

"THE SHADOW OF THE SACK!"

A Super Story of
Tense Human Interest
featuring—

Harry Wharton & Co.

The Magnet²



The SHADOW of the SACK!

By FRANK RICHARDS



THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Just Like Loder!

BUMP!

"Oh!" roared Bob Cherry.

He rolled.

Why Billy Bunter, of the Greyfriars Remove, shot suddenly out of the House, like a pip from an orange, was known only to Bunter. Bob Cherry, certainly, had not been expecting it.

Bob was standing on the lower step, his back to the doorway. He was talking to his friends, Wharton and Nugent, Johnny Bull and Hurree Singh, grouped at the foot of the steps. When Billy Bunter happened, he happened suddenly.

Evidently in too great a hurry to look before he leaped, Bunter shot out of the doorway. Bob was right in his way. Bunter crashed in the middle of his back, rather like a battering-ram.

"Ow!" gasped Bunter.

He reeled from the shock, and sat down.

Bob Cherry rolled headlong off the step. He pitched into the group before him. Throwing out his hands wildly for support, he grabbed Harry Wharton and Frank Nugent round the neck. But they did not support him. It was too sudden for that. They rolled over with Bob.

Three juniors sprawled, gasping, at the foot of the steps. Johnny Bull and Hurree Janset Ram Singh stared at them, and at Bunter.

"Oooooogh!" gasped Bunter.

He sat on the stone step—but only for a moment. Up jumped Bunter, and rushed on again.

Evidently Bunter was in a pressing hurry.

He dodged round the sprawling trio and cut across the quad. Three fellows sat up, spluttering for breath.

"What the thump—" gasped Harry Wharton.

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"What the dickens—" stuttered Nugent.

"Oh crikey!" gurgled Bob. "Something banged me in the back! What—"

"That ass, Bunter!"

"That blithering idiot, Bunter!"

"Collar the potty porpoise!"

"Scrag him!"

But Billy Bunter was not giving the Famous Five of the Remove a chance to collar him or scrag him. He was streaking across the quad. Seldom did the fat Owl of the Remove put on speed. Now he seemed to fancy that he was on the cinder-path.

Dozens of fellows stared round at him. Loder of the Sixth glared at him, and shouted:

"Bunter!"

But Billy Bunter did not heed even the voice of a Sixth Form prefect. He flew on.

From the doorway, another fellow had appeared—Herbert Vernon-Smith of the Remove. He had a cricket stump in his hand.

Billy Bunter did not look round; but he knew that Smithy was not far behind. He barged on.

Loder, frowning, stepped into his way. Juniors were not supposed to barge about the quad like that. Neither were they supposed to pass unheeded the commanding voice of a prefect. Loder grabbed at a fat shoulder, to stop Bunter.

But the fat Owl was going too fast to stop.

Loder gripped his shoulder hard and fast. The result was that Billy Bunter spun round the big Sixth Former. His momentum carried him right round, whirling Loder round in a circle.

"Oooooogh!" gasped Bunter. "Leggo! Beast! Leggo!"

Having circumnavigated Loder, Bunter was dragged to a halt. He gasped and spluttered and wriggled.

"Ow! Leggo! Beast!" spluttered

Bunter. Then, as he blinked at Loder through his big spectacles, he discovered that it was a Sixth Form prefect who had grabbed him. "Oh! Oh lor! I—I say, Loder—Ow! Leggo! I say, Smithy's after me! I say—Leggo!"

"You mad young ass!" hooted Loder.

"Ow! Leggo! I say, you lemme go!" gasped Bunter. "That beast Smithy—Ow! I never had his cake! I haven't been in his study at all! I wasn't coming out of his study when he met me in the doorway—ow!—I was in the Rag at the time! I say—"

"Smithy!" repeated Loder of the Sixth.

Still grasping Billy Bunter's fat shoulder, Gerald Loder glanced round, towards the House.

Smithy had rushed out, cricket stump in hand, almost as fast as Bunter. Only too plainly he was on Bunter's trail; and it was dread of the cricket stump that had caused the fat Owl's frantic flight.

But as he saw Bunter wriggling in Loder's grasp, the Bounder of Greyfriars came to a sudden halt.

"Look out, Smithy!" called out Johnny Bull.

But Smithy did not need the warning. At sight of Loder, the bully of the Sixth, Smithy was on his guard at once.

Loder had a very special reason for being "down" on the Bounder; and for several days he had been on the look-out for a chance of catching him out. Smithy had been too wary to give him a chance, so far. And he did not want Loder to get that chance now, on a half-holiday.

Herbert Vernon-Smith stopped his pursuing rush quite suddenly, slipped the cricket stump under his arm, and turned to stroll away in quite a casual manner!

But it hooted not, as a poet would say. Loder had spotted him, and

spotted the cricket stump, and spotted the chance he had been waiting for.

