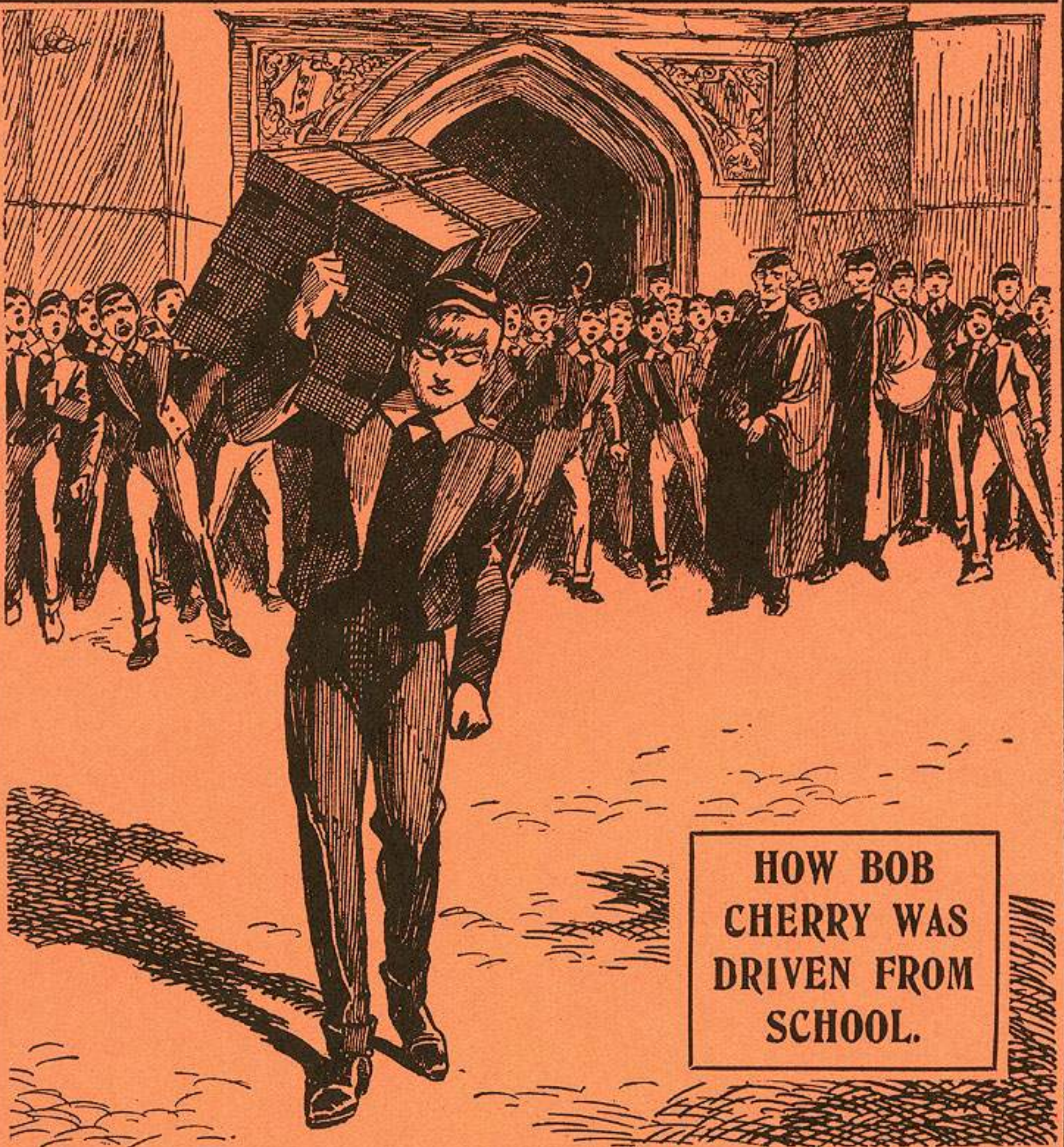


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Driven from School.

A Grand, Long, Complete
Tale of Harry Wharton
& Co.

— BY —

FRANK RICHARDS.

THE FIRST CHAPTER. The New Boy.

BOB CHERRY paused on the School House steps, and looked across the green, sunny Close. Bob had a cricket-bat under his arm, and his cap at the back of his head. It was quite impossible for Bob Cherry even to keep his cap on straight, and he had long ago given up trying. Bob had just finished writing out an impot, and he was hurrying out to join the cricketers on the junior ground, when the sight of a youth coming towards the house arrested him.

“Hallo, hallo, hallo!” Bob ejaculated.

The youth coming towards him looked up. He was a lad about Bob's own age—and a stranger at Greyfriars. He was not a nice-looking fellow. He had thin lips, which seemed to be drawn tightly across his teeth, and light brown eyes with a peculiar glitter in them, as if he were continually on the watch.

He carried a bag in his hand, and a rain-coat on his arm, and had evidently just arrived at Greyfriars.

“You're the new chap?” asked Bob Cherry.

The other nodded.

“I'm the new chap,” he said. “At all events, I'm a new chap. I've only just got here.”

“Your name's Heath?”

“Yes.” The new boy looked Bob Cherry up and down.

“Any more questions?”

Bob flushed.

“I'm not asking you out of curiosity,” he said. “My Form-master told me that a new boy was coming into the Remove, and that he was to be put into my study. I thought I would keep an eye open and speak to you when you came.”

“Oh, I see. Kind of you!”

“My study's No. 13 in the Remove passage,” said Bob Cherry. “Anybody will tell you where the Remove passage is. I can't stop now as I've got to get down to cricket.”

“Don't let me detain you.”

Bob Cherry gave him a look. There was little in the words, but there was a great deal in the way they were uttered. There was something strikingly unpleasant about this new boy—a deliberate ungraciousness of manner that jarred on Bob Cherry. Bob was always thoughtlessly open and hearty, and he expected as much of others.

“Oh, very well!” he said. “I shall be coming in to tea, and then I can look after you a bit, if you like.”

“Thanks! I dare say I can look after myself!”

Bob Cherry restrained his desire to wipe the steps down with the new boy, and walked off to the cricket-field. He wondered

why some fellows went out of their way to make themselves disagreeable. The new boy glanced after him carelessly, and went into the house.

Bob Cherry joined the cricketers. There was a shout of welcome to greet him there. The Remove Eleven were at practice, and Bob Cherry was wanted. Bob, although not a brilliant player, was a good bowler and a reliable batsman, and some of his powerful drives were very valuable to his side when runs were wanted.

The Remove—the Lower Fourth at Greyfriars—were taking cricket very seriously just now. Harry Wharton was no longer captain of the Form; and Bulstrode, who had taken his place, was not eminently successful as cricket captain. Twice the Remove Eleven had drawn with Courtfield County Council School, and they had been beaten by Higheliffe College. Such was the record Bulstrode had made. But the new captain of the Remove was taking his duties very seriously, and Harry Wharton & Co. were backing him up in the most loyal manner.

"Come on, Bob!" called out Harry Wharton. "We've got Hobson of the Shell to bowl, and we want to see how you stand it."

"Right-ho!" said Bob Cherry.

"Finished your impot?"

"Yes, that's all right."

"Nothing wrong?" asked Harry, noting the flush in Bob Cherry's cheeks, and the expression upon his rugged face of less than his usual pleasant cheerfulness.

"Well, no," said Bob. "I've just been talking to a chap who gets on my nerves, that's all."

"Billy Bunter?"

Bob laughed.

"No; the new chap. You remember Quelch told us there was a new chap coming to-day, and he was to be put into No. 13 Study, as there are only two of us there—Linley and myself."

"Yes. Has he come?"

"He has. I'd forgotten about him, as a matter of fact, but as I came out of the house I met him," said Bob. "I wanted to make myself agreeable, but—well, the chap is a disagreeable bouncer, that's all! It will be rotten having him in the study; but I suppose it can't be helped."

And Bob Cherry went to the wicket, to stand up to Hobson's bowling. Hobson belonged to the Shell, and was a good bowler, so his bowling gave the juniors good practice at taking care of their wickets.

Bob Cherry was not in his usual form. It was seldom that Bob's serenity was disturbed. He had splendid health, almost boisterous good spirits, a never-failing jollity of temper. But the new boy had undoubtedly got on his nerves, as he said. The thought of that thin, disagreeable face, that unpleasant voice, incessantly in his study worried Bob. He and Mark Linley had been very comfortable there; and the nicest fellow would not have been over-welcome as an addition to the family circle. But a disagreeable fellow like this—it was too bad!

Bob was admonished to think of cricket, and not of anything else, by Hobson's first ball crashing through his wicket.

The Shell fellow chuckled.

"How's that?" he exclaimed.

"Rotten!" said Frank Nugent.

Bulstrode came forward anxiously. He was frowning. Bulstrode was learning some of the troubles of a cricket captain.

"Hang it all, Cherry, that won't do!" he exclaimed. "Look here, you can bat better than that! I want to play you against Courtfield, too!"

Bob reddened.

"It's all right, Bulstrode—"

"It's not all right!" snapped Bulstrode. "It's all wrong! You know Wharton's going away to join his uncle to-morrow, and he won't be back in time for the match! I'm depending on you, and here you are playing the giddy goat!"

"I'll be more careful."

"Well, do!"

Hobson grinned, and bowled again. But Bob Cherry was more keenly alive to his task now, and he stopped the bowling well. The juniors stood round and looked on, and there were many approving exclamations.

Bulstrode's face lighted up again.

Bob Cherry's form was very good, after all; and, in Harry

Wharton's absence, he was likely to prove as good as any batsman in the Eleven. Bulstrode was very much worried about the prospects of the Courtfield match, and Nugent had remarked that he seemed to watch over the Eleven like an anxious old hen over her chicks.

"Jolly good, Bob!" said Harry Wharton, as the chums of the Remove walked away from the cricket-ground after the practice. "You were rather off your stroke at first."

"It's that new chap," Bob confessed. "I don't like him! I think he's a beast!"

"My hat! What has he done?"

"Well, he has a nasty way of speaking—"

Harry Wharton laughed.

"He may be decent, all the same," he said. "Give the chap a chance, you know."

"Well, yes; but I know he's a beast!" said Bob.

"If you make up your mind that he's a beast now, you're not likely to see any good in him," Frank Nugent remarked.

"Yes, you're right; but—well, I'll try to be fair to him," said Bob. "But sometimes, you know, you dislike a chap instinctively. You feel that he's horrid mean. That's the sort of chap this is. But I'm going to be fair to him. I'm going to keep the peace in the study if I can."

"That's right," said Harry. "Look after him a little, as he's a new chap, and make him comfy. Take in some grub for tea, and feed him. That's the way to bring out his good qualities if he's got any."

Bob Cherry grinned.

"Well, I'll try it," he said.

Bob Cherry stopped at the school tuck-shop to carry out Harry Wharton's advice. The others went on their way. Bob expended the sum of two shillings—not an inconsiderable sum to a junior in the Lower Fourth—upon good things for the tea-table, and carried them into the house with him. The new boy should have no cause to complain of the hospitality of No. 13 Study in the Remove!

With a parcel under one arm and a paper bag of eggs in the other hand, Bob Cherry went upstairs, and tramped along the Remove passage. No. 13 was almost at the end of the passage. Bob wondered whether he would find the new boy there. Mark Linley, he knew, was gone down to the village with John Bull and Fisher T. Fish, so if the new boy was in No. 13, he was alone there.

That somebody was in the study was quite clear as Bob Cherry came along the passage. From the closed door came a sound that made Bob start in surprise. It was a loud and painful mew of a cat!

"Miau-miau-ou!"

"My hat!" Bob Cherry ejaculated. "That must be Mrs. Kebble's cat. But what on earth is it doing in my study? I suppose it's got shut in and can't get out!"

"Miau-miau-ow!"

Bob Cherry's brows darkened as he quickened his pace. The mew of the cat might have been caused by the animal being shut up in the study, and trying to attract attention to get the door opened. But it sounded as if it were in pain. What was happening in No. 13 Study?

Bob ran on and threw the door open. There was a startled exclamation within.

"What—I—"

Bob Cherry burst into a roar of rage.

"You hound!"

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

A Rascal Well Licked!

THE new boy was in the study. He was evidently amusing himself. His idea of amusement was a peculiar one—though it might have been guessed from the spiteful curve of his lips, and the shifty, unpleasant glitter in his eyes.

The cat was tied up by the leg to a chair in the corner of the room. The new boy had a catapult in his hand, and he was evidently practising his shooting upon the unfortunate cat at close range. He could have practised just as easily at a mark on the wall. But that would not have inflicted pain, and, therefore, would have been useless to a boy of Heath's peculiar disposition. At such close range every pellet that struck the unlucky cat elicited a howl of pain from the animal, and it was springing and clawing wildly in its endeavours to escape. And Heath seemed to be a good shot. He was exactly the kind of boy to be expert with the catapult, and to be ever ready to display his skill upon some unfortunate bird or beast.

Bob Cherry was not in the least "soft" or goody-goody, and he was not given to criticising others, but to see a fellow torturing an animal was a little more than he could stand. And it was in his study, too!

Bob Cherry's hands trembled with rage as he laid his parcels on the table. The new boy looked at him with a sour grin.

"Like to have a shot?" he asked.

"What?" roared Bob.

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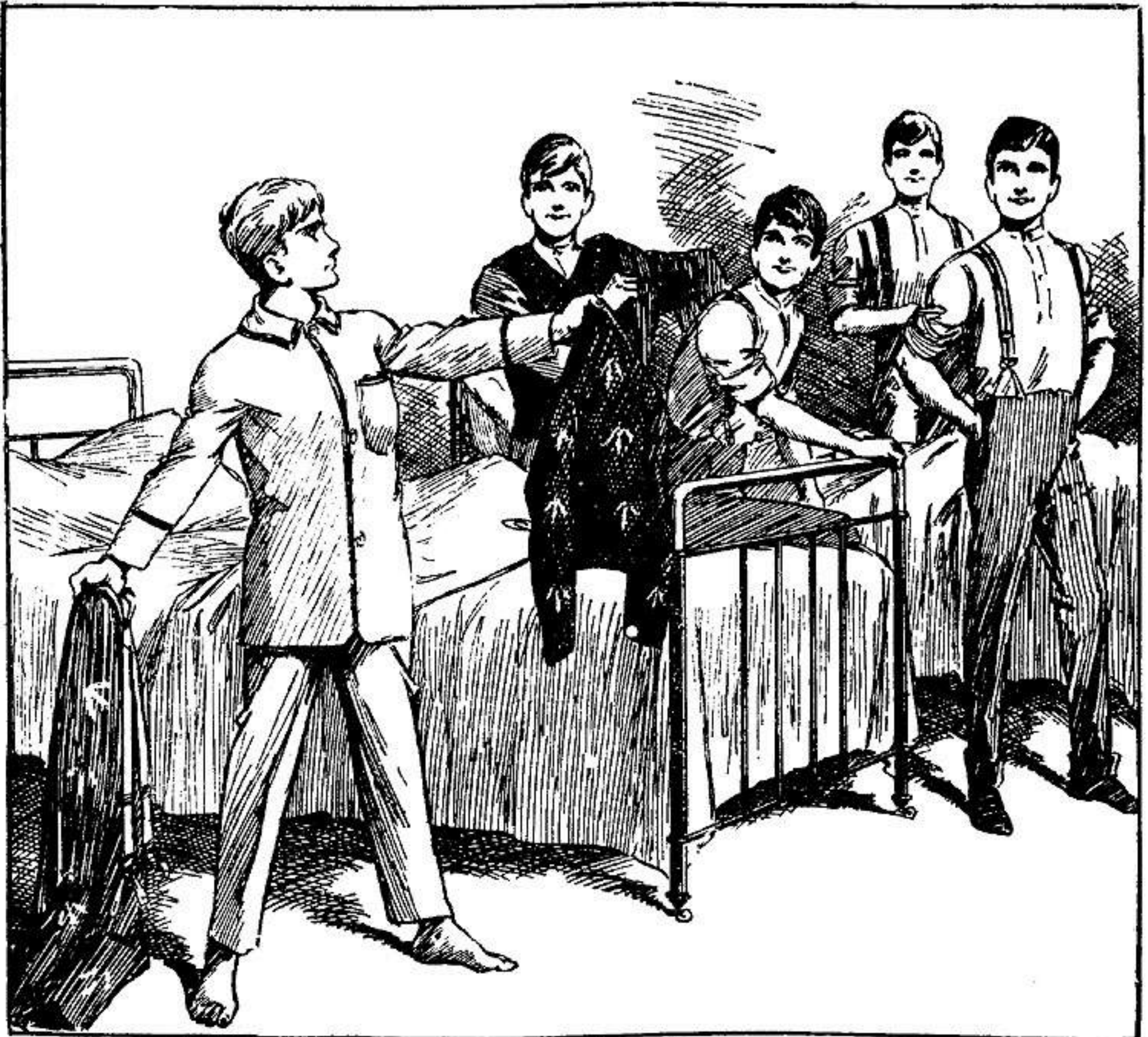
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Bob Cherry caught up his coat and trousers. Upon the dark cloth, broad arrows, in imitation of those upon a convict's garb, had been daubed in white paint. "What rotten cad did that?" roared Bob.

"It's fun to see the beast hop!" said Heath. "I'm trying to get a shot at his eye, but he won't keep his head still."

Bob Cherry breathed hard with a loud noise. He felt that he was choking. He turned on the new boy with flaming face.

"Put that catapult down!" he said.

"What?"

"Put it down!" roared Bob.

Heath looked at him doubtfully for a second, and then threw the catapult on the table. Bob did not look like a fellow to be trifled with at that moment.

Bob took the catapult, and smashed it to pieces under his heavy boot. Heath gave a yell.

"What are you doing? That's mine."

"It's not much use to you now," said Bob savagely. "You cad! You coward! How dare you torture a cat—and in my study? You—you unspeakable beast!"

Heath sneered.

"I suppose you never do anything of the sort?"

"No, I don't!" roared Bob. "Only a dirty, low, mean, crawling viper would torment an animal—only a fellow like you."

Heath whistled.

"Thanks for your good opinion," he said.

"I suppose you're going to be a vivisectionist when you grow up," said Bob. "It's the sort-of job that would suit you."

Heath grinned.

"I shouldn't wonder," he said. "I should like it, I think."

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It would be amusing to see the beggars wriggle, wouldn't it?"

Bob Cherry snorted.

"Well, I'm going to see you wriggle a bit now, and you can see if that's just as amusing," he said. "Put up your hands."

"What!"

"Put up your hands."

Heath backed away.

"Look here, I don't want to fight you," he exclaimed. "I'm not going to fight you. I don't like fighting."

"I dare say you'd fight a very small boy fast enough," said Bob. "Chaps who torture animals are that sort. But you're going to fight me now. You're bigger than I am, and you've got to put up your hands."

"I—I won't."

"Then you'll take the licking with your hands down—for you're going to be licked in any case, you worm!"

"Look here, I've got no quarrel with you," said Heath, backing away round the table. "It was only my fun with the blessed old cat—"

"This is only my fun, too," said Bob.

"I'll let the beast go. Look here, I'm not going to fight you. I don't like fighting, and I won't! I'll complain to the head-master if you touch me."

"You dirty sneak!"

"Sneak or not, I'm not going to fight you, or anybody else," said Heath, striding towards the door.

Bob Cherry grasped him by the shoulder, and swung him back.

"Stay here!"

"I—I won't!"

Bob Cherry placed himself between the new boy and the door.

"Put up your hands," he said, between his teeth.

"Hang you!"

"Take that, then!"

Smack!

Bob's open palm smote the new boy full across the face.

Heath staggered back from the smack.

"Oh!" he gasped. "Oh!"

"Now will you put your hands up?"

Heath gave him a deadly look.

"No, I won't!"

Bob could only stare at him.

"You utter coward!" he said.

"I'm not going to fight you," said Heath, with a livid face.

"I won't fight you! But I'll make you sorry for this—I'll make you suffer for it."

Bob Cherry laughed scornfully. He pointed to the cat, who was still mewling faintly in the corner.

"Set that cat loose," he said. "Mind, without hurting him."

Heath sullenly obeyed. He would gladly have kicked the cat as it skittled joyfully out of the study. But Bob Cherry's eye was gleaming upon him. Heath made an attempt to follow from the study. But Bob closed the door.

"Now," he said, "you're going to have your licking. I may explain to you that we don't torture animals at Greyfriars. If the masters knew, you would be caned, or flogged—you ought to be expelled. I'm not going to tell the masters, but I'm going to lick you. Will you put up your hands?"

"No."

"You coward! You can torture a cat, but you won't fight a chap smaller than yourself." Bob said contemptuously. "But if you think you're going to get off by being a coward, you're making a big mistake."

He advanced upon Heath.

The new boy dodged round the table. His face was white now, and his eyes gleaming with fear and spite.

He made a rush across to the door, and then Bob Cherry's grasp fell upon him. The new boy collapsed at once.

"Let me alone!" he shrieked. "Help!"

"You cad!"

Bob Cherry's face was grim with determination. He sat down, and dragged Heath across his knee, and caught up a slipper.

"If you won't fight, you can take your licking like a kid in the First Form," he said. "So here goes!"

Smack! Smack! Smack!

"Ow! Ow! You!"

Smack! Smack!

"Yacoooh! Help!"

The slipper rose and fell with deadly persistence, and the dust came in little clouds from Heath's garments. Bob Cherry put all the strength of his strong arm into that thrashing.

It was well deserved, and it was well laid on. Heath yelled and writhed and squirmed, but the merciless slipper rose and fell till Bob's arm was tired.

He threw it aside at last.

"There," he gasped, pitching Heath over on the carpet.

"There you are! I hope you'll take that to heart, and drop your dirty tricks while you're at Greyfriars."

"Ow! Ow! Oh!"

"Oh, don't blub!"

Heath lay writhing and gasping and whimpering on the floor. His face was white, and twisted with spite. Bob Cherry went to the door. It was his own study, but he did not care to remain there with Heath.

Bob, with his face still rather excited, tramped down the passage, leaving Heath to his own devices. The new boy rose to his feet, and shook his fist at the closed door, his face convulsed with rage.

"Oh, you wait a bit!" he muttered. "You wait a bit! My turn will come—my turn will come! And you'll be sorry for this!"

Bob Cherry, with a clouded brow, tramped down the passage to No. 1. Harry Wharton and Frank Nugent were there, having tea. They looked up at him with genial welcome.

"Come in, Bob," said Wharton.

Bob Cherry walked in.

"Can I have tea with you chaps?" he asked abruptly.

"Of course you can, old son. Shove the kettle on again, Franky. But what's the matter, Bob—haven't been quarrelling with Bulstrode, have you?"

"No," Bob snorted. "It's that new chap! I can't stay in the study with him—he makes me sick!"

"Stay here, then, old son," said Harry. "You used to be here with us, you know—and now Inky's gone there's plenty of room. But what's the new fellow been doing?"

Bob Cherry explained.

"The cad!" said Harry.

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"The worm!" said Nugent.

"I can't stand him," said Bob. "I knew I couldn't stand the unspeakable beast when I first saw him. It's simply awful to have him in the study. I shall ask Mr. Quelch to change me out—only it would be too bad to leave Marky alone with the beast! I don't know what to do!"

"Have tea—and some poached eggs," said Nugent. "They're prime!"

And Bob Cherry laughed, and had tea.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

No Success.

MARK LINLEY looked into No. 1 Study a little later, when the juniors were finishing their tea there. There was a puzzled expression upon Linley's quiet, pleasant face. The three juniors in the study were looking very cheerful; it was quite like old times for the three of them to be there together.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" exclaimed Bob Cherry, looking round. "Come in, Marky. There's some sardines left."

Mark laughed.

"Thanks; I've had tea with Bull," he said. "I looked in to see if you were here, Bob. What's been happening in the study?"

"Oh, only a row!"

"I found a chap there, squatting in the armchair, and glowering like a demon in a pantomime," said Mark. "I suppose it's the new chap; but I couldn't get a word out of him. He seemed to be sore about something."

"Ha, ha, ha! I've been spanking him with a slipper," Bob Cherry explained.

"Great Scott! What for?"

"For being a cad! Quelch has put him into our study, but I'm not going to stand it," Bob Cherry said warmly. "He's a worm."

"What has he done?"

"Acted like a worm—a measly worm!"

"But—"

"He's a crawling reptile."

"Yes, but—"

"And a sneaking cad!"

"Bob found him tormenting a cat, and licked him," said Harry Wharton. "I don't know what you'll do about getting him out of the study, Bob. The others are up to the full number, excepting Bunter's, and that's a small room."

"Well, he can go in with Bunter," Bob growled. "He jolly well sha'n't stay in No. 13. If he does, I clear out, if I have to work in the box-room, I can't stand that worm!"

