

STORIES BY
FRANK RICHARDS, MARTIN CLIFFORD, OWEN CONQUEST

The Penny Popular

No.
272.

Three Complete Stories of—
HARRY WHARTON & Co.—JIMMY SILVER & Co.—TOM MERRY & Co.



WUN LUNG'S DESPERATE ACT!

(A Thrilling Incident from the Long Complete Tale of Harry Wharton & Co.,
contained in this Issue.)

The Disappearance of Wun Lung.



THE FIRST CHAPTER.

A Desperate Deed.

"HAVE they gone?"
"Not yet."
Bulstrode grunted impatiently. He was sitting in the armchair in his study, in the Remove passage at Greyfriars. Snoop of the Remove was standing at the window, looking out into the Close. The windows of the Lower Fourth studies commanded a view of the gates of Greyfriars, and Snoop was watching the gates. Snoop had been standing at the window, watching the gates, for the last ten minutes, and he was getting tired of it, but he did not care to say so to Bulstrode.

A tirade, or a book hurled at his head, would probably have been the result. Bulstrode, sitting in the armchair with his feet on the fender, before the fire, waited very comfortably while Snoop watched.

But he was impatient. Harry Wharton & Co. were going out that afternoon, taking their skates, for a run on the river, and Bulstrode was waiting till they were gone, to carry out a little scheme he had in his mind. The bully of the Remove felt safer in carrying it out when Harry Wharton was off the scene.

There was a sound of footsteps in the passage, and the study door was pushed open. Bulstrode started a little as the cheery, handsome face of Harry Wharton looked in, and the young captain of the Remove nodded to him.

"Hallo!" said Bulstrode. "I thought you were going out skating?"

"Just going."

"Called in to say good-bye?" asked the Remove bully, with a sneer.

Wharton shook his head, pretending not to notice the sneer.

"No," he said; "I've called in to ask you if you'd like to come."

Bulstrode started a little. He had not expected that.

"You are a good skater," said Harry. "I hear that the ice is as good as ever up the river, though the thaw has made it rotten near Greyfriars. Like to come? We're all going."

Bulstrode shook his head.

"Thanks, no. I can't skate. I've hurt my leg."

"Nothing serious, I hope?"

"It was that Chinese rat, Wun Lung!"

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said Bulstrode, with a scowl. "He tripped me up in the Close when we came out after morning lessons, and gave me a hack on the shin I shall feel for days to come."

Wharton's face shadowed a little.

"That's very curious," he said. "Wun Lung is usually an inoffensive little chap. It's not like him to trip a fellow up for nothing."

"It wasn't for nothing," said Frank Nugent, from the passage. "I saw it happen. Bulstrode was after him, and Wun Lung tripped him up to get away."

"Oh, that alters the case!"

"I was going to twist his pigtail," said Bulstrode. "I wasn't going to hurt him."

"No; only bully him," said Bob Cherry, looking in. "What a beastly bully you are, Bulstrode! You seem to enjoy making yourself a horror to small boys."

"If that's all you've got to say, you may as well get out of my study," said Bulstrode, sneeringly.

"With pleasure," said Bob promptly. "Come on, Harry!"

Harry Wharton nodded, and stepped out into the passage. More than once of late he had tried to get on better terms with his old enemy, Bulstrode; but it was uphill work.

How was a fellow to be on cordial terms with a bully? And Bulstrode, though he had sometimes shown glimpses of a better nature, never could be cured of his favourite pastime of bullying younger boys.

The chums of the Remove went on their way. There were seven of them—Harry Wharton, Bob Cherry, Nugent, and Hurree Singh, Tom Brown and Mark Linley, and Micky Desmond.

They were carrying their skates slung on their arms. Bulstrode chuckled softly as the door closed behind them. He knew that they would not have gone so quietly if they had known what was working in his mind.

Five minutes after the Remove chums had departed, Bulstrode left his study, and went straight across to the school tuckshop.

He looked into the shop, caught sight of the diminutive figure of the little Celestial, and grinned.

Wun Lung retreated further into the shop, the smile dying off his face. He knew that the bully of the Remove meant mischief; and he remembered that Harry Wharton & Co. had gone out.

In a moment it flashed into the little Celestial's mind that Bulstrode had chosen this moment because the Famous Four were away.

"Hallo!" said Bulstrode. "So you're there!"

"Me hele!"

"Good!" said Bulstrode. "I want you to come for a stroll."

"Me no wantee comee."

"Like me to lead you by the ear?" asked Bulstrode agreeably.

"Me comee."

Bulstrode chuckled.

"Come on, then."

He slipped his arm through Wun Lung's, and led the Chinese junior from the shop. Snoop was waiting outside. Bulstrode gave him a nod and a sign to follow, and strolled towards the gates.

Wun Lung walked with him, as he had no choice in the matter. The bully had a tight grip on his arm, and he could not escape. Wun Lung's eyes were growing round with apprehension.

He had had many a rub with Bulstrode, and as a rule the cunning little Oriental had succeeded in getting the better of it.

When Bulstrode resorted to brutality, he could generally get Harry Wharton or his chums to interfere, and more than once Bulstrode's bullying had received a check. But now the coast was clear for the tyrant of the Remove, and he evidently meant to make the most of his opportunity.

Every time his injured shin gave a twinge, Bulstrode scowled afresh, and his grip tightened on the arm of the little Chinese. If Wun Lung had not been as keen as a needle—as he was—he would have known that there was a warm time coming for him.

Cunning, the natural resource of the weak against the strong, was all the little Oriental had to depend upon. He walked quietly beside Bulstrode, screwing up a grin upon his yellow face, but as watchful as a cat for a chance to escape.

Bulstrode walked out of the gates, and took the path through the trees towards the boathouse. It was a lonely spot at this time, because there was no boating at that season, and the ice on the Sark had been thinned by the thaw, and was not in a state to bear skaters or sliders. Bulstrode had no fear of being interrupted.

"Whatee you do?" murmured Wun Lung at last.

Bulstrode grinned in an extremely unpleasant way.

"I'm going to make you sit up, you young heathen ratter!" he said between his teeth. "I'll teach you not to hack my shins again!"

"Wun Lung solly."

"I dare say you are—now!"

"Me plenty solly—no hackee shin no mole."

"No; you won't, I think, after I've put you through it a bit," said Bulstrode. "Have you got the knife to cut off his pig-tail, Snoopey?"

"Yes, rather!" grinned Snoop.

Wun Lung gave a wail of horror.

"No cuttee pigtail—no cuttee pigtail!" "I'm jolly well going to cut it off, but I'll lick you first," said Bulstrode, with a grin. "Have you got the dogwhip, Snoop?" "Here it is." "Give him six," said Bulstrode, gripping the Chinese junior tight. "Lay them on well, too."

Wun Lung wriggled. "No mindee hokee," he murmured; "but no cuttee pigtail." "You'll see."

Snoop, not at all averse to the work, made the lash of the dogwhip sing round the limbs of the Chinese. It was a cowardly act, for the Celestial, in Bulstrode's grip, had no chance of either resistance or escape. "But not a sound of pain came from Wun Lung."

He bore the infliction with Oriental stoicism, and it was hard to tell from his face whether he was hurt or not.

"Shall I give him some more?" said Snoop, with relish. "He doesn't feel it. You ought to make him howl!"

"No; that's enough." "But—"

"That's enough, I tell you!" "Oh, all right!" said Snoop sulkily.

"Now, open the knife and get his pigtail off!"

Then the stoic calm of the Celestial changed. He began to struggle fiercely, and to yell at the top of his voice.

"Help! No cuttee pigtail! No cuttee pigtail! Help!"

"Quiet, you young fool!" "No cuttee pigtail!"

As a matter of fact, Bulstrode would never have dared to cut off the junior's pigtail, for he knew very well that he would have been called to account for it by Dr. Locke; but the little Chinese fully believed that he was in earnest. Bulstrode's face was very grim, and Snoop, opening the knife with his teeth, handed it to the Remove bully.

Wun Lung made a desperate effort, and tore himself away.

In a second he was flying.

"Stop!" roared Bulstrode, dashing in pursuit. "Stop, you young hound! I'll give you another licking! Stop!"

But Wun Lung did not heed.

"It's all right!" gasped Snoop, close behind Bulstrode. "He's going towards the river, and he'll never dare go on the ice. It's too thin to be safe."

"Good!"

Wun Lung had run out on the boat landing-stage. Bulstrode and Snoop dashed towards him. The little Chinese looked at them, and then looked at the level ice of the river. Here and there the thaw had made little streams of water on the ice, and it was manifestly unsafe, to the most casual glance. Wun Lung had seen it, and stopped.

Bulstrode grinned, and dashed on. He had no doubt of catching the fugitive now. Wun Lung waved his hands wildly.

"You goe back!"

Bulstrode laughed, and ran on. The little Chinese turned towards the river, and made a desperate bound upon the ice.

Bulstrode halted, as suddenly as if a shot had struck him. His face went white. Snoop staggered back in horror.

The little Celestial's feet touched the ice, and went clean through. There was a crash of the breaking ice, and down went Wun Lung, deep into the black waters. Water welled up out of the gap and flowed over the icy surface, and the two Removites watched in agony for the junior's head to reappear.

But Wun Lung did not come up! The gap in the ice, the black waters welling there, remained all that there was to show that the little Chinese had gone down.

**THE SECOND CHAPTER.
A Terrible Secret.**

BULSTRODE stood rooted to the ground. He seemed to be unable to believe his eyes for some moments. Snoop leaned against the boathouse, unable to move or speak.

The next minute seemed a century to both of them.

Surely the little Chinese must reappear! It was impossible, incredible that he had gone to his death in the frozen river!

Yet the gap was empty, save for the black waters, and the ice was unbroken in any other place that the two juniors could see.

The current had undoubtedly swept the little Chinese away under the ice. If he had come up in another spot, the thin crust might have broken to let him through. But the juniors' eyes swept the ice wildly in vain for a sign of him.

"Good heavens!" muttered Bulstrode at last. "Good heavens! It—it can't be! He can't be dead!"

"He is dead—drowned!" said Snoop in a shrill whisper. "He—he's dead! And you did it, Bulstrode!"

"Shut up!" "I—I won't shut up! You did it—you know you did! It was you who made him jump on the ice! I hadn't anything to do with it! You know I hadn't!"

"Will you hold your tongue?" cried Bulstrode fiercely, advancing towards Snoop with contracted brows and his fists clenched.

But for once the sneak of the Remove faced him without fear. The terror of the consequences of what had happened to Wun Lung was too great for Snoop to be afraid of Bulstrode just then.

"No, I won't!" he exclaimed. "Hands off! I'm going to the doctor—straight to the Head!"

"Stop!" "I—I won't!"

Bulstrode grasped the shivering junior by the shoulder, and jammed him against the wall of the deserted boathouse.

"Look here, Snoop," he said desperately,

be jolly well expelled from Greyfriars. That's certain, even if we weren't sent to prison."

"It was you—"

"Better think it over, Snoopey. You were in it as much as I."

"You started the whole thing!"

"How are you going to prove that?"

"You—you wouldn't deny it?"

Bulstrode shrugged his shoulders.

"Oh, dear!" groaned Snoop. "I—I know I ought to go to the Head. It's no good trying to keep it dark. It's bound to come out! You know they always say that m-m-murder will out!"

Bulstrode gritted his teeth.

"Hold your tongue, you fool!"

"We'd better go to the Head and own up."

"Well, go if you like! I sha'n't!"

"You'll be sent for!"

"I shall deny the whole story!" said Bulstrode savagely. "You couldn't prove I had anything to do with it!"

Snoop's knees knocked together.

"You—you villain!"

"Well, shut up, then, and do the sensible thing!" said Bulstrode roughly. "Do you know that this might lead to both of us



The little Celestial's feet touched the ice, and went clean through. There was a crash of the breaking ice, and down went Wun Lung, deep into the black waters.

"it's no good making fools of ourselves about this. Wun Lung has gone under the ice—"

"He's drowned, and you did it!"

"I didn't do it any more than you did, come to that," said Bulstrode, with a very white face. "Good heavens, do you think I meant to hurt the poor little beggar? I wasn't even going to touch his pigtail! It was only a jape. You know that."

"He believed you were!"

"How could I help it? How could I guess the mad young idiot would jump, on thin ice?" said Bulstrode helplessly. "But it's done now, and it can't be helped. No good making fools of ourselves about it."

"What do you mean?" said Snoop, with a deep breath.

"I mean that we'd better hold our tongues," said Bulstrode in a low voice. "No one has seen anything. There's no one here. Look here, there will be an inquest over this, some time. We don't want to have anything to do with it. I suppose they would bring it in accidental—"

Bulstrode stopped. He could not bring himself to utter the next word. "I suppose they will bring it in an accident," he resumed, "but we should both

being sent to a reformatory for years, and utterly ruined for life?"

"Oh—oh, dear!"

"I'm not going to face that. What did the young fool jump on the ice for? He knew it wouldn't bear his weight. It was suicide—those Oriental fools are always committing what they call 'hari-kiri' for nothing at all—and it wasn't my fault. Wun Lung had only himself to blame."

Snoop nodded.

His weaker and more cowardly nature was quite under Bulstrode's dominion, and he was already feeling that it would be a terrible task to present himself at the Head's study and inform Dr. Locke that he had had a hand in causing the death of his Form-fellow.

"Better hold our tongues," said Bulstrode in a low voice. "When he—when it's found, they'll think he went sliding, and fell through, that's all."

"I—I suppose so."

"Besides, I—"

"I say, you fellows—"

Bulstrode broke off suddenly at the voice of Billy Bunter. The fat junior's spectacles

came glimmering round the corner of the boathouse.

Snoop gasped for breath. "It's all up!" he moaned. "Bunter saw it—"

"Quiet!"
"But he must have—"
"You know he's as blind as an owl!"

Snoop gasped with relief as he remembered that circumstance. Bulstrode, who was quick enough to act in an emergency, drew a cigarette-case from his pocket, and opened it. He had to account somehow to Bunter for the fact that he and Snoop were there behind the boathouse, and for the pallor in Snoop's face.

"Take one," he whispered—"quick!"
Snoop mechanically put a cigarette between his lips.

"I say, you fellows— Oh, here you are! What—phew!—smoking!"

Bulstrode lit his cigarette.
"What's that got to do with you, you porpoise?" he grunted. "It's all right, Snoopy, you needn't look scared; it's not a prefect."

Snoop mumbled something.
"Smoking, eh?" said Billy Bunter, blinking at them. "Jolly good thing for you I'm a fellow of honour, and won't give you away to a prefect."

"Oh, go and eat coke!"
"All right, Bulstrode, I won't give you away. Of course, it's really my duty to do so, so that you can be cured of these beastly habits. But I won't—I'm going to stretch a point in your favour. By the way, could you cash a postal-order for me?"

"How much?"
"Ten shillings."

"Yes, hand it over."

"Well," said Bunter slowly, "the fact is, it hasn't come yet. I've been disappointed about it, owing to a delay in the post. But it's coming to-night at the latest, and I will hand it directly over to you. I want the cash in advance, because I'm getting into a low state of health for want of proper nourishment."

"Oh, get out!"

"Well, if you could advance me five bob off it—"

"Rats!"
"Say half-a-crown, then. You don't know what a struggle I'm having with my conscience not to give you away to a prefect for this filthy smoking," said Bunter pathetically. "I know I ought to tell Carberry, but I'm stretching a point in your favour. One good turn deserves another."

Bulstrode silently drew a half-crown from his pocket, and handed it over to the Owl of the Remove.

Bunter's eyes glistened. He took the half-crown, or, rather, snatched it as if he were afraid that Bulstrode might alter his mind, and slipped it into his pocket.

"Thanks very much, Bulstrode. You wouldn't care to make it up to the full ten shillings, I suppose, and take my postal-order when it comes this evening?"

"No, I wouldn't," growled Bulstrode.

"Well, never mind. Have you seen Wun Lung?"

Bulstrode started, and Snoop gave a moan. Billy Bunter was too short-sighted to see the pale misery in Snoop's face, or even he must have guessed something.

"No," said Bulstrode, as coolly as he could. "Oh, come off, you know," said Bunter, blinking at him. "You left the tuckshop with him, and I came along to see what you were going to do. Where is he?"

"I don't know."

"I mean, what have you done with him?"

"I—I haven't gone anything with him. He told me he was going to take a slide on the ice," said Bulstrode desperately. "Then Snoopy and I came here to have a smoke, and he went down the river."

