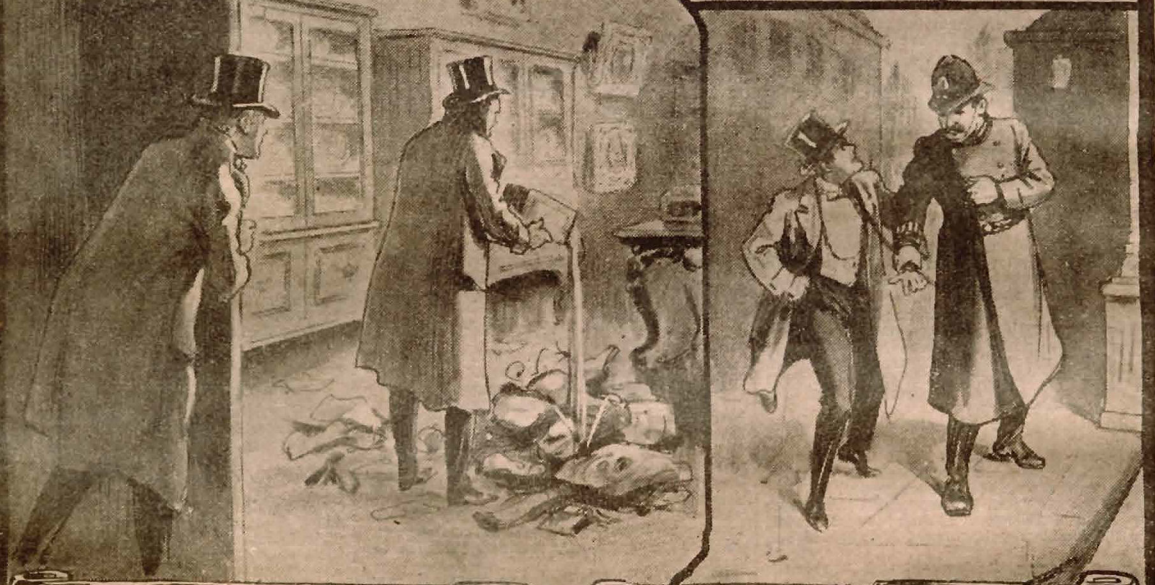


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THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Bitter Blood—The Shadow of a Crime—A Villainous Compact.

"I AM going to send you to school, Dick," Dick Trevelyan looked up and met the shitty, grey eyes of his step-father.

His boyish face brightened considerably. School was not exactly an enticing prospect, but he could nowhere be more miserable than he was at Trevelyan Grange.

"Yes, sir," he said hopefully. "When?"
"To-morrow." There was a strange gleam in Mr. Gadsby's eyes, as he fixed them upon his stepson. "Mr. Carker will arrive here to-morrow morning to take you to Cliff House School. I dare say you will not be sorry to go," he added, with a sneer.

Dick's eyes did not flinch.
"You know I shall not be sorry," he replied. "I should be glad to leave here, if I were going to prison instead of to school."

"I've no doubt that that is your ultimate destination," sneered Mr. Gadsby. "Prison is certainly a fit place for the son of Robert Trevelyan."

Dick started to his feet, flushing with anger.

"You coward! You coward!"
Mr. Gadsby's brows contracted with rage. He rose and made a movement towards his stepson.

Dick cast a hastily glance round for a weapon, and clutched a heavy decanter from the table. He swung it threateningly aloft.

"Keep off!" he said, in a low, tense voice. "I've had enough of your brutality, Mr. Gadsby. I warn you that if you lay a finger upon me I'll strike you to the floor!"

His resolute face and flashing eyes daunted Mr. Gadsby. He paused abruptly, casting a look of the deadliest hatred at his stepson.

"A worthy son of a worthy sire!" he sneered. "You are following early in your father's footsteps. Go to your room, you impudent young hound, and don't let me see you again till morning!"

Without a word, but with defiance in his face, Dick Trevelyan walked out of the dining-room of Trevelyan Grange.

Mr. Gadsby looked after him with gleaming eyes.

"How I hate the young cub! If he stayed here much longer I should kill him with my own hands! But I can trust Carker!"

And there came upon his cold, hard face an expression which would have alarmed Dick Trevelyan if he had seen it.

Dick went to his room. He was not sorry to be alone. His boyish brow was dark with thought. It was his father of whom he was thinking.

Robert Trevelyan had died seven years before. He had died under a cloud.

Dick had been but a child then. He had only a dim and confused recollection of that time of horror—of the finding of Vincent Eversley's body on the Bideford road, the arrest of his father, the long agony of the trial.

Robert Trevelyan had been acquitted. The evidence, wholly circumstantial, did not warrant a verdict of guilty; but suspicion lingered.