"Vernon-Smith!" called out Loder. "Come here!"

Smithy compressed his lips and came up. Billy Bunter blinked at him uneasily through his big spectacles.

"I—I say, Smithy, I—I never touched your cake!" he stuttered. "I never went to your study for that cake! I never knew you had one! I—I went to borrow your Latin grammar, old chap!"

"You fat toad!" snapped the Bounder. "Shut up! What do you want, Loder?"

"I want to know what you were rushing after Bunter for, and what you were going to do with that cricket stump?" said Loder grimly.

"I was going to whop Bunter for scoffing a cake from my study!" grunted the Bounder.

"Oh, really, Smithy——"

"Have you been grub-raiding in Vernon-Smith's study, Bunter?"

"Oh! No!" gasped Bunter. "I only went there to borrow Smithy's algebra, Loder. I've got some to do, and I lost my book. If Smithy's cake's gone, I expect it was the cat! Mrs. Kebble's cat, you know! That cat gets into the studies——"

"If you have been pilfering in the studies, Bunter, I shall take you to the Head!"

Billy Bunter gave a howl of alarm.

"Ow! I say, Loder, I haven't—I didn't—I wasn't—— Oh lor'!" The fat Owl spluttered with terror. "I—I say, it's all gammon! It's only Smithy's rotten temper—just his beastly temper!"

"I've no doubt of that!" assented Loder. "I know you to be an untruthful young rascal, Vernon-Smith, and I prefer to take Bunter's word!"

"Oh crikey!" gasped Bunter.

This was the first time Billy Bunter had ever heard of anybody who was prepared to take his word.

But Loder of the Sixth had his own reasons.

"I'm going to put a stop to this bullying in the Lower Forms," went on Loder. "You've chased Bunter out of the House with a cricket stump, and he's knocked fellows over right and left——"

"A lot you care!" said the Bounder savagely.

"That will do, Vernon-Smith! Go to my study, and wait there till I come in." Loder released the fat Owl, and raised his hand, pointing to the House. "Go at once!"

The Bounder breathed hard and deep.

"I'm just going out, Loder——"

"You're going to do as I tell you!"

"It's a half-holiday——"

"Go to my study this instant!"

Herbert Vernon-Smith hesitated for a long moment.

His temper, never very equable, was rising, and the Bounder was always reckless. He was strongly tempted to defy Loder, regardless of the consequences.

Loder, reading that thought in his face, smiled. If a Lower Fourth junior directly disobeyed a Sixth Form prefect, that prefect had him where he wanted him!

Smithy realised that in time, and, with a black and savage brow, he turned and tramped back to the House.

A few minutes later Harry Wharton & Co. saw his angry face scowling from Loder's window. He was in Loder's study—waiting for Loder to come in, as ordered.

But Loder was not, seemingly, in a hurry to come in. Loder, with his

hands in his pockets and a rather sardonic grin on his face, continued to saunter in the quad—and left the Bounder to wait.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Whose Pound Note?

"FATHEAD!"

Bob Cherry made that remark to the junior scowling out of the window of Loder's study, perhaps by way of comfort.

Smithy did not seem comforted; he scowled still more blackly.

Harry Wharton & Co., after a glance round to make sure that Loder was not in the offing, came up to that window. The Famous Five had an excursion on for that half-holiday, in which Smithy was included. They had, in fact, been waiting for Smithy, when Billy Bunter happened at the doorway. Now they were still waiting.

Time was passing, and the party had to get off. It was a golden October afternoon, and the Famous Five were going to run their boat out on the Sark. And as Marjorie and Clara of Cliff House were to be picked up in the boat at Friardale Bridge they could not wait much longer. Keeping ladies waiting was really impossible. The ladies might possibly keep them waiting, but that was

Vernon-Smith's hasty and truculent temper, and his reckless defiance of authority, have landed him in many a scrape. Now he is faced with the necessity of betraying another's secret to save himself from the sack!

an immemorial privilege; it was not a rule that worked both ways.

"How long's Loder going to keep you there, Smithy?" asked Harry Wharton. The Bounder snarled.

"Long enough to muck up my half-holiday, I suppose," he answered. "I've been here a quarter of an hour, and he hasn't come in yet. I shan't wait much longer."

"Fathead!" repeated Bob. "What the thump did you give Loder that chance for?"

"Oh, don't be an ass! That fat frog Bunter snaffled the cake I was going to take in the boat; you've kicked him often enough for bagging tuck from your study!" snapped Vernon-Smith.

"Yes, ass, but kicking the fat bounder is rather different from chasing him all over the school with a cricket stump!" retorted Bob. "Any prefect would have stopped you and sent you in, and so would Quelch. You were simply asking for it."

"The askfulness was terrific, my esteemed Smithy," remarked Hurreo Janset Ram Singh, with a shake of his dusky head.

"If you'd keep your temper——" said Johnny Bull.