"Well, I wanted to see him." Bunter blinked along the frozen stream, and Bulstrode trembled lest he should see the gap in the ice, and wonder how it came there. But the Owl of the Remove did not even notice it. "You know, he spoofed me about some tarts, and I should like to take him to the tuckshop to see me eat this half-crown—what I'm going to get for the half-crown, I mean, of course. It would be awful fun to take him there and let him watch me eat. You don't know where he is?"

"On the ice somewhere, I suppose."

"The ice isn't safe down the river."

"Well, that's his look-out."

"Yes, I suppose it is. Well, I'm going to the tuckshop—you're sure you wouldn't care

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to cash the whole of my postal-order in advance?"

"Yes, confound you!"

"Oh, all right!"

And Billy Bunter toddled off, and Bulstrode and Snoop, throwing away the cigarettes, walked quickly in another direction.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Missing.

HARRY WHARTON & Co. came back bright and ruddy in the winter dusk, with their skates slung on their arms. They had had a jolly couple of hours on the ice up the river, where some of the girls from Cliff House had been skating, too. Marjorie Hazeldene was a good skater, and always glad of a chance to go on the ice; and, needless to say, the chums of Greyfriars were always glad to take her there. The juniors were feeling very cheerful as they came in at the gates of the school in the dusk.

"Nothing like skating!" said Bob Cherry, as they came in.

His foot slipped on a fragment of orange-peel dropped in the gateway by Billy Bunter, and he whirled along for three or four yards, and sat down with a bump.

"Ow!" he gasped.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Nugent.

Bob Cherry glared at him.

"What on earth are you cackling and gurgling about, Nugent?"

"Ha, ha, ha! That is something like skating!"

"Groo!"

"You said there was nothing like skating, you know, and then—"

"Ow! I'm hurt!"

"Never mind; think—it might have been me!"

That thought did not seem to afford Bob Cherry much comfort. He rose, and growled and grumbled.

"I wish I knew who put that orange-peel there!" he said. "I should like to interview him very much. I say, I'm hungry!"

"What-ho!" said Harry Wharton feelingly. "Nothing like exercise in the keen air to give you an appetite."

"Wun Lung said he would have tea ready at six sharp," said Bob Cherry. "He's promised not to cook any of his blessed Chinese dishes, but to let us have something decent. What's the time now?"

"Six just striking."

"Good!"

The juniors crossed the Close to the School House. They met Ogilvy of the Remove as they went in. Both dug him in the ribs, and the Scottish junior turned round with a gasp.

"Tea ready?" asked Bob.

"I don't know. I've been in the gym."

Bob Cherry snorted.

"Aren't you invited to tea in my study, and isn't it six?" he exclaimed.

"Yes; I've just come in for it. Is Wun Lung getting tea?"

"Yes."

"Well, he wasn't five minutes ago," said Ogilvy. "Bunter was inquiring for him, and said he had looked in No. 13, and he wasn't there."

"The young bounder! Why, if he's forgotten to get tea I'll scalp him!" exclaimed Bob Cherry indignantly. "Come on, you chaps!"

They ascended the stairs, and went along the Remove passage to the study at the end—No. 13, tenanted by Bob Cherry, Mark Linley, and Wun Lung, the Chinese. There was no light under the door. Bob Cherry pushed it open. The room was in darkness, the gas unlighted, not a glimmer of fire in the grate.

Bob Cherry growled.

"Well, this is a ripping welcome home, I must say!" he exclaimed. "Where is that young bounder of a Chinese?"

"He jolly well isn't here!" said Ogilvy. "If this is the way you run your tea-parties, Cherry, I'll be excused next time. I'll go and see if there's anything going on in Hall."

"What-ho!" said Tom Brown. "You can call up when the grub turns up, Bob."

"Faith, and I'm wid ye!" remarked Micky Desmond.

And the three juniors walked off. Bob Cherry lit the gas in No. 13, and looked round the room. There was no sign of Wun Lung.

"Well, I'm sorry," said Bob. "I left the shopping and everything to that—that toad. I can't understand his failing me like this. It's not like him. He's a queer little toad, but he generally keeps his word. I suppose you fellows are too sharp sgt to wait while I shop and get tea?"

"What-ho!" said Nugent emphatically.

"Let's go into Hall," said Mark Linley.

"Good! We can look for Wun Lung afterwards, and scalp him."

"Jolly good!"

"There's some stuff here we can take into Hall," said Bob Cherry, opening the cupboard door. "I've a lot of ham, and a pot of marmalade in hand, as well as heaps of bread and biscuits. Here—Hallo, hallo, hallo!"

"What's the matter?"

"They're gone!"

Bob Cherry stared blankly into the empty cupboard.

"Gone?"

"Yes, every blessed morsel! Somebody has been here!"

"A little joke of Wun Lung's," suggested Nugent, grinning.

"If it is, I'll cure him of playing little jokes!" said Bob Cherry wrathfully. "More likely it's Bunter."

"Yes, much more likely," agreed Wharton.

"Anyway, if the stuff's gone, we'd better be gone, too, before they've scooped up everything in Hall."

"Good!"

And the hungry juniors went down to tea. They were in time to get a meal, fortunately.

Bob Cherry looked round wrathfully for Wun Lung at the Remove table, but the little Chinese was not to be seen.

The conviction forced itself upon Bob Cherry's mind that Wun Lung had taken the food from the study, and was having a quiet feed on his own somewhere. The little Celestial had a peculiar sense of humour, which his friends did not always exactly appreciate.

"I'll warn him presently," Bob confided to Nugent, in a whisper. "By Jove!"

And Nugent nodded sympathetically.

After tea, Bob proceeded to look for his Chinese ehum. But Wun Lung was not to be found. About half an hour later Bob looked into No. 1 Study, where Harry Wharton & Co. were hard at work—not at their prep, but studying Shakespearian parts for a forthcoming performance by the Junior Dramatic Society.

Wharton, Nugent, and Hurree Singh had their parts in their hands, while Billy Bunter sat in the armchair and blinked discontentedly at them.

"I say, you chaps—" began Bob Cherry.

Wharton held up his hand warningly.

"Hush!"

"Eh! What's the matter?"

"We're at work."

"Oh, rats! I say—"

"Hush!"

"But—"

"Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears," said Nugent impressively. "I come to bury Caesar, not to raise him."

"Praise him, you ass!"

"Rats! It's 'raise him' here."

"Then you've copied it incorrectly."

"I don't know. The word seems to fit—"

"Ass! Look at the Shakespeare there."

"Oh, rats! Too much like work. I'll take your word for it. I come to bury Caesar, not to praise him. The evil that men do lives after them—"

"Look here—"

"Shut up, Cherry! 'The good is oft interred with their bones—'"

"Yes, but I say—"

"Go and eat coke! 'So let it be with Caesar.'"

"I say, you fellows," said Bunter, from the armchair, "if you like, I'll be stage-manager for you. Of course, I ought to be Brutus. But as you're too jealous of me to give me a show, I don't mind stage-managing."

"But we do," said Nugent promptly.

"Oh, really, Nugent—"

"Look here," said Bob Cherry, "chuck that piffle for a minute. I can't find Wun Lung anywhere."

"Well, give him a licking to-morrow."

"I don't want to lick him," said Bob, looking worried. "I'm afraid that something's happened to him."

"Eh! Wharton laid down his part on the table at once. "What? Something happened to Wun Lung?"

"He's missing!"

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

A Startling Disappearance.

MISSING!
The chums of the Remove repeated the word simultaneously. Bob Cherry nodded. He was looking quite harassed.

"I can't find him anywhere, and nobody

seems to know what's become of him," he said. "He hasn't been seen all the afternoon, and I heard that he missed call-over. Where can he be, Bunter?"

"I don't know," said Bunter.

"Russell says he saw him with you in the tuckshop."

"Oh, that was just after you chaps went out," said Bunter. "He treated me rottenly. He took me to the tuckshop, and then pretended to think that I was going to treat him, instead of his treating me. He went off with Bulstrode."

"Bulstrode!"

"Yes, and then he went skating on the river."

"We saw nothing of him," said Wharton.

"No, Bulstrode said he went down the river."

Harry looked alarmed.

"Down the river! But the ice isn't safe lower down the Sark. Surely Wun Lung knew that it wasn't safe?"

"He knew it all right," said Bob Cherry.

and he did not look round as the juniors entered.

"Bulstrode!" exclaimed Harry.

The Remove bully looked up at last.

"Hallo! What do you want?"

"Wun Lung is missing. Do you know where he is?"

"How should I know?"

"That is not an answer to my question," said Harry quietly. "I know that once you shut up a fag in a vault, your idea of a joke, and he was there a long time. I think you may have played some sort of rotten trick on Wun Lung."

"Well, I haven't!" said Bulstrode, with a sneer.

"You saw him go on the river?"

"Yes. He said something about going on the ice down to the village. I didn't take any particular notice at the time."

"Did you see him go on the ice?"

"No. He went down the bank."

"When was that?"

Bulstrode yawned.

into his trousers-pockets, and tramped up and down the room.

"I'm not to blame!" he muttered. "They can't say I'm to blame! I—I never meant to hurt the young fool. How was I to know that he would be such a mad fool? It's no good my saying anything, either. It can't bring him back. It doesn't matter whether they find the—the body to-day, or to-morrow, or the next day. Best to say nothing."

He started as the door opened. Snoop came in with a face so ghastly that it seemed as if it had been chalked over. Bulstrode gave him a savage look.

"What's the matter?"

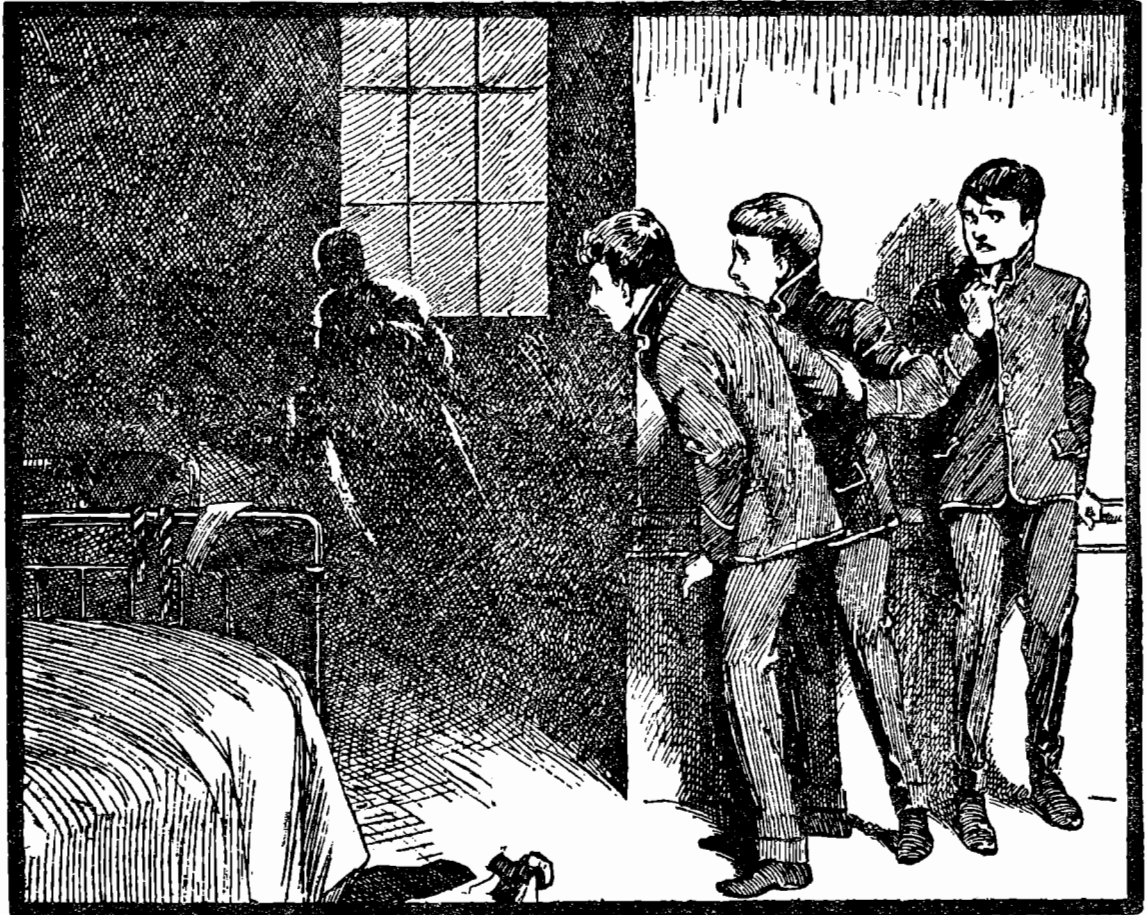
"They've missed him."

"Him! Who?"

"You know who I mean. Wun Lung!"

"I don't know anything about it," said Bulstrode, grinding his teeth; "and if you're sensible you won't know anything about it either, Snoop. If you go about with a face like that, you'll give yourself away at once."

"I—I can't help it!" groaned Snoop, sink-



The watchers in the dormitory held their breath.

"I told him myself; besides, I can't understand his going skating, because I asked him to come with us, and he said it was too cold to go skating."

"It's very odd, then."

"The oddfulness is terrific," remarked Hurree Janset Ram Singh. "Is it possible that the esteemed Bulstrode has not spoken in strict accordfulness with the honourable facts? He may have been treating the unfortunate Wun Lung to the esteemed bullyfulness."

"I'm going to speak to Bulstrode," said Bob Cherry.

"We'll come with you."

The chums of the Remove left Study No. 1, and went along to the next, which was occupied by Bulstrode, Hazeldene, and Tom Brown, the New Zealander. Bulstrode was there. He was sitting in a chair before the fire, his eyes fixed on the glowing embers,

"I can't remember exactly. I didn't take any notice of the time."

"It may be a serious matter, Bulstrode. If Wun Lung went on the ice, he may have gone through. It's not safe below the Pool, as you know."

"By George!" said Bulstrode, with a start. "I didn't think of that. I should be awfully sorry if anything happened to him. Let me see—I think it was about half-past three."

"And you haven't seen him since?"

"No. Bunter may have. He was looking for him, I remember."

"No. Bunter says he hasn't."

"Well, the best thing would be to look for him along the river," said Bulstrode.

"I suppose so."

The juniors quitted the study. As the door closed, Bulstrode rose from his chair. His face was haggard. He thrust his hands deep

ing into a chair. "I—I feel as if everybody can see it in my face."

"So they can, you fool, if you look like that!" said Bulstrode.

"I can't help it. It's horrible!"

"You fool! What's the good of giving it away? Mind, if you let it out, you face it alone. Anything you say about me I shall denounce as a lie. You'd better think whether you're likely to be believed or not. The fellows haven't forgotten how you lied about Mark Linley, and got him sent to Coventry."

Snoop groaned. True enough, any statement he might make in accusation of anybody had very little chance of being believed.

"What shall we do?"

"Do? Nothing; only keep our mouths shut. What would be the good of talking? We can't help Wun Lung now."

"It's—it's horrible!"

"Well, if you want to get sent to a reformatory for ten years you'd better go about with a face like that!" said Bulstrode. "Oh, dear! Oh, dear! I know I shall give it all away soon!" groaned Snoop. "I can't listen to the fellows talking about it without letting out that I know something. We may all be questioned, too, by the Head."

"Well, you needn't say anything."

"That's all very well for you. I—I haven't got your nerve."

Bulstrode gave him a glance of savage scorn. "You cowardly worm!" he exclaimed. "Look here, I'll tell you what to do. Put on an illness, and get sent into the sanatorium for a few days. That will get you out of all of it. Goodness knows, you look ill enough! Say you've got a cold."

Snoop brightened up. "The prospect of getting out of the continual discussion of Wun Lung's disappearance, and away from questioning, was a solace to him."

"You think they'd believe me?" he asked. "Look in the glass!" said Bulstrode, with a sneer.

Snoop looked in the glass. He started as he saw the reflection of his ghastly face. He looked ill enough in all conscience. His skin was almost colourless, and his eyes hollow, and there was perspiration in big drops on his forehead.

"You look sicker than most chaps do when they go into the sanatorium!" sneered Bulstrode. "Go and speak to the housekeeper at once!"

"I—I'll do it."

And Snoop left the study, his knees knocking together.

Bulstrode sat down to his table to work. He had to do his prep. It was necessary that he should keep up an appearance of being absolutely undisturbed. But he could not work. Ever between him and his words a face seemed to come—the frightened face of the little Chinese as he had turned on the bank of the river.