"I say, you fellows—"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Get out, Bunter!"

Billy Bunter's fat face looked in at the door, and he blinked at the chums of the Remove through his big spectacles.

"Oh, really, Cherry—" he began.

"Oh, buzz off!"

"Look here, I hear there's a new chap arrived at Greyfriars, and I've been looking for him," said Bunter. "I want to do the decent thing by a new chap. It's only hospitable, you know. Where is he?"

"You want to borrow money of him, you mean, before he finds out the sort of giddy sponger you are," said Frank.

"Oh, really, Nugent—"

"You can have him in your study, if you like," said Bob. "He's in my study now, and you're quite welcome to him."

"I've heard that his people are rich," Bunter remarked inquiringly.

Bob sniffed.

"I don't know about that, and I don't care."

"The fact is," said Bunter, "I'm expecting a postal-order this evening—"

"Oh, get out! We've heard enough of your postal-order."

"Oh, really, you know—"

Bob Cherry picked up the jam-jar, and Billy Bunter scuttled out of the study and slammed the door.

"Beast!" he yelled through the keyhole.

Then he rolled away down the passage towards No. 13. Billy Bunter always favoured new boys with his kind attentions. His borrowing propensities were too well known in the school for his story of an expected postal-order to have any effect. But new boys did not know Bunter, and the Owl of the Remove frequently made quite a good thing out of them before they learned to know him.

He looked in at the door of No. 13. Heath was sitting in the armchair, as Mark Linley had seen him, twisting very uncomfortably. Bob Cherry had thrashed him pretty severely, and the new boy did not like pain. He was still looking very white, and very savage and spiteful. He scowled at Billy Bunter as he came in.

Bunter blinked at him with the most agreeable expression he could muster.

"I say, you know," he began, "you're the new chap, ain't you?"

"Yes!" snapped Heath.

"I'm Bunter—Bunter of the Remove," the fat junior explained. "I'm a very influential chap in the Form, and I've looked in to see if I can do anything for you."

"Oh!"

"You don't seem to be very well," said Bunter sympathetically.

"I've been assaulted by a bully!" growled Heath.

"Oh, what a beastly shame!" said Bunter. "Was it Bulstrode?"

"It was Bob Cherry!"

"Bob Cherry! He isn't a bully—I mean, he is a bully, an awful beast," said Bunter. "It was rotten. I wish I had been here to help you. Has he hurt you much?"

Heath stared at him.

"Look here," he exclaimed, "what do you want?"

"Oh, really!" stammered Bunter, rather taken aback.

"If you want anything, say so; if you don't, get out, and don't bother me!"

"H'm! I thought that, as—as you're a new fellow, I might be able to help you in some way, you know," Bunter said, in an injured tone.

"Well, you can't, so get out!"

"The fact is, you know, that it's a custom here for a new boy to stand a bit of a feed to the principal members of the Form," said Bunter. "I'm a principal member of the Form."

"You won't get any feed out of me!"

Bunter coughed.

"Ahem! In this case, for the sake of—of hospitality, I'm willing to reverse the usual order of things, and stand you a feed instead," he explained.

Heath looked a little less savage.

"Now you're talking," he said.

"You see, I always like to do the decent thing by new boys," said Bunter. "How would you like a nice little feed in the tuck-shop—say muffins and tea, and then some cake, and some sausage-rolls and dough-nuts, and plenty of jams?"

"Good!"

"Come on, then. Oh, by the way, I forgot one thing," said Bunter, as if struck by a sudden recollection. "I've run out of cash. I'm expecting a postal-order this evening, and if you care to advance me a few shillings, I'll hand you the postal-order as soon as it comes. I suppose that will be all right?"

Heath had risen to follow Bunter. A very unpleasant expression came over his face now. Heath was far from being the kind of person to be taken in by Bunter's clumsy diplomacy.

"You fat cad!" he said. "So I'm to pay for the feed, am I?"

"Ahem! Only temporarily. You see, I was expecting that postal-order this afternoon. It's from a titled friend of mine, and it's certain to come. If you care to advance me the ten shillings—"

"You cheeky cad!"

"Ahem! If you care to advance me the ten shillings—or, say five shillings—if you care to advance me the two-and-six, you know, you can have the postal-order immediately it comes, and it will be the same thing."

"Get out!"

"By the way, I should like you to come in my study, if you'd prefer it to this. You are just the kind of person I could chum with, and—"

"Outside, I tell you! I've had more than enough of you!" said Heath. He was not afraid of the fat, short-sighted junior.

Bunter's expression changed. The agreeable grin faded away, and he looked very spiteful.

"You rotten outsider!" he exclaimed. "Catch me being chummy with a new boy again! You low boulder! Ow!"

Heath twisted the fat junior round, and planted a kick upon his fat person that sent him staggering out into the passage. Bunter collapsed upon the linoleum with a wild gasp.

"Ow!" he gasped. "Beast!"

Heath slammed the door.

Bunter rolled away down the passage, groaning. He blinked in at the doorway of No. 1, and groaned again. The chums of the Remove grinned at him.

"Got on all right with the new chap?" asked Harry Wharton.

"Ow! He's a beast!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I was only courteous to him, and he rushed at me like a wild beast and kicked me!" said Bunter. "Ow! I'm seriously injured! Ow! I think you chaps ought to rag him! Ow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bunter snorted, and rolled away. There was evidently no sympathy to be had in No. 1 Study. Bob Cherry kicked the door shut after him.

"I've got an idea," Harry Wharton remarked. "You know my aunt is coming home from Switzerland, and I'm going with my uncle to meet her to-morrow. I shall be away from Greyfriars at least a week. Now Inky's gone, Nugent will be alone here. Suppose you two chaps dig in this study while I'm away, and leave Heath No. 13 to himself. Before I get back, you may be able to arrange about a new study for him."

"Good egg!" said Bob. "If Nugent doesn't mind—"

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ONE
PENNY.

"I shall be jolly glad," said Nugent. "I don't want to dig here alone."

"What do you say, Marky?"

"I shall be glad."

"Then it's a go!" said Harry Wharton.

And so it was settled. On the following morning Harry Wharton was to leave Greyfriars for a time, but he little dreamed of what was to happen at the old school before he returned.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

On His Own.

THE next morning Harry Wharton did not take his place in the Form-room as usual. Just before first lesson the trap came round to take him to the station, and the juniors gathered to see him off. Bulstrode, the new captain of the Remove, was there, and he shook hands with Harry before the latter mounted into the trap.

"I'm sorry you're going," he said. "We haven't been very good friends, but—well, I'm sorry. Especially about the cricket. We shall miss you from the eleven."

"I'm sorry, too," said Harry. "I hope you'll pull it off all right with the Courtfield chaps. I shall be back in time for the next match with Higheliffe, if you want to play me."

Bulstrode grinned ruefully.

"Of course I shall want to play you!" he said. "I know some of the fellows expected me to act the giddy ox as soon as I became captain of the Remove, but I hope I've got some sense. Come back as soon as you can."

"Right-ho!"

"Good-bye, Wharton!"

Wharton waved his hand to the crowd as the trap drove away. He was sorry to be going away from Greyfriars himself just then, though at the same time he was looking forward to the holiday with his uncle. But it was to be only for a week. As he glanced back from the gateway Bob Cherry waved his hand, and that was the last Harry saw of the juniors of Greyfriars just then.

The Removites turned in to go to their Form-room.

"We'll get our books and things into No. 1 after first lesson," Bob Cherry said to Nugent.

"Good!" said Frank.

Heath was near them, and he turned quickly.

"Does that mean that you are leaving my study?" he asked.

"Yes," said Bob Cherry.

"What for?"

"Because I can't stand you!"

Bob Cherry was always frank. Some of the juniors laughed, and Heath turned red.

"Very well," he said, "I shall be glad enough for you to go, that's certain. Is the other fellow going?"

"Linley? Yes; he's coming with me."

"You can both go to the dickens, for all I care. I shall be glad enough to have the study to myself," said Heath.

"Well, you'll have it to yourself; till Wharton comes back, at any rate," said Bob. "And I'll see if I can't get changed into another study then. It would make me ill to have to dig with you."

Heath sneered, but made no reply.

The looks of the other fellows showed that they shared Bob Cherry's opinion. Heath had not made a good impression upon the Form.

Neither did he make a good impression upon Mr. Quelch in first lesson. The Remove-master was easy with the new boy, but he had to speak to him sharply before the lesson was over. It was perfectly clear that Heath was a slacker of the first water.

After the lesson the juniors had an interval to themselves, and the chums of No. 13 occupied it by removing their property from No. 13 to No. 1 Study.

John Bull and Fisher T. Fish came to lend them a hand, and the "moving job" was soon over. Most of the study furniture was left; they did not need to take it, with the exception of a chair or two, and some crockery.

Heath was left in the study by himself—a study furnished, as Skinner remarked, upon exceptionally easy terms, for the new occupant.

Many of the Greyfriars fellows would have been pleased at having a study to themselves. But Heath did not look pleased. He was left alone because he was avoided and despised, and that rankled very deeply in his spiteful breast.

It was his own fault; but that reflection, if he made it, did not console him. It was more likely to make him the more spiteful.

After lessons that afternoon, Mr. Quelch stopped Bob Cherry in the passage to speak to him. Bob reddened in anticipation; he suspected what the Form-master was about to say.

"Heath is in your study, Cherry?" Mr. Quelch remarked.

"Yes, sir."

"I asked you to look after the new boy a little. I hope you have done so."

"I—I tried to, sir."

Mr. Quelch looked at him sharply.

"I hope you have not been quarrelling already?" he exclaimed.

"We—we don't get on, sir."

"H'm! I am sorry to hear that, Cherry."

Mr. Quelch walked away without saying any more. Bob Cherry was left feeling, and looking, extremely uncomfortable. He had not been to blame in the matter, but he could not help seeing that Mr. Quelch was disappointed in him.

If it had been any other new boy of course, Bob would have pulled with him all right; but Heath was not an ordinary boy. Bob could not, as he said, stand him; and it was not to be expected that he should. But, without sneaking, he could not explain to Mr. Quelch the sort of fellow Heath was. He had to leave matters as they stood.

During the next day or two, Bob Cherry and Mark Linley settled down very comfortably in No. 1 Study, in the place of Harry Wharton and Hurree Janset Ram Singh, both of whom were now away from Greyfriars. Heath had No. 13 to himself, and when he was there he was generally left alone. The Remove fellows did not take to him. If he made a friend at all, it was Vernon-Smith, the Bounder at Greyfriars—a fellow whose friendship was not much credit to anybody. And the Bounder only took Heath up when he had no other companion, and needed one. At other times he seemed to be unconscious of Heath's existence—all of which added to the anger and spite that burned in the breast of the new junior.

He attributed it all to Bob Cherry, and in that he was very unjust. Bob certainly had not held his tongue about the incident in the study, but the fellows were willing to give Heath a chance; but the new junior seemed to have no good qualities at all. He never by any chance fell into a fight with a fellow near his own size or age, but more than once he was found bullying little fags in the First or Second Forms. His love for tormenting animals was evidently a ruling passion, and several fellows who kept pets, and found him even worrying them, fell out with him on that account. Two lickings a day was Heath's average for the first three days at Greyfriars.

By that time he was generally disliked and let alone. Bob Cherry never took any notice of him. The new boy would give him spiteful looks, in class or in the Close, but Bob did not look at him. Heath might have been an insect or a microbe for all the notice Bob Cherry took of him.

Heath did not play cricket, and he did not box; he did not run, he did not swim. He seemed to have no pleasures but hanging about with his hands in his pockets, smoking cigarettes, tormenting animals, and speaking evil of other fellows behind their backs. Of all fellows, he was the least likely to get on in the Greyfriars Remove. And on the fourth day at Greyfriars his intermittent friendship with the Bounder came to a sudden termination.

Vernon-Smith came into his study with a furious face, as he was at prep. that evening, and Heath jumped up in alarm at the look of him.

"Hallo!" he exclaimed. "Come in for a smoke?"

Vernon-Smith closed the door.

"No," he said, "I haven't come in for a smoke. I've come in about my canary."

Heath turned red.

"Your canary!" he stammered.

"Yes; it's dead."

"Sorry," said Heath. "I don't see what it's got to do with me. I can't bring dead canaries to life again, you know."

"You can stop catapulting live ones, though, you cad!" said the Bounder. "Tubb of the Third saw you doing it at my study window."

"I—I—"

"You've done for my canary, and now I'm going to lick you! Put up your hands, if you've got courage enough, you miserable cad!"

Heath, apparently, hadn't courage enough, for he dodged round the table, and tried to escape from the study; but the Bounder did not let him go. Vernon-Smith was in a towering rage, and one of the few soft spots in his nature had been for that canary. He piled upon the new junior furiously, pommelling him right and left; and when he left the study, five minutes later, Heath lay gasping and groaning on the floor. It was his seventh licking at Greyfriars, and the most severe of all.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

A Remittance From Todd!

"A LETTER for you, Nugent!"

"Chuck it over!" said Frank Nugent.

John Bull took the letter down from the rack and tossed it over to Nugent. Frank glanced at it, expecting to see Harry Wharton's handwriting. But it was not from Wharton.

"I guess I know that fist," said Fisher T. Fish, glancing at

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the superscription over Frank's shoulder in his cool, American way. "I guess that's from Todd."

"Hallo! hallo! hallo! A letter from Todd!" exclaimed Bob Cherry.

"I guess so."

Nugent nodded.

"Yes, it's Todd's hand," he said. "I'm glad to hear from him. I hope he's better than when he left. You fellows want to hear from Todd?"

"Yes, rather."

"Listen, then!"

Removites gathered round on all sides. They all wanted to hear from Todd. Alonzo Todd, who had been known as the Duffer of Greyfriars, had left the old school in a very weak state of health, and was likely to stay away for a very long time. The fellows naturally wanted to know how he was getting on. Alonzo had been very, very simple in his ways, but the fellows had all liked him. Many of them missed the kind, obliging, absent-minded Duffer of Greyfriars.

Nugent opened the letter.

"Blessed if I know why he should write to you, Nugent," John Bull said. "Fish and I were his study mates here."

"I guess that's so," said Fish. "Better hand the letter over to me, Nugent. I guess Todd's addressed it to you by mistake."

Frank Nugent laughed.

"Todd left owing me ten bob," he said. "He may have written to enclose it. By Jove, yes, here it is!"

Nugent drew a postal-order from the letter as he unfolded it. It was an order for ten shillings.

"He hasn't filled in the name," grinned John Bull. "Just like Todd!"

"Perhaps he means it for somebody else," Skinner suggested. "Now I come to think of it, I shouldn't wonder if Todd owes me ten bob—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, here's the letter," said Nugent. And he read it out:

"Dear Nugent,—I am sure that you will be very pleased to hear that I am getting on very nicely indeed, and that my Uncle Benjamin is quite satisfied with my slow but sure progress towards convalescence. The neighbourhood in which we have fixed our rural retreat is delightfully rustic and exceedingly conducive to repose. The state of my health precludes me from inditing a lengthy epistle, but I should be extremely delighted and, indeed, very gratified to receive communications from any of you fellows. I hope you are all enjoying your normal physical health at Greyfriars, and that you sometimes allow your thoughts to turn to your absent schoolmate. My Uncle Benjamin says that absence makes the heart grow fonder, and I am sure that I reflect upon Greyfriars with a very sincere, affectionate regard. I enclose a postal-order for the sum of ten shillings in repayment of the kind loan you made me ere I quitted Greyfriars. My Uncle Benjamin has kindly provided me with the necessary financial aid for the repayment of this obligation. Kindest regards to all the fellows.—Always yours sincerely,

"ALONZO TODD."

The juniors grinned over the letter.

Alonzo Todd's delicate state of health had evidently made no difference to his love for long words, and had not simplified his Johnsonian phraseology at all. But it was a kind and sincere letter, and just like the Duffer of Greyfriars.

"Good old Todd!" said Tom Brown. "I shall be glad, for one, when he comes back."

"Yes, rather."

"What a giddy windfall!" said Bob Cherry, looking at the postal-order.

"Yes, rather," said Nugent. "I'd forgotten all about the ten bob. Chaps who leave school owing money don't, as a rule, send along the giddy postal-orders."

"Todd wasn't that sort."

"No; here's the cash. This will just get me my new bicycle lamp, and I sha'n't have to write to my pater," said Nugent, with much satisfaction.

"Good old Toddy!"

Heath, the new boy, was in the crowd listening to the letter. Heath did not, of course, know Todd, who had left before he arrived at Greyfriars. But there was an expression of the keenest interest upon Heath's face. He was looking very thoughtful as he strolled away from the spot. Some thought was evidently working in his mind; and to judge by the gleam in his eyes, it was some thought that boded no good to someone else.

Nugent thrust the postal-order, along with the letter, carelessly into his inside pocket, and the Remove went in to lessons.

After morning school, Bulstrode called the cricketers out to practice. Bulstrode was keeping the junior eleven very much up to the mark. The morrow was Saturday, when the Courtfield match was to be played again, for the third time, both sides having agreed to play and replay till the matter was decided one way or the other. And Bulstrode, feeling sorely the loss of Harry Wharton and Hurree Janset Ram Singh from the junior eleven, meant to make all the others toe the line.



"Well, Mrs. Brett," said the Head's deep voice, "can you identify the boy?" The outstretched hand of Mrs. Brett, the postmistress, pointed directly at Bob Cherry. "That is the boy, sir!"

Nugent went up to his study to change his jacket for a blazer before going out. He hung his jacket on the door, carelessly enough. He was in a tearing hurry, for Bulstrode was calling up the stairs to him.

He had quite forgotten the postal-order for the moment. But if he had thought of it, he would hardly have taken the trouble to remove it from his pocket. He would never even have thought of a possible theft. Even Billy Bunter would not go so far as to take a postal-order out of a fellow's pocket.

Heath was in the passage as Nugent came out. Nugent glanced at him, but did not speak. He ran on, with his cricket bat under his arm, and joined Bulstrode in the lower passage.

"I'm ready!" he announced.

"Good! Come on! Come on, Cherry!"

"Right-o!" said Bob Cherry cheerfully.

The Remove cricketers went down to the juniors' ground, Vernon-Smith was in the team. The Bounder of Greyfriars, hopeless slacker as he always was, had proved on one occasion, at least, that he could play cricket with the best; and Bulstrode asked him to join the eleven; whereat Vernon-Smith, as his nature was, swanked considerably, and consented in a very lofty way, and showed his great importance by turning up late for practice, and affecting to regard the whole matter as a bore.

Vernon-Smith lounged upon the cricket field with a cigarette between his teeth. That was sheer "cheek" on his part, for if a prefect had seen him he would certainly have been caned. Bulstrode flushed as he saw him.

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"Throw that cigarette away, Smith!" he called out. "What are you playing the fool like that for?"

"Oh, rats!" said Smith.

Bob Cherry, who was near him, jerked up his hand, and jerked the cigarette from his mouth; and with the same movement accidentally or not, his knuckles came into hard contact with the Bounder's nose.

Vernon-Smith uttered a yell.

"Ow! You fool!"

"Only helping you to get rid of the cigarette," said Bob politely.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Serve you jolly well right, Smith!" said Bulstrode, "Go on and bowl, and don't play the giddy goat here!"

Vernon-Smith sulkily caught the ball as it was tossed to him, and went to the bowler's end. Bob Cherry took the bat. There was a very spiteful expression upon the Bounder's face, and if Bob had been of a more suspicious nature he would not have stood up to the bowling at that moment.

But Bob was the last fellow in the world to suspect anybody of foul play.

Vernon-Smith set his teeth hard, and his eyes gleamed as he bowled. The ball did not go anywhere near the wicket. Perhaps Vernon-Smith's foot slipped. Perhaps it did not. Bob Cherry uttered a cry of pain, dropped the bat, and caught his ankle in both hands, hopping on one leg.

"Ow!" he roared. "Oh, ow!"

Bulstrode turned furiously upon the Bounder.

"What did you do that for?" he shouted.

"Accident!"

"You threw the ball! Do you call that bowling?"

"My foot slipped."

"Ow!" groaned Bob Cherry. "You cad! Ow!"

"I'm sorry!" said the Bounder. "Was that leg before wicket?"

"You know it wasn't!" said Nugent wrathfully. "You did it on purpose, you miserable worm; you know you did!"

Bob Cherry hopped off the pitch.

"I can't go on," he said. "I don't know whether Smith did that on purpose. I shouldn't wonder. If I thought he did, for certain I'd smash him! Ow!"

And Bob sat on the grass to recover. There was a big bruise on his ankle. He had not been wearing pads, and the blow had been severe.

"Next man in," said Bulstrode.

Nugent shook his head.

"I'm not going to let Smith bowl at me," he said.

"Look here, Nugent—"

"One accident is enough," Frank said drily. "You can put a new bowler on, or you can drop me out. I don't want any Bounder."

The Bounder threw down the ball, which had been fielded and returned to him.

"Just as you like," he said. "I don't want to go on."

And he put his hands in his pockets, and walked away. Bulstrode looked worried. He did not want to lose a player like Vernon-Smith, but he knew it would be difficult to get the team to trust him after what had happened. The practice went on without the Bounder; and Bob Cherry, limping a great deal, went off the field.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Nugent Misses His Postal-Order.

"HOW'S the ankle, Bob?"

Mark Linley asked the question, looking into No. 1 Study a quarter of an hour later. The Lancashire lad was fresh from the cricket field, and he had a glow of health and colour in his cheeks. Mark was rather given to working hard indoors, "swotting" at studies which were outside the usual curriculum at Greyfriars; and the cricket did him worlds of good. He clumped down his bat, and took Liddell and Scott off the shelf.

Bob Cherry was seated in the armchair, with his trouser leg rolled up, rubbing his ankle with Ellinan's. He grunted.

"There's a beastly big bruise," he said.

"Hard cheese, old chap!"

"Yes, rather! I believe the Bounder did it on purpose."

Mark looked at the bruise.

"It's rotten," he said. "I hope you'll be all right for the match to-morrow, Bob."

"Oh, yes; it's not so bad as that. I've been rubbing it for a quarter of an hour nearly, and it's done it a lot of good."

Nugent came in, and threw off his blazer.

"How's the old leg, Bob?"

"Getting on all right."

"Feel inclined for a trot down to Friardale after dinner?" Nugent asked. "I've got a pass from Wingate to go down and get my new lamp."

Bob shook his head.

"No, I think not. I won't do much walking to-day, I think. I don't want to risk being crooked for the Courtfield match."

"Quite right," said Frank. "You come with me, Marky?"

Mark smiled, and shook his head.

"I should like to," he said; "but I've got some Greek translations to do. Mr. Quelch has promised to look over them for me, and he's setting the time aside specially."

"Oh, rats! I'll ask Bull, then."

"Hallo!" said the cheery voice of John Bull at the door. "Who's taking my name in vain?" And John Bull and Fisher T. Fish looked in.

"Come down to Friardale with me?" asked Nugent. "I'm going to the post-office to cash Todd's remittance, and blow it in a new bike lamp. There will be a tanner to spare, and we can have some ices."

"I'll come!"

Nugent put on his jacket, and felt in the pocket for the postal-order. He took out Todd's letter, and looked into it, and then felt in the pocket again. The pocket was empty!

"That's very odd!" he said.

"What's very odd?"

"I'd have sworn I put the postal-order into this pocket along with the letter," said Nugent. "I suppose I shoved it into another pocket. I'm getting as absent-minded as poor old Alonzo himself."

"Well, make sure you've not lost it before we start," said John Bull, the practical. "Don't want to amble down to Friardale for nothing."

"Oh, it must be here somewhere."

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Nugent felt in the other pocket.

"My hat!"

"Got it?"

"It's not here?"

"Try your bags," said Bull.

Nugent felt in his trousers' pockets. But the result was the same; the postal-order was not to be found. Frank looked very much puzzled.

"Blessed if I can make this out!" he exclaimed.

"You've lost it?" asked John Bull.

"No, I haven't lost it. I put it into my pocket, and then I hung my jacket up here when I went down to the cricket."

John Bull whistled.

"My word! Do you mean to say that it's been taken from your pocket?"

"What else can have happened to it?"

"Phew!"

"Hang it all!" said Bob Cherry. "Hang it all, Franky; make sure about it before you say a thing like that outside the study."

"I have made sure," said Nugent, somewhat tartly.

"You may have put it into your desk."

Frank shook his head.

"I haven't. I put it into my pocket, along with the letter, before we went into lessons. Some of you fellows must have seen me."

"I saw you, I guess," said Fisher T. Fish.

"You saw me put the postal-order into my pocket?"

