taken from the Thames at Blackfriars on Monday morning, has been identified at last, as that of Ronald Chenys, eldest son of General Chenys, C.B. Mr. Ian Chenys, brother of the drowned man, in giving evidence at the inquest on Wednesday, told a strange tale. It appears that both were cadets at the Royal Military College, Sandhurst. At the recent examinations held there, a charge of cheating was brought against the deceased. Unfortunately, this was only too fully substantiated. After an inquiry, Mr. Ronald Chenys, who made no attempt to refute the accusation, was informed that only sentence of expulsion awaited him. That same night he left the college secretly, and was not heard of again until Monday, when his body was discovered by the Thames police.

"It has transpired that he had announced his intention to a former comrade of enlisting as a private soldier; but evidently the shame of his disgrace had overwhelmed him.

"Despite terrible injuries to the face, contracted after death, Mr. Ian Chenys was able to identify the body, and after other witnesses had given evidence, a verdict of 'suicide during temporary insanity' was returned.

"The funeral took place on the following day at Norwood Cemetery. Mr. Ian Chenys was the only member of the deceased's family present, though there was a large attendance of uniformed comrades, with whom the unfortunate lad was a general favourite."

"Dead! Buried! Great heavens! What does it all mean? Can I be dreaming?"

Ronald rubbed his eyes, and read the amazing news afresh. It seemed as if it could be only some hideous hoax; and yet there was no doubting the printed facts.

Ronald Chenys, for all the world knew—or even cared, perhaps—was dead and done with, and the only one of his kith and kin to follow him to the grave was Ian, his step-brother. Oh, the irony of it!

There was so much bitterness in the laugh which escaped from Ronald's lips that Rough broke into an uneasy whine, watching his master with anxious, inquiring eyes.

"Dead and done with!" echoed Ronald. "By Jove! Ian ought to be satisfied! Yet I wonder what his feelings really are, now, in his hour of triumph. It is one thing to steal a brother's honour, but surely it is another thing to be blood-guilty of his life?"

He sat silently for a few moments, his chin buried upon his hands. He was thinking of all this would mean at home—the sorrow and the shame of it. The harsh grim lines gradually faded from his mouth, and a moisture had come into his eyes.

"Poor old dad! Poor Ian!" he murmured at last, and rose to his feet.

What was to be done? That was the question.

"Anyhow, the first thing is to tear this cutting out," he thought. "I can't stand the idea of this shameful story lying here, in staring type, for any man to read. Besides, when one comes to think of it, there is not too much difference between Ronald Chenys and Ronald Chester. I was a fool not to have enlisted under the name of Jack Robinson, while I was about it. If old Duffy at the depot lets out the fact that I have been at Sandhurst, somebody will be putting two and two together, and making five of it for a certainty." He had already caught hold of the newspaper, when he heard footsteps echo suddenly behind him, and he drew back; but not in time to escape detection.

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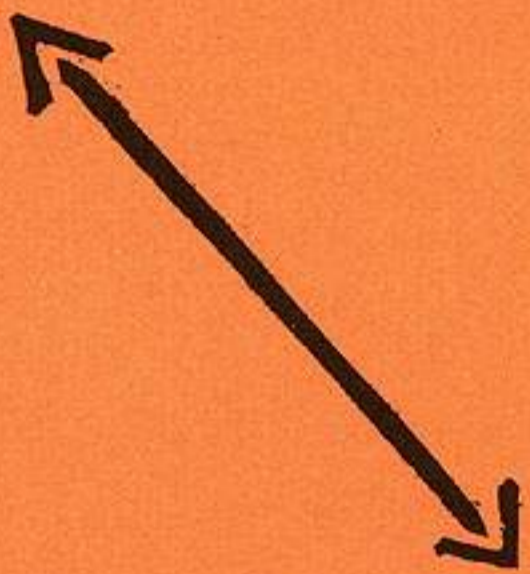
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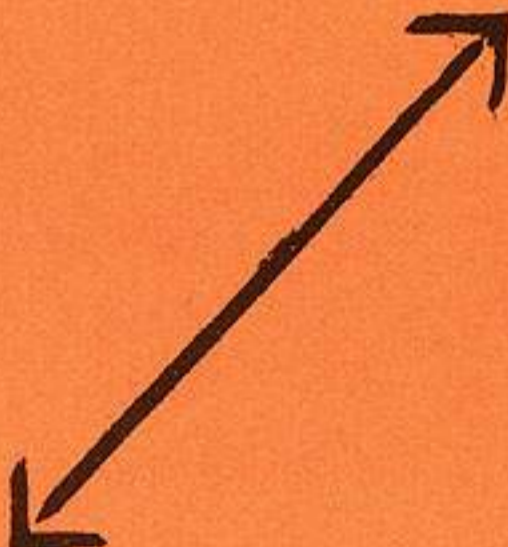
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