"Oh, shut up!"

Herbert Vernon-Smith did not look like keeping his temper; his temper seemed very nearly at boiling-point.

The fact was that Smithy realised that he had been rather a fathead, as Bob pointed out. Any fellow might have been annoyed by the antics of the grub raider of the Remove, and no doubt a kicking had been due to Billy

Bunter. But chasing a fellow into the quad with a cricket stump was rather the limit. The truth was that Smithy's temper had got the better of him and had put him in the wrong. Loder was a bully, and he had jumped at the chance of catching the junior he disliked; but Wingate or Gwynne, had they been on the spot, would certainly have intervened. And there was no doubt that Mr. Quelch, the Remove master, would have done so.

"Well, what's going to be done?" demanded Johnny gruffly. "We can't keep Marjorie and Clara hanging about at the bridge, I suppose, because Smithy has to fly into a silly temper and get sent in."

"Have I asked you to wait for me?" snarled the Bounder. "Get off as soon as you like—and be blowed to you!"

"We can wait a bit," said Harry Wharton soothingly. "Loder can't keep you waiting here much longer."

"Can't he?" sneered the Bounder.

"He means to keep me here half the afternoon if I let him. Well, I'm not going to let him; I'm going to cut!"

"Better not," said the captain of the Remove, shaking his head. "After all, Loder's a prefect, and you've given him a jolly good excuse——"

"I'll give him another ten minutes," said Vernon-Smith. "If he's not here by then I'm going."

"It will mean a row," said Frank Nugent.

"You needn't worry about that. You won't be mixed up in it!" sneered Vernon-Smith.

"Oh, don't be a silly ass! Ten to one Loder will be glad if you cut, to make it worse for you."

"Let him. I'll give him ten minutes more. You fellows go down and get the boat out and wait for me at the raft. If I don't come in a quarter of an hour, get off without me."

"All right," said Harry. "We can't wait longer than that. But, look here, Smithy, take my tip and don't cut——"

"I'll ask for your advice when I want it."

"Oh, go and eat coke!" exclaimed the captain of the Remove. "Come on, you fellows, let's get the boat out!"

And the Famous Five walked away, leaving Vernon-Smith scowling from the window after them.

"I say, you fellows!" Billy Bunter joined them as they headed for the boathouse on the Sark. "I say——"

"Just the man I want to see!" exclaimed Bob Cherry.

"Like me to come, instead of Smithy, old chap?"

"Oh, no! I want to kick you for bowling me over. Turn round!"

"Oh, really, Cherry!"

"It's all that fat frump's fault!" growled Johnny Bull. "Let's kick him as far as the boathouse!"

"Oh, really, Bull——"

"The kickfulness is the proper caper," agreed Hurreo Singh. "Turn your ridiculous person roundfully, my esteemed, idiotic Bunter."

"Oh, really, Inky! I say, you fellows, no larks!" said Bunter, eyeing the chums of the Remove warily through his big spectacles. "I say, it wasn't my fault Loder jumped on Smithy. I never had his cake. I simply went into his study to borrow his 'Holiday Annual'—I mean his algebra. I never touched the cake. In fact, there wasn't a cake there!"

"Kick him!"

"I suppose you can take my word?" said Bunter, with dignity. "There wasn't a cake in the study cupboard. Not that I looked into the study cupboard, of course. I hope I'm not the

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sort of chap to go nosing into study cupboards. Not like some fellows I could name. It's pretty thick that a fellow can't drop into a study to borrow a Latin dictionary without being suspected of being after tuck. Smithy's suspicious. Rotten lot of fuss to make over a cake that had hardly any plums in it, too!"

"So you had the cake?"

"Oh, no! Smithy never had a cake! Besides, it was there all right when I left the study. Untouched! And I never went to the study, either. I was in the Rag at the time. Blessed if I see anything to cackle at! I say, you fellows, Smithy can't come; I'll bet Loder means to keep him hanging about and spoil his half-holiday. He's got his knife into Smithy for something. I'll come, instead. That will be rather more pleasant, won't it?"

"Oh crikey!"

"Marjorie and Clara will like it better, of course. In fact, they'd hardly enjoy it if I'm not there, you know," said Bunter. "Think of them!"

"Scat!"

"I'll row, if you like," added Bunter generously. "You can pick up some tips on rowing by watching me. You fellows row as if you were digging up potatoes; I've got style. Shall I come?"

"No!"

"Beast!"

"No" was quite a plain answer, but it was not the answer that William George Bunter wanted. Declining to take no for an answer, he rolled on after the Famous Five to the boathouse.

"I say, Bob, what have you got in that basket?" asked the fat Owl. "I'll carry it for you if you like."

"You're carrying Smithy's cake already," answered Bob. "That's enough for you to carry, old fat man!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The chums of the Remove reached the boathouse and trundled out their roomy old boat. As it was slid into the water Billy Bunter promptly ensconced himself in the stern seat.