Bulstrode rose at last with a suppressed groan and left the study. He walked down to the housekeeper's room, and found Mrs. Kebble there. He inquired about Snoop.

"He is quite ill," said Mrs. Kebble. "I have sent him into the infirmary, Bulstrode. I think he must have taken a chill. He was all of a tremble."

"Ah! I thought he looked seedy," said Bulstrode.

He left the housekeeper's room more easy in his mind. Snoop, at all events, was out of the reach of questioning, and no longer in risk of blurring out the truth at any moment.

The whole school seemed to be discussing the disappearance of Wun Lung now.

Harry Wharton had gone to Wingate, the captain of Greyfriars, to tell him what he feared. Wingate had at once seen the seriousness of the matter, and he had promptly informed Mr. Quelch, the missing boy's Form-master. Mr. Quelch ordered an immediate search along the river.

Gladly would the Removites have joined in the quest of their missing Form-fellow, but it was not allowed. A dozen of the Sixth went down the Sark with lanterns to look for traces of the missing lad.

The juniors waited anxiously enough for their return.

Nothing could be done—work was neglected, every customary amusement was dropped. The juniors stood about in groups discussing the matter in low voices. The shadow of the wings of the Angel of Death seemed to have fallen upon the school.

It was past the usual bedtime of the juniors before the search-party returned. But no one thought of bed. Mr. Quelch, seeing the keen alarm and anxiety in the boys' faces, allowed them to remain up until Wingate and the rest returned. Two Form-masters had gone with the seniors to search.

They came in at last, muddy and weary and despondent.

A single glance at their faces showed that they had had no success.

Harry Wharton heard Wingate make his report to Mr. Quelch.

"No trace of him, sir. There were a good many holes in the ice towards the village, but no sign of the boy anywhere."

Mr. Quelch nodded without speaking, and went away to see the Head in his study.

Carberry the prefect came to see the Remove to their dormitory. Carberry the bully was quite subdued now.

He remembered many an act of brutality towards the boy whose body, it seemed only too probable, was now lying at the bottom of

the Sark. And Carberry was strangely gentle that night to the juniors. The Remove went to bed, but not to sleep.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

The Ghost of Wun Lung!

HERE was usually a buzz of talk in the junior dormitories for some time after lights were turned out, but on the present night it was prolonged much further than usual. With Wun Lung's empty bed in the dormitory, and the fate of the Chinese junior still unknown, none of the Removites felt inclined for sleep.

For an hour, at least, they lay awake, talking over the mysterious disappearance of Wun Lung, and generally agreeing that only one thing could have become of him—that he had fallen through the ice of the Sark.

Harry Wharton and his friends cherished a faint hope that there might be some other explanation.

Wun Lung was a keen fellow enough, and could generally be trusted to take care of himself. He had known that the ice was unsafe. His skates, too, were in his room, so if he had gone on the ice it was simply to slide. Why should he do so? Yet, if that was not his fate, what had become of him?

That was a question to which Wharton could find no answer.

He turned it over and over in his mind, the conviction forced itself upon him that they would never see Wun Lung in life again; yet a faint hope still struggled against that conviction.

The boys one by one dropped off to sleep.

Harry Wharton was one of the last to slumber. But there was one boy in the Remove dormitory who did not sleep at all.

It was Bulstrode!

There was another sleepless lad, tossing and turning, in the school infirmary—all in mind if not in body. Snoop suffered more than Bulstrode. Bulstrode had hardened himself into a desperate mood. He felt far less concern for the fate of his victim than for his own safety. But he could not sleep. He was safe enough, apparently, but he could not sleep.

He lay awake and heard the clock strike eleven.

Blackness lay upon Greyfriars—hardly a star glimmered in at the high windows of the Remove dormitory.

Still Bulstrode could not sleep.

Why was it that that pale, frightened face would ever keep appearing before his eyes—open or closed, it was just the same.

The bully of the Remove groaned in spirit. Why could he not forget for a few minutes? What would he not have given to sleep? But sleep refused to come.

"You fellows awake?" said Bulstrode at last.

The sound of his own voice in the stillness of the dormitory startled him, and he shivered. Gladly would he have heard a reply from anyone; but the Remove were fast asleep now.

Only steady breathing answered the Remove bully's question.

The whole dormitory slept—save Bulstrode!

He turned and turned again. At last his senses began to grow dimmer, and he hoped that he was about to sleep.

Then suddenly he started into broad wakefulness.

There was a sound in the dormitory!

What the sound was Bulstrode did not know—and at any other time he would have taken no notice of it, for the nerves of the Remove bully were generally good.

But now the falling of a feather would have startled him.

He raised his head from the bedclothes, and cast a quick, fearful glance up and down the long, dark room.

What was that sound?

Was it a faint footfall?

And what—what was that glimmer of light—that glimmer of faint phosphorescent light—that broke the blackness of the dormitory?

Bulstrode gazed at it, fascinated.

There was no doubt about it—it was no dream. A strange, ghostly light was glimmering and quivering through the gloom.

Slowly—slowly the outlines of a face appeared in the midst of the glimmer.

Bulstrode sat up in bed, and sat still—aching with fear, the sweat running down his body. What was the face he saw in that ghostly glimmer?

There was no mistake!

It was not fancy!

It was the face of Wun Lung. The face of the missing junior, whose body lay at the bottom of the Sark.

Bulstrode gazed and gazed.

Clearer and clearer the face came in the strange, unearthly light, till Bulstrode could distinguish every feature—the almond eyes, the strange olive skin, the pig-tailed head.

It was Wun Lung!

The vision came nearer to Bulstrode's bed. And as it approached, the Remove bully found his voice.

A wild yell rang through the dormitory.

On an instant the light vanished—the vision disappeared. There was a faint sound again in the dormitory, lost in the noise Bulstrode made, as he scrambled wildly out of bed.

"Oh, oh! The ghost! Help!"

"What on earth's the matter?"

"Who's that yelling?"

"What is it?"

"Help!"

"Bulstrode!"

"The ghost!"

"What on earth—"

"Oh, Heaven! The ghost!"

Harry Wharton, amazed and alarmed, sprang out of bed, and lighted a candle.

Bulstrode was standing beside his bed, trembling in every limb.

He turned a ghastly look upon Wharton.

"What is the matter?" asked Harry, stepping quickly towards him, thinking that he must be in a fit of some kind.

"The ghost!"

"What?"

"The ghost!"

Harry looked at him closely. It needed only a look to show him that Bulstrode was in deadly earnest—in a state of shivering terror. What was the cause of it?

"Bulstrode! What do you mean?"

"I saw it!"

"You saw what?"

Bulstrode gasped for breath.

"The ghost of Wun Lung!"

There was a general exclamation in the dormitory. All the Removites were awake now, and everyone heard Bulstrode's wild words.

"You've been dreaming," said Wharton soothingly. "You've let the matter get on your mind, Bulstrode."

"It wasn't a dream," said Bulstrode, shivering. "It was real enough. There was a sort of ghostly light, and then I saw his face—Wun Lung's face."

"But it's impossible!"

"I tell you I saw him!"

"It must have been somebody japing," said Nugent, "though I hope there's no fellow here who would jape on such a subject."

"Not likely!"

"Bulstrode dreamed it."

"I didn't dream it," said Bulstrode, shivering, but a little calmer now. "I don't understand it, but I didn't dream it."

It's jolly funny!" remarked Wharton seriously. "But I tell you what. I'm game to stay awake, if you are, to see whether the ghost returns."

"Oh, he won't come back to-night!" said Bulstrode.

"Well, are you game to stay awake?"

"If you like."

Harry Wharton turned to Nugent.

"What do you say, Nugent?"

"I don't mind keeping awake," said Nugent. "I don't think there's anything in Bulstrode's yarn, but it'll probably quieten his nerves if we stay up with him for a while."

"Get some of your things on, then," urged Wharton. "We'll take up our position by the door. If Bulstrode's yarn is true, the ghost is bound to make for his bed if he returns."

"All right."

The three juniors put on their coats and trousers, whilst the rest of the Removites lay back on their pillows, and were soon fast asleep again.

"Ready?" whispered Wharton at length.

"Yes."

"Well, come along, and don't make a noise."

Wharton led the way to the door, followed by Nugent and Bulstrode. They were going to lay in wait for the "ghost." But would the spectre make its appearance? That was the thought that ran through each of the juniors' minds.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Wun Lung Does Not "Savvy."

"TWELVE!" muttered Harry Wharton. The last booming stroke of midnight died away, and a more solemn and ghostly stillness seemed to settle upon the dormitory.

A quarter of an hour passed.

Wharton gave a sudden start.

A faint sound had reached his ears.

"Look out!" he whispered. "Quiet!"

A shiver passed through them. They knew that there was now someone else in the dormitory—whether earthly or unearthly, there was now another there, close to them in the darkness.

The watchers in the dormitory held their breath.

From the darkness a faint light glimmered out—a dim, phosphorescent light that seemed to tell of an unearthly presence.

It glimmered out near Bulstrode's bed, now unoccupied.

Harry Wharton's heart was beating hard. But he did not flinch. He stepped forward to reach the door of the dormitory. Earthly or unearthly, the visitor to the dormitory should not leave it unchallenged.

The light glimmered out more strongly.

In the pale, ghostly gleam a face appeared. Bulstrode set his teeth hard to keep back a cry of horror. It was the face of the little Chinese—a face white, startling, ghastly, as from the grave.

Surely that was no living face!

A soft voice was audible in the darkness: "Bulstrode!"

Bulstrode was silent.

The glimmering face moved on towards the unoccupied bed.

"Bulstrode! Wake!"

Still dead silence.

Nugent's heart was in his mouth. Bulstrode's teeth were hard set. Harry Wharton silently opened the door of the dormitory, reached out to the electric switch just outside the door, and pressed it.

Whatever was the secret he would know it. The click of the switch was immediately followed by a blaze of illumination in the Remove dormitory.

Nugent and Bulstrode, dazzled, uttered a simultaneous exclamation. For the moment they could see nothing clearly.

There was another cry in the room—a startled cry.

Wharton jammed the door shut again, and put his back to it.

"Wun Lung!" he shouted.

It was the Chinese!

In the blaze of electric light he was full in the view of the juniors.

There he stood, his almond eyes dilated, moving from one to another of the watchers of the dormitory.

He made a quick spring towards the door, but stopped as he saw Harry Wharton standing there.

Wharton fixed his eyes upon the Chinese junior.

"Wun Lung! The game's up now!"

The Chinese blinked at him in dismay.

There was no doubt that it was Wun Lung, alive and well, and nothing in the nature of a ghost. Already a smile was lurking round the lips of the little Celestial.

"Wun Lung!" muttered Nugent. "Alive!"

Bulstrode gave a cry of rage.

"You young hound! Alive!"

The Chinese grinned at him.

"Me alive, Bulstrode!"

"You—you young beast! You—"

"Me fighten you," said Wun Lung composedly. "What you tinkee? You cuttee off pigtail, Bulstrode—eh?"

"I wasn't going to touch it, you young fool!"

"You sayce cuttee off."

"Yes, but—"

"You lickee Wun Lung—lickee with whippee."

"Yes, I might have guessed that," said Wharton sternly. "It serves you jolly well right what you've gone through, Bulstrode, as far as that goes."

Bulstrode was silent. He felt that that was true; and, indeed, at the present moment there was more of relief than of anger in his breast.

"You young rascal," went on Wharton; "you jumped on the ice, knowing you would go through, and swam away?"

The little Chinese nodded and grinned.

"You swam away under the ice, and came up further down the stream—"

"Among the bul-lushes," murmured Wun Lung. "While Bulstrode lookee at gappee in ice, me lookee at Bulstrode from the bul-lushes."

Dulstrode made a gesture of rage.

All the time, then, that he had been enduring that terror and agony of mind outside the bathhouse, Wun Lung had been watching him and quietly enjoying the scene!

"And why did you not show up afterwards?" demanded Wharton.

"Me tinkee punish Bulstrode. Me pictondee dead—me buzsee off," said Wun Lung cheerfully. "Aftel dalk me sneake in back way—takee glub from study cupboard, and hidde in box-loom."

"You young rascal! You took Bob Cherry's grub, instead of getting tea for us."

"What you tinkee?"

"And didn't you know how much anxiety you were causing?" said Harry severely. "You made the whole school think you were drowned. And then you played ghost—"

"Me puttee. Me wantee tinkee deadee, makee Bulstrode sit up. Punish beasty bully, me tinkee. You savvy?"

"And then you played ghost—"

"What you tinkee?"

"With a little phosphorus," said Harry. "You are a cunning little rascal. It serves Bulstrode right; but what about the rest of us? Didn't you think we should care at all for your being drowned?"

The little Chinese looked comically repentant.

"Me no tinkee."

"You ought to have thought of that. It was a mad trick to play."

"Me fighten beasty bully Bulstrode."

"Yes, you've done that."

"Me wnece up in a week or so," said Wun Lung.

"You young duffer! You were going to keep this game up for a week?" exclaimed Wharton, in surprise.

"What you tinkee?"

"Well, I'm glad you're alive," said Bulstrode. "You ought to have a record licking for playing such a mad trick."

"Velly good tickce."

"What will Mr. Quelch say to it?" said Wharton. "Have you thought of that? The whole school has been upset, and work interrupted, by your fatheaded jape. What explanation are you going to make to the Head?"

Wun Lung looked startled.

"Me no tinkee of that," he said.

"What! You didn't think of that!"

"No tinkee," confessed Wun Lung. "Me only tinkee good japee—punish bully Bulstrode. Me solly."

"My only hat!" said Wharton, surprised by the statement. He had before noticed the curious limitation of the Oriental intellect, which seemed to enable the little Chinese to think only of a matter immediately at hand, without considering the future. "But you'll have to explain, Wun Lung."

"Me tinkee what sayce," said Wun Lung.

"Makee up someting."

Wharton frowned.

"You'll tell the truth, you young duffer."

You—

Wharton was interrupted. The door of the dormitory suddenly opened, and Mr. Quelch, the master of the Remove, strode in.

"What does this mean?" he exclaimed angrily. "I think it is fortunate that I happened to be working late this evening, and saw the reflection of your lighted windows from mine in the Close. What do you mean by lighting up the dormitory at this hour, and being out of bed? What—"

The angry Form-master broke off as he saw Wun Lung.

He gazed at the Celestial for some moments with his eyes almost starting from his head, scarcely able to believe what he saw.

"Wun Lung!" he gasped at last.

"Yes, sil," said Wun Lung meekly.

"Boy! What—what does this mean? You—you are alive?"

"Me tinkee so, sil."

Harry Wharton plunged into bed to disguise a chuckle. He fancied that Wun Lung would be able to take care of himself.

"Wun Lung, you have just returned, I presume, and that is why the light is on in the dormitory. Is that the case, Wharton?"

"Yes, sir."

"Where have you been, Wun Lung?"

"No savvy."

"You have been absent more than a whole day. We believed that you were drowned in the Sark. Have you been in the river?"

"Yes, sil."

The whole Remove were wide awake now, sitting up in bed and staring alternately at the little Chinese and the Form-master. Wun Lung was looking quite calm and meek. He did not seem to be aware of the sensation his return was causing.

"Did you fall in?"

"Yes, sil."

"And went under the ice?"

"Yes, sil."

"But you got out again, evidently. Why have you allowed us to believe that you were drowned all this time?" demanded the Remove-master.

Wun Lung's face assumed an expression of hopeless puzzlement.

"No savvy, sil."

"What! You understand me well enough, boy. You have hidden yourself away all this time, and caused us great anxiety. Why did you do it?"

"No savvy, sil."

"Boy, answer me!"

"Yes, sil."

"Why have you played this outrageous trick?"

"Me no savvy."

Mr. Quelch made an angry gesture.

"Very well, you will answer to the Head in the morning!" he exclaimed. "Go to bed at once now!"

The Chinese turned in, and Mr. Quelch, greatly perplexed, but much relieved in his mind by the safe return of the Chinese, extinguished the light and retired. He went directly to inform the Head of Wun Lung's return before going to bed.

In the Remove dormitory Wun Lung was assailed by a volley of questions. He did not answer one of them. The only reply that came from the little Celestial's bed was a succession of steady snores.

And, after shouting and threatening and hurling boots at him for some time, the Removites gave it up and allowed him to sleep.

Early in the morning the little Chinese was called before the Head. Whether he felt any inward trepidation or not, his manner as he appeared in the doctor's study was calm as of old, and his smile was childlike and bland.