"I guess I saw you put it into the letter, and put the letter in your pocket."

"That settles it," said John Bull. "The letter's still there all right."

"Yes."

"You haven't taken the letter out since?"

"Of course not. I came up here directly after lessons, and hung my jacket up. I was only up here a second; Bulstrode was waiting for me, and bawling up the stairs."

"I remember."

"You couldn't have dropped it in the Close when you were out after second lesson?" Bob Cherry suggested.

"Not without dropping the letter, too; and the letter's still here."

"It's jolly strange, then."

"Jolly strange, I guess."

Nugent looked at Bob.

"Look here, I suppose this isn't a rotten joke?" he asked.

Bob stared.

"Eh?" he ejaculated. "What do you mean?"

"I mean, you haven't taken it for a jape, and planted it somewhere for me to find?"

"Ass! I hope I'm not the kind of fellow to play tricks with money."

"Then what on earth has happened to it? Somebody has taken it out of my pocket while the jacket was hanging on the door."

The juniors looked at one another very seriously. If the postal-order had been removed from Nugent's pocket in that way, it meant only one thing—that there was a thief in the school.

The fact that the name of the payee was not filled in on the order made it a very easy thing to cash it if it were stolen: the thief had simply to fill in his own name. The number of the order, of course, could be ascertained by writing to Todd, and it could be traced. But—

"The curious thing is that the fellow who took it must have been awfully quick about it," said Mark Linley. "You've been here a quarter of an hour, Bob?"

"Quite that," said Bob.

"And it's not more than twenty minutes since I hung the jacket up," Nugent said.

Bob Cherry nodded.

"That's right. I wasn't on the cricket-field more than five minutes."

"I've got it!" said Fisher T. Fish suddenly.

They turned upon him.

"You! You've got it?"

"I guess so."

"Hand it over, then, you fathead!"

"Eh? Hand what over?"

"The postal-order, if you've got it."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, what are you cackling at, you silly image?" asked Nugent, whose temper was growing a little acid.

"I guess I didn't mean I'd got the postal-order, sonny. I mean I've got it—I've got it, who it was that's taken it."

"Oh, I see."

"You've seen somebody in the study?" asked Bob.

"Oh, no; I was at the cricket all the time. But I can guess."

"And whom do you guess?"

"Bunter!"

And each of the juniors nodded. It seemed only too likely.

Billy Bunter was not what anybody would have called an honourable fellow. He was, as a matter of fact, really too stupid to distinguish very clearly between right and wrong. If he saw any money at any time he wanted it: and his wanting it often seemed to him a sufficient reason for having it. He was an inveterate borrower, and inveterate borrowing is, after all, not so very far removed from stealing when the borrowed money is never returned. It would be exactly like Bunter to take the postal-order and spend it, and intend to replace it with some postal-order he expected to come, and which, of course, never would come. If the order had been left lying on the table — But would even Bunter go to a fellow's pocket for it? That seemed doubtful.

"Bunter!" repeated Nugent.
 "Well, I guess he's more likely than anybody else," said Fisher T. Fish.

"You're right."
 "We'd better question Bunter, before we go further," said Mark Linley quietly.

"Good! Will you come, Bob?"
 "No, I'll stay here—I don't want to limp around."
 "All serene!"

And leaving Bob Cherry to continue his treatment of the bruise upon his ankle, Nugent and Linley and Bull and the American left the study in search of Bunter.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER, Not Bunter.

BILLY BUNTER was discovered outside Mrs. Mimble's little tuck-shop, in the corner of the Close, behind the old elms. Bunter was looking into Mrs. Mimble's window with a longing eye. He had been inside the shop, trying to persuade Mrs. Mimble that a system of credit would be of immense service to her business. Mrs. Mimble did not see it in the same light. She had been very sharp with Bunter, and the Owl of the Remove had rolled out of the shop in a disappointed frame of mind. Mrs. Mimble had a fresh array of jam tarts that day, and the sight of them made Bunter's mouth water. He was looking in at the window, and feeling in his pockets in the desperate hope that some overlooked coin might yet linger there, when the four juniors found him, and Frank Nugent clapped him heavily upon the shoulder. Bunter jumped, and blinked round at him.

"Ow! Oh, really, Nugent——"
 "I want to speak to you, Bunter."
 Bunter's eyes glistened behind his big spectacles.
 "Good!" he said. "Come into the shop, will you; we can talk much more comfortably there. Mrs. Mimble's got a fresh lot of tarts——"

"Never mind the tarts now——"
 "They're jolly good, and quite fresh——"
 "Have you been feeding?" asked John Bull, with a searching glance at the fat junior's face. As a rule, Bunter showed signs of having had a feed.

The fat junior shook his head disconsolately.
 "No; Mrs. Mimble is a most unbusinesslike woman. I've explained to her that I'm expecting a postal-order this evening, and that big businesses are always built up on a system of credit. But she can't see it."

"You haven't been cashing a postal-order, by any chance?"
 "I haven't had one yet," said Bunter. "I was disappointed about a postal-order this morning. I was expecting one from a titled friend of mine, and it hasn't come—there's been some delay in the post. It's rotten! I've been thinking of writing to the Postmaster-General about it. Look here, if any of you fellows would advance me the ten bob, you could have the order when it comes, and——"

"Oh, cheese it! Look here," said Nugent abruptly. "Somebody has taken the ten shilling postal-order I had from Todd this morning——"

"Oh, really——"
 "Have you taken it?"
 Bunter blinked at him.
 "Oh, really, Nugent! I hope you don't think I would take another chap's postal-order," he said. "I'm very particular indeed in money matters. Whenever I borrow anything, I put it all down to the account."

"Have you taken my postal-order?"
 "No, I haven't."
 The juniors looked at him, and at each other. Bunter's denial was explicit enough, and certainly he had not been feeding, as would have been the case if he had had any money.

But if Bunter had not taken the order, who had? And they knew only too well that the word of the fat junior could not be relied upon.

"Bunter's the most likely chap," said John Bull.
 "I know that," said Nugent. "I remember how he took Wingate's banknote and cashed it——"

"Oh, really, Nugent—I mistook it for one of mine——"
 "Yes; you'll make mistakes like that once too often, and get sent to a reformatory," said Nugent. "Look here, you chaps, we can't take Bunter's word; we shall have to inquire into this. The postal-order was taken after I hung my jacket up in the study, and before Bob Cherry got there with his gammy ankle.

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 173.

NEXT WEEK: "A SCHOOLBOY'S HONOUR." A Splendid, Long, Complete Tale of the Chums of Greyfriars. By FRANK RICHARDS.

EVERY TUESDAY, **The "Magnet" LIBRARY.** ONE PENNY.

Where did you go immediately after the form was dismissed, Bunter?"

"I came here."

John Bull chuckled.

"Well, we can believe that," he said. "It's just where he would come."

"We'll ask Mrs. Mimble," said Nugent. "Come in with us, Bunter."

"Look here——"

"Shut up, and come in!"

Nugent grasped the fat junior by the collar, and marched him into the shop. Mrs. Mimble came out of her little parlour.

She had a frown for Bunter, and a pleasant smile for the other fellows, so the expression upon her plump face was a little mixed.

"Did Bunter get in here immediately after morning school, Mrs. Mimble?" Nugent asked, coming to the point at once.

The good dame looked surprised.

"I think so, Master Nugent," she said. "He was here very soon after half-past twelve."

"Before twenty-five minutes to one?"

"Yes, I am sure of that."

"H'm! Then he was here by the time I got to the study," said Frank. "How long did he stay, Mrs. Mimble?"

"Oh, quite a long time," said Mrs. Mimble. "He was talking a great deal of nonsense to me about a credit system. He wanted me to give him some tarts, which I know very well he would never pay me for."

"Oh, really, Mrs. Mimble——"

"You know very well you never intended to pay me, Master Bunter. You owe me fourteen shillings and threepence half-penny now."

"I am expecting a postal-order——"

"Nonsense, Master Bunter!"

"How long was Bunter here?" interrupted Nugent. "As much as five minutes?"

"Oh, yes, quite—nearer ten minutes."

"You are quite sure of that, Mrs. Mimble?"

"Quite sure, Master Nugent; though I really do not see what is the importance of it," said Mrs. Mimble, in wonder.

"It is really very important. You see, we suspect Bunter of having taken something, and if he was here ten minutes, he couldn't have done it, as it was taken just that time," Nugent explained.

"I am sure he was here seven or eight minutes at least."

"Thank you, Mrs. Mimble."

"And I've stayed outside the shop all the time since," said Billy Bunter, in an extremely injured tone. "I've been waiting to see some chap who would be decent enough to lend me a few bob in advance upon my postal-order to-night——"

"Oh, rats!"

The juniors turned towards the door. They were satisfied upon the point they had set out to ascertain. Billy Bunter was not the guilty party, and they were done with the fat junior now.

But the Owl of the Remove was not so easily got rid of. He rolled after them, and caught Nugent by the sleeve.

"I say, Nugent——"

Frank jerked him arm away.

"Look here, you know, you suspected me of boning that postal-order, you know you did," said Billy Bunter. "It was jolly mean of you."

"It was your own fault for being that kind of a worm," said John Bull, in his direct way. "We shouldn't have suspected a decent chap."

"Oh, really, Bull——"

"And it's jolly lucky for you that Mrs. Mimble was able to prove you an alibi," said Mark Linley. "You mightn't have been believed otherwise."

"Well, under the circumstances, I don't see how you can avoid lending me a few bob, after hauling me over the coals like this for nothing," said Billy Bunter, indignantly.

John Bull put his hand into his pocket.

"Something in that," he admitted. "Here's a bob, and now for goodness' sake shut up, and don't jaw!"

"Oh, really, Bull——"

"Oh, scat!"

"Couldn't you make it half-a-crown——"

But the Removites did not stay to listen. They walked out of the shop, and Bunter blinked after them discontentedly.

"Beasts!" he murmured.

Then he turned to the counter, and proceeded forthwith to expend the shilling in those tempting new jam tarts.

The four juniors quitted the shop, and walked slowly towards the house. The bell was sounding for dinner.

"It wasn't Bunter," said Mark Linley, breaking a long silence, as they met Bob Cherry on the steps of the house. Bob Cherry was still limping.

"Proved it?" asked Bob.

"Yes; Mrs. Mimble's proved an alibi for him. He went to

the tuck-shop immediately after lessons, and stayed there nearly ten minutes."

"Then he wasn't the chap," said Bob. "Whoever took the postal-order, nipped into the study and took it after you left, Frank, and before I came in—and that wasn't more than five minutes at the most."

"Just so."

"Then we've got to find out who nipped into the study between twenty-five to one and twenty minutes to," said John Bull.

"And then we find the thief," said Bob.

"Exactly!"

"As to who it is——"

"I haven't the faintest idea, for one," said Mark Linley. "It seems impossible to believe that there is a thief in the Remove."

"It's horrible!"

"Suppose we say nothing about it, till we've found out more," Bob Cherry suggested.

Nugent made a grimace.

"Too late!" he said.

"How so?"

"Bunter knows."

That settled it. Whatever Bunter knew was pretty certain to be known shortly over all the Lower School. Bunter came rolling in for dinner with a smear of jam on his face; and before dinner was over all the Remove knew that a postal-order—Todd's postal-order—had been stolen from Frank Nugent's jacket pocket in his study.

And when the Form crowded out of the dining-room, the news went buzzing through the Lower School. There was a thief in the Remove, and it was no longer possible to disguise the fact or to keep it secret.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER. Halves.

"FOUND your postal-order, Nugent?"

"No!"

"Found who's taken it?"

"No!"

Frank Nugent had the same answer to make every time he was asked, which was pretty frequently. The news had sent quite a thrill through the Remove, and the fact that Billy Bunter's innocence was clear, made the question all the more puzzling. Bunter might have taken the postal-order with some stupid idea of replacing it with another; but there was only one Bunter in the Form. If anybody else had taken it, that somebody else was a thief.

"Who was it?"

Fellows asked that question, and looked at one another dubiously. The doubt cast a shadow over the whole Form.

Who had done it?

It was known that the theft must have been committed during the five minutes in which the study had been unoccupied, and inquiry was made as to who had been about the Remove passage at the time.

It was not easy to tell exactly; but it seemed clear that a dozen or more Removites had been near at hand, and it might have been any one of them.

That it was a member of the Remove who had taken the note was pretty clear; for a fellow belonging to another Form would certainly have been noticed about, with so many Remove fellows in the passage or on the stairs at the time.

Besides, how was a fellow in another Form to know just where to look for the note, or to know when the study was empty?

It was possible, but it was not likely, that it was anyone but a Removite.

But which one?

"Blessed if I can make it out," Bob Cherry said, talking it over with a group of fellows just before afternoon school. "The chap, whoever he was, nipped in and did it just in time. I don't remember seeing anybody near the study when I came in."

Some of the fellows looked at Bob Cherry curiously.

He did not notice it.

As a matter of fact, it had already occurred to some of the Remove that the theft might not have taken place in that special five minutes.

Bob Cherry had been alone in the study for a quarter of an hour. He had had ample opportunity to take the postal-order if he had wanted to!

True, Bob was the very last fellow in the world whom anyone would have suspected of anything savouring of dishonesty.

But then, everybody else was really above suspicion too; and if suspicion was to fall upon someone, Bob could not expect to be exempt.

That thought was in several minds now, but no one had cared to give it utterance.

It did not occur to Bob himself. He went in with the rest to afternoon lessons without dreaming that the finger of suspicion might point to him.

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 173.

READ the grand school tale of **TOM MERRY & CO.**, entitled: "THE MYSTERIOUS DOCUMENT," in the "GEM" Library. Price One Penny.

Billy Bunter blinked at him in class several times, with a mysterious manner which caught Bob Cherry's attention at last, and made him wonder. Bunter's manner seemed to hint that he knew what he knew, so to speak.

There was an under-current of whispering in the class which could not fail to draw Mr. Quelch's attention during lessons.

The Remove-master was very sharp with some of the class, and at last he rapped his desk impatiently with the ruler.

"What are you whispering about, Skinner?" he exclaimed. Skinner started.

"I, sir?"

"Yes. You were whispering to Snoop."

"If you please, sir——"

"There seems to me to be something the matter with this class this afternoon," said Mr. Quelch, frowning.

The dead silence, and significant looks, that followed this remark made the Form-master realise that he had hit the mark by chance.

"What is the matter?" he exclaimed, sharply.

"N—n—nothing, sir," said Skinner.

"Nonsense! You explain, Bulstrode."

Bulstrode stood up, looking very red and awkward.

"It's a—a—a rather unfortunate matter, sir," he said. "Nugent has missed a postal-order, sir."

"What!"

"Nugent had a postal-order this morning, sir, from Todd, who owed him ten bob—shillings when he went away. Somebody's taken the postal-order out of Nugent's pocket, sir, while his jacket was hanging on the door of his study."

"Good heavens! Is this correct, Nugent?"

"Yes, sir," said Frank, reluctantly.

"You do not know who has taken it?"

"No, sir."

"You are sure you did not lose the postal-order?"

"Quite sure, sir."

"Kindly explain the full circumstances to me."

Nugent did so.

"This is a most unfortunate occurrence," said Mr. Quelch.

"I prefer to think that some foolish boy has taken the postal-order for a joke. If this is the case, I call upon the boy in question to tell the truth, here and now, and I am sure Nugent will freely look over the occurrence."

"Certainly, sir," said Frank.

A silence followed.

No one was inclined to own up to having taken the postal-order, whether for a joke or not. Mr. Quelch's face seemed to grow very lined.

"I hope it is not possible that there is a thief in the Remove," he said. "It would be terrible to think so. I hope that the postal-order will be discovered. If it is not found by bedtime to-night, Nugent, kindly tell me so."

"Very well, sir."

The lesson went on.

The juniors were glad enough when classes were dismissed. The affair of the postal-order was in every mind, and weighed upon all thoughts. Billy Bunter gave Bob Cherry one of his mysterious glances as they came out of the Form-room, and touched the sturdy Removite on the arm.

Bob shook him off as if he were some troublesome insect, and the fat junior coloured angrily.

"Look here, I want to speak to you, Cherry," he said, in a shrill whisper.

"Oh, go and eat coke."

"It may pay you better to listen to me," said Bunter.

Bob stared at him blankly, in sheer surprise. He could not, for the life of him, guess what the fat junior was driving at.

"Are you off your rocker?" he demanded.

"No, I'm not. I've got something to say to you—something jolly important, too," said Bunter, with a threatening note in his voice that amazed Bob Cherry still more.

"You must be dotty, I should think," said Bob. "But go on."

"Better not let the other fellows hear."

"Why not?"

"It will be better."

"Oh, you're cracked," said Bob Cherry, impatiently. "What is it—some new silly scheme for making money?"

"No, it isn't."

Bob Cherry, in sheer surprise, allowed the fat junior to draw him aside. Bunter's mysterious manner had attracted many glances, which the fat junior was too short-sighted to observe. Bob Cherry, in considerable doubt as to Bunter's sanity, watched him with blank looks.

"Now, look here," said Bunter, lowering his voice cautiously, "I don't want to be hard on you."

"Eh?"

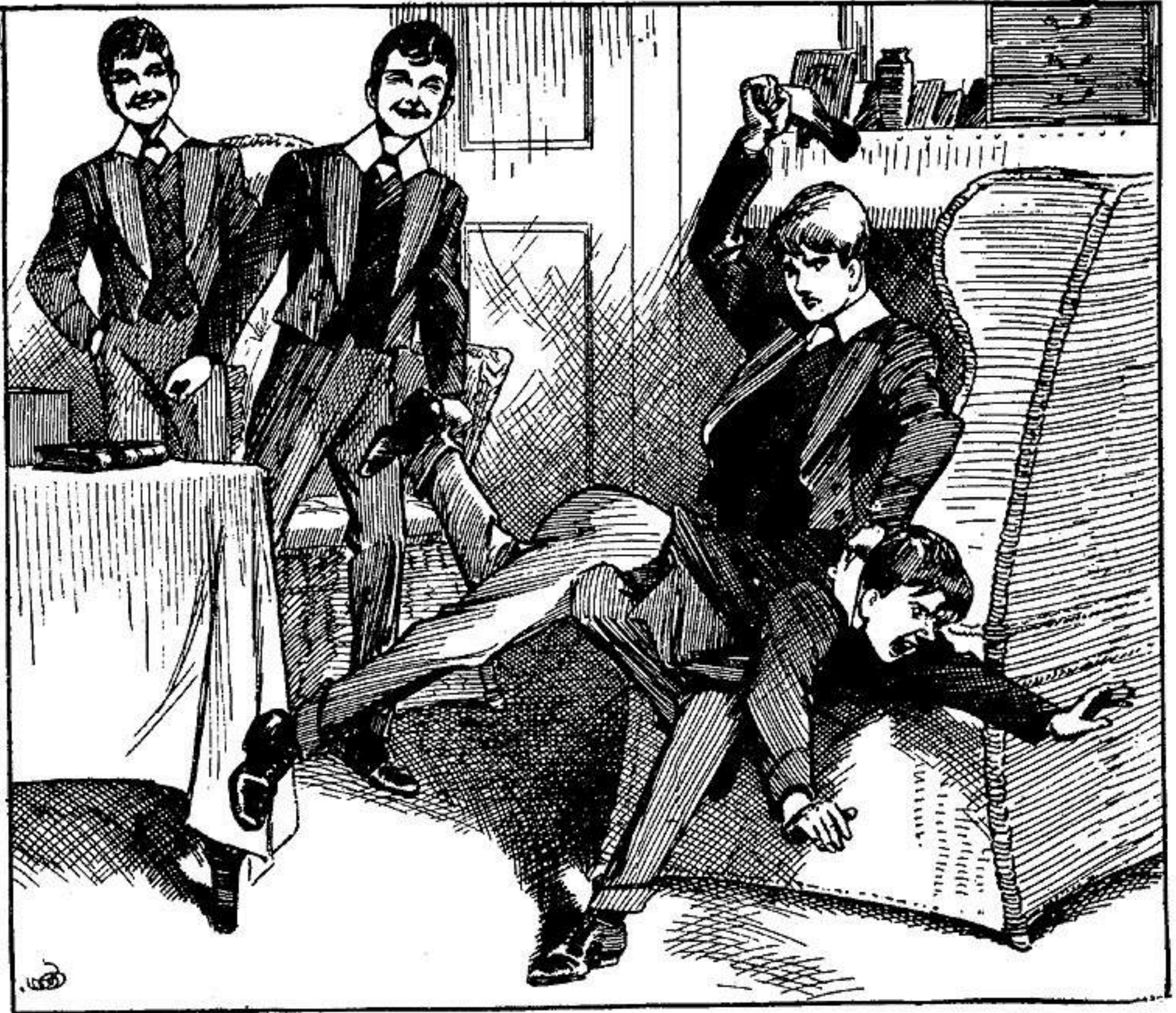
"I say I don't want to be hard on you."

"What?"

"I know how fellows come to do these things," said Bunter.

"What things?"

"Oh, you can't pull the wool over my eyes," said Bunter,



Bob Cherry drew Heath across his knee and grasped a slipper. "If you won't fight," he said, "you can take your licking like a kid in the first form. So here goes!" (See page 4.)

impatiently. "Don't play the giddy ox. I say I don't want to be hard on you. What I say is—halves!"

"Eh?"

"Halves!" said Bunter.

"Are you stark mad?" asked Bob Cherry.

"Look here, it's halves, or there will be trouble," said Bunter.

"Halves of what?"

"The ten bob."

"Ten bob?" repeated Bob Cherry, dazedly.

"Yes."

"What ten bob?"

"Oh, don't beat about the bush," said Bunter. "Ten bob is five for me and five for you; and if you don't go halves, I'll tell Nugent you took it."

Bob Cherry stared at him blankly, Bunter's meaning slowly dawning upon his mind. When it had fairly dawned upon him, Bob Cherry flushed a sudden crimson, and his right hand rose and fell—and Bunter fell, too, going with a crash to the floor.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

Under Suspicion.

BOB CHERRY stood over the Owl of the Remove, his face burning, his eyes flashing fire, his chest heaving with passionate anger. There was a rush to the spot of the fellows who had been watching the scene with great curiosity.

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NEXT WEEK: "A SCHOOLBOY'S HONOUR." A Splendid, Long, Complete Tale of the Chums of Greyfriars. By FRANK RICHARDS.

"What's the row?" asked Bulstrode.

"Oh!" groaned Bunter. "Ow! I'm killed—ow—I'm dying! Beast! Ow!"

Bob Cherry panted.

"What's the trouble?" Nugent asked.

"Only this," panted Bob. "He says I took the postal-order out of your pocket, and he says he'll tell you unless I go halves."

"What!"

"My hat!"

Bunter sat up.

"I didn't!" he roared. "I never said anything of the sort! Ow! I said I knew it was Bob Cherry, and I'd give him a chance to put the postal-order back! Ow!"

"You lying worm!" said Bob.

"You dirty toad!" said Nugent. "I know you'd go halves with a chap who robbed a church, as far as that goes; but what put it into your rotten, beastly little brain that Bob took the postal-order?"

"Ow! I know he did."

"How do you know?" asked Skinner. "Did you see him?"

Bob Cherry clenched his fists.

"You'd better be careful what you say, Skinner, if you don't want to join Bunter on the floor," he exclaimed, passionately. "I'll allow no fellow to hint anything of that sort."

Skinner started back in alarm.

"Here, hold on! Hold on!" he exclaimed. "I only want

to get at how Bunter knew—I—I mean how he came to think so."

"I know he did it," shrieked Bunter.

"What makes you think so, you crawling worm?" asked John Bull.

"Because he was in the study, and I know he took it. Of course he did! Nobody else had a chance to take it."

"By Jove!" said Vernon-Smith.

Bob Cherry turned upon the Bounder like a flash.

"Does that mean you think I took it, Smith?" he exclaimed.

The Bounder shrugged his shoulders.

"How should I know?" he said.

"That won't do! Do you think so?"

"Well, I suppose you're no more above suspicion than anybody else in the Form," said Vernon-Smith.

Bob Cherry pushed back his cuffs.

"Nobody will hint that I'm a thief without putting up his hands for it," he said. "Take care of yourself, Smith."

And Bob, whose hand was always as ready as his word, advanced upon the Bounder, hitting out. Vernon-Smith backed away.

"Here, cheese that!" said Bulstrode. "If you didn't do it, Cherry, that's not the way to prove your innocence!"

Bob Cherry stopped.

"Do you think I did it?" he cried.

"How should I know? You had the chance, anyway."

"Am I the kind of chap—"

"Is anybody in the Remove the kind of chap?" replied Bulstrode. "But we know that somebody in the Remove took it."

"By Jove! That's true!" said Elliott.