Billy Bunter was not, perhaps, particularly keen on a pull on the river; neither, perhaps, was he fearfully keen on seeing the Cliff House girls. But he was particularly and fearfully keen on the contents of the basket carried by Bob Cherry. That picnic-basket drew him like a magnet.

The Famous Five took their places in the boat, and Bob held on to the raft with a boathook. They waited for Smithy to appear. There was no doubt that the reckless Bounder would join them if he could—Loder or no Loder—and they gave him a quarter of an hour.

"I say, you fellows, let's get off!" urged Bunter. "You don't want that ill-tempered beast Smithy. You've got me."

"Somebody pitch him overboard!" said Bob.

"Well, we're wasting time," said Bunter. "Rotten bad form to keep the girls waiting. I say, put that basket on this seat beside me; lots of room. I hope you can trust me with that basket."

"What a hopeful nature!" remarked Nugent.

"I say, you fellows——"

Harry Wharton glanced at the clock tower, visible over the trees, in the distance. Time was up, and the Bounder had not appeared. It was impossible to wait longer without keeping the Cliff House girls waiting at the village bridge—which was not to be thought of.

"Time!" said Harry. "Get out, Bunter!"

"Oh, really, Wharton——"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" exclaimed Bob

Cherry suddenly. "Did you drop a pound note on the raft, Wharton?"

"Eh—no! I've no pound notes, and I shouldn't drop them about if I had!"

"Did you, Franky?"

"I say, you fellows, I did!" exclaimed Billy Bunter, jumping up in a great hurry. "I say, that's my pound note! I dropped it just as I was getting in! I remember now I heard it fall——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Hold on! Don't shove off, Bob Cherry, you beast!" yelled Bunter. "Lemme pick up that pound note! It's mine! I say, hold on!"

"Oh, rot!" said Bob. "It's not yours, Bunter!"

"I tell you it is!" roared Bunter. "Hold on to the raft, you beast! That's my pound note! Hold on!"

"Well, buck up!"

Bob Cherry held on to the planks with the boathook, and Billy Bunter scrambled hurriedly out of the boat to pick up that pound note. Bob's chums stared blankly over the raft. They could see no pound note there.

Neither could Bunter. He blinked round him eagerly for the pound note which, according to his own statement, he had heard fall. But neither his little round eyes nor his big round spectacles spotted that pound note. And as he blinked in eager search of it, Bob Cherry, grinning, shoved at the raft, and the boat shot out into the river.

"I say, you fellows, where's that pound note?" yelled Bunter. "I say, stop! Where did you see that pound note, Cherry?"

"Eh—what pound note?" asked Bob. "I never saw any pound note!"

"You said you did!" yelled Bunter.

"Not at all. I asked Wharton if he'd dropped one. He might have, for all I knew!" answered Bob cheerfully.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Why, you—you—you beast!" roared Bunter, his very spectacles gleaming with wrath. "You—you silly fathead, making a fellow get out of the boat for nothing! Pull in, you fellows! I can't jump in from here!"

"You can't!" agreed Bob. "That's a cert! Pull, you men!"

The juniors pulled—but not to the raft. Their grinning faces looked back at Billy Bunter as they pulled down the river.

"I say, you fellows——" yelled Bunter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You—you—you beast! You were pulling my leg to make me get out of the boat!" howled Bunter, as that dreadful truth dawned on his fat intellect.

"What a brain!" said Bob. "He's guessed it!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Beasts!" roared Bunter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And the chums of the Remove, as they pulled away down the Sark, had a last view of Billy Bunter, pink with fury, shaking a fat fist after them as they went.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Cat and Mouse!

HERBERT VERNON-SMITH stood at Loder's window, staring out with a black brow, after the Famous Five had gone.

A good many fellows in the quad glanced at him as he stood there scowling. Temple, Dabney & Co. of the Fourth smiled at him in passing, and were rewarded with a dark scowl. Coker of the Fifth gave him a very dis-

approving look. Coker did not approve of scowling juniors.

Wingate of the Sixth happened to come along with Gwynne, and the Bounder, leaning from the window, called to him.

"I say, Wingate!"

The Greyfriars captain glanced round. "Hallo! What are you doing there?" he asked.

"Loder's told me to wait here for him——"

"Oh, all right!"

"I've waited nearly half an hour!" said Vernon-Smith, between his teeth. "Can I go now, Wingate?"

"Not if a prefect told you to wait. What the dickens do you mean?"

Wingate walked on, and the Bounder bestowed his blackest scowl on the back of the Sixth Former's head as he went.

Wingate, as head prefect, could have intervened, but evidently he did not choose to do so. Simple-hearted old Wingate was not likely to suspect that a fellow in the position of a Sixth Form prefect would keep a junior hanging on for no reason except to "muck up" his half-holiday. But the Bounder had no doubt that that was Gerald Loder's game, and his temper grew more and more bitter. He was going to join the Remove boat before it pushed off, with or without leave.