Dr. Locke bent a severe glance upon him. "Wun Lung, you seem to have played an inexplicable trick upon us. You have caused us all to feel the greatest anxiety."

"Me solly."

"Why did you do it?"

Wun Lung rubbed his forehead thoughtfully, and did not reply.

"Have you no explanation to offer?"

"No savvy."

"Come, Wun Lung, you must know your reason for this foolish action."

"No savvy."

"Is it possible, Mr. Quelch, would you think, that his brain was affected by a narrow escape, and that he was not responsible for his actions?" said the Head, aside. "It would certainly seem that he does not understand it himself."

Mr. Quelch pursed his lips.

"It is possible, sir, but not probable. Yet the possibility makes it impossible to use very severe measures to make him explain."

"That is what I think, Wun Lung, I shall reflect upon this matter, and meanwhile I hope you will see the advisability of making a free and full confession. You may go."

And Wun Lung went.

The free and full confession was never made, but Wun Lung was not called up for judgment. It was not easy to deal with the little Oriental as with an English boy; and the Head knew that he would receive no answer from Wun Lung except that he did not "savvy." And it was a long time before the gossip of the school reached the Head and acquainted him with the true explanation of the disappearance of Wun Lung.

THE END.

Next Friday's Grand Long Complete Tale of Harry Wharton & Co. is entitled:

"BULSTRODE'S PREDICAMENT!" By FRANK RICHARDS.

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FOILING THE FUGITIVE!

A Magnificent Long Complete Tale, dealing with the Early Adventures of
Jimmy Silver & Co. at Rookwood School.

By OWEN CONQUEST.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Mr. Manders' Cousin.

"THE beast!"
"The rotter!"
"The low-down Prussian!"
Thus Jimmy Silver, Lovell, Raby, and Newcome, the Fistical Four of Rookwood School.

The lamentations of the Classical chums were loud and forcible.

They were in a very wrathful mood. They had been over to the Modern side for the purpose of ragging their rivals, Tommy Dudd & Co.

On the way they had come into contact with Mr. Manders, the Modern master.

They had certainly been making more noise than was absolutely necessary, with the result that Mr. Manders had come down on them rather more heavily than usual.

The Fistical Four had received two swishes of the cane on each hand, and as the Modern master did not require any instruction in the art of "laying it on," the last quarter of an hour had been a very painful one for Jimmy Silver & Co.

"I wish I was the Head!" remarked Jimmy Silver at length.

"Eh?" exclaimed Lovell in surprise. "What the dickens do you want to be the giddy Head for?"

"And I wish Manders was a boy in the Third," went on Jimmy Silver.

"My hat! What ever for?"

"So that I could get a bit of my own back on the rotter!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver forcibly. "I'd make the boulder sit up! I'd give him lines by the million, and keep him occupied from morning to night, and night to morning—Sundays included!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Lovell & Co.

"If I had my way," continued Jimmy Silver warmly, "he wouldn't be allowed to remain at a decent school like Rookwood. The chap's a Hun—a measly, low-down Prussian!"

"Quite so," agreed Lovell, "and he wants a jolly good bumping!"

"He wants boiling in oil, you mean!" said Jimmy Silver.

"Well, anything like that!" said Lovell firmly. "He's got to be shown that he can't cane Classical fellows whenever he likes. And it's little us who's going to show him the error of his ways."

"Oh, good!"

"The question is, what sort of wheeze are we going to work on the rotter?"

Lovell looked at his chums. Jimmy Silver, Raby, and Newcome looked at Lovell.

"Well?" said Lovell at length.

"Well?" said Jimmy Silver, Newcome, and Raby in one voice.

"Haven't you got a wheeze?" asked Lovell.

"Haven't you?" questioned Jimmy Silver.

"No. I thought you—"

Jimmy Silver grinned.

"I suppose the job will have to be done by Uncle James," he remarked. "Never mind. Uncle James is not a back number yet. Look here! You know Manders always keeps a big fire going in his study."

"Does he?" queried Lovell.

"Didn't you notice it blazing away when we were in his study?" demanded Jimmy Silver.

"I'm afraid I didn't," said Lovell. "I guess I had my eyes on that blessed cane of his."

"Well, it was flaring away for all it was worth!" said Jimmy Silver. "Now, my idea is for one of us to pop into his study and pull down the register."

"What's the register?" asked Newcome innocently.

Jimmy Silver glared.

"Fathead!" he exclaimed. "The register is a thing at the back of the grate that allows the smoke to go up the chimney."

"Well?"

"Supposing the register is pulled down, and the smoke can't go up the chimney?"

"Then it'll come down," said Lovell.

"Of course it will!" said Jimmy Silver rather snappily. "It'll all come into Manders' show, and blacken everything in the room. What's more, it'll send Manders into a blue fit when he enters the smoky room."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Just the thing!" said Lovell.

"Trust your Uncle James in times of emergency!" said Jimmy Silver grandly. "I'm going to buzz along to Manders' study now and work the giddy oracle!"

"You'll want my assistance—" began Lovell.

"Not at all!" said Jimmy Silver, with a wave of the hand. "Too many cooks spoil the jolly broth, you know. Besides, if you come there's more likelihood of Manders spotting one of us, and we don't want another bust up with the old bird."

"Oh, all right!" said Lovell resignedly.

"Buzz off, Jimmy, old son! And mind you do the thing properly!"

Jimmy Silver "buzzed off," with the firm intention of carrying out his scheme in a proper manner.

The leader of the Fistical Four wended his way towards the door which separated the two houses.

He passed through into the Modern house, and was soon in the corridor in which Mr. Manders' study was situated.

Jimmy Silver crept slowly towards the Modern master's room and observed to his satisfaction that the door was ajar.

He listened intently, but not a sound came to his ears from inside the room.

Was Mr. Manders inside his study, or—

Jimmy soon satisfied himself on this point. For, throwing caution to the winds, he popped his head round the side of the door and gazed into the room.

Mr. Manders was not there. A bright fire was burning in the grate, and the electric light was full on, but of the Modern master there was no sign.

Jimmy Silver crept into the study, and was soon standing before the fire.

He reached out, and tugged at the register at the back of the grate.

It did not move.

Jimmy tugged harder, but still without result.

He was just preparing to make a stronger heave than ever when the sound of voices in the corridor could be plainly heard.

"Manders!" gasped Jimmy Silver, recognising one of the voices. "What am I to do?"

Jimmy Silver soon discovered the answer to the question.

It would never do for him to be discovered in the Modern master's study. He must get out of sight—and quickly, too.

The Classical junior glanced round the room, and his gaze fell upon a cupboard let into the wall.

In an instant Jimmy Silver had hopped across the study, and, pulling open the door of the cupboard, stepped inside, and pulled the door close.

Next instant Mr. Manders and his companion entered the room. The latter Jimmy Silver did not see, but his voice could be plainly heard.

It was a deep, growling voice, and Jimmy Silver did not like the tone of it at all.

"You must save me, Herbert—you simply must!" urged the stranger. "Remember, you are my blood relation. Surely you would not like to see me, your cousin, sent to gaol—to spend years of my life herded amongst a lot of common criminals!"

Mr. Manders stared hard at his cousin.

"It's exactly what you deserve, Walter!"

he said harshly. "You've committed theft, you've robbed your employers of two hundred pounds—"

"A hundred and eighty," corrected Walter Manders.

"Well, a hundred and eighty, then!" said the Modern master. "You've taken money which is not yours, you've stooped to the depths of a low-down criminal, and now you come to me for help!"

"You're my cousin—my blood relation."

"I know I am, much to my regret," said Mr. Manders coldly. "You always were a bad lot, Walter. I remember when we were at school together how you endeavoured to get me expelled for an act you committed!"

Mr. Manders' cousin emitted a coarse laugh.

"I reckon that was very cleverly done, Herbert!" he said gloatingly. "But there, that's a thing of the past, and I always like to let the past bury itself. My present trouble is different, and—"

"You are right, Walter," broke in the master, "and you have only yourself to blame for it. You've committed an act of blackguardism, and you must suffer for it. You've disgraced the family name, and—"

"Not yet, Herbert!" broke in the other.

"What do you mean?"

"The family name has not yet been mentioned," explained Walter Manders. "It may never be mentioned unless—the police get on my track, and I am brought up in the police-court."

"Which you will most certainly be!" said the master. "No doubt by now your employers have put the matter in the hands of the police, and that means—"

"That I have got to clear out of this district as soon as possible," concluded the fugitive.

"Yes!" snapped the Modern master. "And the sooner you're gone the better. If the police follow you here there will be trouble—trouble that will revert on my shoulders. The name of the school will be blackened if you are taken here. Even my position will be at stake. I may be discharged—"

"You can prevent it."

"How?"

"By doing what I ask," said the fugitive.

"Give me—lend me twenty pounds. With that sum of money I could get out of the country, and—and no one need know where I have gone. Your name will be kept clear, and for all intents and purposes I shall be dead."

"But I haven't twenty pounds to give you," exclaimed Mr. Manders, pacing up and down his study. "Where do you think I am going to get such a sum of money from? I'm not a millionaire, Walter."

"You don't need to be a millionaire to have twenty pounds," said Mr. Manders' cousin craftily. "It is really a small sum of money, and a man in your position—"

"Nonsense!" cried the Modern master. "You know very well, Walter, my salary is quite a meagre one. I spend every penny I earn and—"

"You won't help me, then?"

"I can't!"

"Very well," said the fugitive, with a downcast air, "you will have to take the consequences. If I am caught by the police I shall be tried for theft, and—and then your name will be brought into the case. You will be disgraced as well, and it will be your own fault."

"I must risk that."

The fugitive moved towards the door.

"Good-bye, Herbert!" he said. "I shall be nabbed in the end; there is no doubt about that. But for the present I intend to hide—to hide in a railway-truck in the goods siding at Latcham. Should you repent, you will know where to find me. I shall stay there until—well, until the goods-truck is moved,

I shall be carried with it, no matter where it is going. Maybe it will go to London. I shall try and make my escape. But what can a penniless man do? Surely, Herbert, you will—"

The Modern master made an impatient gesture.

"For Heaven's sake, Walter, drop the subject!" he exclaimed harshly. "I can't help you! I simply can't! You have stooped to crime; therefore you must take the consequences!"

"Ah! You will be sorry, Herbert," said the fugitive. "You will regret the day you refused me help and succour. I shall suffer, but you—you shall suffer far more than I!"

Slam!
The door of the Modern master's study closed with a bang, and the fugitive was gone.

Jimmy Silver remained in his place of hiding, fearful of making a sound lest Mr. Manders should discover his presence.

The Classical junior could plainly hear the Modern master pacing up and down the study, muttering occasionally beneath his breath.

Jimmy wondered how much longer he would have to remain in the cupboard. Supposing Mr. Manders did not leave his study until bed-time?

Jimmy Silver's fears were short-lived, however.

After a few minutes Mr. Manders turned out the light in his study and took his departure.

Jimmy Silver emerged from his place of hiding, and listened intently to the sound of the master's retreating footsteps.

Then he, too, left the study.

He had forgotten all about the intended jape on the Modern master. His mind was full of the conversation which had taken place between the two cousins.

Unwillingly he had become acquainted with Mr. Manders' secret; but the secret was perfectly safe with the leader of the Fiscal Four.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Jimmy Silver's Triumph!

JIMMY SILVER entered the end study at Rookwood.

"Well?" asked Lovell, looking up from a book he was reading.

Jimmy Silver did not answer. He walked straight to the easy-chair by the fire and sat down.

"Well, I'm bowled!" exclaimed Arthur Edward Lovell, in considerable surprise.

"What's the matter, Jimmy?" asked Newcome. "Wouldn't the giddy wheeze work?"

"Eh?"

Jimmy Silver looked up.

"Why, the chap's gone potty!" remarked Lovell. "Where have you been all this time, Jimmy?"

"Out!" replied Jimmy Silver rather curtly.

"Of course you've been out!" replied Lovell. "I know that! You went to pull that blessed register down in Manders' grate. How did it work?"

"It didn't work."

Lovell gave his chum a wrathful glare.

"You don't mean to say Manders caught you in the act?"

"No."

"Well, what the dickens have you been doing all this time?"

"You might pass me that copy of the 'Magnet,'" said Jimmy Silver, pointing towards the table and ignoring Lovell's question.

Lovell passed the copy, and Jimmy Silver started to read.

Newcome tapped his head significantly.

"Potty!" he exclaimed.

"Absolutely!" agreed Lovell and Raby.

"We shall have to have the state of his mind inquired into," said Newcome. "We can't have him going off his nut like this, Jimmy, you ass! What's the matter?"

Jimmy Silver did not reply. His eyes were glued on the book before him.

At length Lovell & Co. gave it up in disgust, and turned to their prep, thoroughly convinced that there was something wrong with the state of Jimmy Silver's mind.

It was getting very near bed-time when the door of the end study was thrown open in an unceremonious manner, and in strode Townsend and Topham, the nuts of the Fourth.

"Hallo! What the dickens do you silly asses want?" demanded Lovell wrathfully.

"Haven't you heard the news?" asked Topham.

"What news?"

"Why," explained Topham eagerly, "old P.-c. Boggs has come to arrest Manders! He's committed some frightful crime or other, and—"

"What's that?" exclaimed Jimmy Silver, jumping up quickly from his chair.

"Sit down, Jimmy, old son," urged Lovell blandly. "Don't excite yourself. You know your mind's a bit unhinged, and—"

"Oh, rats!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver impatiently. "I'm all right, only—"

"Only not quite," concluded Lovell, with a laugh.

"What's this about Manders?" asked Jimmy Silver, turning to the two nuts.

"He's going to be arrested," explained Topham quickly. "P.-c. Boggs has just gone in to see the Head. It appears that Manders has knocked down and robbed old Squire Heath. Boggs says he took about a hundred quid. Boggs is a frightful exaggerator, and I don't suppose the old johnnie had more than ten quid on him."

"And Manders has been accused of robbing him?" asked Jimmy Silver eagerly.

"Yes," said Townsend, with a drawl. "It's jolly funny, though. I knew old Manders

theft?" he asked. "What sort of a clue did they have?"

"Can't tell you that," said Townsend. "All I know is that P.-c. Boggs has come to take old Manders in charge, and I guess that by now he's marching him to the lock-up."

"What a silly fool that chap Boggs is," remarked Jimmy Silver quietly. "Trust him for nailing the wrong party."

"There he goes again," laughed Lovell hilariously. "It's marvellous the implicit faith he's got in human nature."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, rats!" snorted Jimmy Silver savagely. "I'm going to look into this!"

Jimmy Silver left the end study, and made his way downstairs to the Hall, followed by his chums, and several other fellows.

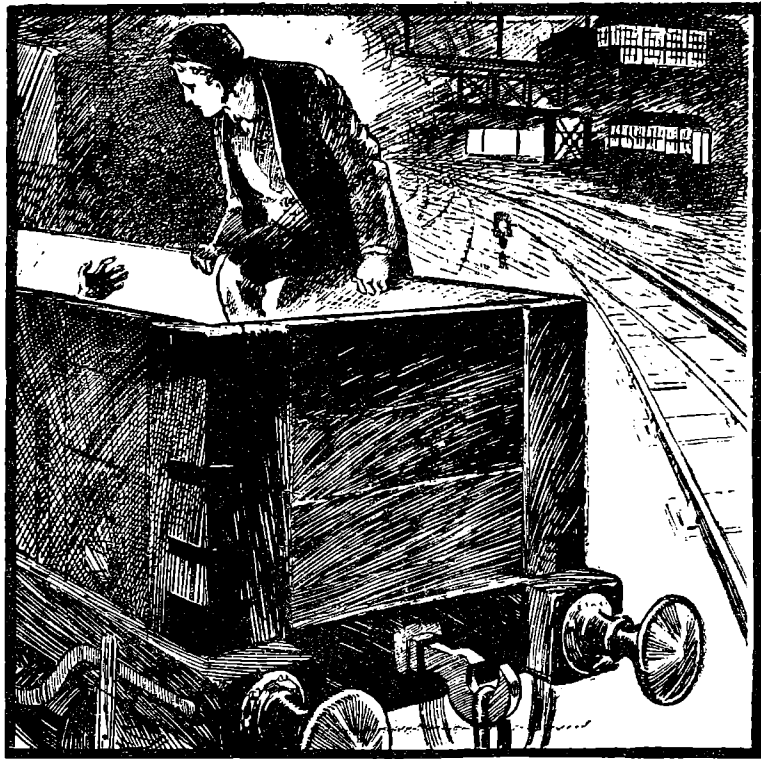
Jimmy Silver arrived in the Hall, to find a crowd of juniors waiting there.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver, in surprise. "What are you kids doing here?"