The acquitted man encountered cold looks or averted glances from former friends. Under the burden of it he sank. Two years after his trial he was in his grave.

Dick, holding his father in deeply affectionate remembrance, was greatly pained when his mother married for the second time. And yet, in truth, Mrs. Trevelyan had done so chiefly for his sake—that he might have a second father in life, and to care for the large property of which he was the heir.

Mr. Gadsby had been her suitor in earlier days. When she married Robert Trevelyan, Gadsby had apparently taken the disappointment calmly, and, instead of a lover, he became a friend.

During her widowhood he had been of service to Mrs. Trevelyan in many ways; but when he became her husband he showed the cloven foot. He loved her in his hard way. But he hated the son of his former successful rival.

It was not easy for the poor lady to keep the peace between the two; and at length, harassed by the consciousness that she had done the worst instead of the best for her boy, she closed her eyes upon life.

This terrible loss for a time subdued the enmity of stepfather and stepson; but it broke out again ere long.

To his wife Gadsby had always professed a belief in Trevelyan's innocence; but he had no similar regard for Dick's feelings. He took a gnomish pleasure in taunting the lad with bitter allusions to his father, of whose guilt he now professed to entertain no doubt.

But the severest thrashings could not make Dick bear these cruel taunts in silence; and, as he grew older, he began to strike back when Mr. Gadsby resorted to violence.

It was clear that such a state of affairs could not last for ever, and Mr. Gadsby found a solution of the difficulty in sending for Mr. Carker to take Dick away to Cliff House School.

"The cowardly cur!" muttered Dick wrathfully, as he strode to and fro in his little room. "He always told mother that he believed in poor dad's innocence—to get into her good graces, I suppose. He would eat his own words to any extent for the sake of

thing afoot, of course. Another little game like that of nine years ago?"

"Shut up!" growled Mr. Gadsby irritably. "I don't see why you want to bring that up." "You don't care for reminiscences? For my part, now—"

"Let's get to business. I want you to take my stepson to Cliff House School."

"Only too pleased. The lad I saw in the hall, I suppose? A fine boy!" said Mr. Carker, with a sly look at Mr. Gadsby.

The latter scowled.

"Don't talk rot! You know how matters stand—Trevelyan left everything to his wife. She, in her turn, left it to the boy. In case of his death before marriage it comes to me."

"I understand perfectly. It has sometimes surprised me that you have done nothing up to now."

"There was no hurry; and I don't want to excite any inconvenient suspicions."

"You don't like the boy?"

Mr. Gadsby ground his teeth.

"Like him? I hate him! It poisons me to breathe the same atmosphere with him!"

Mr. Carker nodded sympathetically.

"Of course, you can't be expected to love a brat who stands between you and three thousand a year. It isn't human nature."

"That is not all. It isn't that. He's the



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taunting me. When I'm a man won't I just give him a good hiding, that's all!"

His eyes sparkled at the thought. He was sixteen now. In five years he would come back and kick Mr. Gadsby out of Trevelyan Grange. That would be a pleasant task.

But, if Mr. Gadsby could prevent it, there would be no homecoming for Dick Trevelyan, as we shall see.

Mr. Carker arrived early on the following day, and Dick saw him as he went to the library—a short, thin man, with sallow face and meagre features, and cruel little hawkish black eyes. He was dressed in a suit of rusty black, and looked more like an undertaker than a schoolmaster. Dick's heart sank at the sight of him.

The door closed, shutting off Mr. Carker from Dick's view. The boy went slowly and thoughtfully up to his room, where his box was in the process of packing.

In the library Mr. Gadsby's greeting of Carker was brief.

"Glad you've come early. I suppose you know why I've sent for you?"

"I can guess," replied Mr. Carker, nodding. He had an unpleasant voice, in sound like the creaking of an obstinate hinge. It was a voice that suited his physiognomy. "Some-

image of his father. Every look of his, every tone of his voice, recalls to me his father—the man I hated—the man I still hate, though my vengeance drove him seven years ago to a dishonoured grave."

Mr. Gadsby hissed out the words. His face was dark with passion; but he calmed himself at once.

"You will take the boy away with you, Carker. You understand what you are to do?"

The schoolmaster nodded.
"You leave the matter entirely in my hands?"

"Entirely. You will take care that no suspicion is aroused. I care for nothing else."

"Rely upon me. This isn't the first case of the kind I've handled. Rely upon Elisha Carker." He grinned hideously. "And now, as to terms."

They talked for a time in subdued tones. Then Mr. Gadsby rose.

"One thing more—have you heard from your brother yet?"
Carker shook his head.

"No, not a word for seven years. I greatly fear that he must be dead."