As he stood staring savagely from the window, with an eye open for Loder, a stalwart, athletic figure passed at a little distance.

Smithy's eyes followed it morosely.

It was that of the new games master at Greyfriars School—the man who passed under the name of "Stephen Lagden," which only the Bounder knew was not his own.

Vernon-Smith knew—or, at least, was sure that he knew—that the new games master was James Loder, No. 22, the convict who had escaped from Blackmoor a month ago.

Smithy was sure of that, and yet sometimes he doubted; and he doubted again now as he watched the games master sauntering down to the gates, exchanging remarks with the fellows he passed, his manner casual, and his handsome face cheerful and smiling.

If Stephen Lagden, so-called, really was James Loder, No. 22, and a hunted man, he undoubtedly had a nerve of iron.

The Bounder watched him as he went out at the gates and disappeared. Then he looked round for Loder again.

Loder of the Sixth was not to be seen.

The Bounder made up his mind.

He left the window and crossed to the study door. It was quite likely that, as Nugent had said, Loder would be glad if he cut, and added to his offences thereby. But Vernon-Smith was too savagely angry to care about that. He was going, and there was an end.

He stepped out, and walked quickly down the passage. He was very wary as he went. He did not want to meet Loder and be taken by the collar and marched in again. Near the door he came on a group of Remove fellows—Wibley, Russell, Ogilvy, Kipps, and Peter Todd.

"Seen that rotten cur Loder?" asked the Bounder.

"No," answered Peter Todd. "I say, Smithy, I heard him tell you to wait for him in his study."

"I've waited as long as I'm going to!" grunted the Bounder.

"Better wait a bit longer, old chap! You're asking for it!" said Wibley. "Loder may take you to the Head if you cut!"

"Blow the Head!" answered Vernon-Smith; and he went out into the quad.

Loder was not to be seen, and the Bounder walked away.

He did not go down to the gates. Whether the bully of the Sixth was or was not playing cat-and-mouse with him, the Bounder had no doubt of it, and it was quite possible that Loder was keeping an eye on the gates.

He walked away to the old Cloisters. There, in a secluded spot out of general view, was a place Smithy knew well, where the ancient wall could be climbed easily with the aid of the old ivy. It seemed safer to drop out quietly over the wall and cut down to the river unseen.

The Bounder scudded along the old Cloisters and reached that well-known

You've had a down on me ever since you failed to screw something out of me against Lagden, and you hate him because he stopped your rotten bullying! Now leave me alone, you cur!"

"So that's how you talk to a prefect, is it?" said Loder grimly. "I'll give you a chance of saying it over again before the Head! Now come down!"

"I won't!" snarled the Bounder, between his teeth.

"I order you to get down from that wall, Vernon-Smith!"

"You can order till you're black in the face, and I won't!" snarled Smithy.

"Won't you?"

Loder's eyes glittered. He slipped the ashplant into his right hand, and, stepping closer to the junior, grabbed his ankle with his left.

remained within reach of it, he would have been hurt.

But one moment was enough for Herbert Vernon-Smith. The instant his ankle was released he whipped over the top of the wall.

Loder's furious lash rang on the old ivy as Smithy dropped outside. The Bounder was out of reach.

He stood panting, and as he stood, a furious face, with a red-streaming nose, rose to view over the wall. Loder, almost frantic with pain and rage, was clambering after him.

Smithy gave him one look, and bolted.

"Stop!" raved Loder.

He dropped from the wall in his turn. Smithy was not likely to stop. He



"I say, you fellows, where's that pound note?" yelled Billy Bunter, standing on the school raft and blinking round eagerly. "I say, stop! Where did you see that note, Cherry?" "I didn't see one!" answered Bob, cheerfully pushing off with his oar. "I only asked Wharton if he'd dropped one, that's all!"

spot. He grasped the thick, ancient ivy and clambered.

"Stop!"

A sharp voice rapped behind him.

Vernon-Smith panted, and glared over his shoulder. Loder of the Sixth, with his ashplant under his arm, was coming towards him, a sour grin on his face.

With one hand on the coping of the wall and the other grasping the ivy, the Bounder glared down at him over his shoulder. He did not need telling that the bully of the Sixth had been keeping an eye open, and had spotted him when he left the House and followed him there.

"Get down!" said Loder, coming up to him. "Didn't I tell you to wait for me in my study, Vernon-Smith?"

"I did wait!"

"Didn't I tell you to wait till I came in?"

"Oh, chuck it, you rotten bully!" The Bounder's savage temper flamed out. "Think I don't know you were mucking up my half-holiday on purpose! And think I don't know why I

swipe!