"Waiting to see old Manders carted to the lock-up," said Selwyn of the Shell.

"You've heard the yarn then?"

"What-ho!" cried Selwyn. "Best news we've had for a long time. I always did think old Manders was a bit of a dark horse."



Jimmy Silver hauled himself to the top of the truck, and at the same instant he caught sight of a hand raised in the darkness.

was a bit of a rotter, but I never guessed he could do anything like that."

"He didn't do it!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver confidently.

"Who says he didn't?"

"I do!"

"But you know nothing about it!" protested Townsend. "You hadn't heard about the affair until I told you. How can you possibly know that Manders isn't guilty?"

"I'm sure he isn't!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Lovell. "Just like old Jimmy! He always likes to be different to everybody else!"

"Not at all," said Jimmy Silver mildly. "But, all the same, I'm confident that Manders is innocent. He's a beastly outsider, but he's not a thief."

"That's all rot!" drawled Townsend. "If the police hadn't got jolly good proof that he's the guilty party, they wouldn't take the trouble to arrest him."

"The police make mistakes sometimes."

"Nonsense!"

Jimmy Silver knitted his brows.

"How do you know Manders committed the

Fancy him having the nerve to rob a chap of a hundred quid!"

"Don't talk piffle!" snapped Jimmy Silver.

"It ain't piffle!" said Selwyn resentfully.

"It's the solemn truth, and I'm jolly glad to hear it!"

"Yaas, I must say I don't feel at all sorry," drawled Adolphus Smythe. "Only yesterday Manders had the sauce to gane me—me, mind you!"

"Serve you jolly well right!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver fiercely. "I expect you deserved it. If you will act like a shady young rotter, you must put up with the consequences!"

"Hallo, here comes Bulkeley!"

At that moment, the captain of Rookwood came up. There was a stern, serious look on his face.

"Clear off to bed, you kids!" he exclaimed. Smythe looked at his watch.

"It isn't time yet, Bulkeley," he said.

"Another quarter of an hour before—"

"I told you to get to bed!" exclaimed Bulkeley. "Do as you're told, and don't argue!"

"But—"
 "I'll fetch a cane to you in a minute," said the captain of Rookwood. "Head's orders, and they've got to be obeyed."
 Jimmy Silver walked towards the senior.
 "I say, Bulkeley—" he began.
 Bulkeley gave him a severe look.
 "Don't start arguing, Silver," he said firmly. "It's your duty to set the Form an example. The Head says you've got to go to bed, and that's an end of it. Now then, clear off!"
 Jimmy Silver smiled.

"All serene, Bulkeley, old man," he said, and then strode towards the dandy of the Shell, who had made no move to obey the captain's command.

"Come on, Smythe!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver, gripping the dandy's ear. "You've got to learn to do as you're told!"
 "Ow! Yow! Leggo my ear!" yelled Adolphus Smythe.

"Kim on, old son!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver, and the struggling dandy was dragged willy-nilly up the stairs.

At the same moment, Mr. Bootles, the Classical master, appeared on the scene.

His presence was sufficient warning to the juniors that it was time they made themselves scarce, and in less than a minute they were all scuttling up the stairs.

Jimmy Silver and his chums halted on the passage that overlooked the hall below, and looked down.

At the same moment, the form of Mr. Manders, in charge of P.-c. Boggs and another constable, could be plainly seen making towards the door.

Mr. Manders held his head low, and the juniors noticed that his face bore a pale, worn expression.

"Poor fellow!" said Lovell sympathetically. "He looks knocked to the wide. I wonder whatever made him do it."

Jimmy Silver turned round quickly.
 "Haven't I told you he didn't do it?" he exclaimed hotly.

"What-ho!" exclaimed Lovell. "And we don't want you to tell us again. You're dead of the mark this time, Jimmy."

"I tell you—"
 "Silver!"
 Jimmy Silver jumped as the voice of Bulkeley came from behind.

"Sorry, Bulkeley, old man," said Jimmy Silver quickly. "We're just going along. We'll be in bed in a couple of shakes. Honest Injun!"

"You'd better," said Bulkeley. "And no larks, mind!"

Jimmy Silver moved towards the captain of the school.

"I say, Bulkeley," he said softly, "I wish you'd tell us what all the shindy's about. Some beastly rotters are saying that Manders has been arrested for theft."

Bulkeley nodded his head gravely.

"I'm sorry to say, Silver, that it's true," said the captain. "There doesn't seem to be much doubt about it, either. Squire Heath was robbed of twenty pounds in the lane about a couple of hours ago, and a letter of Mr. Manders' was found by the side of him."
 "Pshaw!"

"I don't know what to think about it, myself," said Bulkeley seriously. "Mr. Manders came in just after the attack, and there is no doubt that he had been struggling with somebody. The letter, too, leaves little doubt but what he is the guilty party."

"Manders is no more guilty than you are, Bulkeley, old son," said Jimmy Silver firmly.
 "How do you know?"

"And what's more, I know who the guilty party is!"

"You do. But who—"
 "Ta-ta, Bulkeley," said Jimmy Silver, with a laugh. "We'll be in bed in less than five minutes. Come on, you fellows!"

Jimmy Silver darted off, dragging his chums with him, leaving the astonished prefect gazing after him in amazement.

The Fistical Four strode along towards the Classical dormitory.

They pulled up short outside the door.
 "Look here, Jimmy, old son," said Lovell admonishingly. "We want to know what you're driving at, and, what's more, we're going to find out. Now then, out with it!"

Jimmy Silver drew his chums closer towards him.

"Are you chaps game for a little expedition after 'light's out'?" he asked.

"What's the wheeze?"

"Would you like to prevent a grave miscarriage of justice?"

"What are you driving at?"

"Supposing Manders is innocent," said

Jimmy Silver, "would you like to lend a hand in proving his innocence?"

"But he's guilty!" protested Lovell.

"He's not guilty!" declared Jimmy Silver firmly. "But if you're not keen on the idea I'll go over and see Tommy Dodd & Co."

"Oh, we're keen," said Lovell promptly.

"But, look here, if Manders is not guilty, who is?"

"I'll tell you," explained Jimmy Silver. And he proceeded to tell his chums of the conversation he had accidentally overheard in Mr. Manders' study that afternoon.

"Pshaw!" gasped Lovell. "What a rotter the chap must be!"

"Quite so. A rotter like that would stop at nothing, not even to robbing the giddy squire!"

"You think he did it, then?"

"What-ho!"

"Well, it's our business to run him down," said Lovell enthusiastically. "You think then that he'll try to get to London in a goods waggon?"

"Pretty sure," said Jimmy Silver. "Even though he's got the squire's quidlets, I don't suppose he'll run the risk of travelling openly by train."

"He'd be a fool if he did!"

"Of course," said Jimmy Silver. "Now, let's get into bed. Bulkeley will be along soon to see lights out."

Without further ado, the Fistical Four entered the Classical dormitory, and in less than five minutes they were in bed, and apparently fast asleep.

An hour later Jimmy Silver sat up in bed.

"You fellows awake?" he asked.

"What-ho!" replied Lovell & Co.

"Well, buck up, then," answered Jimmy Silver, beginning to slip on his trousers.

The Fistical Four were very quiet, but very quick, in their movements, and in less than five minutes they were outside the dormitory, and making their way towards a box-room window, through which they intended to make their escape from the school.

Another five minutes found the juniors outside the school, and running for all they were worth in the direction of Latcham.

It was a good distance, and the Fistical Four were compelled to stop several times to take breath.

At length, however, they came in sight of the station.

They worked round towards the siding, creeping stealthily along in order to keep their presence secret.

Most of the railway servants had gone home for the night, but Jimmy Silver caught sight of two men, evidently porters, in conversation some distance ahead.

"Look here," he said, in a whisper, "you fellows had better stay here while I have a look round. We don't want to rouse suspicions. If I come across the giddy thief, I'll whistle, and you chaps had better buzz along for all you're worth."

"Right-ho, Jimmy, old son," said Lovell.

"Buck up, then!"

Jimmy Silver wended his way in the direction of a line of goods waggons.

There were quite twenty or thirty of them, and, of course, he had no idea in which one the fugitive would be likely to be lurking.

The leader of the Fistical Four was very quiet in his movements. He crept slowly from one truck to another, listening intently for any sound of movement inside.

It seemed that his efforts to clear Mr. Manders were doomed to failure.

He passed along the line of trucks, until at length he came to the last one.

He stopped, and put his ear close to the side of the truck.

Next instant the sound of a match being struck could be faintly heard, and Jimmy Silver's heart beat quickly at the thought that the fugitive from justice might be hiding in the truck.

In another moment the junior had hauled himself to the top of the truck. At the same instant Jimmy caught sight of a hand raised in the darkness.

Then Jimmy Silver let forth a piercing whistle, and immediately the occupant of the truck made a clutch at Jimmy Silver's leg.

But Jimmy Silver was ready for the man. He threw himself upon the prone figure, and grappled with him in the darkness.

"Come on, you fellows!" exclaimed the Classical junior excitedly, as he heard his chums' footsteps down below.

"Coming!" sang out Lovell; and a moment later he was in the truck beside Jimmy Silver, grappling with the fugitive from justice.

"How are we going to get the rotter out of here?" asked Lovell.

"Newcome had better go and fetch a porter or two," said Jimmy Silver. "Newcome, old scout, buzz along to the station and fetch a couple of porters!"

"Right-ho!" shouted Newcome, and he tore off in quest of the porters.

In less than five minutes he returned with two burly men, and between them they managed to secure the rascal securely.

"And now to get to the police-station, and clear old Manders," said Jimmy Silver excitedly. "This is the chap who robbed the giddy squire."

"I didn't!" exclaimed the fugitive. "It was—"
 "Shut up, you beastly outsider!" cried Jimmy Silver. "You can spin your yarn to the police. I bet they won't believe it any more than I do!"

"I tell you—"

"Oh, shut up, do," roared Jimmy Silver impatiently, "and get a move on! We don't want to be out here all night!"

And Walter Manders got a move on with a vengeance. The Classical juniors, assisted by the two porters, dragged the unwilling captive to the police-station at Coombe.

P.-c. Boggs was about to retire for the night when the juniors and their captive entered the station.

"What is the meaning of this?" he asked angrily.

Jimmy Silver explained. He told P.-c. Boggs of his suspicions, and of their quest for the fugitive.

"Werry well," said Mr. Boggs. "we shall have to search the feller, and if 'e's got the notes on him, there won't be much doubt as to 'is being the guilty party."

In his usual official manner, P.-c. Boggs carried out the search, and when he found eighteen one-pound notes in the captive's pockets, he whistled with amazement.

"Well, I'm blowed!" he gasped.

"Good enough, isn't it?" asked Jimmy Silver.

"Well, I should say so, Master Silver," said the man in blue. "But it's impossible for your master to be released to-night. The superintendent will have to go into the matter, and he won't be here until the morning."

"Right-ho," said Jimmy Silver. "Mind you let him go early. We don't care much for old Manders, but, all the same, we don't like the idea of his staying here longer than is necessary."

"You can trust me, Master Silver," said P.-c. Boggs grandly.

"Come on, you fellows," said Jimmy Silver. "It's time we got back to the school. We shall miss our beauty sleep if we're not careful."

Feeling thoroughly pleased with themselves, and excited over their midnight adventure, the Fistical Four trooped back to Rookwood.

The next morning Mr. Manders arrived back at the school. He was looking very white and anxious, but after a brief interview with the Head he brightened up considerably.

The fact was, Mr. Manders was very much afraid the Head would disapprove of his staying at the school on account of his cousin being a criminal.

Mr. Manders explained how his cousin had come to him for help, and how he had refused it. He also told the Head that he had been returning from Coombe a little later, when he had again come in contact with his cousin. He suspected his cousin had performed some rascally deed, and had had a severe struggle with him, in which the fugitive had escaped.

He could not, however, account for a letter of his being found by the side of the squire. His cousin must have taken it from his study table during their stormy interview.

The Head listened to the master's explanation, took a cheerful view of the matter, and assured Mr. Manders that the affair would make no difference to his position at the school.

It was with a happy look on his face that Mr. Manders, a little later, thanked the Fistical Four for the part they had played in foiling the fugitive!

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TOM MERRY'S DISCOVERY!

BY
MARTIN
CLIFFORD

THE FIRST CHAPTER. A Sudden Surprise.

IT was a glorious afternoon. The St. Jim's Scouts were in great spirits.

Tom Merry called a halt in a deep green glade in the wood near St. Jim's. "Now, you fellows know the programme," he said. "Gussy and I have got to have five minutes' start, and then you track us down. If we keep out of your hands and get back to St. Jim's, you're beaten. Remember that we are giddy foreign spies, scouting in advance of an invading army, and do your best."

"Yaas, wathah, deah boys! And wemembah the motto of the Boy Scouts: 'Be prepared—'"

"Oh, you won't get through!" said Jack Blake confidently. "We shall have to fix up something else after this. We shall lay you by the heels in ten minutes after the start."

"Weally, Blake—"

Tom Merry laughed. "I don't think you will," he remarked. "We shall give you plenty to do all the afternoon, I think, and when you get back to St. Jim's you'll find us having tea in the study."

"Rats!" said Blake promptly. "The contest closes at five o'clock," continued Tom Merry. "If you haven't caught us by then, you go back to the school. But if you see us outside the school gates we're still liable to capture. That clear?"

"Clear as mud!" said Monty Lowther genially.

"Ready, Gussy?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Come on, then!"

And Tom Merry and D'Arcy disappeared into the wood.

Figgins took out a big silver watch to time the start. Two or three other fellows took out watches. Fatty Wynn of the Fourth took out a packet of sandwiches. Meanwhile, the two "hares" plunged into the depths of the wood.

"Pway be careful not to leave any twacks, Tom Mewwy, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus, as Tom pushed through a clinging mass of brambles.

"Ass!" said Tom Merry. "You've left two big hoofmarks here! Look!"

"Bai Jove! I didn't observe that the ground was so soft!"

"Use your eyes!" said his leader severely.

"Now, follow me."

Tom Merry flung himself into the lower branches of a big tree. Arthur Augustus fastened his eyeglass in his eye and looked after him in surprise.

"Bai Jove! There's no time for playin' twacks now, Tom Mewwy!" he expostulated.

"Ass! Follow me!"

"What for?"

"We're going this way for a bit, to puzzle the pack."

"Bai Jove! It will be howwidly wuff on our clothes!" said Arthur Augustus, in dismay. "And those bwnanches are vevy dirty to take hold of."

"I see you've forgotten your kid gloves," said the Chief Scout sarcastically. "Don't you remember the motto—'Be prepared?'"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"If you stand there talking much longer, the pack will be on the back of your neck," said the Shell fellow pleasantly. "The time's up now, and they've started."

Arthur Augustus sighed. His Boy Scout costume was a picture to behold—so clean



and neat and elegant it was. But evidently it had to be sacrificed; and D'Arcy, remembering that he was training himself to defend his native land some day, heroically nerved himself for the sacrifice. With his eyeglass fluttering loose at the end of its cord, he swung himself into the tree.

Tom Merry worked along the branch, where it penetrated the branches of the next tree, and swung himself from one to the other. The trees grew very thickly in this part of the wood, and progress was easy for an active lad with plenty of nerve.

Tom Merry had plenty of nerve; and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy feared nothing but soiling his hands. But suddenly Tom Merry found that his companion was stopping behind.

He turned his head and peered through the foliage. He could see an elegant leg among the leaves; but that was all that was visible of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Why don't you come on?" he called out, in a suppressed voice.

"I'm caught, deah boy."

"Caught! What's the matter?"

"My beastly monocle has caught in the bwnanches!"

"Jerk it."

"If I bweak the stwing the glass will be lost."

"Lose it, then, fathead! What does it matter?"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Buck up, you chump! The pack are looking for us now!"

"Pway wait a minute!"

Tom Merry breathed hard through his nose.

"You fearful ass!" he murmured.

"I wufuse to be called a fealful ass, Tom Mewwy!"

"Will you come on?"

"Yaas, when I've welaesed my cyeglass."

"Don't jaw; they may hear your voice."