"Faith, and ye're right," said Micky Desmond. "But sure I'd as soon suspect meself intirely as Bob Cherry."

Bob Cherry dropped his hands.

His excitement was natural enough; but it had done him no good in the eyes of the Removites. It might have been the effect of natural indignation, or it might have been mere bluster to carry off the matter with a high hand. Who was to tell?

"It's all rot!" said Nugent. "As if Bob would dream of touching money that didn't belong to him! The only likely chap was Bunter—"

"Oh, really—"

"And as it wasn't Bunter, it's a giddy mystery. But any chap who says it might have been Bob Cherry is a fool and a dummy, and that's plain English!" said Nugent warmly.

"Thank you, Franky," said Bob, in a low voice. "I know you're not likely to think such a thing of me, anyway."

"No fear!"

"Of course not!" said John Bull. "As for Bunter, if he doesn't wriggle away, I'll stamp on him, and burst him!"

"Ow!" gasped Bunter.

The fat junior scrambled away at top speed, leaving the fellows grinning. But the evil he had done remained behind him. The vague suspicion had been in many minds before. Now Bunter's words had crystallised it, so to speak.

Bob Cherry looked round at the faces of the juniors, and on many, many of them he saw the dark cloud of uneasiness and suspicion. There was a grin of malice on Vernon-Smith's face. He evidently enjoyed the situation. And Snoop, and Skinner, and Heath and other fellows who had never got on well with Bob Cherry, could hardly conceal their satisfaction. The Bounder did not attempt to do so.

"You fellows," said Bob Cherry, looking round, "you—you can't believe I did it?" His voice grew hoarse and husky.

There was a grim silence.

The juniors moved away one by one. But Bob's own friends remained round him—John Bull, and Nugent, and Fisher F. Fish, and Tom Brown, and Mark Linley, and Micky Desmond. They were not likely to believe a word against him.

Bob looked crushed.

To a free and frank nature like his own, a nature that was the very essence of honour and straight dealing, such an accusation was horrible. And the impossibility of proving his innocence, at all events until the actual thief should be discovered, occurred to him at once.

He ran his fingers through his thick shock of flaxen hair, a trick he had when he was worried or bewildered.

"Cheer up, Bob!" said Frank Nugent encouragingly. "It's all rot, you know—just Bunter's rot! And we'll have the real thief soon, anyway."

"The Remove can't believe such a thing of me," said Bob, in a broken voice. All his excitement was gone now.

"Of course not, old chap!"

"I guess not," said Fisher T. Fish. "I guess you are straight goods, Bob, from the word go! And we'll have the real rotter known soon, I guess!"

"It's horribly unfortunate that you were alone in the study so long," said Frank. "I didn't look at it in that light before. You see, you really had more time than anybody else of taking the beastly thing. Any other chap had to dodge into the study in the five minutes or so that it was empty, and you were there alone for a quarter of an hour. That makes the thing look

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rotten. But no one in his senses would imagine for a second that you did not."

Bob Cherry nodded gloomily. He could see that a great many of the Remove imagined that he might have done it.

"But look here, we'll jolly soon clear it up," said Nugent. "I'll wire to Todd to send me the number of the order. The thief must have taken it; I suppose, to cash it. Well, we can inquire after it when we know the number, and, if it is cashed, we shall get on to the chap who did it."

"Yes, if it's cashed," said John Bull.

"The thief may keep it back," said Mark Linley.

"That's not really likely; for a chap isn't likely to steal, and run the risk of being expelled, unless he was in pretty severe need of money," said Nugent, "and if he's hard pushed, he must use it."

"I guess that's correct."

"I suspect that it's some young ass who's in tow with Cobb and that gang at the Cross Keys," said Nugent. "Some fool who owes money on betting, or something of the sort. The postal-order may have been sent to some cad at the Cross Keys already."

"Very likely."

"Buck up, Bob!"

Bob Cherry was not listening. He nodded absently to his chums, and walked away with his hands thrust deep into his pockets, and his head drooping. The shameful accusation seemed to have knocked him quite over.

The other fellows looked very glum.

"I say, this is simply rotten!" Nugent remarked. "It's beastly unfortunate about Bob having been in the study all the time!"

"He's taking it very much to heart."

"And all through that fat cad Bunter!"

"Well, I don't know about that; some of the fellows had been thinking of it, I'm sure," said John Bull. "I've seen it in their faces, though Bob never suspected it. But buck up and get the number from Todd, Nugent; Bob will be under a cloud until we've found out who really took the note."

"Come down to the post office, and I'll send the wire now," said Frank.

And a quarter of an hour later the wire was sent.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

Broad Arrows!

HEATH, the new junior, looked out of his study window. Bob Cherry was crossing the Close, with his hands thrust deep into his pockets. Bob's attitude as he walked was very different from usual. He seemed like a fellow upon whom some heavy burden had suddenly fallen. To the frank, free nature suspicion was intolerable, and Bob had all the feeling of an animal caught in a net from which escape was impossible. A cold, cruel smile crossed Heath's lips as he looked at him. From Esau Heath Bob was not likely to get much sympathy in his misfortune.

Bob tramped down to the gates, and went out. He wanted to be alone—now that he knew that some of the Remove suspected him, the unhappy lad saw suspicion in every glance. Even his own chums, he felt, might allow cold doubt and suspicion to creep into their hearts.

Heath watched him till he was gone.

Then he turned from the window, and locked the door of his study, and opened a bag that lay upon his table.

For ten minutes or more Heath was busy in examining the contents of that bag; and then he left the study, carrying the bag in his hand, and he also left Greyfriars.

Half an hour later Nugent and his friends came in. They had wired to Alonzo Todd to send them the number of the missing postal-order. When the number was ascertained, further inquiry could be made.

Until then, nothing could be done.

"Where's Bob, I wonder?" Nugent said, as he glanced into No. 1 study, and found it dark and deserted.

"Bob! Bobby!" John Bull shouted along the passage.

"He's gone out," said Hazeldene, looking out of his study.

"Alone?"

"Yes."

"Poor old Bob!" said Mark Linley. "He feels this awfully; it's too beastly of the fellows to get such an idea into their heads."

"It's rotten!" said Hazeldene.

"No good moping alone, though," said Bull. "We'd better look after Bob, and stick to him, and keep him from thinking about it too much. I wish Wharton were here; he might be able to help."

"I'll write to him to-night about it," said Frank.

It was some time before Bob Cherry came back. Heath had returned long before then, but no one was taking any notice of Heath's movements. Bob did not return till after the gates were locked, and he had to ring up Gosling, the porter, and was

reported for missing calling-over. He had to go into Mr. Quelch's study and face the Form-master.

The haggard expression of his face arrested Mr. Quelch's attention at once, and he laid down the cane he had picked up, and fixed his eyes upon the junior.

"Are you ill, Cherry?" he exclaimed.

"No, sir," said Bob.

"You are looking very strange."

"I'm all right, sir."

"Come, Cherry, what is the matter?" Mr. Quelch said kindly. "I can see that there is something wrong with you. Why did you miss calling-over?"

"I hadn't come in, sir."

"But why had you not come in?"

"I—I forgot about the time, sir."

"You were very busily occupied, I suppose?"

"N-n-no, sir."

"Come, my lad. You have stayed out till long after dark, a most unusual and reprehensible thing to do, unless you have a pass from a prefect. Why did you do it? What have you been doing?"

"Walking about, sir."

"Where?"

"In the lanes, sir."

"Why?"

Bob Cherry was silent.

"I think you had better explain, Cherry," said Mr. Quelch.

"I—I—I've been thinking it over, sir," said Bob miserably.

"Thinking what over?"

"About that postal-order."

"Ah, yes! But why should that matter weigh upon your mind, Cherry, more than upon anyone else?" asked Mr. Quelch.

Then Bob burst out.

"They suspect me of having taken it, sir."

Mr. Quelch started.

"They suspect you, Cherry?"

"Yes, sir!" groaned Bob.

"You are surely innocent?"

"Oh, sir!"

"Why should they suspect you?"

"Because I was in the study nearly all the time. Of course, I could have taken it easily if I had wanted to."

"It is ridiculous," said Mr. Quelch. "Utterly ridiculous! I should not entertain such a suspicion for a single second. It is cruel and absurd."

"Thank you, sir," said Bob gratefully. "My own friends don't think it, but—but a lot of the fellows do."

"I hope they will think better of it," said Mr. Quelch, frowning. "The postal-order has not, of course, been found?"

"No, sir."

"I shall acquaint the Head with the matter this evening, then, and a searching inquiry will be made," said Mr. Quelch. "I do not think you need have any fear but that your innocence will be proved, Cherry."

"Thank you, sir."

"You may go."

And Bob Cherry went, unpunished. His chums met him in the passage, and he was marched off to John Bull's study, where a specially delectable tea had been prepared. But even ham patties and poached eggs and jam tarts failed to comfort Bob.

He was gloomy and depressed.

"It will be all right in the morning, Bob," Nugent said. "I shall have a letter from Todd by the first post, I expect, giving me the number of the order. Then we shall be able to get on the track of the rascal."

Bob nodded without speaking.

"Cheer up, old son."

"I can't cheer up," said Bob miserably. "It's too rotten being suspected of a mean, dirty thing like that. The fellows ought to know me better."

"Oh, they're all fools," said John Bull.

"Besides, only a few suspect you," Nugent urged. "And it will all come right in the morning, when we get the number of the order."

"I guess so," said Fish.

But Bob's face was very gloomy when the Remove went up to bed. Bob's special enemies in the Form were in high feather over it. Vernon-Smith and Heath had made up their quarrel, for the special purpose of enjoying Bob's discomfiture together. They were grinning and chuckling, and Bob knew very well what they were whispering about.

Snoop and Skinner and Stott and some more made it a point to avoid Bob very carefully, as if he were not fit to be touched.

Vernon-Smith, in a most ostentatious way, removed some loose money from his pockets before going to bed, and locked it up in his box.

Bob saw him, and he flushed crimson. His anger got the better of him for a moment, and he strode over to the Bounder.

"What are you doing?" he exclaimed.

The Bounder, kneeling beside the box, looked up at him coolly.

"Locking up my money," he replied.

"What for?"

"To keep it safe."

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NEXT WEEK: "A SCHOOLBOY'S HONOUR."

A Splendid, Long, Complete Tale of the Chums of Greyfriars.
By FRANK RICHARDS

EVERY
TUESDAY,

The "Magnet"
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ONE
PENNY.

"So you think your money's in danger in this dormitory, do you?" Bob Cherry exclaimed, in a choking voice.

"Well, I shouldn't wonder. There might be thieves about," said the Bounder calmly.

And there was a joyous chuckle from Heath and Snoop.

Bob clenched his hand hard. But Nugent drew him away.

"Don't take any notice of that cad, Bob," he murmured.

"He's only trying to draw you. When the matter's cleared up, you can give him a hiding."

Bob Cherry nodded; he could not speak. He went quietly to bed, affecting to see nothing of the significant glances that were being exchanged.

There was little sleep for Bob Cherry at first, but towards midnight he fell into a deep slumber, and dreamed of postal-orders, policemen, and detectives. He did not wake again till the rising-bell was clanging through the sunny morning.

He started, and sat up in bed. Immediately upon waking the remembrance of the wretched happenings of the day before crowded into his mind. His face, usually as bright as the sunshine itself in the morning, clouded over.

He stepped out of bed, and reached for his clothes. Then a cry of rage escaped his lips. The clothes were not folded up neatly as he had left them.

Someone had disturbed them in the night. Bob Cherry caught up the jacket and trousers. He held them up, and looked at them in almost speechless rage.

Upon the dark cloth, broad arrows, in imitation of those upon a convict's garb, had been daubed in white paint!

Bob's exclamation brought all eyes in his direction.

"What on earth's that?" Bulstrode exclaimed.

"Broad arrows!" ejaculated Skinner. "Ha, ha, ha!"

There was a loud laugh from Vernon-Smith and Heath and Snoop. Bob's face was dark with fury.

"Who did that?" he exclaimed in a choking voice. "Who did it?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What rotten cad did that?" roared Bob. "Hasn't he pluck enough to own up to what he's done?"

There was no reply.

"Was it you, Snoop?"

"No, it wasn't," said Snoop.

"Was it you, Heath?"

"My dear chap, don't ask questions."

"Was it you, you cad?"

"Well, no, it wasn't," said Heath.

"I believe you're lying."

"Thank you."

Heath turned away to his washstand. Many of the fellows were grinning. Bob threw down the clothes.

He dressed in another suit, and left the dormitory without speaking another word, either to friend or to foe. But the expression on his face was enough to give pause to those who felt inclined to "chip" him on the subject. Heath was the last fellow to leave the dormitory; and before he went he removed a little pot of white paint and a brush that had been concealed under his mattress, and concealed them under his jacket to convey them downstairs.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER

"R. Cherry."

"HERE you are, Nugent!" said Ogilvy.

It was a letter for Frank, addressed in Todd's handwriting. Frank opened it in the midst of a crowd. The former Greyfriars fellow had not been long in answering. The letter ran as follows, as Frank read it out:

"My dear Nugent,—I was considerably astonished and perturbed by the receipt of your wire. I sincerely trust that by this time you have succeeded in recovering the missing postal-order. I proceeded immediately to ascertain the number of the order, paying a visit to the post-office where I purchased it for that purpose. The number is 00012468. I have requested my Uncle Benjamin to check the number, in order to obviate any possible error in so important a matter.

"With kind regards from Uncle Benjamin,

"Always yours,

"ALONZO TODD."

"P.S.—I sincerely trust that the postal-order has not been extracted from your pocket by any person of dishonest proclivities. If such should prove to be the case, I should be glad to send some excellent tracts for the perusal of the unfortunate youth who has strayed into the paths of moral turpitude."

"Good old Duffer!" said Tom Brown.

"The number's 00012468," said Nugent. "That's the important point. We'll get down to the post-office as quickly as we can, and see whether it's been presented there."

"Good egg!"

"Let's ask Mr. Quelch for leave off first lesson," said John

Bull. "It's a jolly important matter, and it ought to be settled at once."

"Yes, we'll ask him."

Mr. Quelch readily gave leave to Nugent and John Bull, when he was asked, to go down to the village post-office instead of attending for first lesson. The Form-master was as anxious as the juniors could be to get the matter cleared up.

"It will be all right now, Bob," Nugent said.

Bob Cherry shook his head.

"I don't suppose the order has been presented," he said.

"Why not?"

"Well, after all this talk about it, the chap would be afraid to take it to the post-office for payment, I should think."

"But he must be in need of the money, or he wouldn't have stolen it."

"Yes; but—"

"Besides," said John Bull, "he may have cashed it before he knew that such a fuss was going to be made."

"Well, we'll see, anyway," said Nugent.

And Nugent and Bull went down to the gates while the other fellows were going into the Form-room. Bob Cherry went into the Form-room with downcast eyes. Fellows in other Forms looked at him very curiously, as well as the Removites.

Nugent and Bull walked quickly down to the village. They were anxious to see the post-mistress and get the matter over. If the post-office was drawn "blank," they would have to try further; but Nugent hoped to get a clue there.

They reached the post-office of Friardale, a small establishment that was also a grocer's shop. The post-mistress, a kind looking middle-aged lady in spectacles, peered at them over the little partition.

"Yes?" she said.

"If you please, we want to know if a postal-order was cashed here yesterday," said Frank. "By one of the chaps from the school, I mean. A postal-order has been—lost—and we're trying to trace it."

"Yes, certainly," said Mrs. Brett. "A postal-order for ten shillings was cashed last evening by a schoolboy. I was here."

Nugent and Bull exchanged glances.

"We're on the track now," Bull murmured.

"By a Greyfriars chap?" asked Nugent.

"Yes; he wore a Greyfriars' cap, at all events."

"That's certain enough, then. Do you know his name, ma'am?"

"I do not, but it is written on the order," said the post-mistress. "I forget the name."

She looked puzzled. "Is here anything wrong about it?"

"I'm afraid there is," said Nugent. "Is he a chap you know by sight, ma'am?"

"Yes; I have seen him here before, with you."

"With me?" Nugent exclaimed in surprise.

"Yes, Master Nugent."

"By Jove!" said John Bull. "This is getting rather thick. I admit I had a hope that it might turn out to be that new chap, Heath."

"It wasn't Billy Bunter, ma'am?"

"Oh, no."

"Was the name Heath?"

"No."

"I suppose you still have the postal-order here?" Nugent asked. "I have the number of the one that is missing. Will you tell me if it is the same?"

"Certainly."

The post-mistress opened a drawer, and took out a small bundle of postal-orders fastened in an elastic band. From the bundle she selected one.

"What is your number?" she asked.

Nugent read it out from Todd's letter.

"00012468."

"That is the number, Master Nugent."

"My hat!"

"It's the same," John Bull exclaimed. "It's Todd's postal-order that was cashed here last night, Franky. We've only got to find out the name of the rotter who cashed it, and all's serene."

"Good!"

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"You see, ma'am," Nugent explained to the post-mistress, "I had that order by post, and the name of the payee was not filled in. Somebody boned it out of my pocket, and he must have filled in his name to cash it. Will you tell me what is the name filled in on the order?"

The post-mistress held the order up closer to her spectacles.

"R. Cherry," she said.

"What!"

"WHAT!"

Nugent staggered back.

John Bull stood petrified.

A thunderclap from the clear summer sky could not have startled them more.

"R. Cherry?" said the post-mistress in surprise. "The order is filled in: 'Pay to R. Cherry,' and it is signed R. Cherry."

"Good heavens!"

"Impossible!"

Nugent and Bull looked at one another in blank dismay. R. Cherry! Bob Cherry! What did it mean?

"Oh, I've got it," John Bull exclaimed, breathlessly. "I ought to have thought of it at first. Of course, the thief wouldn't fill in his own name, would he? That would be giving himself away at the first shot."

"He'd have to, to cash it here," said Nugent, with a haggard face. "If any other chap came in and signed it 'R. Cherry,' it wouldn't be paid. Mrs. Brett doesn't happen to remember his name. But Mr. Brett knows him well, and so does young Sam Brett. A chap wouldn't risk coming in here and signing himself 'R. Cherry' unless—"

"Unless that was his name?"

"Yes."

"But it can't have been Bob."

Nugent did not reply. In spite of his firm and loyal faith in his friend, a horrible doubt was creeping into his mind.

"It can't — it can't have been Bob!" repeated John Bull, but a faltering tone was in his voice now.

"Will you let me see the postal-order, Mrs. Brett, please?" said Nugent. "I know R. Cherry—he's a chum of mine—I know his writing as well as my own. Let me see the postal-order, please."

"You may see it, certainly."

The post-mistress handed him the order. Nugent held it up to the light and looked at the signature.

"R. Cherry."

A wave of deadly paleness came over Nugent's face. For

he knew the hand, and even in his heart there could be no further doubt. It was Bob Cherry's writing or else the work of a skilled and cunning forger. And what skilled and cunning forger was there likely to be in a junior form at a public school? That was a wild supposition.

It was Bob Cherry's handwriting!

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

Fish Guesses He Knows.

NUGENT handed the postal-order back to Mrs. Brett without a word. He could not speak. He seemed stunned. Without even thanking the post-mistress, he walked out of the post-office with an unsteady step. John Bull followed him, in the same frozen silence. They were halfway back to Greyfriars before either of them broke the silence.

Then Nugent halted, and faced his companion.

"What do you think about it?" he said.

"Heaven knows what a chap ought to think!" said John Bull. "I'd as soon believe myself a thief, as Bob Cherry!"

"So would I! But—"

"But—"

"It's horrible!"

"It's ghastly!" said John Bull.

"Bob can't be guilty," said Nugent. "He can't! He can't! I won't believe it—I won't believe a word unless he tells me so himself!"

"It's beastly."

They tramped on to Greyfriars in black spirits. Second-lesson

NEXT TUESDAY

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Gosling tied Bob Cherry's wrist to his own with a length of cord. "You'll bolt, will yer?" he asked unpleasantly. "What I says is this 'ere, young shaver; I've got to keep you here till four o'clock, and I'm going to keep yer, too."

was about to commence when they reached the school, and entered the Remove Form-room.

Mr. Quelch signed to them to come up to his desk.

"You have been to the post-office?"

"Yes, sir," said Nugent.

"What have you discovered?"

"The postal-order was cashed there last evening, sir."

"Is that certain?"

"I have the number from Todd, sir, and it's the same as that on the postal-order the post-mistress paid out on."

"That is unquestionable, then. I understand that the payee's name was left blank on the order Todd sent you?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then some false name was filled in?"

"Yes, sir."

"What was the name? If the thief filled in his own name his discovery should be perfectly easy," said Mr. Quelch.

Nugent's lips seemed frozen.

The Form-master looked at him in irritated surprise.

"Why do you not answer me, Nugent? You are wasting my time."

"Ye-e-es, sir."

"What was the name filled in on the postal-order, then?"

"R. Cherry, sir."

"What?"

"R. Cherry, sir," said Nugent, in a low voice. But it was

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not too low for most of the class to hear. There was a buzz in the Remove.

Mr. Quelch frowned.

"Silence!" he said.

Bob Cherry sat immovable. He heard what was said, but the words hardly conveyed their proper meaning to his brain. He doubted his own senses.

"'R. Cherry' was the name filled in?" said Mr. Quelch.

"And the order, of course, was signed 'R. Cherry' by the person to whom the money was paid?"

"Yes, sir."

"Cherry, stand up!"

Bob Cherry stood up.

"Did you cash a postal-order at Friardale Post Office last evening, Cherry?"

"No, sir."

"Did you go to the post-office at all?"

"No, sir."

"You were not in the school when the postal-order was being cashed?" Mr. Quelch said, with a sudden remembrance of Bob Cherry's escapade of the previous evening.

"No, sir. I've told you where I was," said Bob, dully.

"Were you quite alone while you were away from the school last evening, Cherry?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then there is no corroboration of your statement that you spent so much time in aimless wandering in the lanes?"

"I hope my word doesn't need corroborating, sir," said Bob Cherry, with a flash of spirit. "I don't tell lies, sir."

"I am afraid that in so serious a matter as this, Cherry, proof will be required," said Mr. Quelch, drily. "Did the post-mistress recognise Cherry, Nugent?"

"She said the order was cashed by a Greyfriars chap, sir, whom she knew by sight, that's all," said Frank.

"Did you see the order, Nugent?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did the writing look like Cherry's?"

"It looked like it, sir."

"Would you have taken it for Cherry's signature?"

"Yes, sir, if I'd seen it on anything else. Of course, I knew Bob wouldn't sign a postal-order that didn't belong to him, so—"

"H'm! You may go to your place, Nugent."

Nugent and Bull went to their forms.

"I shall speak to Dr. Locke about this at once," said Mr. Quelch, addressing the class. "For the present, a prefect will take charge of the Remove. The post-mistress will be sent for immediately after lessons, and requested to identify the boy who cashed the postal-order. If you are innocent, Cherry, you have nothing whatever to fear—no one who is innocent need fear anything. Mrs. Brett is a sensible woman, and not in the least likely to make mistakes in so simple a matter."

Mr. Quelch quitted the Form-room.

There was a buzz of voices the moment he was gone.

"R. Cherry!" grinned Heath. "My hat! R. Cherry! Ha, ha, ha!"

"I say, you fellows, I told you so all along, you know—"

"Shut up, Bunter!"

"It's beginning to look pretty clear, blessed if it ain't!" said Skinner. "Are you going to own up, Cherry?"

Bob gave an almost wild glance round.

"Own up!" he said. "Own up to what?"

"Boning the giddy postal-order."

"You cad!"

"Oh, keep your wool on," said Skinner. "If you didn't do it, there's a giddy forger in the Form, that's all—and that's rather steep."

"I'd rather believe there were twenty forgers, than believe that Bob Cherry did a wicked, dishonourable thing like that!" said Mark Linley, quietly.

"Birds of a feather, perhaps!" murmured Snoop.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Of course, you had jolly high ideals in the factory where you were brought up, Linley," sneered Heath. The new junior had heard all about the scholarship boy and his early life as a factory hand, of course. Snoop and Skinner and the Bouncer were not likely to leave anyone in the dark on that subject.

Mark Linley did not reply. He endured taunts on that topic with a patience that sometimes led fellows to suspect him of want of spirit—till they went too far, and then found that they had roused a lion.

"I guess I can see the how of it," said Fisher T. Fish.

"What do you know about it, Fishy?" demanded half a dozen voices.

The American grinned serenely.

"Jevver get left?" he said. "I guess I can see as far into a millstone as anybody. Of course, the chap who cashed the order knew all about Bob being already suspected by some of you fools—"

"Oh, draw it mild!"