There was a yell from Vernon-Smith as the cane landed. He made a fierce effort to pull himself up, but the grip on his ankle kept him back.

Swipe!

The Bounder, as he got the second lash, forgot all prudence. He had one foot free, and he kicked out with it.

There was a fearful yell from Loder of the Sixth.

He had not expected that—or even dreamed of it. It was, indeed, a fearfully reckless act on the part of a junior. But the Bounder, always reckless, was now enraged and desperate, and cared nothing what he did.

Loder staggered back, dropping the ashplant, and claspng both hands to his nose. The heel of the Bounder's boot had crashed on it, and it was spurting red.

"Oh!" roared Loder. "Ow! Oooh! Oh, my nose! Ooooh!"

The next moment he was grabbing up the ashplant again. Had the Bounder

flew. After him came the rapid, pattering footsteps of the prefect. With the ashplant gripped in his hand, and the claret streaming from his nose, Loder rushed in fierce pursuit.

Smithy covered the ground in record time, darting into the trees along the river, hoping to shake Loder off there, before he made for the raft and the boat. He stumbled over a trailing root, and pitched over—and as he scrambled breathlessly up, Loder reached him.

A clutch closed on his collar and dragged him down again. And the Bounder kicked and struggled and yelled, as the ashplant rose and fell, and the blows came down on him.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

A Licking for Loder!

MR. STEPHEN LAGDEN, games master of Greyfriars School, paused in his walk, a slight cloud settling over his handsome face.

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He had walked down to the river, after Smithy had seen him go out of the gates. Now he was sauntering up the towpath, in the direction of Courtfield Bridge and Popper Court. Between the gleaming, rolling Sark, and the woods in their autumn brown, it was a very pleasant walk, and little frequented—and for reasons of his own, the games master preferred to keep away from crowds.

What gave him pause now, was the sight of a rather portly figure coming down the tow-path from the direction of Popper Court.

It was that of Inspector Grimes, of Courtfield; and had the games master kept on his way, he would soon have met the Courtfield inspector face to face, and no doubt exchanged greetings with him.

But he did not keep on.

He paused, turned off from the river, and entered a shady path under the trees, heading in quite a different direction.

His face was clouded as he did so.

A year ago, the man who was called Stephen Lagden, had been a master at Okeham School, in Devonshire, and had feared to look no man in the face.

But, since then, he had been Convict No. 22, of Blackmoor; and he had been a hunted fugitive. And, secure as his position at Greyfriars seemed, under another man's name, the sight of a police official gave him a sinking at the heart.

Yet he knew how slight the danger was.

The police had their man—or believed that they had! In the prison hospital at Courtfield lay a man suffering from concussion, after being knocked down by a motor-car. He had been found, senseless, with disfigured face—and dressed in the tattered garb in which No. 22 had escaped from Blackmoor.

There had been no suspicion, so far, that he was not the right man—there could be none till he recovered sufficiently to speak.

And he still lay in unconsciousness, not yet fit even to be taken back to Blackmoor. So long as that lasted, the man who had changed clothes with him had a breathing space—a much-needed respite.

And that man, with iron nerve, had taken the injured man to the police station, and handed him over, and then gone to Greyfriars School in his name! And he was so happy and contented there that, from day to day, he put off making further plans.

Prudence warned him to go, while the going was good—yet he did not go.

He knew that one Greyfriars fellow suspected him—Vernon-Smith of the Remove. But the Bounder was silent about what he suspected. Loder of the Sixth loathed him, little dreaming that he was a near relative. But Loder never thought of guessing the games master's secret.

So long as the injured man at Courtfield was silent, he was safe—and yet he knew that it would be only prudent to go. And still he did not go.

It was a couple of weeks since James Loder, in Lagden's clothes, had handed over Stephen Lagden, in the convict's tattered garb, to the police. Then he had met Inspector Grimes—and the inspector had had no doubt, no suspicion.

But Mr. Grimes was a very keen man; and the man in a false name did not want to meet him again, if he could help it.

He had grown a moustache during his flight, and he had made one or two other little changes in his appearance:

but he knew that the photograph of No. 22 must have been circulated, and he did not want Mr. Grimes to be struck by a resemblance, if it could be avoided.

He disappeared into the wood by the river, while the Courtfield inspector was still at a distance.

He walked by a shady footpath, with a moody brow.

That glimpse of Mr. Grimes had reminded him of what he was in danger of forgetting, in his peaceful days at Greyfriars—that he was still a “wanted” man—a hunted man.

It was a bitter and unpleasant reminder.

A sudden outbreak of sound from the trees near him, drove Mr. Grimes and his own affairs from his mind. He started, and stared round him.

There was a sound of blows, a scuffling sound of struggling, and a panting voice:

“Let me go! Loder, you rotten bully! Oh! You cur!”

It was the voice of Herbert Vernon-Smith, yelling.

Lash, lash, lash, lash!