"Vevy well, deah boy. I won't say a word. Undah the circs, it would be more prudent not to speak to one anothah, deah boy. Don't you think so?" asked Arthur Augustus innocently, as he struggled with his refractory monocle.

"You chump! What are you doing now?"

"Extwactin' my cyeglass."

"Will you come on?"

"Pway don't call out like that, Tom Mewwy. It would be much more cautious not to uttah a word. I think we had bettah keep our mouths shut, deah boy, as sound twavels vevy fah in the open air, you know, and they may heah us: It would be

aw'fily wotten to be caught in the first quartah of an hour, deah boy. I think—"

"Shut up!" breathed Tom Merry.

"Certainly, deah boy! That's what I'm wecommendin'," said Arthur Augustus, in surprise. "I considah—"

"You awful ass! Keep your silly head shut, and come on! We're going to make for the Poacher's Glade first, and lie low for a bit till they're quite off the track. Shut up, and come on!"

The juniors worked their way along the thick, heavy branches. D'Arcy had put his eyeglass in his pocket now, so he was not caught again by the string, and the two scouts made good progress.

Tom Merry dropped to the ground at last, in a track that wound through the heart of the wood. They pressed on fast, treading lightly in order to leave no tall-tale tracks for the pack to pick up.

Deep in the heart of the wood was a deep depression of ground which was called the Poacher's Glade. There was a story that a poacher had been shot there upon some occasion, and superstitious people in the vicinity had fancied that his shade had been seen revisiting the glimpses of the moon in the spot where he had met his death.

But the juniors did not trouble their heads about the ghost story. The two scouts pressed into the glade, down the steep declivity clothed with young trees and thick bushes.

Tom Merry knew the wood like a book. He paused at a spot where heavy thickets clothed an abrupt rise in the ground.

The acclivity was at least fifty feet, and almost as steep as the wall of a house. Tom Merry seemed to be scanning the thickets for a passage through, and Arthur Augustus tapped him on the arm.

"You can't get through theah, deah boy," he said.

"Why not?"

"The ground wises on the othah side. It's a wewulah hill."

Tom Merry snorted.

"I know that, ass! There's a hollow there like a cave. I found it by accident one day, and I remember it's close here somewhere. Hark!"

A sudden sound came through the wood, close at hand in the thick trees. It was a low, musical whistle—evidently a signal.

Tom Merry and D'Arcy looked at one another in surprise.

"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus. "That doesn't sound like one of the fellows. I've nowah heard that whistle before."

"It was a signal."

"Yaas, but—"

"Might be other scouts praetisin' here," said Tom Merry. "Might be the Granular School bouncers. Anyway, they won't find us. Here's the cave."

He drew aside a heavy mass of foliage, and a dark opening in the hillside was revealed. There was a slight sound behind the bushes, and D'Arcy uttered an exclamation.

"There's somebody in there, Tom Mewwy."

"Only a rabbit or a stoat."

Tom Merry plunged in through the thicket, and D'Arcy followed him. The great mass of foliage fell back into its place, and completely concealed their retreat.

It would have been difficult for any searcher to guess that anybody had passed through that mass of vegetation into the apparently impenetrable hillside.

It was very dim in the hollow under the hill, and to the juniors, fresh from the daylight, it seemed densely black.

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Tom Merry stumbled over a trailing root, and fell forward on his hands and knees.

As he did so a hand gripped his collar from the darkness, and the junior, with a sudden start, and a thrill like ice in his veins, felt a keen steel point against his neck, and a voice, soft and low and hissing, muttered in his ear in some strange tongue he did not understand:

"Silenzio o la morte!"

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

An Amazing Encounter.

"SILENZIO!"

The word was hissed again, and the sharp point penetrated a fraction of an inch into Tom Merry's skin. The junior did not attempt to rise. The grip that was upon him was like iron, and the knife was at his throat; and although he did not understand the words that were spoken, he understood what they implied.

He remained quite still.

D'Arcy came stumbling after him into the cave.

Then the grasp upon Tom Merry was relaxed as his unknown assailant saw that he had two to deal with.

"Bai Jove!"

A dark figure leaped up, and Arthur Augustus was grasped and hurled into the cave. He stumbled against the damp earthen wall.

Tom Merry leaped to his feet.

The dark figure was between the two juniors and the narrow opening of the earthen cave. In the dim light they vaguely saw a powerfully-built man with a swarthy face—swarthy but strangely pale.

His eyes seemed to burn in their sockets; and they saw, with shudders, that there was a streak of red across his cheek—a stain of blood. There was a glimmer of steel in his right hand, and the hand was raised in menace.

The man was evidently a foreigner—a Spaniard or Italian. And the two amazed juniors, utterly astounded as they were, recovered confidence a little as they saw that the man was in a state of greater fear than they could be.

As he stood, barring them from the entrance with uplifted weapon, his head was thrown back, and he was listening with painful intensity for some sound from the wood.

"Look here—" began Tom Merry.

The foreigner made a fierce gesture.

"Silenzio, sotto pena della vita!"

"Bai Jove!" muttered Arthur Augustus.

The juniors were silent.

It was easy enough to guess what "silenzio" meant. It was still easier to read the threat of the shining steel in the dusky, upraised hand.

From the wood came a low, penetrating sound—that soft, clear whistle which the juniors had heard while they were outside the hidden cave.

At the sound of it the Italian's face blanched yet whiter, and the hand that held the knife trembled.

"Silenzio!" he murmured, but his voice now was shaken, and more pleading than threatening in its tone.

The juniors stood mute. They were lost in wonder.

Tom Merry had expected to find the hidden cave in the hillside untenanted, unless, indeed, by some animal of the wood. He was utterly astounded at this encounter.

Foreigners were not common in the quiet neighbourhood of Rylcombe, and to find a foreigner, evidently wounded, armed with a deadly weapon and in a state of mortal fear—that was a surprise the juniors could not easily recover from. They stood and stared at the Italian in blank wonder.

The man was evidently being searched for by enemies. That was the meaning of the signal whistle. Who were they? Who was he? What did it all mean? What tragic mystery had the two Boy Scouts suddenly stumbled upon?

"Silenzio! Silenzio, ragazzi!"

There was a sound of footsteps in the glade outside the cave, a brushing of the thickets, a murmur of indistinguishable voices.

Closer the voices came.

The Italian lowered his upraised hand. He bent his head towards the juniors, and pointed to the screen of thickets.

"Silenzio, signorini. Sono morto se trovato."

The juniors could not understand the words, but they were in no doubt as to what the man meant. And, in spite of the rough reception he had given them, they did not feel hostile towards him. A man in fear of

his life could be excused for a little roughness. And the man clearly was in fear for his life.

The voices came nearer. The juniors were silent save for their hurried breathing. The Italian seemed hardly to breathe. Every nerve in his body seemed to be bent upon listening.

The voices could be heard now, speaking in a tongue the juniors could not understand, but which was evidently quite clear to the ears of their strange companion:

"Non e qui."

"E sicuro?"

"Per bacco! Ho cercato, Pietro—non e qui; andiamo."

"Andiamo!" responded the second voice.

And the footsteps passed on.

The sounds died away in the glade. The Italian maintained the same attitude till every sound was still. Then he drew a deep breath, or, rather, a sob. The knife was trembling in his hand.

"They're gone whoever they are," said Tom Merry.

The man started. It seemed as if, in his mortal terror, he had forgotten the presence of the juniors. He fixed his fierce black eyes upon them now.

"Siete soli qui?" he demanded.

"I don't understand you."

"Bai Jove! He's speakin' in Italian," said Arthur Augustus. "I know some words of Italian twom singin' songs in it, you know. Pewwaps I can pitch it to him in his own lingo."

"Try," said Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wathah! Questi e quella per me pari sono," said Arthur Augustus cheerfully to the Italian.



Tom Merry turned his head and peered back through the foliage. He could see an elegant leg among the leaves, but that was all. "Why don't you come on?" he called out. "I'm caught, deah boy!" replied D'Arcy.

The man stared, as well he might. D'Arcy's words were the first line of an operatic solo, and they meant "This and that one are the same to me." But they were Italian, at all events, and the best that D'Arcy could do under the circumstances.

"Non capisco," muttered the man.

"Bai Jove! The chap doesn't undahstand his own language!" said Arthur Augustus, in surprise.

"Don't you speak English?" asked Tom Merry.

"Speak little English," said the man, with evident difficulty. "English spoken—yes. Me Italian. Me Marco Frulo."

"Marco Frulo!" repeated Tom Merry. "What are you doing here?"

The Italian waved his hand towards the screen of thickets before the cave.

"I nemici!" he said.

"That means enemies," said Arthur Augustus. "He means that he's got enemies who are looking for him."

"Yes, so it seems," said Tom Merry. "But I'm blessed if I understand it. I don't see why he can't apply to the police for protection!"

The man heard the words, and shrugged his broad shoulders.

"Non sarebbe—what you say—no good," he replied. "Non capite—you no understand."

"No, I'm blessed if I do!" said Tom Merry.

"Are you going to stay here?" Marco Frulo nodded.

"Have you got anything to eat?"

"No."

"How long are you going to stay?"

"Non so."

"What on earth does that mean?" said Tom Merry, puzzled.

"He means he doesn't know," said D'Arcy. "Ah, but you can't stay here without food!" said Tom Merry. "You'd better go to the police."

"Non puo restare qui senza mangiare," said D'Arcy, grinding out Italian with as much difficulty as Marco Frulo found with the English. "You can't stay here without somethin' to eat!"

Frulo shrugged his shoulders again. Evidently hunger had no terrors for him in comparison with the mysterious "nemici," who were seeking him in the recesses of Rylcombe Wood.

"Shall I go to the police for you, and tell them how you're fixed?" asked Tom Merry.

Frulo shook his head energetically.

"No, no, signor! Ecco! Go way vizz yourself and say nozzing—zat is all zat I ask of you. You do zat, or it is zat I— He touched the knife in his vest.

Tom Merry looked at him sternly.

"You needn't threaten us," he said. "We're not afraid of your knife."

"Wathah not!"

"Knife or no knife, you wouldn't find it easy to handle the two of us!" said Tom Merry, grasping his staff. "But if you're an honest man we don't want to do you any harm. If you choose to stay here in hiding, I suppose it's your own business, and we'll say nothing about having seen you."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"You say nozzing?"

"Yes."

"Grazie, signorini, grazie—fanto grazie!"

"That means many thanks, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus, with the gentle smile of superior knowledge. "It's all wight, my man. We'll keep mum."

"Zen you go?"

"Yaas, we're goin'."

"Buono, and say nozzing—nozzing!"

"Nothing!" said Tom Merry.

The juniors moved towards the screen of thickets at the mouth of the cave. Then Tom Merry turned back. In the pallid, troubled face of the Italian, he thought he could read that the man had suffered, and his impression of him was that he was an honest man.

"Have you been here long?" he asked.

"Non capisco?"

"Have you been here a long time—how many hours?"

"Ah! Venti ore!"

"Twenty hours!" said D'Arcy.

"Have you had nothing to eat?"

"Niente!" said Marco Frulo, with a shake of the head.

Tom Merry drew a packet of sandwiches from his wallet. The man's eyes fastened upon them with a hungry gleam. Tom Merry held them out to him, and he seized upon them with avidity, and devoured them with evident hunger.

"Grazie, grazie!" he murmured.

"I wish I had some more to give you," said Tom Merry pityingly. "Look here, are you going to stay here to-night?"

"Si, signor!"

"And to-morrow?"

"Si, signor!"

"But you'll starve?"

"No morri di fame—I not die of ze hunger," said Marco Frulo.

"By Jove! Look here, you can't stay here without any grub," said Tom Merry uneasily. "What do you say, Gussy?"

"It would be vevy wuff, deah boy," said D'Arcy sympathetically.

"He looks to me like an honest man," said Tom Merry, in a low voice. "The men looking for him weren't police, anyway. If he had done anything against the law, it wouldn't be Italians who would be looking for him, but English bobbies. I dare say it's some row—some giddy vendetta, you know—they go in for that kind of thing in Italy. If the poor beast is going to stick here over to-morrow, he ought to have something to eat. It's up to the Boy Scouts to help strangers in distress."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Would you like me to bring you some food?" asked Tom Merry.

The Italian grinned.

"The signorini is good—much good," he said.

"But non possible—if zey see him zen he come—"

"They won't see me," said Tom Merry. "Look here, I'll come back after dark and bring you some tommy."

"Che cosa e tommy?" asked the Italian, puzzled by that word.

Tom Merry laughed. "I mean food—something to eat."

"Qualcheosa per mangiara," explained Arthur Augustus.

"If ze signor be so good—so kind—me tank—tank—tank so much!"

"All right!" said Tom Merry. "It's settled. Good-bye!"

"A riverderci!" said Marco Frulo. "That's au wevoir," said D'Arcy. "Au wevoir, deah boy!"

And the juniors plunged through the thicket, and the Italian, within the cave, carefully closed again the screen of bushes that had saved him once more from his enemies.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Caught!

TOM MERRY and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy stared at one another blankly when they were in the sunlight again. It seemed like some strange dream that had happened.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus, speaking first. "I wegard that as a vevy remarkable occuwnence, Tom Mewwy, deah boy."

"I should jolly well say so," said Tom Merry. "I hope we haven't undertaken to help a rascal—but he looked like an honest man—and he was hurt, too. It's up to us to see that he doesn't starve in that blessed cave, anyway."

"Yaas, wathiah!" Tom Merry scanned the trees round them. "I wonder where the fellows are—"

"Cooley!" "Bai Jove! That's Kangawooh!" "Cooley!"

Tom Merry looked round anxiously. The Cornstalk junior's signal was answered from different directions, and Tom Merry realised that during the time they had been in the earth-cave the scouts had been closing in on them. They had left the place of concealment now, and could not return to it, and they had to take their chance.

"Bettah wun for it," said Arthur Augustus. "We mustn't be beaten, deah boy. It was beastly unfortunate wunnin' into that foweyn chap just now!"

"Can't be helped. This way!" Tom Merry led the way through the wood. He advanced vry cautiously, peering through the foliage as he advanced. The enemy were close at hand now, and some of them might be sighted at any moment.

A figure passed before Tom Merry's eyes on the other side of a bush, and he stopped suddenly, and made a signal to D'Arcy. The swell of St. Jim's halted behind him in the underbrush, breathing hard.

"Is it one of the boundahs, deah boy?" he whispered.

"It's somebody; I can't see." "Might be one of those Italian chaps—"

"I'm going to see." Tom Merry cautiously parted the leaves before him, and looked. A man had halted within six paces of him, knee deep in ferns and bracken.

He was a powerfully-built man, in the garb of a sailorman, with an officer's peaked cap. He had a very keen face, and a very sharp and prominent nose, and little grey eyes set close together.

He was looking full towards Tom Merry, and the junior felt for a moment that the man must see him, but he did not. The leaves and twigs hid the St. Jim's junior from sight.

The sailorman was looking about him keenly, too. Tom Merry wondered whether he had anything to do with the party who were seeking Marco Frulo.

"He's vamoused!" The man uttered the words aloud, with a savage snapping of the teeth.

"Bai Jove! He's affah that chap in the cave, too, Tom Mewwy!" D'Arcy murmured, in the Shell fellow's ear.

"Yes—lush!" The man swung on again through the wood, trampling down the thick ferns, and brushing against the bushes. There was a sudden yell, and three or four figures came leaping through the bracken.

"Got one of them!" "Collar him!" "Hurrah!"

The first voice was Jack Blakk's; the

second was Figgins'. The St. Jim's juniors fairly leaped upon the sailorman, and bore him with a bump to the earth.

In the thick underbrush they had not seen him clearly, and they had acted rather hastily, under the hurried impression that he was one of the "hares." They had not expected to meet anybody else in the shady depths of the wood.

There was a startled yell from the sailorman as he went down, with three or four juniors sprawling over him.

"Marco Frulo! It's you, you swab! Why—what—"

"Hallo!" ejaculated Figgins. "It's not Tom Merry—or Gussy, either. It's a man!"

"My hat!" "Great Scott!" Tom Merry chuckled softly in the concealment of the bushes, and D'Arcy smiled. They were very silent; the scouts did not guess how near they were.

"You young scoundrels!" roared the sailorman, sitting up in the grass and ferns, and glaring and blinking at the juniors. "You—you—lucky for you I didn't shoot you!"

"Well, you are an ass, Blake, to make a mistake like that!" said Figgins.

"Didn't you make the same mistake, you fathead?" demanded Blake.

knocking me over; accidents will happen. So long!"