"Some of you fools," went on the American, imperturbably, "and of course, as he wasn't going to sign his own name, he signed Bob's, by choice. It was just the trick a cunning hound would think of."

"Of course!" said Nugent, greatly relieved at the idea.

"What about the writing being just like Cherry's?" demanded Snoop.

"I suppose a chap could easily get hold of some of Cherry's writing to imitate?" said Fish. "He could get an old impot of Bob's, or he could get some old letter, and after a bit of practice he could imitate the signature. I guess it would be as easy as rolling off a log."

"Too steep!" said Skinner.

"Rats!"

Wingate came into the Form-room.

"Order here!" he exclaimed. "This isn't a conversazione."

And the juniors resumed work under the charge of the captain of Greyfriars. But all their thoughts were in the mystery of the postal-order. Bob Cherry gave his lessons no attention, but Wingate carefully passed him over. The Greyfriars captain knew of what the lad was suspected, and he knew what his state of mind must be, especially if he was innocent? Was he innocent?

It was a question that even his own friends were beginning to ask themselves now.

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THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

Identified!

AFTER lessons that day the Removites had expected to be thinking of nothing but the Courtfield match, arranged for the afternoon. But as it happened, hardly a thought was given to the Courtfield match now.

The question of Bob Cherry's guilt or innocence occupied every mind to the exclusion even of cricket.

Bulstrode, as cricket captain, was thinking about the match, but his suggestion of a little practice at the nets before dinner was disregarded.

Nobody wanted to go down to the nets.

The Remove knew that the post-mistress at Friardale had been sent for to identify the boy who had cashed the postal-order, and they wanted to be on the scene when she arrived.

Dr. Locke had sent a very polite request to Mrs. Brett to come up to the school, and had sent his own trap for her, and she was expected soon after lessons were over.

Bob Cherry stood alone.

Most of the Remove had made up their minds on the subject, after the report Nugent and Bull had brought back from the post-office. Even Nugent himself was sorely troubled in mind.

Everything seemed to point to Bob's guilt, every fresh discovery made the case blacker and blacker against him.

What would the post-mistress say when she came?

Bob Cherry was to be placed in a row of boys in the Form-room, and Mrs. Brett was to be asked to pick out the junior who had been to the post-office the previous evening with the stolen order.

If she identified Bob Cherry the case was complete.

There was no other fellow in the Remove who could by any possibility be mistaken for the sturdy junior.

Bob Cherry, with his shock of flaxen hair, his bright complexion, and his somewhat prominent tie, made a marked figure in the Form.

But would Mrs. Brett identify him?

That was the burning question now. The fellows were anxious to know how Bob looked forward to the ordeal.

He seemed to be confident.

There was a somewhat bitter expression upon his face when Frank Nugent asked him what he thought about it.

"They'll see," said Bob.

"You mean, they'll see that you're innocent, Bob."

"Yes, that's what I mean. And so will you, Frank."

Nugent started a little.

"I, Bob?"

"Yes, you and Johnny. You have doubted me, I can see it."

"Look here, Bob—"

Bob made a gesture.

"Oh, it's all right," he said wearily. "I know the evidence is about as black as it could be, and enough to stagger any chap. Everything seems to have worked out to prove the thing against me."

"I guess I don't doubt you, Bobby," said Fisher T. Fish.

"And I don't," said Mark Linley. "Nothing would make me doubt you, Bob, unless you told me it was so with your own lips."

"Thank you, Marky," said Bob. "It's jolly decent of you to say so, anyway."

"I mean it, Bob."

"Yes, yes, I know you do. I'm an ungracious brute," said Bob. "I'm sorry. But I'm feeling this horribly!"

"It will be all settled when Mrs. Brett comes. Thank goodness you're not like anybody else in the form to look at—not closely alike, I mean. It would be possible to mistake Snoop and Skinner for one another after dark, but you're only like yourself."

"Well, that's one comfort."

"You fellows get into the Form-room," said Wingate, coming along. "All the Remove are to go in and form up."

"Righto, Wingate."

"Now we'll see what we shall see," said Heath, with a sneer. Nugent turned on him quickly.

"What do you mean, you cad?"

Heath shrugged his shoulders.

"I mean that the truth's coming out," he said. "If it wasn't Bob Cherry did it, I'm sure I shall be pleased."

"Liar!" said John Bull.

"But you know what my belief is," said Heath.

"Oh, hang your belief!"

"Somebody's going to be found out, at all events," Hazeldene remarked as the juniors crowded into the Form-room again. "Mrs. Brett will identify the chap, whether it's Bob Cherry or not."

"It mayn't be anybody in the Remove at all," said Ogiley.

"I fancy it is, though."

Mr. Quelch came into the Form-room. He formed up the boys in a rank along the wall, ready for the identification.

The sound of wheels could be heard outside. Mrs. Brett, the post-mistress of Friardale, had arrived in the doctor's trap.

She came into the Form-room with Dr. Locke. The Head's face was very severe. Mrs. Brett looked worried and ill at ease. It was not a pleasant task that was before her. But it was a duty to be done.

Dr. Locke glanced along the silent expectant Remove.

"You know why Mrs. Brett is here, my boys," he said. "She has kindly consented to help establish the truth by identifying the boy who cashed a postal-order for ten shillings at Friardale Post-Office last evening. If Mrs. Brett succeeds in identifying the boy, all doubt upon the subject will be set at rest."

There was a murmur.

All eyes were turned upon Bob Cherry. He stood erect, his eyes fixed straight before him, and a flush in his cheeks. But he did not look afraid.

Some of the other boys looked more nervous than he. It was no pleasant task to stand there and be scanned by a short-sighted old lady who might possibly make a mistake.

"Now, madam," said Locke.

"Ye-es, sir, I am ready," said Mrs. Brett nervously.

"Please look at the boys carefully, and tell me which is the one who came to the post-office last evening."

"Certainly, sir."

Mrs. Brett passed slowly down the line, peering at the breathless, expectant boys through her spectacles.

There was a deep tense silence in the Form-room.

The Head stood like a statue. Mr. Quelch was grimly quiet. The boys were nervous and ill at ease, some of them standing erect, some shifting their feet.

Mrs. Brett scanned each face in turn.

She stopped half-way down the line.

There was an audible murmur again, the post-mistress of Friardale had stopped directly opposite Bob Cherry!

Bob's face showed a tremor for a moment.

Then it was firm again.

His clear, steady gaze met the peering eyes of the post-mistress firmly, bravely, unflinching.

"Well, Mrs. Brett," said the Head's deep voice, "have you found the boy?"

"Yes, sir."

"Kindly point him out to me."

Mrs. Brett raised her hand, and pointed.

Bob Cherry grew deadly pale.

The outstretched hand of the Friardale post-mistress pointed directly at him.

"That is the boy, sir!"

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.

Condemned!

"THAT is the boy!"

Bob Cherry stood rooted to the floor.

His startled gaze was fastened upon the post-mistress in a kind of fascinated stare.

Dr. Locke came forward.

"That he is the boy?" he repeated.

"Yes, sir."

"Robert Cherry! What have you to say?"

Bob gave a hoarse cry.

"Oh, sir! I—I am innocent! There is a horrible mistake!"

The Head's face was hard as iron. He turned to Mr. Quelch.

"I understand, Mr. Quelch, that Cherry was left alone in the study from whence the postal-order was stolen, and had more opportunity than any other boy for committing the theft?"

"Yes, sir," said the Remove master.

"The postal order was filled in with the name of R. Cherry, Mrs. Brett?"

"Certainly, sir."

"You have it with you?"

"It is here."

"Kindly let me see it."

The postal-order was handed to the Head. There was a dead silence in the room. The Head's brow was lined and dark.

"The number of this postal-order is 00012468," he said. "Was that the number of the postal-order sent you by Todd, Nugent?"

"It was, sir."

"Then this is undoubtedly the same order. Mr. Quelch, will you look at that signature. Is that Robert Cherry's handwriting?"

The Remove-master looked closely at the signature. He nodded his head.

"That is certainly Cherry's handwriting, sir," he said.

"Very well! You positively identify this boy, Mrs. Brett, as the boy who came to the post-office last evening?"

"Yes, sir," said Mrs. Brett, looking very much distressed.

"Do you deny it, Cherry?"

"Yes," gasped Bob Cherry, in a dry, choking voice, "I—I deny it, sir. It's not true, sir. I never went near the post-office last evening."

"I cannot believe you, Cherry. I regard it as sheer impudence on your part to endeavour to cast doubt upon this good lady's word."

"I—I don't, sir! I think Mrs. Brett has made a mistake."

"You are quite sure, Mrs. Brett?"

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"Quite sure, sir."

"You noticed the boy particularly?"

"I can't say that, sir. But I noticed especially that he had fair hair, and a great deal of it, sir, and his straw hat on the back of his head. There is no other boy here with hair like that."

That seemed to settle it. Bob Cherry's shock of hair, that never would yield to brush or comb, was a standing joke in the Remove.

Belief in his guilt was written in every face.

What further doubt was possible? Even Mark Linley was staggered. Nugent could doubt no more—horrible, impossible as it seemed, Bob Cherry was a thief!

Bob Cherry had stolen the postal-order, Bob Cherry had written his name upon it as the payee, and Bob Cherry had cashed it.

There was not a loophole of escape left.

Doubt seemed impossible.

Up to the last moment, Nugent had entertained a hope that Mrs. Brett would identify somebody else as the boy who had come to the post-office, or would fail to identify any member of the Remove at all.

But she had decided upon Bob Cherry at once—and Bob was not a common type of boy; he stood out from the rest in many ways.

Bob turned a haggard glance round him.

Condemnation was plain in every face.

"I—I say, Nugent," he stammered, "you—you don't believe me guilty, do you?"

Nugent was silent.

"Bull—Johnny Bull—you—you don't think so?" cried Bob, in a voice of agony.

John Bull turned away his head.

Bob seemed to stagger for a moment.

The room, the grim condemning faces, seemed to swim round him; he saw nothing, he did not hear what was said. As from a cloudy mist, the voice of the Head came to his ears at last, as he recovered.

"I am speaking to you, Cherry! Kindly pay me attention! Have you anything to say, or have you not?"

Bob gasped like one in physical pain.

"I—I—I'm innocent, sir."

"I cannot believe that," said the Head, in a voice like iron. "If there were any possible loophole of doubt, I would try to believe you, Cherry, for you have always had a good record. But the proof is too complete."

"Oh, sir—"

"Confess, you wretched boy! That is all you can do now. Say that you yielded to a sudden temptation—"

"I—I didn't! I didn't take the postal-order," said Bob, in a strangled voice. He started forward, and caught the post-mistress by the arm. "Mrs. Brett—look at me again—look—I never came into your post-office last night—I swear it! Look again!"

Mrs. Brett shook her head.

"I am sorry for you, my poor boy," she said. "However did you come to do it?"

"Did I—did I come into the post-office last night?"

"Yes."

"Oh! What can I say?" panted Bob. "It's a mistake—it's a horrible mistake! Do you fellows all believe me guilty?"

Silence.

"Nugent, you're my chum—you've always said so—Franky, old man, say you don't believe that I'm a thief!" shrieked Bob.

Nugent groaned aloud, but he spoke no word.

Bob gave a wild glance at the boys.

The passion died out of his face, leaving it white, and drawn, and haggard, and strangely old.

"And there isn't one of you to stand by a fellow when he's down?" he muttered brokenly. "Not one!"

"There is one, Bob." It was Mark Linley's voice, and the Lancashire lad came out of his place towards Bob. "I believe you, Bob; I know it's a horrible mistake—I know it must be. I know you're innocent, old chap."

The Head's voice rapped out with unusual sharpness.

"Go back to your place, Linley."

Mark stepped back obediently.

"Cherry!" Dr. Locke's voice was deep and stern. "You are guilty; in the face of such conclusive proof, I marvel at your audacity in venturing to deny your guilt. You are guilty—of theft, of lying, of such a rascality as I hope is very uncommon in one so young as you are! You are a thief, and not fit to associate with the boys of this school! You will be expelled from Greyfriars to-day, Cherry, in the presence of the whole school; and until then you will stay in your room."

The Head pointed to the door.

Bob Cherry gave one wild glance round, and then staggered to the door, and disappeared.

"The school will assemble in hall at four o'clock, to witness an expulsion," said the Head quietly; and then he, too, left the Form-room.

THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER.

No Submission.

BOB CHERRY was in his study.

He had been ordered there by the Head, to await the assembly of the school in hall, when he was to be expelled from Greyfriars—"sacked" from the school with public ignominy.

Bob had gone there quietly, like one stunned.

He had thrown himself into his chair, and sat there for some time, quiet, motionless, inert.

The sun was shining in at the open window, and from the Close came the chirping of the birds in the trees. From the distant cricket ground came the faint voices of the players. They were playing cricket—Bob remembered that it was the Courtfield match that afternoon, for the Remove—and the Courtfielders had doubtless arrived. The Sixth had a match on, too! Most of Greyfriars would be on the cricket-ground now.

They did not want Bob.

His place would have been filled already in the Remove eleven. So far as the juniors were concerned, he might have been dead and buried.

They had no further concern with a fellow found guilty of theft, and sentenced to be expelled from the school. No concern excepting that they had to leave their cricket for a short time, at four o'clock, and assemble in hall to see him "sacked."

Bob Cherry glanced at the sunny window, and listened like one in a dream to the echo of the distant voices.

Was it real—had it really happened? Or had he fallen asleep in his chair there, and dreamed it all? It was all so horrible—so incredible. He, Bob Cherry, had been adjudged guilty of theft, and sentenced to expulsion.

He started to his feet.

It was real enough! Three o'clock boomed out from the clock-tower! In an hour's time the school would be assembled; he would be called into the crowded hall, and, in the midst of a breathless assembly, he would be expelled—and driven from school!

Bob Cherry's eyes began to gleam. He was innocent—he knew that! The bitter injustice of it all maddened him. It had never been Bob Cherry's way to take injustice quietly. Some fearful mistake had been made—or it was some fiendish plot, which he did not understand and could not combat. But he was innocent, and he would not submit.

He tramped up and down his study like a wild animal in a cage, now.

No one came to his door.

Why did not Mark come? The others believed him guilty—but Mark? Perhaps he, too, believed that he was guilty, on reflection. Had he not a friend left? Oh, if Wharton had only been still at Greyfriars—Bob felt that somehow Harry would have seen a way out of this horrible tangle. But Harry Wharton was far away, and the others had deserted him in his dire distress.

The door-handle turned, the door opened. Bob Cherry halted in his hurried tramp, and looked round quickly.

It was Mark Linley who looked in.

"Marky!"

"Bob! I've just come for a second; we've all been ordered not to speak to you," said Mark breathlessly. "But I wanted to tell you, before you go, that I believe in you—I believe in you all along the line. I know you didn't do it."

"And the others, Marky?"

Linley was silent.

"They all believe it against me, Marky!"

"I'm afraid they do, Bob."

Bob gritted his teeth.

"Well, let them," he said savagely. "Let them, and be hanged to them. If that's their friendship, I don't care for it."

"It looks so horribly black against you, Bob. Don't blame them. But the truth will come out—it must come out."

Bob made a hopeless gesture.

"When I'm expelled, Marky."

"You will come back if your innocence is proved, Bob."

"If," said Bob. "It shall be proved, Marky. Do you think my people will let it rest at this? There will be a row about this—I know my father will believe in me, and my mother—bless her soul! A chap can always depend on his mother, anyway. They'll see that the truth is brought out—though I don't know that I shall care to come back to Greyfriars afterwards."

"Bob!"

"So they think me guilty, do they?" said Bob, grinding his teeth. "Nugent, too! Why, I wouldn't have believed that Franky was a thief, if I saw him with stolen money in his hand! I'd rather have believed that I was blind or mad myself. And he finds me guilty with all the rest, does he? Well, let him!"

"Bob, old man—"

"Linley! What are you doing here?"

It was a sharp voice from the passage. Mr. Quelch, the master of the Remove, came to the study-door. Mark looked at him fearlessly.

"I was speaking to Bob, sir. I wanted to tell him that I was sticking to him, in spite of the evidence."

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"You were ordered not to see Cherry again; you and the rest," said the Remove-master, with unusual harshness. "Go to your study at once, Linley, and remain there until the bell rings for assembly in hall."

"Very well, sir."

The Lancashire lad gave Bob a last look, and walked quietly away up the passage. Mr. Quelch fixed his eyes upon Bob Cherry.

"You may go to the dormitory and pack your trunk, Cherry," he said curtly.

Bob looked at him, full in the eyes.

"What for, sir?" he asked.

"You are leaving Greyfriars by the five o'clock train at Friardale. Go to the dormitory and pack your box in readiness, please."

Bob did not stir.

"Do you hear me, Cherry?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then obey me."

"I obey no one who calls me a thief," said Bob Cherry, between his teeth. "I will not pack my box, sir. I will not leave Greyfriars, unless I am thrown out. I am innocent, and I will not submit as if I were guilty."

"Cherry!"

"I mean what I say, sir! And the Head will hear of this further, too. My people won't take it lying down."

"You are insolent, Cherry."

"I don't mean to be, sir. But I mean what I say."

The Remove-master looked hard at him.

"You are disobedient, Cherry," he said. "but I shall not punish you for that now. You will shortly be punished severely enough. But I should think that, unless you are thoroughly hardened, you would be grateful to the Head. Dr. Locke is keeping this matter out of the hands of the police. For what you have done, you deserve to be sent to a reformatory."

"I have done nothing I am ashamed of, sir."

"I will not argue with you, Cherry. If you refuse to pack your box I will order Trotter to pack it for you."

"I shall not touch it."

"Very well."

Mr. Quelch quitted the study. Bob Cherry stood looking out of the window with a hard fixed face. He was reflecting, and within his breast anger was rising higher and higher.

He threw open the door of the study and quitted the room, and tramped down the passage. There were several fellows in the lower hall, and they looked at him curiously, but they did not speak. Wingate came in with a bat under his arm as Bob reached the school house door, and he looked frowningly at the junior.

"Cherry!" he rapped out.

"Yes, Wingate."

"You were ordered to remain in your study and come to the hall at four."

Bob looked straight at him.

"I shall not remain in my study, and I shall not come to the hall at four," he replied.

"What!" gasped the Greyfriars captain.

"I am not guilty, and I am not going to be treated as if I were guilty," said Bob. "That's what I mean."

"Go back to your study at once."

"I won't!"

And Bob Cherry stepped out into the Close. Wingate made an angry movement towards him, but checked himself. Mr. Quelch came to his study window.

"Cherry!" he called out.

Bob looked round.

"Yes, sir."

"Go back to your study."

"I have done nothing to be shut up in my study for, sir."

"Obey me, Cherry!"

"I cannot, sir."

Mr. Quelch frowned heavily. He called to Gosling, the school porter, who was standing looking at Bob Cherry as if he were some peculiar animal.

"Gosling!"

"Yes, sir."

"Take charge of Cherry, and keep him with you; and bring him to the hall at exactly four o'clock."

"Yes, sir."

Gosling dropped his heavy hand on Bob's shoulder.

"Come with me, Master Cherry, please."

"I will not."

"You will use force if necessary, Gosling," said Mr. Quelch, and he closed his window.

"Come, Master Cherry. Wot I says is this 'ere—it ain't no use, you know," said Gosling. "I've got to take you."

Bob gritted his teeth. Truly it was useless to struggle with the school porter. The junior was taken into Gosling's lodge.

"Now, Master Thief," said the porter, "you stay 'ere. Stop, will yer?"

The moment he released Bob the junior made a bound to

the door. Gosling caught him by the shoulder only just in time, and swung him back into the room.

"You'll bolt, will yer?" said Gosling unpleasantly. "What I says is this 'ere, young shaver; I've got to keep yer until four o'clock, and I'm going to keep yer if I 'as to tie yer 'and and foot. You hear me?"

"Let me go, you brute!"

"Horders is horders, you young willain," said Gosling.

And, to prevent any further attempt at bolting, Gosling tied Bob Cherry's wrist to his own with a cord, and Bob was a prisoner. As they waited thus in the porter's room several fellows peeped in to look at Bob in his strange situation. The junior sat grim and silent, in a savage mood.

Four o'clock rang out from the tower. Gosling rose to his feet.

"You'll come with me now, Master Cherry," he said.

Bob walked with him doggedly to the school door. There Gosling untied the cory. The moment it was untied Bob Cherry jerked his arm away, and ran.

"Hi! Stop there!" cried Gosling.

But Bob Cherry did not stop.

"Stop him! Stop him!"

There was no one to stop Bob Cherry. The cricket field was deserted save for the Courtfield fellows, who were waiting. The Close was empty. There was no one to aid the school porter to recapture his prisoner. And Gosling, looking very blue, went in to report that Bob Cherry would not come!

THE SIXTEENTH CHAPTER.

Expelled!

FOUR o'clock had struck, and the great hall of Greyfriars was packed. The school had assembled, all the Forms in their places.

Many of the juniors had come in in their cricketing flannels. It could not be helped; they had bolted in at the last minute from the playing fields. Their looks were not amiable. To have a cricket match interrupted for a ceremony of this sort was not pleasant.

Bulstrode had explained to the Courtfield fellows as well as he could that there was an expulsion "on," and that the Form had to go in; and the Courtfielders were kicking their heels on the cricket field while it should last.

Dr. Locke had been, apparently, quite oblivious of cricket matches when he ordered the assembling of the school that afternoon, usually a free half-holiday.

The fellows were all in their places now, and the prefects walked up and down seeing that they were in order.

Dr. Locke entered.

There was a faint murmur from some of the boys. The doctor was not looking as usual. Unusual troubles had fallen upon him lately. He had had to leave Greyfriars for a time owing to the illness of his daughter, who required change of air, and during his absence the tyranny of his substitute had caused a revolt in the school. He had returned hastily to restore order; and now, after only a few days, this new miserable affair had arisen. And this was worse, for the Head felt keenly anything that reflected upon the good name of Greyfriars, and nothing could reflect upon it so blackly as the discovery of a thief in the school. There were lines of trouble in the Doctor's face, but his mouth was hard and grim. There was no mercy in the usually kind countenance. The offender had been discovered, and he was to suffer the severest penalty: that was evidently what the Head was thinking and feeling.

Dr. Locke paused and looked at the crowded Forms. He glanced round for Bob Cherry; but the boy who was to be expelled was not present.

Dr. Locke had ordered him to appear in the hall at four o'clock. It was now some minutes past four.

"Cherry!" said the Head.

"He is not here, sir," said Wingate.

"Not here!"

"I gave him into Gosling's charge as he refused to remain in his study, sir," said Mr. Quelch. "Ah, here is Gosling! I directed him to bring Cherry here at four."

Gosling entered; but he was alone.

He came tramping heavily up the hall, looking very sheepish, with his hat in his hands.

"Where is Cherry?" asked Mr. Quelch sharply.

"He's gone, sir."

"Gone!"

"He's bolted, sir. Wot I says is this 'ere, sir: it's as 'ard to 'old a heel as to 'old that young feller, sir. He twisted away and bolted, sir."

"Do you mean that he refuses to come in in spite of my positive orders, Gosling?" the Head exclaimed.

"Yes, sir. That's it, sir."

Dr. Locke frowned darkly.

"Let the prefects fetch him," he said.

"Where did he go, Gosling?"

"He ran towards the Cloisters, sir."

"Wingate, Courtney, Taylor, please go and bring Cherry in."

"Very well, sir," said Wingate.

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The three prefects left the hall. The boys looked at one another and muttered. The Head stood like a statue.

There was a faint colour in Dr. Locke's cheeks. The scene of the expulsion was intended to be impressive—very impressive. It should have stricken dread and remorse to the heart of the culprit; it should have been a terrible warning to all others inclined to follow the same road.

But what had happened brought it perilously near to becoming ridiculous.

The whole school, including the Head himself, stood there waiting for a junior—a recalcitrant junior who refused to come.

The minutes passed.

The boys shifted from one foot to another, and the muttering voices grew into a loud buzz. Some chuckles were heard.

Dr. Locke turned a frowning brow upon the school.

"Silence!" he said sternly. "The prefects should see that order is preserved."

And at that hint the prefects walked up and down busily with their canes, and several painful yelps were heard from the ranks of the fags; and then silence was in some degree restored.

There was a sudden din outside.

A loud, angry voice, and scuffling of feet, and gasping of breath, and a bumping against doors and walls. A struggle was evidently in progress.

Necks were craned round towards the door.

"My only hat!" muttered Bulstrode. "Cherry is showing fight—and against three giddy prefects, too! My hat!"

"Silly ass!" murmured Snoop. "Why doesn't he take it quietly?"

"Because he is innocent," said Mark Linley.

"Oh, rats!"