The games master's brow darkened, and his eyes glinted. But he paused.

It was no business of a games master to intervene between a Sixth Form prefect and a junior whom he was caning. But he knew Loder. He had never seen the Greyfriars senior, who was in truth his young Cousin Gerald, before coming to the school—but he had seen enough of him since. Once already he had intervened, when Loder was whopping Billy Bunter not wisely but too well. He wondered now whether he had better interfere again.

Lash, lash, lash!

“Oh, you bully! You rotter!” yelled Vernon-Smith, and there was a sound of fierce struggling.

The games master hesitated only a few moments. This was no prefect's caning—it was a savage thrashing, and he was bound to interfere.

He pushed through the thickets hurriedly and reached the spot.

What he saw as he arrived made his eyes blaze with anger.

Vernon-Smith, pinned down in Loder's grip in the grass, was struggling and kicking wildly, while the bully of the Sixth dealt out lash after lash. The blows rang almost like pistol-shots.

Loder's nose was streaming red. His face was as red as his nose, with fury. He lashed and lashed; and it was only too clear that he had utterly lost control of his temper, and gave no thought to anything but thrashing the writhing junior with all the force of his arm.

“Stop that, you brute!” shouted the games master.

Loder started and glared round at him. Taking no other notice of him, however, he lashed at the Bounder again.

The games master ran straight at him, grasped him, and wrenched him away from the struggling junior.

Loder turned on him, almost foaming with rage.

“Let go, you hound!” he yelled.

And in his rage he struck at the games master with the ashplant, and caught him across the cheek.

A red mark showed where the blow fell.

The next moment Loder was gripped by the collar, and his ashplant was wrenched from his hand. He was twisted over, in a grasp twice or thrice too strong for him, and the cane was laid on hard.

Vernon-Smith struggled dizzily to his feet.

He was aching all over, from his

thrashing. But he had reason to be thankful that the games master had come on the scene. Loder was very far from having finished—if he had not been interrupted.

“Oh gad!” gasped Vernon-Smith, staring blankly, as Loder of the Sixth yelled and writhed, and the games master brought his ash down again and again.

Whack, whack, whack, whack!

Loder yelled and roared and struggled, as Vernon-Smith had been doing a minute ago. But his struggles were as unavailing as Smithy's had been.

The Bounder staggered, panting, against a tree. He was hurt; but he grinned as he watched Loder of the Sixth getting that thrashing.

“You brute! You bully!” rapped the games master. “How dare you handle a boy like that! Do you suppose that your headmaster would allow it! By Jove! Take that—and that—and that!”

Whack, whack, whack, whack!

Loder yelled, and almost raved, as he took them.

Whack, whack, whack!

“Now go!” snapped the games master. He spun Loder away, with a twist of his arm, and threw the ashplant after him. “Get out!”

Loder, panting, gasping, plunged after the ash, and grabbed it up. He turned on the games master, foaming with fury. For a moment, Smithy thought that he would rush at Mr. Lagden, lashing out.

“Better not!” said the young master, quietly but grimly.

And Gerald Loder realised that he had better not; and, gasping with rage, he turned and tramped away.

The games master watched him out of sight, with a grim brow. Then he turned to Vernon-Smith.

“Thank you, sir!” said the Bounder.

The games master gave him a long look, and without speaking nodded, and went on his way through the wood. The Bounder, grinning, cut away towards the river. Loder of the Sixth tramped back to the school; and the look on his face as he went in caused about fifty fellows to turn their heads and stare at him.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Trouble Ahead!

“HALLO, hallo, hallo!”

“Smithy!”

The Remove boat was tied up to the bank, below Friar-dale Bridge, under a shady tree. The picnic basket was unpacked. Miss Clara Trevlyn, of Cliff House, had set up the spirit-stove for making tea. Now she was gazing at it—and Marjorie Hazeldene was smiling faintly. And all the Famous Five were going through their pockets—for matches.

The Cliff House girls had provided the tea-making outfit. The stove was there, in excellent order; the kettle was there, filled with water from a bottle; cups and saucers and sugar and milk were there. Everything was there, except matches.

A match is a very little thing—a mere trifle. But without a match all the rest of the outfit was useless—the stove, the methylated spirit, the kettle of water, the packet of tea, the milk and the sugar, the cups and the saucers. And Miss Clara had forgotten the matches.

“Haven't you a match, Marjorie?” asked Miss Clara, in a concentrated sort of voice.

“No, dear!” murmured Marjorie.

“Havn't any of you boys a match?”

“I—I think not—” murmured Harry Wharton.

“We are absolutely matchless, esteemed and beauteous, miss!” said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, with a shake of his dusky head.

“Priceless, you mean!” said Miss Clara. “Priceless duffers! Five boys—without a match!”