And the sailorman plunged away through the wood.

"Well, that was a sell!" said Blake. "You are an ass, Figgins!"

"Awful sell!" said Figgins. "You are a chump, Blake!"

"You're a pair of chumps, if you ask me!" said Monty Lowther.

"Well, we didn't ask you," said Blake. "Now, don't waste time jawing; we've got to find those hounders before five o'clock! It would be too bad to let them dodge us."

"Can't let 'em dodge us," said Manners, "especially that ass Gussy! It would be too rotten—"

"Wecally, Mannahs—" Manners jumped. "Hallo!"

"Why, he's here!" roared Blake. Tom Merry bestowed a glare upon his companion. Arthur Augustus, by his involuntary remark, had given the game away with a vengeance. Blake & Co. were rushing into the thicket, and Tom Merry and D'Arcy were surrounded in a moment. The scouts set up a yell of victory.

"Got 'em!" "Here they are!"



As Tom Merry peered through into the interior a strange sight met his eyes. The Marco Frulo lay upon the ground, bound hand and foot, while the sailorman was speaking. "I guess we've got you now, Marco Frulo!"

"Oh, don't argue!" said Figgins loftily. "I say, sir, we're sorry we bumped you over. We took you for somebody we're looking for."

"Don't often see strangers in this wood," explained Kerr. "We're Boy Scouts at scouting practice, looking for some chaps. We're sorry."

"Yes, rather, sir!" The man regained his feet, with a scowl, muttering angrily. But his expression changed suddenly, and he spoke civilly to the scouts.

"Well, it's all right, if it was a mistake. Who might you be looking for here in this wood?"

"Some other scouts, who're dodging us," explained Figgins.

"Oh! Have you seen any strangers about here by any chance?" asked the sailorman. "I'm looking for somebody, too—a friend. Have you seen anybody?"

"Not a soul, excepting ourselves!" said Figgins.

"Not any Italians?" "Italians!" said Jack Blake in astonishment. "No fear! Don't see many Italians in this part of the country."

"Thank you, my lad! Never mind about

"Hurrah!" "Well caught!" Tom Merry made a grimace.

"Well, you've got us!" he said good-humouredly. "If anybody wants to boil Gussy in oil, I won't say no!"

"Wecally, Tom Mewwy—" "What did you give us away for, you ass?" roared Tom Merry.

"I wefuse to be called an ass! I spoke because Mannahs made use of an oppw'bvious expression concernin' me—"

"I only called you an ass!" said Manners cheerfully. "Under the circumstances, I withdraw the word ass—"

"Vevy good!" "And substitute the words fatheaded idiot!" went on Manners calmly.

"Wecally, Mannahs—" "Ha, ha, ha!"

"I say, I'm getting pretty peckish!" remarked Fatty Wynn. "Let's get back to tea. We've caught the hares, and I'm hungry. Didn't you have some sandwiches with you, Tom Merry?"

"Yes, Fatty." "Have you eaten them?" "No."

"Going to eat them?" continued Fatty Wynn.

Tom Merry shook his head. "Then you can hand them over to me," said Fatty Wynn. "I'm awfully hungry. I always get extra hungry in this weather, you know."

"Sorry, Fatty—"

"Oh, dash it all, you can hand the sandwiches over if you're not going to eat them!" said Fatty Wynn warmly. "Don't be a giddy dog in a manger!"

"Haven't got them now," said Tom Merry. "Well, my hat! Do you mean to say that you've lost them—lost good beef sandwiches?" Fatty Wynn exclaimed in horror and disgust.

"No, not exactly lost them. You see, I gave them away!"

Tom Merry coloured a little as he spoke. He did not intend to mention the man hiding in the earth-cave in the Poacher's Glade, but already he was finding out the difficulties of keeping a secret.

"Gave them away!" said Fatty Wynn in dismay. "Well, you must be an ass!"

"Let's get back to the coll., deah boys!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "It's vevy neahly tea-time now."

And the scouts started for St. Jim's.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER. A Narrow Escape!

WHEN his chums were fast asleep that night, Tom Merry left the dormitory, carrying in his hand a small bag, which contained food for the mysterious Italian.

All was quiet and dark outside the school, but the captain of the Shell kept on his way, and at length passed through the wood, and reached the Poacher's Glade.

The glade was dark and deserted, and Tom Merry was reassured. He came through the damp ferns and bracken towards the cave; and then suddenly stopped, with a start. A light was gleaming through the foliage there; a lantern was burning in the hidden cave.

"The awful ass, to burn a light here!" muttered the junior. "If those fellows are still looking for him—"

He broke off.

From the hidden cave under the hill there came a murmur of voices. Marco Frulo was not alone.

Tom Merry remained quite still for some moments, and then he cautiously crept towards the cave and listened.

The thought had come into his mind now that Marco Frulo's enemies had found him. The man who was hiding in fear of his life would hardly have been imprudent enough to betray his presence by burning a light in the cave. And the voices—what did that mean?

As he drew closer, Tom Merry heard a voice in English—a voice he had heard before. It was that of the man with the knife-blade nose, whom Blake and Figgins had captured by mistake in the afternoon.

Tom Merry knitted his brows.

All was clear now. Marco Frulo's enemies had found him, and they were in the cave now. What had happened to the Italian?

The foliage before the cave had been torn and trampled, and no longer concealed the opening completely. Tom Merry could see through into the interior, and a startling scene met his gaze.

Marco Frulo lay on the ground, bound hand and foot, with the lantern light gleaming upon his pale and hunted-looking face.

The big sailorman was seated on a mound close to him, with his hand resting on his knee, and a revolver in his hand.

Two Italians were standing close to the captured man, and one of them was wiping away blood from a knife-cut across the face. Marco Frulo had evidently not been captured without resistance.

The sailorman was speaking. "I guess we've got you now, Marco Frulo."

Marco Frulo muttered indistinctly. "Has he hurt you much, Beppo?"

The wounded Italian growled.

"Per Bacco! I am hurt!"

"We're going to make him pay for it," said the sailorman. "He's going to pay twenty-five thousand pounds—eh, Marco, my old chum?"

Frulo was silent.

"I guess you'd better go and get that cut seen to, Beppo," said the sailorman, looking at the deep slash in his follower's face. "You can get it bound up in Wayland. Let the surgeon think you got it in a row with the bargemen on the river. I can look after our friend Marco now that he's tied up."

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"I bleed like vun stuck peeeg!" growled Beppo.

"Now, Marco, my friend, you are going to talk," said the sailorman.

"Non parlero!" grunted the man lying on the ground, making a sudden effort to break loose from his bonds.

The sailorman chuckled.

"You can't get loose, Marco, old chum. You won't get loose easy when Joe Harker has tied you up with sailor's knots."

"Non parlero—non parlero!"

"That means that you won't speak, I guess. I reckon we shall make you speak, Marco. You are coming down to the coast with us—you are coming on a ship, Marco—and between here and Venice you will talk—what? I guess you know how I shall persuade you if you don't talk, my man. What?"

"Bah! Non parlero!"

"You can go and get that cut tied up, Beppo, and bring back the trap—you and Pietro. Get it as near the wood as you can, and then come back here. I'll look after our friend Marco till you get back. Don't forget the sacks in the trap, to cover him with."

"Si, signor!"

Tom Merry drew back hastily and took cover in the trees. The two Italians emerged from the cave and strode away, Beppo groaning and grunting as he went. They disappeared into the darkness.

Tom Merry drew near the cave again when they were gone.

The sailorman was still speaking; and Tom Merry, as he saw the thin, keen face in the gleam of the lantern-light, almost shuddered at the expression of cold and cruel determination upon it.

"I guess you are going to talk, Marco," said Joe Harker. "You are going to talk, and you are going to write it down, every word. I'm going to have that twenty-five thousand pounds. Eh?"

"Non mai!"

"Never's a long word," said Joe Harker; "a very long word. We've hunted you out, Marco. You gave us the slip at Southampton; you've given us the slip since. We nearly had you once; now we've got you. Savvy? Now we want the money—twenty-five thousand pounds, Marco; though it's not in good British money. The secret that you got from the drunken sailor in Leghorn, you're going to pass it on to me and my pals—Beppo and Pietro. What?"

"Non mai!"

"When you've got a cord tied round your head, Marco, squeezing tighter and tighter till your eyes bulge out, you'll change your tune, I'm inclined to think."

Tom Merry shuddered.

"You know where the money is, Marco—on one of the islands in the Lagoon of Venice, I guess. You're going to tell us."

"Non parlero!" repeated the bound man. "La morte, ma silenzio!"

"Death, but silence!" grinned the sailorman. "We'll change your tune for you, Marco, when you're on board the schooner. You will see! Beppo and Pietro will be back in half an hour, and then you're going away, Marco, wrapped up in a bundle of sacks, in case any inquisitive policeman should look into the trap; and when you're on the schooner—"

The Italian groaned. He evidently realised his helplessness in the hands of his relentless enemy.

Tom Merry's heart beat fast.

In half an hour the two ruffians would be back, and then the bound man would be taken away a helpless prisoner.

There was nothing to stop them.

Tom Merry thought of the police; but he could not have reached the nearest police-station. And then, the local policeman would not have been able to deal with this desperate gang, armed with deadly weapons, and only too clearly prepared to use them.

What could he do?

He had come there to help the unfortunate fugitive, and he had proof enough now, if he wanted it, that Marco Frulo was a man pursued by remorseless rascals; that the right was on his side.

To let the man be taken away by that gang of scoundrels—it was impossible.

But what could the junior do?

If he waited till Beppo and Pietro returned, he would have three enemies to deal with. If anything was to be done, it must be done now, while the sailorman was alone with the prisoner.

But to tackle that powerful ruffian—Tom Merry, strong and athletic as he was, would have been but an infant in the grasp of Joe Harker.

The thoughts raced through his head.

What could he do? He would not abandon the Italian to his fate. But what could he do?

The sailorman yawned, and rose from his seat. He came towards the opening of the cave, and Tom Merry crouched back in the darkness.

The big man, his tall form shadowed in the darkness, moved to and fro. At intervals Tom Merry heard him give a faint chuckle. The man was in a state of gleeful triumph, as his chuckling indicated.

Tom Merry made up his mind.

He could not tackle the big ruffian by himself, but if he could get Marco Frulo free, between them they might handle him.

Tom Merry, crouching in the dark shadows, watched the sailorman pacing to and fro as he smoked a cigar. And when the man's back was turned, and he was a dozen paces away, the junior made a sudden dash and passed through the thickets into the cave.

Whether the sailorman had heard him or not, he did not know. He bent over Marco Frulo, opening his pocket-knife with hurried fingers.

The bound man's eyes gleamed up at him with new hope.

"Amico—mio amico il ragazzo!" he breathed.

Tom Merry cut through the cords that bound him with hasty slashes of the pocket-knife. Outside, he heard the sailorman humming a tune. The man had not seen or heard the junior; he did not suspect for a moment that anyone else was in the lonely glade at that hour.

A few more slashes of the knife, and Marco Frulo was free.

The Italian sailor, lithe and active as a panther, leaped to his feet. His sharp, black eyes searched round the cave, evidently for a weapon.

His knife had been taken away, and Tom Merry was glad of it. Villain and ruffian as Joe Harker clearly was, Tom Merry did not want to look upon a scene of bloodshed in the lonely wood that night.

Some sound had apparently fallen upon the sailorman's keen ears. He came back to the entrance of the cave and looked in.

As he peered through the broken branches, a glare of rage came into his eyes, as he saw Marco Frulo free, and the junior standing by his side.

His hand went into his pocket—Tom Merry knew what for. The junior was desperate, and he acted quickly. He snatched up the lantern, and hurled it into the face of the ruffian.

Crash!

There was a yell of pain from the sailorman as the lantern smashed into his face, and he staggered back blindly. The lantern was instantly extinguished. Tom Merry grasped Frulo by the arm.

"This way," he muttered.

He led, half-dragging, the startled man through the thicket, before the cave. He could hear Joe Harker cursing in the darkness as he rushed the Italian towards the trees. In a moment they were in the shelter of the wood.

"Run for it!" panted Tom. "He's got a pistol! Run!"

Crack!

It was a sharp, ringing report. The sailorman had fired. But it was a shot at random. In the darkness he could not see the junior or Frulo. Tom Merry grasped Frulo's arm, and ran with him blindly through the wood.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER. The Secret!

TOM MERRY ran, and ran, his companion panting along by his side.

For a few minutes they ran blindly, at random; then Tom Merry remembered the way, and they followed a beaten track, where progress was easier.

Frulo ran without a word, only breathing heavily.

They came out on the footpath at last, and then over the stile into the road. Tom Merry led his companion up the road for a short distance, and through a gap in the hedge on the opposite side, and into a dim building. It was an old barn now disused, which the junior knew well. There he stopped, panting.

"All right now!" he gasped. "We're a good two miles away, and I'll bet that chap won't be able to follow our giddy tracks!"

Frulo leaned against the wall, breathing hard.

"Grazie, signorino—grazie!"

Tom Merry knew that that meant thanks. "That's all right," he said; "I was jolly

glad to get you out of the hands of that rotter! What did he want with you?"

"Il segreto!"

"The—the what?"

"What you say—secret—secret of ze orozze gold," said Marco Frulo. "I am tell by ze sailor who die in Leghorn—and he know—he would find. Capite?"

"I think I understand," said Tom Merry. "They want to rob you!"

"Si, si!"

"Well, you're out of their hands now." Frulo breathed hard.

"I brought you some grub, as I promised," said Tom Merry ruefully. "But I dropped the bag in getting you away. I'm sorry. Of course, I didn't expect to find those rotters there. But, look here, you won't be able to go back to the cave again, now that they've found it."

"E' giusto!"

"You'll have to bunk?"

"I go!" said Marco Frulo heavily. "But I zink—I zink—how you say—I not get away perhaps from zem. But I fly. Listen to me, ragazzo. You save my life. Zey kill me on ze ship, for I tell zem nozing."

"The rotters!" said Tom Merry. "You can go to the police for protection, Frulo. We've got law in England, you know."

"Zat non good. Zat man, zat Harker, he is il diavolo himself! Listen to me, you—you are all ze friend zat is to me now. Suppose zat I am kill. I not vish zat ze gold lose itself. Capite?"

"Yes," said Tom Merry.

"I give you a paper," said the Italian in a low, hurried voice. "You have carta—what you say—carta per scrivere?"

"Carta!" said Tom Merry, puzzled. "Oh, paper! Yes. If you want to write, I've got a pocket-book, and you can have a leaf. And I've got a pencil. But—"

"Datem, give to me."

Tom Merry, in wonder, took out his pocket-book, and tore out a leaf, and handed it to the Italian, with a pencil.

Marco Frulo stepped to the door of the barn.

Clear starlight fell into the field outside, and it was light enough to write.

The Italian spread the leaf upon the cover of the pocket-book, and wrote rapidly with the pencil.

Tom Merry did not see what he was writing, but he knew that it must be in Italian. He could not have read Italian, of course, but he did not say that to Marco Frulo.

The man was in a state of intense agitation, and Tom Merry wisely decided to let him do as he chose without contradiction. The Italian wrote with feverish haste, in the clear and beautiful calligraphy which even uneducated Italians generally use. He finished, and folded the sheet in two.

"Take zat!" he said.

Tom Merry took the paper.

"Listen, zen," said Frulo in a low voice. "I have write zere where it is zat ze money is. Capite?"

"Yes," said Tom Merry, guessing the meaning of the word "capite" easily enough. "I understand."

"Zat is all mine, for I have il segreto—how you say—"

"The secret?"

"Si, si, signorino—ze secret. I have him from ze sailor who die in Leghorn. I zink I find him, but perche—perche—vat you say—perhaps zat demonio—zat Harker—he find me first—and he kill. Capite?"

"Yes; but—"

"But zen I give him to you."

"The secret?"

"Si, si. If I no come to you vizin, say, four day—four day—quattro giorni—you say four day—"

"Yes, four days," said Tom Merry.

"In quattro giorni—four day—I come or I send, but if I do not I will give him to you, because zat you save my life, amico. If I do not come for him, it is because zat I am dead. Capite? Zen he is yours, signorino, because you good friend to Marco Frulo. But for quattro giorni—four day—you no read—you no look at ze carta."

"I understand. If you do not ask me for the paper back in four days it belongs to me," said Tom Merry.

"Certo!"

"And I'm not to read it or look at it—four days?"

"Si, si!"

"I give you my word!" said Tom Merry.