"Shut up, Linley!"

"Don't talk rot!"

"You know as well as I do that he's a thief," said Heath. "Nugent knows it, and he's more Cherry's chum than you ever were."

Frank was silent.

The din outside was growing louder, and the hall was in a state of suppressed excitement. Many fellows moved instinctively towards the door, and the prefects drove them back.

Suddenly a huddled, struggling mass of humanity came whirling in at the door. The bodies and arms and legs were so mixed that at first it seemed impossible to tell who was who or what was what. But as the mass whirled up the centre of the hall it resolved itself into a sturdy, red-faced, breathless junior, fighting desperately in the grasp of three seniors.

Wingate, Courtney, and Taylor were bringing in Bob Cherry, but they had their hands full with him!

Courtney's nose was bleeding, Taylor's mouth seemed to have set curiously sideways, and Wingate's left eye was growing a deep purple rim. They were dishevelled and dusty, and gasping for breath. It was amazing that a junior could put up such a fight against three big Sixth Formers.

Of course, Bob really had no chance. He was rushed up the hall and plumped down in a panting heap, the prefects keeping hold of him still.

"Here he is, sir!" gasped Wingate.

"Cherry!" thundered the Head.

Bob scrambled to his feet. His chest was heaving, his eyes blazing, and his face was burning. His breath came in short gasps.

"Cherry! How dare you! You are going to be expelled!"

"I am not, sir!"

"What?"

"I am innocent, sir," rang out Bob Cherry's voice. "I am innocent, and I won't be expelled!"

THE SEVENTEENTH CHAPTER.

No Surrender.

DR. LOCKE looked at Bob Cherry. All other eyes in the great hall were fastened upon him, too!

It was a scene such as Greyfriars had never witnessed before.

It had fallen to Dr. Locke to expel fellows once or twice, though it was rare. But never had he experienced anything like this.

Rebellion and resistance in the face of the whole school—a refusal to accept the sentence of expulsion—it was incredible!

But there it was! Bob, torn and dishevelled, and panting for breath, stood the embodiment of force and indignant resistance.

There was an indefinable murmur from the school. They believed Bob Cherry to be guilty; yet they could not fail to admire his pluck. He was putting up a good fight for his honour, at all events.

"Silence!" said Mr. Quelch.

The murmur died away.

In the great hall was heard no sound but the gasping of the

exhausted junior, and the hard breathing of the three seniors who had brought him in. Wingate rubbed his eye, and Courtney felt tenderly over his nose.

The Head was at a loss for words for some moments. He could only look at the panting boy, nonplussed.

But his anger was rising.

"Cherry," he said at last, "this disgraceful, ruffianly conduct will not help you in any way."

"I don't mean to be ruffianly, sir. But I don't think a chap is called upon to submit to injustice."

"You have been found guilty——"

"I am not guilty!"

"Silence!"

"I am sorry, sir, but I can't allow even you to say that I am guilty when I am nothing of the sort."

There was a gasp from the School. For cool, sublime "cheek," the fellows thought they had never heard this equalled.

"Cherry, it has been proved to my satisfaction, and to the satisfaction of Greyfriars, that you are guilty. The identification by the post-mistress completed the proof against you, which was already overwhelming."

"I am innocent!"

"You are adjudged guilty! You will be expelled from Greyfriars——"

"I won't go!"

"What!"

"I won't go!" said Bob undauntedly. "I'm not guilty, and I won't go as if I were guilty. I won't leave Greyfriars unless I'm chucked out by force, and then you will hear from my people about it!"

"Silence!" thundered the Head. "Silence, you insolent boy! I am amazed at your impudence in asserting your innocence in the face of such proof. You have been found guilty of theft, of lying, of acting more like a grown-up criminal than a schoolboy! Robert Cherry, you are expelled from Greyfriars. Go!"

Bob did not move.

The Doctor's hand rose majestically, and pointed to the door.

"Go!" he thundered.

"I refuse to go, sir."

"Cherry!"

"I am innocent—and I won't go!"

The Head's face flushed.

"The prefects will remove that boy," he said.

Wingate, Courtney, and two or three other prefects made a simultaneous movement towards Bob Cherry. They were looking very angry. Believing Bob to be guilty, like all the rest, they put his conduct down to desperate hardihood, and they were naturally indignant at seeing the authority of their headmaster flouted.

"Come out, you young cad!" muttered Wingate.

Bob sprang back, his fists clenched.

"I won't go!"

"Then you'll be taken, you young fool! Collar him!"

"Hands off!"

"Collar him!"

The prefects rushed upon Bob. The junior hit out desperately, savagely. His blood was up to boiling-point now.

Wingate, the powerful athlete of the Sixth, staggered back from a furious blow, and fell. There was a gasp of amazement from the school. Wingate had been knocked down—knocked down by a junior! But the other seniors closed on Bob, and he was grasped by many hands, and whirled away off his feet towards the door.

Wingate staggered up. A struggling crowd of fellows whirled doorwards, Bob Cherry, fighting like a madman, in the midst.

Dr. Locke looked on with a stony face. The masters shouted to the boys to keep their places.

But the excitement was too great. The fellows crowded round the struggling group, exclaiming and shouting.

The hall was the scene of the wildest disorder and uproar now.

Bob Cherry was got to the door at last, and he went sweeping through, in the grasp of the prefects, and the whole bunch of them rolled over in the passage outside.

"Out with him!" gasped Courtney.

With a last big effort, Bob Cherry was whirled out of the house, into the sunshine of the Close, and sent sprawling on the gravel walk.

He lay there for some moments, half-stunned.

He staggered up at last, to see the steps and the doorway crowded with hostile faces, to see scores of fists shaken at him, to hear derisive words and shouts.

"Get out!"

"No thieves wanted!"

"Kick him out!"

Bob tried to find his voice. But only a dry, choking sound came from his throat. His voice was gone.

Twice he tried to speak, but no sound would come, and the gells of scorn and derision were growing louder.

The unhappy lad turned away, and staggered through the sunshine, with scornful shouts ringing behind him.

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He was expelled!

Expelled, amid the derision and contempt of the whole school! Sacked! Driven out! But his spirit was not broken yet. He was innocent, and he would not surrender. Exhausted in every limb, he threw himself down to rest upon the bench outside Gosling's lodge at the gates. He was expelled; but he was not gone. And he would not go! To surrender a single inch was, in effect, to admit that his sentence was just—and Bob Cherry did not mean to surrender the fraction of an inch!

THE EIGHTEENTH CHAPTER.

Driven from School.

DR. LOCKE was in his study, with a dark and troubled expression upon his kind face. The scene in the hall had disturbed him deeply. Mr. Quelch entered the study, and he, too, was looking grim enough.

Dr. Locke raised his eyes to the Remove-master.

"The boy is gone?" he asked.

"He has been put out of the house——"

"This is terrible, Mr. Quelch. Such a scene has never happened before at Greyfriars," said the Head, deeply moved.

"It is disgraceful, sir."

"The boy must be out of his senses. He should have been glad to escape being handed over to the police. Yet he has caused all the trouble and disgrace he could."

"I am very disappointed in Cherry," said Mr. Quelch. "It shows how one can be deceived in a boy. I always regarded him as being frank and honest, and open as the day. But the proof of his guilt is too complete to admit of any doubt."

"Yes, yes, that is certain. And he is gone at last?"

"From the house, yes."

The Head started.

"What do you mean, Mr. Quelch? Has he not left the school?"

The Remove-master shook his head.

"No, sir! I have had his box taken out of the gates, and placed in the road. A vehicle was ordered for him, but he sent it away."

"Sent it away, Mr. Quelch?" said the Head faintly.

"Yes, sir."

"Then he refuses to leave the precincts of Greyfriars?"

"Apparently, sir."

"Where is he now?"

"Wingate tells me that Cherry is sitting on the bench outside the porter's lodge, sir, and refuses to go. He asked me for instructions."

The Doctor rose to his feet.

"I will go and speak to this wretched boy," he said. "It is intolerable that this disgraceful scene should be prolonged in this way."

The two masters quitted the study. Dr. Locke strode down to the gates with rustling gown. There was already a crowd on the spot. Excepting for the players, the cricket ground was deserted. Fellows of all Forms had gathered round to see this last scene, unexampled in the history of the school.

Bob Cherry sat breathing hard—exhausted, but undaunted. There was no surrender in his looks, and no surrender in his heart. His box lay out in the road, unheeded. Bob Cherry did not mean to go.

The Head paused before him.

"Cherry!" he said quietly.

Bob looked up.

"Yes, sir," he said.

"You have been expelled, Cherry—you no longer belong to Greyfriars! Can you not see that it is useless and disgraceful to prolong this scene?"

"I am innocent, and I won't go!"

Dr. Locke flushed.

"If you refuse to go, Cherry, you will be thrown out by force, and the gates will be locked upon you."

Bob gritted his teeth.

"Very well, sir. If force is used, I can't help it; but I won't go of my own accord. I am innocent."

Dr. Locke pointed to the gates.

"Go, Cherry!"

Bob had risen to his feet. But he did not stir from the spot where he stood. His hands were clenched hard; his eyes were gleaming with the light of battle.

There was a yell from the crowd of fellows.

"Get out!"

"Outside, you thief!"

"Go out!"

Bob stood unmoved.

"Very well," said the Head, with a sigh. "Put him outside, and you, Gosling, close the gates."

There was a rush made at Bob Cherry.

A dozen pairs of hands grasped him, and in spite of his fierce resistance, he was dragged to the gates.

Fighting desperately, the junior was whirled out in the mist of

an angry crowd, and he was sent staggering and sprawling into the road.

He fell!

As he lay in the dust, gasping, exhausted, there was a yell from the fellows crowding the old stone gateway.

"Yah!"

"Thief!"

"Get out!"

"Go!"

"Close the gates, Gosling," said Mr. Quelch.

"Yes, sir. Hout of the way, please, young gentlemen!"

The boys crowded in, and the gates were closed. Gosling locked them with the ponderous key.

Bob Cherry staggered up. The loud click of the key in the lock struck him like a chill. The gates of Greyfriars had closed upon him now. He was an outcast.

Driven from School!

Exhausted, utterly dejected, struggling hard to keep back the tears that forced themselves to his eyes, Bob Cherry sank down upon his box, and sat there with downcast face—the unhappiest lad, probably, under the summer sun that bright afternoon.

THE NINETEENTH CHAPTER.

Harry Wharton's Task.

HARRY WHARTON stepped out of the train at Friardale Station, and ran across the platform. He had a bag in one hand and a ticket in the other. He threw the ticket to the old porter at the barrier, and dashed out of the station, and the old Friardale porter scratched his grizzled head, and looked after him in slow amazement. Wharton rushed from the quiet little station, and shouted to the driver of the ancient, time-worn hack that stood outside.

"Hack! Driver! Quick!"

The old driver slowly detached himself from a post, and took a pipe out of his mouth.

"Yes, Master Wharton?" he said. "Ack, sir?"

"Yes—quick!"

"Werry good, sir!"

And the old driver rolled towards his old horse, and Wharton jumped into the old hack. Horse and driver and hack seemed as if they had been outside Friardale Station from the Dark Ages, and seemed part and parcel of the slow, sleepy old place. But Wharton was wildly impatient now. The slowness seemed horrible to him. He put his head out of the hack as the driver gathered up his reins in a leisurely manner.

"Quick!" he shouted.

"Yes, Master Harry."

"I'm in an awful hurry! It's fearfully important!"

"Yes, Master Harry."

"Oh, do move!"

"Yes, Master Harry."

And the hack started at a jog-trot, but it was faster than walking, to a lad tired from a long journey. Harry Wharton had travelled fast and far that day. He threw himself back on the old smelly leather cushions, panting. The bag had dropped to the bottom of the hack. Harry Wharton drew a letter from his pocket, and looked at it. It was in Frank Nugent's hand.

"Poor old Bob! Poor old Bob!"

It was Nugent's letter—the letter that had told Harry of the happenings at Greyfriars School; a letter that was full of trust in Bob Cherry. It had been written before the identification scene in the Form-room.

Of what had happened since, Harry Wharton, of course, knew nothing. But immediately he had received Nugent's letter, he had explained matters to his uncle, and had started off to return to Greyfriars. His only thought was to get back to his chum and stand by him in this terrible hour.

Travelling, even by express trains that flashed through the shimmering landscape, seemed too slow to Harry. He was wildly impatient to reach the school. What had happened since Nugent wrote?

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

Had Bob's innocence been proved, or— Wharton hardly dared to think of the alternative! Could circumstantial evidence have proved so strong that Bob had been adjudged guilty?

It seemed impossible; yet such things had happened. Oh, if he were only at Greyfriars to stand by old Bob and help him in this difficulty, and assure him that one chum, at least, still believed him, and would believe in him and be loyal to him to the last, whatever happened!

The hack seemed to crawl, though the old horse was going at a speed that astonished itself. Wharton looked out again.

"Hurry up! Hurry up!"

"Yes, Master Harry."

The hack rolled on. The green hedges glided by; the grey old tower of the school rose into view among the trees.

Greyfriars at last!

Wharton leaned out of the window. He could see the tower over the trees, and now the great stone gateway, and—what was that in the road?

A schoolboy's box, and a fellow sitting on it in an attitude of utter dejection and exhaustion! It was Bob Cherry!

Harry leaped from the hack without waiting for it to stop, and ran.

"Bob!"

Bob Cherry looked up at the sound of the voice and at the footfalls. He started to his feet, his face flushing deep scarlet.

"Harry!" he stammered.

"Bob, old man, what's happened?"

"Harry!"

Bob made a gesture towards the box.

"Can't you see?" he said bitterly.

"Your box, Bob, and you out here! You—you haven't left the school?" Harry Wharton exclaimed, in dismay.

"I've had to!"

"Not—not—not expelled!"

"Yes."

"Oh, Bob!"

Harry Wharton looked at his chum, the words dying on his lips. Bob Cherry expelled from the school—driven from Greyfriars! It seemed impossible!

"How did it happen, Bob?" he gasped, at last. "What are you so mucked up for? Have you been licked?"

Bob Cherry glanced down at his dusty, disordered clothes. "I didn't give in," he said. "I made them chuck me out. I was innocent, and I wouldn't stand it. That's how it was."

"And the other chaps—some of them stood by you, surely?" Wharton exclaimed indignantly. "Surely the Remove stood by you, Bob?"

"The Remove all believe me guilty!"

"But—but—but it's impossible!" stammered Wharton. "You're not guilty!"

Bob laughed bitterly.

"No, I'm not guilty," he said; "but the Form all believe I am!"

"But Frank——"

"Nugent believes the same as the rest."

"Nugent does?"

"Yes."

Wharton staggered.

It had never even crossed his mind that Frank Nugent would fail Bob in such an extremity. Nugent believed him guilty. What did it mean? Did a momentary chill of doubt cross Wharton's own mind, as he heard it? If so, he dismissed the horrible thought at once. His faith in Bob was as firm as his belief in himself.

"Frank must be mad!" he muttered. "And Bull—and Tom Brown—and Fish—what do they say?"

"They all think the same!"

"Good heavens!"

"Mark Linley was the only chap who stood by me," said Bob heavily, "and he was ordered to go to his study for speaking a friendly word. They all think I'm guilty—masters and fellows—everybody but Marky! Oh!"

"Good heavens, Bob!"

"The evidence is strong enough," said Bob drearily. "I dare say you'll believe me guilty, too, when you've heard it."

Wharton shook his head.

"Never!" he said.

"You haven't heard it yet!"

"I don't care! I shall never believe anything against you, Bob, while you tell me that you're innocent."

"I am innocent, Harry!"

"I know you are! This must be some plot. It can't be all circumstantial," said Harry. "Some cad has fixed it up for you—Vernon-Smith, perhaps, or Snoop, or that new chap, Heath. Tell me about it."

The hack was standing in the road, the driver stolidly smoking his pipe. Standing there in the sunny lane, Bob Cherry told his chum what had happened.

Wharton's face went pale as he listened. He would not allow

doubt to creep into his mind. But he could not help seeing how terribly strong was the chain of evidence that had wound itself about the unfortunate junior.

"You see," said Bob miserably, "whoever took the postal-order must have nipped in in those few minutes that the study was empty, and I was there a long time! That was the first thing that made the fellows doubtful. Then it turned out that the villain had signed my name on the order, and imitated my handwriting, so that even Nugent didn't know it from the original."

"The scoundrel!"

"Then a chap looking like me cashed the order. You see, there's no doubt that Mrs. Brett was telling the truth, so far as she knew it, when she identified me."

"And she knows you well by sight, Bob."

"Yes, I can't understand it," said Bob desperately. "She must have mistaken some other chap for me—and there isn't a chap in the Remove much like me—or at Greyfriars at all, for that matter. She made a special point of having noticed my hair—and that's not like any other chap's in the Remove."

And Bob ran his fingers helplessly through the shock of flaxen hair that was now untidier than ever.

Wharton's brows contracted. The whole thing seemed to him a hopeless, horrible puzzle. He had not expected anything like this when he came back to Greyfriars.

The evidence of the post-mistress was terrible.

Her good faith could not be questioned, and although she certainly was short-sighted, and it was in the dusk that the unknown junior had gone to the post-office, yet Bob's personality was too distinctive for her to have mistaken another fellow in the Remove for him.

That was an impossible theory! The person she had taken for Bob Cherry must have resembled Bob Cherry closely, and there was no fellow in the Remove, or in Greyfriars, who resembled Bob Cherry closely.

Yet the postal-order had certainly been stolen and cashed by a fellow in the Remove—or, at any rate, in Greyfriars.

There seemed to be only one solution—that Bob Cherry was guilty! But that was a solution that Harry Wharton was determined not to believe in. There was some other explanation, but what was it? Bob Cherry watched the changing expressions of his face with a beating heart.

"What do you think, Harry?"

"I—I don't know what to think."

"You believe the same as all the others?"

"Never!"

Bob rubbed the back of his hand across his eyes.

"It's horrible, Wharton. I can't understand it myself. But—but as true as I'm standing here—as true as I believe in heaven, Harry, I'm innocent!"

"I know you are, Bob!" Wharton compressed his lips. His brain seemed to swim in the desperate effort to think out this horrible puzzle. "Bob, Mrs. Brett must have seen a chap like you, whom she took to be you—but it wasn't you."

"No, it wasn't me."

"It must have been a Greyfriars chap."

"It must have."

"But there isn't one who could be mistaken for you."

"That's the truth."

"But look here, suppose a chap got himself up as you?" said Harry desperately. "That's the only possible explanation. A chap must have got himself up in disguise somehow, so as to pass himself off as you."

Bob Cherry started.

"I—I suppose so," he said.

"It wouldn't be an easy thing to do, but it would be possible for a cunning villain," said Harry. "And the chap who's done this business was cunning enough, goodness knows! And he can be found out, Bob!"

"The truth's got to be found out," said Bob. "I've been kicked out of Greyfriars, but the matter doesn't end here. My father won't let it rest. My people won't see me disgraced like this! There will be an inquiry, and the police will have to undertake it. I know my pater well enough! He won't leave a stone unturned."

"Quite right, too," said Wharton. "And while your pater's doing that, Bob, I'm going to work for you at Greyfriars, and see if I can't find the villain out!"

Bob shook his head.

"He's covered up his tracks too well, Harry, whoever he is."

Wharton gritted his teeth.

"I'm going to try," he said. "I've got a pretty clear theory, anyway, of what was done, and the thing is to find out the chap who did it, and bring it home to him, so that he can't wriggle out of it. And you, Bob—"

Bob drew a deep breath.

"I'm going, Harry," he said. "I shall have to go now. But God bless you for what you've said, old chap. It's put new life into me!"

"Take the hack, Bob. You'd better go. But you'll come back to Greyfriars soon—come back with your name cleared—and all the fellows will tell you they're sorry they were such fools as to suspect you!"

"I don't care for them," said Bob bitterly. "A chap who can't believe in me can do the other thing! I don't want to speak to any of them again! Let them go! You and Marky are the only two who've stood by me. I shall remember that."

Wharton did not reply. Bob's bitterness was natural enough under the circumstances; but in the happy day when his innocence should be proved there was no doubt that he would forgive those who had failed him—those to whom the terrible mass of evidence had proved overwhelming.

The box was lifted upon the hack. Bob stepped into the old vehicle, and it turned round in the road. Harry Wharton shook hands with his chum at the door of the hack.

"Good-bye, Bob, old son—and keep your pecker up!" he said. "Remember you've got friends here working for you—working to clear your name."

Bob squeezed his hand.

"Thanks, Harry, thanks, old man! Good-bye!"

Wharton signed to the driver, and the hack rolled away.

Bob Cherry was gone!

Harry Wharton stood in the lane, looking after the hack as it rolled slowly off, till it disappeared beyond the turn of the lane, and the sound of the slow rolling wheels died away in the distance.

Harry Wharton's face was pale, and his eyelashes were wet. Bob Cherry was gone—Bob, the frank and free-hearted, the last fellow in the world to do any mean action—he was gone, in black disgrace, with a stain upon his name, a shadow upon his honour!

Would that shadow ever be lifted?

Harry Wharton was determined that it should. His face was set and resolute as he turned and strode towards the school gates. His holiday was over. He was going back to Greyfriars—to seek out the unknown plotter, to bring the truth to light, to fight for the honour of his chum!

THE END.

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A NEW ADVENTURE TALE OF ABSORBING INTEREST!

LION AGAINST BEAR.

A Thrilling Story of the Further Amazing Adventures of
FERRERS LORD, MILLIONAIRE.

By **SIDNEY DREW.**

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

In which Rupert Thurston receives Mysterious Orders, and the Lord of the Deep Receives a Visit from a Ghost.

Rupert Thurston whistled with amazement. In his hand he held a plain gold ring, and he uttered an exclamation of surprise as he examined it more closely under the light. The front of the ring was diamond-shaped, and engraved with cabalistic signs.

Ferrers Lord, the millionaire and eccentric owner of the submarine, Lord of the Deep, had done many strange things since Rupert had become his friend, yet surely of all this was the most unaccountable.

Sealed orders were inscribed on that ring, and the solution of the strange signs seemed likely to baffle all attempts to decipher them.



The naked eye refused to make out the puzzle, so Thurston thrust the ring on his finger, and hurried to his cabin for a magnifying-glass.

What he read is printed above.

If these were his orders, they were the most mysterious orders ever given to a man who captained a submarine. He copied the inscription on a sheet of paper, and sat puzzling over it. There was nothing definite at all except the latitude and longitude—twenty-six degrees sixteen minutes north latitude, and one hundred and twenty-five degrees twelve minutes east longitude—and the depth of seventy fathoms.

What was the Crimson Hill for which he had to watch? It seemed reasonable to imagine that the two words "Show me" meant show the ring. But to whom? Evidently to some person; but it did not seem at all reasonable that he would find anyone seventy fathoms deep.

Perplexed and puzzled, he crossed to the bell and rang it. The Chinese boy, Ching-Lung, answered the summons.

"Hallo!" said Rupert. "What are you doing here? What's the matter with your nose? Where is Mr. Lord's servant Sin-Ho?"

Ching-Lung's snub-nose was strangely discoloured and swollen. He rubbed it tenderly and grinned.

"Dat yaller image Sin-Ho him no come any more."

"Won't come any more? Why not? What have you been doing?"

"We hayee a lilly algment," squeaked the Chinese boy

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mournfully. "I telle him Mr. Lord gone 'way, and, delcfole, he gotee de sackee. Sin-Ho sayee he no gotee sackee; he going to be Mr. Thulston's selvantee. I tellee him nobody selvee Mr. Thulston but Ching-Lung. Den de ole yaller cowald punchee me on de nosee."

"And you struck him back, I suppose?"

"Yes," he squeaked; "I biffce him a few times. Dey sweeping up de pieces of 'um now."

Rupert wanted to laugh, but he succeeded in looking terribly stern.

"This is a bad beginning," he said gravely. "You must report yourself to Mr. Horton for punishment. Before you do that, go to No. 87—Mr. Prout—and tell him to bring the Admiralty plan of the Chinese waters from the chart-room. It is the nineteen-hundred chart I want. It is numbered seventeen hundred and three."

Ching-Lung's pigtail stood erect with horror.

"You mindee saying allee dat again, Mr. Thulston?"

Rupert repeated the order, and the Chinese boy collapsed limply against the door.

"Exclusee me," he gasped weakly, "and open de windel. Me feely velly faint. P'laps you'll lite it downee."

"You yellow image!" cried Thurston impatiently. "I hope Mr. Horton will give you a week in the cells."

He dipped a pen in the ink and scrawled down the message. Ching-Lung's slanting eyes sparkled mischievously as he took the paper.