"You fear?" sneered Mr. Gadsby. "You

know you would be as glad as I should be if he was no longer able to wag his tongue." "Poor Roger, he had no stamina!" said Carker, with his unpleasant grin. "He allowed little matters like that Eversley affair to weigh upon his mind. It would perhaps be better, as you suggest, if he joined the silent majority; though, as he is as deep in the mud as we are in the mire, he is not very likely to babble, I think."

To this Mr. Gadsby made no reply. "He touched a bell. A servant entered. "Tell Master Dick to come here."

In a few minutes Dick made his appearance.

"Dick," said Mr. Gadsby coldly, "this is your future schoolmaster, Mr. Carker."

"I am glad to make the acquaintance of Master Dick," creaked Mr. Carker, holding out a skinny claw. "Shake hands, my dear lad! I am sure we shall be excellent friends."

"I hope so, sir," said Dick, as cordially as he could.

But he had his doubts about it. "Believe me, Mr. Gadsby, I shall take excellent care of your ward," continued Elisha. "At Cliff House School I make it a point to allow my dear boys all the comforts of a home. Plenty of food, plenty of holidays—that's my maxim. Every indulgence, consistent with a proper attention to studies, is allowed."

Dick cheered up a little at that.

He had few friends to say good-bye to. In an hour he was in the train with Mr. Carker, speeding towards Cliff House School and his new life.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Cliff House School—Dick Makes a Friend and a Foe—A Night of Torture.

AN old, rambling building, in the midst of ill-kept and desolate grounds, the latter circled by a high, spiked wall—that was Cliff House School.

It stood about twenty miles from Bideford, the part of Devonshire with which Dick was familiar.

From the upper windows could be seen the watery waste of the Atlantic, dotted with glancing sails and black patches of smoke.

An ill-tempered-looking porter opened the huge gate at the summons of Mr. Carker. Dick felt a sense of depression as he entered, which was not lessened by the dull clang of the closing gate.

"Take Master Trevelyan's box in, Bissley!" said Mr. Carker. "Come along, you young whelp!"

Dick stared. Mr. Carker's manner during the journey had been so genial that the boy began to forgive his unprepossessing looks. He saw now that Mr. Carker, like the spider in the story, abandoned dissimulation as soon as the victim was safely within his web.

The dismay in Dick's face brought a malicious grin to the meagre features of Elisha Carker.

"Your good and indulgent guardian has told me of your violent character, Master Trevelyan," resumed Mr. Carker. "I hear that you have even raised your hand against him."

"Only when he beat me, sir."

"Only, eh? Well, don't you do it when I beat you, that's all. And I shall beat you often enough, I've no doubt. You're a hardened young ruffian. But Elisha Carker will cut it out of you."

Dick followed the master into the house with his face more woebegone than it had ever been at Trevelyan Grange. And the sight of the boys of Cliff House School deepened his despondency.

There were some twenty, all told. As Dick soon discovered, most of the inmates of Cliff House were boys whom their relations cared little about. Few had living parents. Mr. Carker took charge of them for a fixed sum, and they were left to his tender mercies.

The "comforts of a home," of which Mr. Carker had spoken, proved to be only a figure of speech. At least, Dick could see no sign of them at Cliff House.

Dinner consisted of sloppy broth and poor potatoes, and chunks of stale bread.

It was very different from the fare Dick had been accustomed to; but he got it down—not without wry faces, however.

A boy seated next to him observed his distaste with a smile of amusement.

"You don't like our Tommy, I can see," he remarked, in an undertone.

Dick looked at him. He was rather a

delicate-looking lad of about fifteen, very pale, with big, dark eyes as soft as a girl's. Dick liked him at once.

"I can't say I care for it," he replied. "Do you always live on this stuff?"

"Rather, and glad to get it! So will you be when you've been here a week or two. We don't get any too much to eat at Cliff House, I can tell you. Mr. Carker believes in strict economy. At least, that's what he calls it. I call it beastly meanness!"

"You don't like the school, then?"

"I hate it! So do all the fellows. No one would stay here if he could help it."

"Can't you write to your father—"

"Not very well. You see, he was lost at sea six years ago," was the grim reply. "I'm paid for here by a distant relation who lives in India. He looks upon me as a burden, and thinks he's awfully good to do anything for me at all. Sometimes I wish I was at the bottom of the sea with poor old dad." His eyes moistened. "But, I say, what's your name? Mine's Percy Conway."

"Mine's Dick Trevelyan."

"I— But 'sh! Old Skimp's looking our way," said Percy hastily.

Mr. Skimp was the second master at Cliff House. He was not liked there. Servile to Mr. Carker, he indemnified himself by playing the tyrant towards the boys.

"You were talking, Conway!" he said harshly, his greenish eyes resting upon the pale-faced boy. "Come into my study this evening."

Percy made a grimace at Dick. Dick did not speak again till they rose from table.