"Buono, buono! I trust you. You are onesto ragazzo," said Marco Frulo. "It may be I live—zen I send to you; ozzerwise, you keep and you find! Zat is yours!"

"But I say—"

"Now I go—I fly! Zey look for me again—"

"But look here, I can't let you go away into danger like that," said Tom Merry, in great distress. "Why not let me take you to the police-station—"

Frulo shook his head.

"I go!" he answered. "You keep promise—you guard carta—ze paper—four giorni—zen he is yours if I no send. Now addio!"

"But look here—"

"Must go!"

"Hold on," said Tom Merry. "I've left in the wood the grub I brought for you, but I've got some money, if that's any good. Have you got money?"

The Italian shook his head.

"Leetle," he said. "Italian money."

"That won't be much good to you here," said the junior. "I'll give you all I've got—you can pay it back when you come for the paper, if you like. I've got nearly two pounds—it will help you on your way."

The Italian sailor took the money eagerly enough. Then he held out a dusky hand, and Tom Merry grasped it.

"If you will go, good luck to you," said Tom Merry. "And, mind, I'm keeping this paper for you, and even if you don't claim it in four days, I shall still consider it your property. Good-bye, and good luck!"

The Italian pressed his hand, and vanished into the darkness of the road.

Tom Merry stood watching him till he was gone. Then he turned his steps in the direction of St. Jim's, utterly amazed by the strange events of the night.

What was the paper the Italian seaman had given him?

From what the man had said, it was apparently the clue to some hidden hoard of money—somewhere in the isles and lagoons of Venice!

More likely it was some wild tale of a sailorman, which had deceived Marco Frulo—for he had evidently believed what he said. Yet the keen-faced sailorman must believe it, too, since this was the secret for which he was pursuing Frulo.

And Joe Harker did not look the kind of man, certainly, to be taken in by a wild tale. He was cool and cunning and calculating, by no means the kind of man to be led away upon a wild-goose chase.

Tom Merry's brain was in a whirl as he hurried back to St. Jim's.

Would he ever see Marco Frulo again? If he did not, the paper was his—for what it was worth. Was it worth anything? he wondered.

The junior reached the old school. In a few minutes more he had climbed in at the window. He made his way silently to the Shell dormitory, and entered his bed without waking a single junior.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.
The Document.

TOM MERRY decided not to run any risk with the precious paper. After a great deal of thought on the matter, he sewed it up in a corner of his handkerchief, and kept that handkerchief always in his pocket.

The next day passed, and the next, and Tom Merry did not hear anything of Marco Frulo. He wondered a great deal about the man, and what had become of him.

On Saturday afternoon the Boy Scouts of St. Jim's had another run in the wood, and Tom Merry & Co. visited the earthen cave in the Poacliier's Glade.

But in the cave, and the wood, they did not find any signs of the strangers who had been there on the previous Wednesday. Marco Frulo was gone, and Joe Harker and his followers had gone, too—perhaps in pursuit of the Italian, or perhaps having given up the chase.

Tom Merry thought a good deal about the Italian sailorman, to whom he had taken a liking in their short acquaintance.

If he did not hear from Marco Frulo by Monday, he was to read the paper.

Then, according to what the Italian had said, the secret would be his—if it was worth anything.

Sunday passed without news of the Italian. On Monday morning Tom Merry inquired eagerly for letters. There was one for him, but it was from Miss Priscilla Fawcett, his old governess. That was all.

Tom Merry had told his chums, Manners and Lowther, and also Jack Blake & Co. about the mysterious happenings in the wood, and, naturally, they were keen to know the secret of the paper.

After lessons that day Tom Merry's chums gathered round him eagerly as he came out of the Form-room.

"Time!" said Blake.

"Yaas, wathah! Are you sure you've still got the papah safe, Tom Mewwy?" asked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy anxiously. "I have been feelin' vewy uneasy about it."

"I've got it tied up in my handkerchief—sewn up, in fact," said Tom Merry.

"Have you had it sewn up there all the time?"

"All the time!" said Tom.

"Bai Jove! Must have been a feahful twial for you, not to change your handkerchief for four days, deah boy," said Arthur Augustus sympathetically.

"Ass! I've had two handkerchiefs—one with the paper sewn in it, and the other not," said Tom Merry. "The paper's as safe as houses. If you fellows want to see it—"

"What-ho!"

"Come up to my study, then."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"What about getting it translated?" said Blake. "The only chap who knows Italian, is Brooke, of our Form."

"Brooke's the chap I was thinking of," said Tom Merry. "He'll do it for us like a shot. He's always an obliging chap."

"But he's a giddy day boy, and he'll be gone," said Blake anxiously. "My hat! If he's gone home we shall have to wait till tomorrow for the translation."

"Bai Jove! I nevah thought of that."

"Look for him, then," said Tom Merry quickly. "If he's started home, collar him and bring him back. Tell him it's important, and carry him if necessary. He's got to come."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Blake and Herries ran away in search of Brooke of the Fourth.

The Terrible Three proceeded to their study, with D'Arcy and Digby.

As soon as he entered his study, Tom Merry took out the handkerchief in which the precious papers were sewn up. The fellows stood round the table and watched him eagerly. Tom Merry snipped through the threads with his penknife, and took the paper out. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy screwed his monocle into his eye, and regarded it with great interest.

"Bai Jove! Now we're gettin' to it!" he remarked.

Tom Merry hesitated as he held the paper in his fingers.

"I suppose we can read this?" he said. "I mean, get it translated. It's doing the fair thing by poor old Frulo, isn't it?"

"I think so," said Manners. "He told you plainly what you could do."

"Well, let's look at the paper," said Lowther. "We can't read it until young Brooke gets here, but we can have a squint at it."

"Yaas, I'm weally ewious about it, deah boy."

Tom Merry opened out the paper.

The writing upon it, in pencil, was easy enough to read; the agitated hand of the Italian had scored the lines deep. And this, as the juniors looked at the strange document, was what they read:

"La casa di danaro e sepolta fra le rovine della capella di Santa Maria dell'isola, presso Burano, nela grande laguna di Venezia. La pietra e segnata d'una croce rossa."

"MARCO FRULO."

"Well, my only summer chapeau!" said Monty Lowther. "What does it mean?"

"Ask me another!"

"Yaas; I can't wead it," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, scanning the document through his famous monocle. "I can see that it's good Italian, and I can make out some words. 'Capella' is a chapel, and 'casa' is a box, and 'Burano' is an island near Venice, deah boys. 'Cwoce wossa' means a wed cwooss."

"Cwoce rossa—red cross," said Tom Merry. "Good! We're getting on. But what does the whole bizny mean?"

"I weally don't know."

"Where's that ass Blake? Why doesn't he bring Brooke—"

"Here they come!"

The door of the study opened, and in walked Blake, Herries, and Dick Brooke.

"Here you are at last!" said Tom Merry. "Does Brooke know what's wanted, Blake?"

"Yes; I've told him," said Jack Blake.

"You want help in a translation," said Brooke, looking round. "What is it—Latin prose?"

"No fear!" said Tom Merry, laughing. "We haven't fetched you up here to ask you to help us with our lessons."

"Wathah not!"
 "What is it, then?"
 "Italian."
 "Italian?" said Brooke, in surprise. "You chaps taking up Italian?"
 "Not much."

"We've got a paper in Italian we want translated," explained Tom Merry. "I think Brooke had better know about it, you chaps. He can keep a secret."

"Certainly," said Brooke.
 Tom Merry explained the history of the Italian document in concise words. Dick Brooke listened with his eyes growing wider and wider in astonishment.

"Well, my word!" he exclaimed. "It beats a novel! And that's the paper you want me to translate?"

"That's it, my infant!"

"Yaas, wathah, deah boy!"
 "I'll do my best," said Brooke. "You know, I'm not so well up in Italian as in French and Latin. It's a study I've taken up for pleasure, not for profit, and I haven't been able to give much time to it—"

"Queer idea of pleasure some fellows have," murmured Herries.

Brooke laughed.
 "I'll do my best with the paper," he said. "If I can't manage it I've got an Italian dictionary, and I'll work it out with that. But let's see the paper."

Tom Merry handed him the paper.
 Brooke fixed his eyes upon it, and as he read his eyes grew wider, and he gave a low whistle. It was evident that he was reading easily enough the words that looked so utterly mysterious to the rest of the juniors.

"I was curious to see him standing there reading what to the other fellows present was totally incomprehensible."

"Well, my hat!" said Brooke at last.

"There was a general shout of inquiry."

"You understand it?"

"Yes."

"All of it?"

"Every word; it's quite easy."

"Hurrah!"

"Bwavo, deah boy! You know, I couldn't possibly wead that," said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, with the air of a fellow making a very impressive and singular statement.

"Go hon!" murmured Blake.

"Let's have the translation," said Tom Merry. "This is ripping of you, Brooke!"

"Yes, rather!" said Herries. "Good thing to have a giddy genius in the Form. Write it out, Brooke, old man."

Tom Merry handed the Fourth-Former a pen. Brooke sat down to write. He read the paper over again, and then wrote out the translation easy enough:

"The box of money is buried among the ruins of the chapel of Santa Maria of the Island, near Burano, in the Grand Lagoon of Venice. The stone is marked with a red cross.
 MARCO FRULLO."

The juniors gazed at the words as they ran from under Brooke's pen in breathless interest. There was a buzz as his pen ceased to travel.

"The box of money! By Jove!"

"Buwied, deah boys! A wegulah buwied treasure!"

"Near Burano, in the Lagoon of Venice!"

"Hurrah!"

Brooke rose to his feet.

"Looks to me as if there is something in it," he remarked. "If that Italian chap doesn't claim the paper again, Tom Merry, you are in for a good thing!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"No more mysterious documents to translate?" asked Brooke, with a smile.

"No, thanks. Awfully obliged."

"That's all right. So-long!"

And Dick Brooke quitted the study.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER. Good News for Gussy.

IN Tom Merry's study the juniors read over the paper with great jubilation.

The mere idea of a buried treasure appealed very much to their imagination, and a buried treasure upon an island in the romantic Lagoon of Venice was, as Monty Lowther put it, especially ripping.

And they had no doubt about it now.

The words Marco Frullo had written down so hurriedly to give Tom Merry before his flight were true!

Far away in the blue Adriatic, in a ruined building upon an isle, lay the buried treasure

—for the sake of which the unfortunate Frullo was hunted down by Joe Harker, the sailorman.

And the sum? Harker had said twenty-five thousand pounds in English money! The mere thought was dazzling to the juniors.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "It would be wippin'! If that chap Frullo doesn't turn up again the money is yours, Tom Mewwy!"

"I hope he will turn up!" said Tom Merry.

"But if he doesn't?" said Blake.

"If he doesn't," said Tom Merry gravely, "I think it's because he's fallen into the hands of Joe Harker and his gang, and they've kidnapped him! The best thing we can do is to get this box of money removed from where it is now, so that Harker can't get his hands upon it."

"Bai Jove! I wish we could go!"

"Why shouldn't we?" said Tom Merry. "The vacation's close now, and we shall be away from St. Jim's. Some of us can get away, at all events, and we can make up a party to pay a visit to Venice. Dash it all, Cook's tourists go there in crowds every year! These places aren't so far away as they used to be. You get to Venice in three days by train, and then—"

"Bai Jove! I'll write to my governah at once, and put it to him!"

"Good egg!" said Monty Lowther. "I'll write to my uncle. To raise the exes, however, I shall have to make a personal call upon my uncle—another uncle. I'll take your gold ticker with me, Gussy."

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy turned his eyeglass upon the humorist of the Shell in astonishment.

"I fail to comprehend you, Lowthah," he said. "How would it make any difference if you took my watch when you called upon your uncle?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You see, your watch is worth two or three pounds—"

"You uttah ass! My watch is worth twenty-five guineas!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus indignantly. "It was a birthday present from my patah, as you knew vevy well."

"And it isn't rolled gold?" asked Lowther, with a look of astonishment.

"You—you uttah wottah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ah the better!" said Monty Lowther blandly. "My uncle is all the more likely to lend me something on it."

"You fivightful ass! I did not know you were alludin' to that kind of an uncle!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry picked up the two papers, and pinned them together. Then he tied them both up in a corner of his handkerchief, and restored them to his pocket. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy turned his eyeglass rather anxiously upon the Shell fellows.

"Those papahs are awfully valuable, Tom Mewwy!" he remarked.

"Worth their weight in gold!" said Lowther facetiously.

"Pewwaps you had bettah hand them ovah to me to be taken care of, Tom Mewwy. They are vevy vevy valuable, and a fellow of tact and judgment—"

"Oh, ring off, Gussy!" said Tom Merry, laughing. "Now, you fellows, we've got to the bottom of the giddy mystery, and the only thing to be done now is to make up a party for the search as soon as the vac begins. All of you write to your patahs and kind uncles, and tell them it's specially necessary for you to have a holiday in Venice this vac, and that you expect them to come down handsomely."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The idea of an excursion in the wonderful city of Venice, the Queen of the Adriatic, during the coming vacation was pleasant enough; the only difficulty was, that it might not come off.

Some of the fellows were already booked

for the holidays; others were very doubtful whether their parents would allow them to go upon an excursion so far afield.

There were a good many letters written during the following days.

On Wednesday evening, as the Terrible Three were sitting down to tea in their study, the door was thrown open, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy rushed in with a letter in his hand.

The swell of St. Jim's was in a state of great excitement, and had completely forgotten the repose that stamps the caste of Vere de Vere.

"It's all wight!" he exclaimed.

"What's all right?" demanded Tom Merry.

"Hurrah!"

"What the dickens—"

"I've written to my governah, and he's witten back—"

"Well, that's happened before, and no harm come of it," remarked Monty Lowther. "Has he sent you a tenner instead of a fiver this time, fathead?"

"Weally, Lowther—"

"What's the news, Gussy?" asked Tom Merry, laughing.

"Listen to this, and I'll wead it out." Arthur Augustus turned his eyeglass upon the letter in his hand. "Sent too many fivahs lately— Ahem! That's not the place. Money wasted— Them! them! them!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I haven't found the place yet, deah boys. Oh, here it is! 'My dear Arthur,—I wegard your suggestion of a holiday in Italy as quite sensible. Your former tutor, Mr. Mopps, is about to proceed to the North of Italy to collect materials for a book upon which he is engaged. If you and your friends wish to spend a part of the vacation in Italy, I can arrange with Mr. Mopps to take charge of the party, and I hope you will find the excursion enlightening as well as amusing. Italy is a country peculiarly rich in historical associations— That's all the part that's intewestin', deah boys. The patah wuns on about Italy to a vevy great length, but I won't wead that out, as he isn't your patah, and you're not weally called upon to stand it. What do you think of the ideah, deah boys?"

"Hoorary!"

"Mopps makes it all wight," said Arthur Augustus. "He's an Oxford man, you know—an M.A., and a vevy tame and quiet little chap; stutters, and talks awful wot, you know, and thinks great guns of himself. Wegular Oxford man, you know. He won't be the least twouble to us."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tom Merry. "I fancy we may be a trouble to him."

"Don't, explain that before we start," or D'Arcy's pater may alter his mind," grinned Monty Lowther.

Arthur Augustus shook his head wisely.

"Wathah not! You can wely on me to be diplomatic. It requires a fellow of tact and judgment to deal with a patah, you know. But weally I think the patah is playin' up splendidly this time. What do you think?"

"Ripping!"

And the Terrible Three, jumping up from their chairs, clasped Arthur Augustus D'Arcy in their arms and waltzed him round the study, in the exuberance of their spirits.

"Weally, Lowthah—weally, Tom Mewwy— Ow! Bai Jove! Yawogh!"

Crash!

The waltzing juniors waltzed into the tea-table, and there was a terrific crash as the table went flying, and tea and tea-things shot in a stream to the floor.

Crash! Crash!

"My hat!"

"Bai Jove!"

Arthur Augustus rolled over, and sat up in the midst of broken crockeryware. He sat there in a graceful attitude for a decimal fraction of a second, and then leaped to his feet with a wild yell.

"Bai Jove! I'm hurt! My twousahs are wuined! Ow!"

"Never mind, Gussy," said Tom Merry cheerfully. "You've mucked up our tea, but we'll come and have tea with you in Study No. 6."

And Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, whose feelings were really too deep for words at that moment, was led away by the Terrible Three; and it was quite a quarter of an hour before he recovered the repose which, upon all occasions, ought to stamp the caste of Vere de Vere.

THE END.

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