"Exclusee me," he squeaked, turning the sheet over and over. "you sulee allee dat down on dis lilly papel?"

"Certainly it is! Why do you ask?"

Ching-Lung sidled towards the door.

"I askee becausee it sounded such a jolly big mouful. I going askee you to lendee me a calpet-bag to cally it."

Rupert snatched up a book and hurled it at Ching-Lung's head. It struck the closed door with a thud, for Ching-Lung had vanished. A moment later the door opened cautiously, and a grinning yellow face was thrust in.

"Dank you velly mooch!" said Ching-Lung.

Like a flash the head disappeared. Had Rupert been acquainted with Eric Hagensen, and Eric's favourite remark, he could not have helped admiring Ching-Lung's wonderful imitation of the Norwegian boy's voice. As it was, he merely registered a second black mark against Ching-Lung for impertinence, and sat down again.

Prout brought the chart, and laid it upon the table.

"Thank you!" said Rupert.

The steersman did not move, but stood behind the chair with folded arms. Rupert was too excited to notice him. He spread the chart out before him. He measured off latitude and longitude, and then, using a ruler, pencilled a line from north to south, and a second from east to west. Where the two lines cut one another at right-angles he scrawled a star.

"By Jove," he said, "the mysterious spot is in the Wang-Hai, which geography books call the Yellow Sea."

"Ahem!" coughed Mr. Thomas Prout.

Rupert turned with a start. There was a strange, musty smell in the room.

"What, you?" he said. "I thought you had gone, Prout. Do you want me?"

The steersman scowled darkly and mysteriously, but he failed to look impressive.

"Sir," he roared—his voice was so enormous that even when he whispered it sounded like an escape of steam—"sir,

I have to ax you a question, if you'll forgive the liberty. Is this a decent, respectable ship, or is it not?"

"That's an odd question, Prout," said Rupert, amazed. "Are you sure you are quite well?"

"As well as a man could be under the circumstances, sir," roared the steersman, getting red in the face. "I ax you again, sir, is this a respectable ship? Is it a respectable ship where a man takes a bit o' snuff and enjoys it, and then, five minutes arter, takes another, and finds his box full o' cayenne-pepper? Is it a respectable ship, sir, I ax, where a man goes to his bunk, and finds flat bunk chock full o' tater-peelings, oyster-shells, bits o' b'iled cabbage, and--and mutton-pies?"

The last two words came out like two shots from a double-barrelled gun.

"Mutton-pies!" gasped Rupert.

"Yes, sir, mutton-pies! Not fresh mutton-pies, but old, fusty, mildewed mutton-pies, with a scent about 'em like the bilge-water of a cod-boat. Here's one of 'em, sir!"

Mr. Thomas Prout thrust his hand into his coat-pocket in search of the decayed dainty. The next instant, uttering a wild yell of pain, he withdrew it, and hopped about the saloon in agony.

"Great Scott!" cried Rupert. "Are you mad? What's the matter?"

The matter was a mouse-trap. It was not a common English mouse-trap, but one of those American atrocities made of wire, with a powerful spring, and a trigger intended to hold the bait. The moment the trigger was touched, two half-circles of wire snapped together with terrific force. By the way the brawny steersman pranced about it was evident the mouse-trap had not a gentle bite.

"Oh, goodness!" he wailed, sucking his smarting fingers. "This is too much, sir; wot with the snuff and this!"

Rupert was beginning to think so, too, especially about the pie. The odour that exuded from the steersman's pocket might almost have been chopped up with a hatchet and tied into bundles.

"Get out," shouted Rupert, holding his nose, "and take that abominable scent with you! Someone has been playing practical jokes. I'll inquire into it to-morrow. For goodness' sake go, before I do murder!"

The steersman strode away, groaning, and, going to his cabin again, Rupert brought back a bottle of eau-de-Cologne, and sprayed it about the saloon. He did not doubt for an instant that Ching-Lung was at the bottom of the mystery, and another black mark was registered against him. Ching-Lung must be checked properly and sternly.

"I'll deal with the little yellow imp to-morrow," thought Rupert, "and not very tenderly, either."

Then, laughing softly, he went to bed, to dream strange dreams, just as the saloon clock struck one.

It happened that Tom Prout was on duty at the wheel, still brooding over his wrongs. He had a straight course to steer clear of the rocks, and there was no danger of collision, for the Lord of the Deep was racing merrily along twelve fathoms deep on her southward way. The steersman clinched the wheel amidships, and lighted his pipe.

Thurston had brought a bundle of London papers aboard, and distributed them among the crew. Mr. Prout spread his under the light of the binnacle-lamp. Then he smacked his lips, and the following startling headlines caught his eye:

**"A HORROR AT HACKNEY!
WHOLE FAMILY MURDERED!
TERRIBLE TALE!"**

The brawny steersman revelled in horrors. Even as a boy he had spent all his pocket-money on "penny dreadfuls," and had waded neck-deep in blood through the pages of "Gory George, the Pirate," and "Boldero the Bold; or, the Blood-stained Bandit of Borneo." He smacked his lips with relish again, and proceeded to read the thrilling narrative.

It was a hideous story of crime, and little by little the small amount of hair he had left began to bristle. Prout was one of those men who could easily grow a beard a yard long without difficulty, and yet so bald at an early age. All the strength and nourishment seemed to fly to his chin, and the top of his head was quite smooth and glossy.

The gruesome story was getting upon his nerves, and once or twice he glanced timidly round him.

"By gum," he muttered, with a shiver, "that chap almost beats Boldero the Bold! Let's see if they've got him."

He turned over the sheet nervously, and was just on the point of discovering that the author of the "Horror of Hackney" had hanged himself in a stable, when the light went out.

There was a crash and a muffled groan. In springing up, the steersman had tripped over the chair. He lay where he fell, endeavouring weakly to think what had happened.

A hollow, sepulchral voice wailed in his ear:

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"Thomas Prout!"

"Y-y-yes?" gasped the steersman, with chattering teeth. "W-w-who are y-y-you? W-w-wotcher w-w-want?"

"I'm Davy Jones. I want you!"

The conning-tower was as black as the pit. With rolling eyes the steersman tried to pierce the gloom around. Davy Jones! Though he was lying down, his knees knocked together. He managed to stammer:

"W-w-wotcher w-w-want me f-f-for?"

"Don't ask questions, Thomas Prout!" said the blood-curdling voice. "You've got to come along with me!"

"I—I c-c-c-can't s-s-swim."

A wild, fiendish laugh rang through the conning-tower, and a weird, bluish light broke through the darkness. With a yell of terror, Tom Prout got upon his hands and knees and stared at his grisly visitor.

It was certainly Davy Jones, for the steersman had seen a picture of him long ago in one of the "penny dreadfuls" he had been so fond of. His jaw dropped, and his eyes stood out like a crab's.

Surrounded by a ghostly, bluish glare, the spectre sat upon the wheel. It wore a striped worsted cap, huge sea-boots, and smoked a clay pipe. A cutlass dangled at its waist, and a couple of pistols were thrust through its belt. And, strange to relate, it had discovered the bottle of rum which the steersman kept carefully concealed for private consumption.

"O-o-oh!"

The steersman drew in a quaking breath, and stared at his gruesome guest.

"Are you ready?" inquired Davy Jones. "I'm in a bit of a hurry."

Prout did not answer. He tried, but the words would not come. He was as dumb as a lobworm.

"Now I think of it," went on the apparition, putting the bottle to its lips, "it's a dangerous thing to bathe on an empty stomach. You'll get wet coming down below with me, and it may give you cramp. You'd better have something to eat. My wife, Mrs. Davy, put me up a little snack just before I left. I'm not feeling peckish myself, so it's just the thing. Try that."

Davy Jones whipped out his cutlass, impaled something on the point, and thrust it under the steersman's nose. It was a mutton-pie.

"Eat it!" said the ghost. "Ha, ha, ha!"

Prout shuddered and groaned. Undoubtedly that pie had lost the first fresh bloom of youth. The perfume that filled the conning-tower was like the aroma of a bone-yard on a hot August day.

"Eat it!" said the ghost again. "It's all right, ain't it?"

"I—I ain't h-h-hungry!" wailed the steersman. "I—I—I n-a-never t-t-touch p-p-pies!"

Davy Jones slid noiselessly from his perch, and approached the cowering Mr. Prout.

"Eat it," said the ghost, "or I jab this into you!"

"M-m-mercy, m-m-mercy!"

The horrible pie was close under his nose. Prout gave a wild scream, and something cold went pouring down his back. With a weird laugh the spectre vanished, leaving the steersman on his back, roaring, kicking, and howling.

The noise reached the fore-castle and roused the sleepers. Heads appeared over hammocks.

"Oh, help! Ow, murder! Help, help!"

Ben Maddock, the bo'sun, who had the biggest feet ever seen on a little man, and the reddest head ever seen on any man at all, big or little, was the first to awake. He awoke with such a sudden start that he fell out of the hammock and shook himself rather badly.

"What's the row?" asked a dozen voices.

"Murder-r! Help!"

Ben Maddock rubbed himself tenderly in the darkness, and muttered something about a collision. The shouts from the conning-tower increased, and half a dozen men sprang from their hammocks. Several of them fell over the bo'sun in the darkness, and one of them, in the confusion which ensued, trod on his face.

Maddock had not an angelic temper, and he resented having his face turned into a doormat. He used strong language, and struck out with both fists, and, by sheer luck, both blows went home.

The next moment blows fell thick and fast and indiscriminately. The men underneath had a bad time of it, and strange, thudding noises and strange words of wrath echoed through the fore-castle. Then someone turned on the light—Ching-Lung.

He looked sorrowfully at the writhing heap of angry sailors. The writhing heap ceased to writhe, and the men, all rather worse for wear and tear, got up and looked at each other in astonishment.

"My fiends and bluthers," said Ching-Lung gravely, "this am a tellible sight for me to see. It am a tellible t'ing to see

shipmates fightee—a healt-bleaking t'ing! I cannot heal it, 'exclusee me!"

He buried his face in a yellow handkerchief, and sobbed. "What's it all about, Maddock?" asked one of the men, who had obtained a black eye in the fray.

Ben Maddock didn't know. He felt himself all over tenderly in search of broken bones. He had been the man at the bottom, and the man at the bottom had come in for a good many hard knocks.

"Murder!" wailed the steersman.

Ching-Lung dropped the handkerchief.

"Dat's Mr. Prout!" he cried. "Somet'ing's de mattel. Come on quicke, boyees!"

As a rule, Rupert Thurston slept like a doormouse; but he had been restless for once, dreaming strange dreams of hills as red as blood, honeycombed with caverns, where sea-monsters made their homes. He thought he was at the bottom of the sea, seventy fathoms deep, and that he was looking for the ring which had slipped from his finger. Suddenly, as he groped among the trailing weed, a fish came swimming past. It looked at him with glassy eyes, and then cried:

"Murder!"

Rupert awoke, sat up, and listened. Cries filled the ship. Startled, he opened his cabin door. Sailors in nightshirts and sleeping-suits were racing along the corridor, headed by Ching-Lung. Rupert heard Prout's bellow again, and dashed towards the conning-tower. He sprang up the steps, and turned on the light.

"What's the matter? Good gracious, Prout, what's the meaning of this?"

The steersman looked up at him helplessly as the others crowded in. A deep sigh came from Ching-Lung.

"Tellible—tellible!" he squeaked. "Oh, dis awful dlink! I fancy there lay the empty bottle."

"Prout," said Rupert, in disgust, "I couldn't have believed it of you! I thought you were a sober man. To be drunk on duty is one of the worst offences a man can commit. Take him below."

The accusation brought him to his senses as if by magic. The pea-green colour left his face, and he leapt up, flushing with indignation. Ching-Lung was again shedding tears in his handkerchief at the thought of such awful depravity.

"I'm not drunk, sir," said the steersman. "All I've had to-day was one more glass than usual, sir, when you gave us extra grog. I tell you the blessed ship's haunted! If I've never to move from this spot again, the ship's haunted! I've seen Davy Jones!"

"Bah!" said Rupert. "You are either drunk or mad. You reek of spirits. Ah, is that you, Horton? Talk to this man, please. I cannot do it calmly, for I am too disgusted and disappointed."

Except where Nathan Trethvick was concerned, the diver was never known to lose his temper. Besides, he knew Tom Prout was one of the steadiest and best of the hands.

"Why don't you make a clean breast of it," he said kindly, "and admit that you took a glass too much?"

"But I didn't, sir. I'm as sober as a judge."

"Then how do you account for smelling like a distillery?"

Ching-Lung sidled forward, and, thrusting his snub-nose into the middle of the steersman's back, took a loud sniff.

"Tellible—tellible!" he squeaked, raising his yellow hands in horror. "Dere no hopee for himee. He so fondee of lum dat when he dlink as much as he can, he poul de lestee ckel himee. Oh, tellible—tellible!"

"Silence!" cried Rupert angrily.

Tom Prout neither spoke nor acted like a man under the influence of drink. He told the amazing story in a straightforward way, and it was not his fault that the listeners smiled incredulously. He described his spectral visitor, and pointed triumphantly to the mutton-pie to corroborate his words. Ben Maddock, who was supposed to be an authority on intoxication, smelt the steersman's breath, and swore that, although Tom Prout had at least three-quarters of a bottle of rum on his clothes, he hadn't more than a couple of glasses inside him.

"What are you going to do about this extraordinary affair, Horton?" asked Rupert.

"What can I do, sir?"

Rupert turned away, beckoning to Ching-Lung. The Chinese boy followed him to his cabin, and Rupert closed the door.

"Now, Ching-Lung," he said sternly, "where is the cutlass that should be hanging up there?"

"Howee me knowee, Mr. Thulston?" he squeaked.

"None of that, my friend. You do know, and you know you were the ghost."

"Why," he answered, "you askee Mr. Plout yourself how

de bogey man talkee, and him tellee you de bogey speakee velly goodee English. Me don't speakee good English."

"Don't you?" said Rupert bluntly, as he took down a light riding-crop. "I don't know your full capabilities yet. You've only been here a few hours, and strange things have happened. For instance, Prout complained of a lot of disgusting things in his bunk. Fun is fun, and I like to see people happy. You've gone too far, Ching. But I'll give you one more chance. Promise to behave better, or I'll give you a hiding that'll take a week to rub off!"

Ching-Lung wept as he sat on Rupert's bed and thanked him fervently for his kindness.

"Me be tiptop good," he said. "Me be velly, velly solly."

"Off with you, then," said Thurston, putting back the hunting-crop, "and don't forget what I've told you."

The Chinese boy scuttled away, and, turning out the light, Rupert sprang into bed. Instead of feeling the springy caress of the mattress, he was received by the business side of a stiff hair-brush, which brought him back to the floor with a groan, vowing vengeance black and terrible against Ching-Lung.

But Ching-Lung slept the calm sleep of a little child that night.

Rupert Discusses His Strange Orders With Horton—The Naval Battle of the Swimming Bath—Monsieur Pierre Attempts to Murder His Foe, the Cat, and Gets Much the Worst of the Encounter.

Though Nathan Trethvick had been nominally in command of the Lord of the Deep, and possessed a private cabin of his own, he had never been allowed the privilege of dining in the saloon with Ferrers Lord and Thurston. This was not to be wondered at, for, in addition to his hideous looks, Lucifer, the dead ape, was almost as mannerly as the dwarf, his owner.

When Ching-Lung appeared with his hot water, looking very innocent and subdued, Rupert was considering how he should treat the diver. He was fond of Horton, and admired his sterling qualities. He hated the thought of having his meals alone, and he felt that Horton was not the man to presume in any way.

"Breakfast for two, Ching," he said, as he lathered his chin, "and tell Mr. Horton I'd like him to join me. By the way, have you interviewed him yet?"

"Yes, sir. Mr. Horton velly kind, sir. Him letec me off with a scorpion dis oncee."

"A caution, you mean. All right. Get out of this!"

Horton was waiting for him when he entered the saloon.

"Good-morning, sir!" he said, saluting.

"Good-morning, Horton! You look pretty fit for a man who was roused in the middle of the night. Sit down. I've got a queer thing to tell you. Now, Ching, be smart with the breakfast."

Ching-Lung proved himself to be the king of waiters. He seemed absolutely to fly between the table and the cook's galley, and between the cook's galley and the saloon. Titt-bits of bacon and kidney, succulent pieces of crisp toast, and grilled mushrooms popped out of the dishes, apparently of their own accord, only to hop into Ching-Lung's mysterious pocket.

Horton had a splendid appetite, and the Lord of the Deep carried plenty of frozen meat in her refrigerators. The diver ordered a chop, and Ching-Lung carried the order to the cook, a fat little Frenchman, who rejoiced in the name of Pierre Bourille, but was generally known as Bovril.

"Vat!" cried the cook. "Ze captain vant a chop?"

He went to the refrigerator, and returned, not only with a chop, but a string of half a dozen sausages for his own private consumption.

Ching-Lung's beady eyes glistened hungrily, and he smacked his lips.

"How longee it be, Mr. Bovril?"

"Ten minutes."

"I comee back in ten minutes, den."

Ching-Lung did not go to the saloon, but hurried away to find Eric Hagensen, who was teaching Billy Buttonee, the magpie, to catch pieces of biscuit. Ching-Lung whispered something, and Eric's grin widened. Then he pulled a cork, which bristled with fish-hooks, from his pocket, and watched Ching-Lung conceal one of the hooks in the end of his pigtail.

"Dat chop leady yet, Bovril?" inquired the Chinese boy, as he reappeared at the galley.

It was done to a turr, and the sausages beside it were frizzling merrily and deliciously. The cook placed the chop on a silver entree-dish, and placed a ring of crisp, brown potatoes round it. His head was only turned for a few seconds, but that was quite long enough.

ANSWERS

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 173.

NEXT WEEK: "A SCHOOLBOY'S HONOUR." A Splendid, Long, Complete Tale of the Chums of Greyfriars. By FRANK RICHARDS.

Like an elephant's trunk, Ching-Lung's pigtail stiffened, and hovered over the frying-pan. One by one Eric's big cod-hook impaled the sausages, and one by one they vanished into Ching-Lung's pocket.

"Tankee," said Ching-Lung, seizing the dish, and vanishing also.

Then the cook received a shock as he turned, fork in hand, to see how the sausages were getting on. He stared transfixed at the sight of the empty pan for a moment, and then began to tear his hair.

Suddenly his eyes rested on the cat.

"Aha!" he yelled. "I haf found you! Aha! Thief! R-r-rascal! Robbaire! You steal de sausages! Aha-r-r!"

Monsieur Pierre whipped up a saucepan and made a wild rush for the cat. But Whiskers, the demon rat-catcher of the Lord of the Deep, knew too much about the treachery of mankind to be caught napping. He made a glorious leap for safety, uttering a weird howl of wrath, and gained a high shelf. The shelf was loaded with crockery, dishes, and metal dish-covers. A whole avalanche poured down on the hapless Frenchman, and swept him off his feet. The crash was heard all over the ship.

Frightened men came running in, forgetting their fright, and roaring with laughter. The cook sat among the ruins like the classic gentleman who sat among the ruins of Carthage—the picture of woe.

"Velly sad—velly sad!" said Ching-Lung, who looked as grave as a whole bench of judges. "De manee who illtreat a dumb animal is a disgrace to his countree."

"Zee r-rascal steal my sausages!" roared the Frenchman.

"No mattel," answered Ching-Lung. "You a disgrace! Come, puss, puss—come to your pa."

And Whiskers came at once.

In the saloon, breakfast was over and Rupert produced the ring. If the strange inscription had puzzled Rupert, Horton was doubly puzzled.

"I can't make anything out of it," he said, in despair.

"I think I can," answered Rupert. "I've been thinking my level best. Mr. Lord must have had some good reason for leaving us in the dark like this. Do you know, Ned, I really think he's giving us a test just to see what we're made of. I wouldn't make a mess of this affair for anything on earth. The only definite order I've got is to meet him in Shanghai on the twenty-sixth. That means we've got over three weeks before us, and at the rate we can travel, it won't take long to get to China."

"Very likely you're right, sir. I hadn't thought of that."

"I'm sure I'm right," went on Rupert eagerly. "Ferre's Lord means us to make for the place the ring calls the Crimson Hill. Latitude, longitude, and depth of plain enough, and it's plain enough by the words 'Show me,' that there will be somebody there to meet us. What 'Watch well' means, I don't know."

Horton scratched his head.

"Perhaps it means watch for Scaroff, sir. He's a dangorous customer."

"Perhaps it does. Anyway, we'll steer for the Crimson Hill. Where are we now?"

"Somewhere north-west of Madeira, sir. We've not been breaking our necks."

"We had better travel faster," said Rupert. "See about it, Horton."

Thurston began to find time hanging heavily, for he had nothing to do in particular, so he strolled off to the swimming-bath. As soon as he saw the water, he felt too lazy to bathe. He found a comfortable chair behind a pile of guns, sat down, lighted a cigarette, and took out a notebook. He wrote for a time; but he had not passed a good night, and his eyelids were heavy. The pencil slipped from his fingers, the cigarette fell from his lips, and he slumbered.

Rupert had not been long in dreamland, when the yellow face of Ching-Lung appeared through the cautiously-opened door.

"It's allee lightee, Elic," said the squeaky voice of Ching-Lung. "Blingee in de ilonclads."

There was a bumping sound in the corridor, and Hagensen appeared, carrying a huge hip-bath. A second later he brought another, and after that two mops and a couple of boards. The two sat down on the edge of the bath, and Ching-Lung produced his stolen dainties, which they disposed of with evident relish.

"You me again tell how you play dot game," said the Norwegian, biting the last sausage in half.

"Oh, you likee dat gamee!" squeaked Ching-Lung. "Wo oachee get in a baff, and collal a mop. Den I sayee 'Go!' and we go and tly to knockee each othel ovel."

Hagensen was delighted at the prospect Ching-Lung held out, and the baths were quickly launched.

"You leady?" asked Ching-Lung, shouldering his mop.

"Dot so, dank you," answered the Norwegian boy.

"Den go!"

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A big hip-bath is not an easy craft to manœuvre, with a solitary board as a paddle. For a start, it requires careful balancing to keep it afloat at all, and a tremendous amount of skill to propel it in a straight line, even at a snail's pace. Ching-Lung had the knack, but little Hagensen hadn't. When he was whirling helplessly round and round, Ching-Lung lighted a cigarette, and bore down upon him.

The wet mop struck Eric full behind the left ear, and put him out of action—as the naval people say—immediately. The hip-bath sank, and Eric rose with a splutter, and then dived after it. He was soon afloat again, grinning merrily, but only to meet the same wet fate. In less than a quarter of an hour he had been submerged more than a dozen times.

"You had 'nuff, Ginger?" asked Ching-Lung.

"Nod me, dank you! Dis jolly fun!"

"Hushee!"

Ching-Lung held up a warning hand as his quick ears caught the creak of a footstep outside the door. In an instant both hip-baths went to the bottom, and the two boys dived like rabbits into hiding.

The door opened, and Monsieur Pierre had been thirsting for r-r-r-revenge against the cat. He was a Frenchman, and he had been insulted by that cat. It had made him look ridiculous; it had caused him pain. They had laughed at him—aha!—but he would have revenge. Ma foi, yes, he would slay the cursed cat!

But Whiskers had to be caught first, and he took a lot of catching. Monsieur tied a string to the lid of the biscuit-tin, and baited the trap with Ben Maddocks' pet canary, cage and all.

The misguided Whiskers had long had a greedy eye on that particular canary. He fell into the trap, and with a howl of joy the Frenchman pounced upon him. Whiskers yelled and meowed in pain.

"Aha, miserable r-r-ruffian!" said monsieur triumphantly. "I shall be r-r-revenged!"

This was the reason for Pierre's unexpected appearance at the swimming-bath, and also for the appearance of the tin containing the luckless Whiskers. Pierre, with a fiendish chuckle of exultation, raised the biscuit-tin high in the air, and Whiskers uttered a doleful yell.

"Let 'um biff, Elic," whispered Ching-Lung.

Two wet ropes hissed down with deadly aim. There was a roar, a splash, and a terrific succession of agonised howls from both Whiskers and the Frenchman. Ching-Lung and Eric fled, and Rupert sprang from sleep.

Rupert almost laughed himself into an apoplectic fit. The cook was striking out wildly for the steps, bellowing with agony. On his head, clinging with all the strength of its claws—and they were very long and very strong—was Whiskers, the cat.

Whiskers did not mean to be left behind. He did not look like a real cat, but like some horrible ghostly animal, for his damp fur stood up on end, every hair like the bristles in a brush, and his eyes glowed horribly.

Pierre scrambled out as limp as a piece of wet tape. It was a lucky thing for Whiskers that the box had opened. To screen himself Pierre had to lie—and he did it well—for Rupert was fond of the cat.