"I'm sorry," he whispered then.

"Don't worry. I was bound to have a licking before bed-time. Just as lief have it for something as for nothing," answered Percy carelessly.

Dick met him when he came out of Mr. Skimp's study in the evening. His face was whiter than ever, stained with tears and twitching with pain. Dick felt his blood beginning to boil.

"Has he hurt you much?"

"Rather, the brute!" gasped Percy. "Scissors! He does know how to lay it on! The brute!"

"Who are you calling a brute?" A large, coarse hand seized Percy by the ear. It belonged to a hulking fellow of seventeen, who had suddenly stepped from a study into the corridor. "Is it my father, you little beast, eh?"

"No, Carker, really," said Percy, making no effort to release himself.

Indeed, such an effort would have been useless. He was a mere child in the hands of the bully.

Samuel Carker, a worthy son of his father, looked at the boy suspiciously.

"I dare say you're lying. Take that, anyway." He began to twist Percy's ear. "Stop your squealing, or I'll really hurt you!"

Dick could stand no more. Conway's spirit had been broken by years of ill-treatment. But Dick was new to Cliff House School.

"Let him go, you cowardly bully!" he exclaimed. "Do you hear? Let him go, I say!" In sheer amazement Samuel released Percy. He fixed a furious look upon Dick.

"Ah, you're the new boy, are you? Come here to run the show, I suppose. I shall have to put you in your place, I see. Take that as a starter!"

His heavy hand swung towards Dick's head. But he had to deal with a sturdy Devonshire lad, whose limbs were full of strength, whose heart was full of courage. If Dick had not submitted to the blows of his guardian he was certainly not likely to knuckle under to Master Samuel Carker.

Samuel's blow was parried, and a clenched fist, planted fairly in his pasty face, sent him reeling and staggering along the corridor, till he fell at full length outside Mr. Skimp's study.

He gave a howl, which was heard in every corner of the building. Mr. Skimp came bounding out of his study, and stumbled over Samuel. In the dusky corridor he could not see who it was, and his cane descended in a vigorous slash upon the prostrate bully.

"I'll teach you to play these tricks!" panted Mr. Skimp. "Take that, and—"

"Stop!" yelled Samuel, wriggling. "Can't you see it's me, you bithering idiot?"

"Samuel, pardon my mistake. I thought—" stammered Mr. Skimp.

It was his policy to keep on good terms with his master's son.

"You ought to have looked! How dare you strike me?"

"I'm sorry—extremely sorry. But how came you to be lying there?"

"Do you think I laid down on your dormer for fun, you beating booby?" Samuel was never very choice in his selection of epithets, and he was more abusive than usual now. "It was the new boy who shoved me over while I wasn't looking."

"That's a lie!" broke in Dick. "You attacked me, and I knocked him down. And for two pins I'd do the same again!"

"You hear him threatening me, Mr. Skimp? You hear him, father?" whined Samuel.

Mr. Carker had suddenly appeared upon the scene, attracted by the uproar.

"You have begun early, Trevelyan," said Elisha, in his creaking tones. "I think I warned you what to expect if you showed your ruffianism here?"

"I was not to blame, sir."

"Don't dare to argue with me! Come here!" Mr. Carker gripped his collar and dragged him into Skimp's study. "Skimp, kindly select your stoutest cane. Trevelyan, take off your jacket! You won't? We'll see about that!"

He locked the study door. Dick was shut in alone with his three enemies. His heart was palpitating as if it would burst. His colour came and went.

He would not have dreamed of resisting an ordinary school "licking." But this was nothing of the kind. Only too clearly he could see that Mr. Gadsby had sent him to this den of tyranny and cruelty in order to make him suffer. His spirit was fully aroused. He resisted Carker and Skimp as he would have resisted two common ruffians who sought to beat him.

But his resistance, fierce and hardy as it was, availed him nothing against such odds. They got him down, they flung him across the table. Skimp and Samuel held him there, in spite of his struggles, while Mr. Carker wielded the cane. The long, flexible instrument of torture rose and fell with frightful rapidity and force.

Such agony Dick Trevelyan had never experienced before. Pride for a while kept back his cries. But that could not last long. As savage cut succeeded cut long, piercing screams of anguish left his lips. Percy, in the corridor without, stopped his ears with his fingers, while the tears ran down his cheeks.

The cries died abruptly away. Dick had fainted. His tortured form lay limp across the table.

"There!" panted Mr. Carker. "That's the first lesson! I think that will take some of the insolence out of him. Take him to the dormitory!"

Dick was put to bed. When he came to himself he lay tossing and turning, moaning and gasping, in ceaseless, biting pain.

And that was Dick Trevelyan's first night at Cliff House School.

(To be continued.)

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