The Frenchman, who had not seen either Eric or Ching-Lung, swore that he had entered the room casually, and was looking at the water, when the horrible cat had sprung upon his head. Naturally he had missed his footing, and fallen into the bath.

Whiskers looked as if he could have told a good deal as he rubbed his wet body against Rupert's legs, but he said nothing.

"Ching-Lung again, for a thousand pounds!" thought Rupert, in despair. "What shall I do with him?"

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

In Which Edward Horton Sights a Strange Craft, and Rescues a Castaway—The Cook and Conger-eel Cause More Excitement, which Makes Ben Maddock Sign the Pledge.

The Lord of the Deep, flying along below water, had passed up the Mozambique Channel, and, turning east on her way to China, had left the Seychelle Islands behind her. Soon after eight in the evening the head engineer reported a slight mishap to one of the engines.

"Nothing serious, I hope?" said Ned Horton.

"No, sir; only a trifling thing. But it must be seen to. I'll get it put right in an hour."

The vessel was stopped, and the water pumped out of her tanks. Horton lighted his pipe, and strolled into the conning-tower to look at the weather. It was a night such as only tropics can show, with a glorious moon, so bright that the Southern Cross was hardly visible. The seas around lay white and placid, gleaming with phosphorescence.

"A grand evening, sir!" said the diver, as Rupert came up to taste the air.

"Grand, indeed, Ned, but terribly warm! Have you anything to report?"

"Not a thing, sir," answered Horton; "but I think a sherry-cobbler wouldn't be a bad suggestion."

Ching-Lung answered the tinkling of the bell, and brought the drinks in all their delicious coolness. Instead of going down below he slipped out upon the low-lying deck, and, baiting a heavily-weighted line with a piece of meat, tied one end of the line to his ankle, and calmly fell asleep.

Rupert sucked up the sherry-cobbler through the straws, and then took a turn along the deck. As he came back he saw Horton leaning over the rail, peering eagerly eastwards.

"Do you see anything, sir?" said the diver eagerly. "Look straight ahead, sir, where I'm pointing!"

For a time Rupert looked in vain, then he descried something like a tiny dot upon the gleaming waters.

"By Jove, I think I do!" he answered. "A black speck! What eyes you have!"

"I thought I wasn't mistaken, sir. The question is, what is it? Not a rock, for certain. The chart gives open water. Most likely a bit of floating wreckage. I wonder if the engineer could give us five minutes?"

"I'll ask," said Rupert.

Ting-ting-ting! went the bell, and Rupert put his ear to the speaking-tube.

"Yes, sir."

"Can you run us ahead for a mile, Forbes, without inconvenience?" questioned Rupert.

"Sorry I can't, sir. It's a bit worse than I thought. We've got two hours' hard work here."

The night grew hotter, and Rupert threw off his coat. Horton was still staring at the distant speck.

"It's no use, Ned," said Thurston, "unless you care to have the launch. Do you think it worth bothering about in this heat?"

"I dunno, sir; but I've got a queer feeling that it is. I'll take the dinghy."

Rupert whistled, aghast. The man who would tug a heavy boat along on a night when the mercury was almost boiling in the thermometer was certainly a man of energy.

"You'll melt, Horton," he said. "Great Scott! Was that a light?"

A sudden flash of silver hovered for an instant over the distant speck. Horton did not see it, for he was unfastening the indiarubber covering of the boat. He sprang round, and both waited eagerly for a repetition of the flash, but they waited in vain.

"Fancy, I suppose," said Rupert. "But I can almost swear I saw a light. I'll go with you."

The davit went over, and the dinghy splashed into the water. Horton grasped the oars, and sent the boat swiftly along. The rudder was shipped, and Horton pulled till the perspiration streamed from him.

"By Jove!" shouted Rupert. "It's a raft! Steady, Ned, or you'll run it down!"

They sat silently as the boat ran alongside the flimsy platform of timbers. Three whisked black fins were cutting the water around it—the dorsal fins of hungry sharks. A broken spar was rigged upon the raft, from which a ragged shirt hung.

There was a human figure lying face downwards on the boards. Horton brought the oar down with a splash that made the black fins vanish.

"Get a grip from the boathook, sir," he said. "Are you right? I'm going, sir!"

He crawled carefully over the bow. The wretched platform groaned beneath his weight as if about to part asunder. Then a pale face was lifted, in which two sunken eyes gleamed with unnatural lustre.

"Christopher! He's alive!" said the mate.

"Ho, ho, ho!" weakly laughed the wretched castaway. "Of course I'm alive! You've been away a long time, Bill; but I knowed you'd come back. Help yourself to the whisky-and-soda. What did old Father Neptune say to you? Hang it, there's that black dog again! He followed me all the way. There's the gun behind you, Bill. Shoot him—shoot him!"

He pointed wildly at the water-keg, and gnashed his teeth.

"Mad as a hatter!" whispered the diver. "That's the sun. He's not been short of grub, that's plain."

Besides the water-keg, half full, there were some biscuits and a square case filled with tinned mutton.

The man shook him by the hand, and laughed uproariously. He was certainly mad.

"You've never told me what old Neptune said, Bill," he went on. "Is the old boy well?"

"Fit as a Tinker, my boy," said Horton. "He asked after you."

"Ho, ho, ho! Did he, now? Did you tell him I'd gone on a visit to the Mikado of Japan, with a present of Dutch oysters from Lord Salisbury?"

"Of course I did," said the diver winningly.

"Ho, ho, ho! And what did he say to that?"

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NEXT WEEK: "A SCHOOLBOY'S HONOUR."

"Well," answered Horton, "he'd thought you'd not object to execute another little commission of the same kind for him. I told him you'd be back to-night, and he sent me up to ask you if you'd give him a call. He wants you to take a shipload of lobsters to the Shah of Persia."

"Then I'll come at once," said the castaway, "if you'll promise to kill that black dog."

Ned Horton promised, and helped the madman into the boat. He was not a big man, but he had evidently not suffered from either hunger or thirst. Horton knew that when he felt his weight. He turned back, and collected a few things that were on the raft. A few sturdy blows with the boathook broke up the flimsy platform, and they pulled back to the ship, guided by the light in the conning-tower.

All the way the castaway chattered and laughed wildly. When the light fell upon his face Rupert looked at him pityingly.

But for the deeply sunken eyes, rolling and gleaming in their hollow sockets, there was no madness in his face. It was an evil, treacherous face. He turned towards Rupert with a shudder, and pointed behind.

"There's the dog again! Shoot him—shoot him!"

"Certainly, my poor fellow," said Thurston. "I'll take care he does you no harm. Prout, throw me a gun."

A Lee-Metford was handed down, and Thurston loaded it.

"Do you see him now?"

"Yes, there! He's showing his awful teeth. Shoot!"

The gun cracked twice and the castaway uttered a yell of joy; but he absolutely refused to leave the boat, declaring that he was going to gather mushrooms for the Prince of Wales. Rupert argued with him, and tried to humour him, but in vain. At last he grew violent, and tried to jump overboard. It took six men to get him below, and four to strap him down. Horton stayed with him for half an hour, and then came into the saloon.

"This is an odd adventure," said Rupert. "How is the poor fellow?"

"Raving, sir," answered the diver. "I have set Maddock to watch him. He's the last survivor of some wreck, I expect, but there's not a line or stroke to tell who he is, or the name of the ship. The doctor says he may get over it in a week or two. I've hardly the heart to say it, sir, about a poor, shipwrecked sailor, but his figurehead is about the ugliest I ever clapped eyes on."

"The poor fellow isn't handsome, certainly," said Rupert, "but he can't help his looks. I'll give him a visit before I turn in. What do you say to billiards for an hour before dinner?"

"With pleasure, sir. I think it's calm enough."

They went down to the billiard-room. The sea was so still that the balls ran as truly as if on dry land. In vain they rang the bell for the marker, Ching-Lung, for Ching-Lung was not forthcoming.

Ching-Lung was still fishing, with that calm, hopeful patience inborn in the Chinaman. The report of the rifle had roused him from slumber, and he pulled in the line and examined his bait. The water around him was alive with fish, but Ching-Lung only wanted one particular kind of fish, and the fish he wanted did not swim near the surface.

Down plunged the bait once more, and the Chinese boy lighted a cigarette, and again composed himself to sleep. His slanting eyes closed, and he dreamed sweet dreams of a little yellow girl who lived on a sampan on the mighty Yung-tse-Kiang, whose name was Mimia-Hoo.

"Gleatee Scottee!" shrieked Ching-Lung.

A mighty tug at his ankles that almost jerked him into the water banished the pleasant vision of Mimia-Hoo.

The line was dragging and tugging with a strain strong enough to jerk his leg out at the socket.

Ching-Lung clutched the rail with a groan, and, reaching over, wrapped the line round his wrists.

"I must have hooke de sea-selpent," thought Ching-Lung.

Tug, tug, tug went the line, and, clinging to it like grim death, the Chinese boy battled the unknown monster he had hooked.

He began to perspire, but he fought gallantly, and felt that he was winning. He coiled up the line behind him as he drew it in.

At last there was a mighty splash, and a monstrous snake-like head appeared above the water.

"It am de sea-selpent!" tittered Ching-Lung. "He, he, he! Don't you go awayee, mister, fol a minute."

Ching-Lung knotted the line round the rail, leaving the huge eel to splash and plunge, and threw off his blouse.

Then, seizing his line again, he took a firm grip with his feet, bent his back, and pulled with all his strength.

The writhing conger came with a rush, for Ching-Lung had amazingly tough muscles.

There was a loud snap as the line broke, but the eel was on deck.

Ching-Lung flung himself bodily upon his prey.

He received a blow in the face from the lashing tail that made his teeth dance a jig.

Struggling, fighting, grunting, wriggling, the strangely-assorted wrestlers rolled over and over.

Ching-Lung was covered with clammy slime, but he clung to the eel, and the eel clung to him.

A bite from a heavy conger causes a nasty wound, but the Chinese boy took good care not to get within reach of the snapping jaws.

"He, he, he!" he squeaked at last. "You takee dat double knockee! Biff!"

Two stunning blows with his clenched fist on the conger's skull settled the matter.

A conger takes a tremendous amount of killing, and Ching-Lung had not hit to kill.

He wrapped the stunned monster in his blouse, and, with the bundle in his arms, crept below, chuckling to himself.

As the tanks had been almost emptied to bring the vessel to the surface, there was barely a foot of water in the swimming-bath. A foot was quite enough, however, and Ching-Lung dropped in the bundle.

"Dat watee blingee you lound, ole chap," he murmured, gleefully rubbing his hands. "You watee dere a bit."

Ching-Lung changed his slimy clothes and waited upon Rupert and Horton at dinner. He never waited more diligently or looked more innocent in his life. He amazed Monsieur Pierre with his wonderful politeness when duty took him to the galley.

"Zat lectle Chinees ees most gentlemanly," said the cook to Tom Prout. "He call me 'sare' a t'ousand times."

"Did he?" roared Prout, who had the toothache. "Then he must want a blessed job, Bovril. Called you, sir? Why, I'd as soon say it to a cropped French poodle!"

He strolled off, writhing with pain.

Ben Maddock's whistle sounded "Lights out!" The repairs in the engine-room were finished, and the Lord of the Deep was again under way. The cook did not swing his hammock like the rest in the fore-castle, but rigged his bunk on a heap of lockers. He had built the lockers up so as to form a kind of little cabin, and screened the entrance with a curtain.

It was at the far end of the fore-castle, and he had been driven there by Maddock on account of the mingled odour of garlic and pomade, which the boatswain said was enough to paralyse a file of Marines.

Monsieur Pierre had a wonderful black moustache, which was the joy of his life. Every evening before turning in he carefully combed, greased, scented and curled that moustache by the light of a candle stuck into an empty bottle.

Smells of singeing hair and strange pomades drifted over the curtain. Sometimes boots, flung by enraged hands, drifted over the curtain also; but the cook dodged them, and calmly went on training his moustache in the way it should go.

But to-night, as Monsieur Pierre lighted his candle, he received a shock. High and low he searched for the beloved moustache-curlers, which had cost, with the spirit-lamp that heated them, no less than twelve bright francs.

"Horreur!" gasped the cook, wringing his hands. "Vere have zey gone?"

He searched again, and then, clutching his temples wildly, sat down to think. There was just a chance that he had slipped them by accident into the pocket of his cook's apron. To have gone to bed with his moustache uncared-for would have meant a sleepless night of agony. The apron was hanging up in the galley.

"I must go and see," thought Monsieur Pierre. "It ess str-range, ver' str-range."

The fore-castle slumbered and snored, and was abominably dark. He was afraid to take the candle, for if the light happened to rouse any of the sleepers, threats loud and deep would be hurled at him, and very likely other things that hurt considerably more than words--boots, and things like that."

"Be br-rave, Pierre," muttered the cook. "R-r-remember you are a son of France. Allons!"

Barefooted, he stole out. As he advanced into the darkness he grew braver, and quickened his pace. Ben Maddock had a knack of sleeping with one of his enormous naked feet hanging over the side of the hammock. Pierre ran full tilt against the foot, and received Maddock's toe in his eye. With a groan he fell upon his hands and knees, fervently wishing he had never started.

But, of course, Pierre was a son of France, and sons of France have never been known to turn tail. A light was burning outside, and with renewed courage he made for the galley and pulled out the key. Then he received another shock--the door was open.

"Str-range!" gasped the cook again. "I swear I lock eet."

It was horribly dark in the galley also, but Pierre knew every inch of the place. As he hurried in, something caught his foot. With a cry he plunged forward; the door closed behind him.

There was a splash, a shrill howl of terror, and then a succession of hideous shrieks.

It was a long way from the galley to the fore-castle, and the closed doors muffled Pierre's agonised yells. Strangely enough, Ching-Lung, who was generally a heavy sleeper, awoke at once. He listened intently for a moment, and then, grinning, shook Ben Maddock roughly.

"Wot's smarrer?" murmured the bo'sun. "'Tain't time ter gerrup."

Ching-Lung shook him again.

"Wakce up, Mr. Maddock," he whispered, "and makee no noisec. De cookee makee fuss to-day 'bout things being stole from de galley. I justee heal a chap go outee. You and me catchee de tief."

Pierre had certainly complained to Horton of the mysterious disappearance of chops and other dainties from the galley. Maddock had been highly indignant about it, and had sworn that none of the men could be guilty. The news made him wide awake at once, and, seizing an enormous slipper with which to chastise the offender, he followed Ching-Lung.

"Lor!" gasped the bo'sun, as a faint howl reached him. "There's somebody there for sure! It's funny he should yell and give himself away. Won't I just murder him--ch? Ho, ho!"

"P'laps him tloed on a lat-tlap," suggested Ching-Lung. "De cook setee dem at night."

"P'raps so," said Ben Maddock, spitting on his hands and brandishing the slipper. "He'll think he's trod on a nest of rattlesnakes when I get hold of the lubber. I'll give him pinching grub! Come on!"

The howls grew louder as they neared the galley.

Maddock reached the galley door first. He hooked down a lantern. A box of matches, in the handy way sailors have, was inside it. The howls had given way to dull groans, mingled with soft splashing.

"Now I've got you!" roared the bo'sun, dashing open the door. "Come out, you thieving lubber!"

(Another splendid, long instalment of this wonderful new serial story in next Tuesday's number of THE MAGNET Library. Please pass this issue on to your friend so that he may read the opening chapters of "Lion Against Bear.")

For Next Week

"A SCHOOLBOY'S HONOUR."

The story of how Bob Cherry was driven from Greyfriars made splendid reading; but in next Tuesday's sequel Frank Richards has excelled himself, and I am sure you will more than enjoy reading—

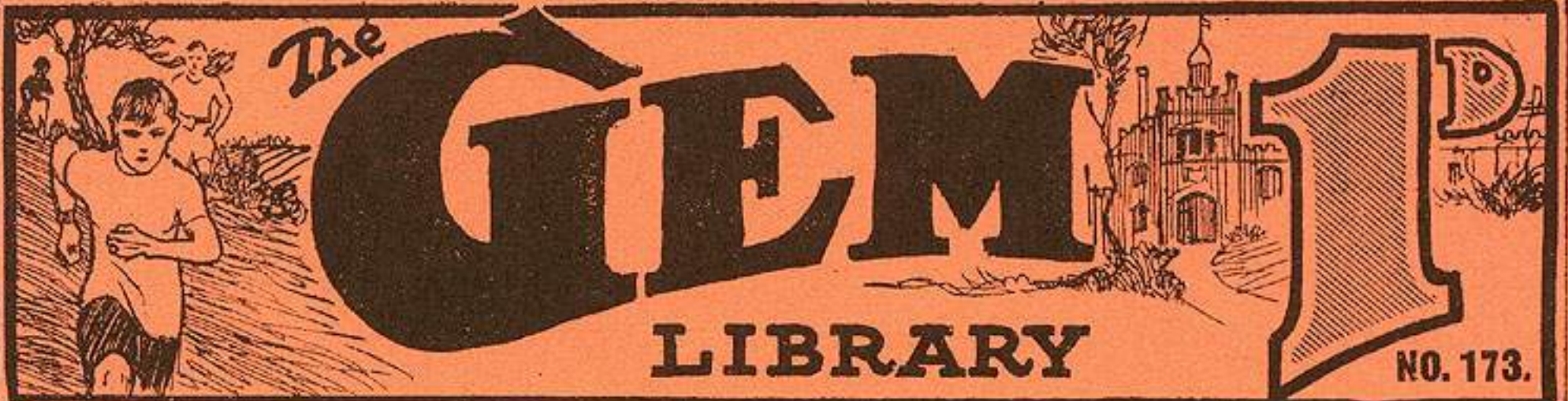
"A Schoolboy's Honour."

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The Editor



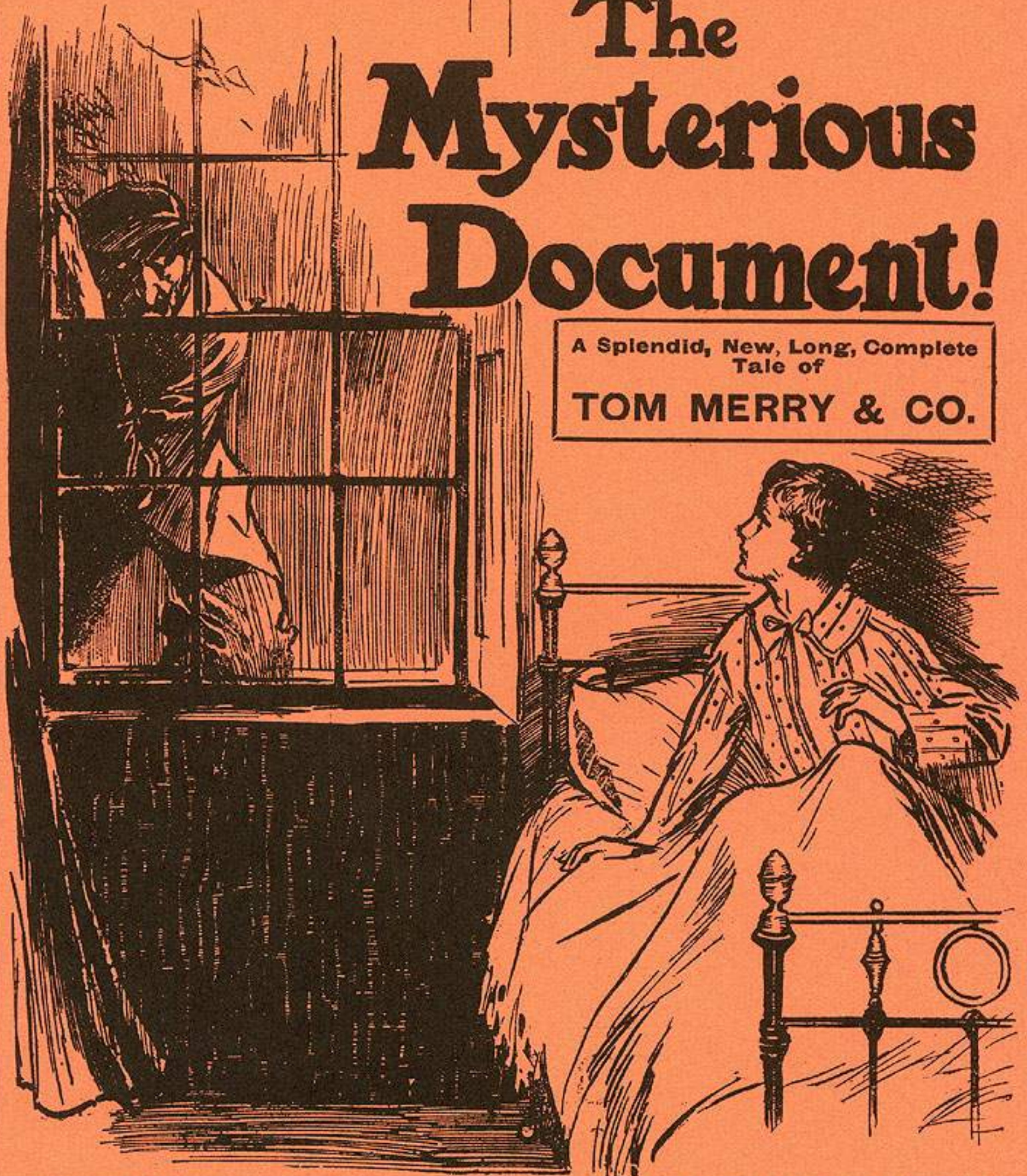
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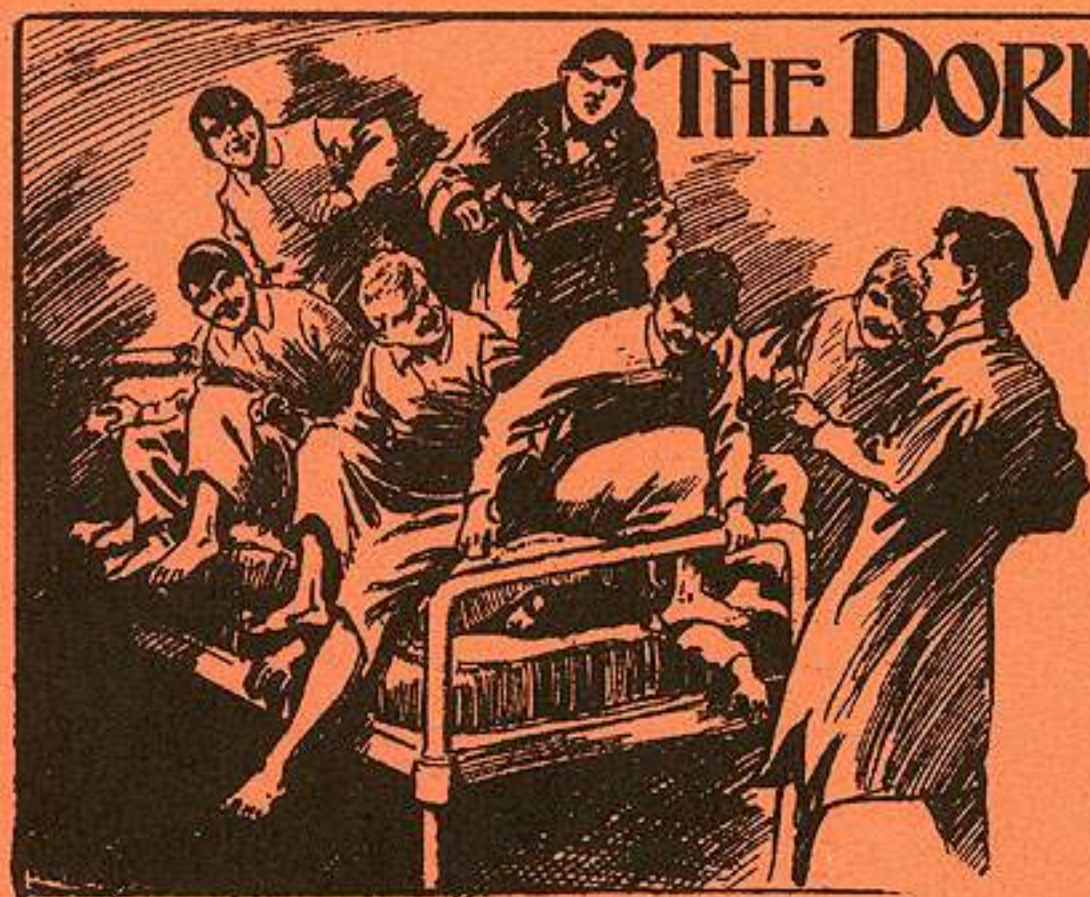
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