“We don't smoke, you know!” murmured Nugent. “Now, if that ass Smithy had turned up—”

“If a boy happens to be wanted you can depend on him not to turn up!” said Miss Clara. “I really think somebody might have brought some matches.”

The Famous Five were diplomatically silent. They could not help thinking that it was up to the provider of the spirit-stove to add matches to the outfit. Had Miss Clara been a Greyfriars man they would have mentioned the fact, with a few compliments attached. Miss Clara being, however, a Cliff House girl, they left the fact unmentioned and the compliments unuttered.

And then, to the general relief, Bob Cherry spotted the Bounder coming down the towpath, and roared to him.

Smithy was fairly certain to have matches! There was little doubt that he could have provided cigarettes as well!

“This way, Smithy!” roared Bob.

Welcoming hands were waved. Smithy waved back, and came on at a run.

As he had failed to turn up in time for the boat the Famous Five had given him up for the afternoon. Evidently, however, the Bounder had followed on down the river in the hope of catching the picnickers. And here he was—much to the general relief. Miss Clara was growing more and more sarcastic about boys who never could remember anything. And it looked as if there was going to be no tea till the Bounder appeared in the offing.

Harry Wharton looked rather curiously at the Bounder, as he came up and raised his cap politely to the Cliff House girls. Smithy was cool and smiling and good-humoured, but it seemed to the captain of the Remove that he could read signs in his face that his looks belied his thoughts. He wondered whether Smithy had had trouble in getting away, little guessing how very serious that trouble had been.

“Got a match?” asked Johnny Bull.

“Lots!”

“Oh, good!” said Miss Clara. “We can't get the stove going—nobody thought of bringing any matches.”

“Well, you fellows must be duffers!” said Vernon-Smith. “Fancy bringing a spirit-stove and no matches! Fatheads!”

The Famous Five suppressed a chuckle. Smithy did not seem aware that it was Miss Clara who had brought the spirit-stove.

Miss Clara's face was pink as she took the match-box from Smithy, and proceeded to ignite the stove under the kettle.

“Which silly ass was it?” asked Smithy.

Marjorie laughed involuntarily.

“Oh, anybody might forget the matches, Smithy!” said Bob Cherry.

“Anybody who was a silly duffer, certainly,” assented Vernon-Smith. “If I packed a spirit-stove I should pack in matches along with it. I should think anybody would who wasn't a blithering idiot.”

“Thank you!” said Miss Clara, over her shoulder.

“Oh!” ejaculated the Bounder.

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“Oh, sorry!” gasped Smithy. “I thought it was one of these duffers.”

"I—I mean, anybody might forget to bring matches—sort of thing anybody might forget, of course—"

"Unless he happened to have cigarettes, too!" said Miss Clara crushingly. "Thank you for the matches—we don't want any of the cigarettes."

The Bounder grinned, winked at the Famous Five, and sat down. Miss Clara, with a severe face, made the tea. But when the tea was made the smiles returned to Miss Clara's face. Tea was grateful and comforting.

It was a very pleasant picnic, by the bank of the shining Sark, in the golden October afternoon. Herbert Vernon-Smith seemed in great spirits. He laughed and chatted as cheerily as any other member of the party, and neither Marjorie nor Clara had the remotest suspicion that Smithy was in expectation of bad trouble when he returned to his school.

What was going to happen when he got back to Greyfriars was rather a painful problem to the Bounder.

He had acted, as usual, with a reckless disregard for consequences; but during his walk down the river he had had time to think of them.

He had defied a prefect of the Sixth, and he had kicked that prefect on the nose to get away from him. Loder, there was no doubt, had a prize nose that afternoon. If he went to the Head—

There could not be much doubt that he would go to the Head. Everything was on his side—the Bounder had put himself completely in the wrong.

A Head's flogging in Hall was an unpleasant sort of thing to look forward to, and there loomed behind it the possibility of worse—the "sack"!

But Smithy was not the fellow to wear his heart upon his sleeve or to let his troubles show in his face.

The two girls suspected nothing, and of the Famous Five only Harry Wharton had an impression that there was something on the Bounder's mind—something that he was, for the present, putting at the back of his mind.

Tea was over, and it was time for the party to embark again, when a fat figure was spotted in the distance on the tow-path.

The circumference of that figure, and the big spectacles that flashed back the rays of the sun, revealed that it was Billy Bunter.

The Owl of the Remove was apparently in search of the picnickers.

"All aboard!" grinned Bob Cherry.

"There's a fat pirate in the offing!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The girls pushed off as Billy Bunter came panting and puffing down the path. The fat Owl spotted the boat and waved a podgy hand.

"I say, you fellows!" he yelled.

Bob Cherry waved a hand in farewell.

"Beasts!" roared Bunter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

For the second time that afternoon William George Bunter had failed to catch the boat! For the second time he stood on the bank, and brandished a plump fist as it pulled away.

"I say," yelled Bunter, "I say, Smithy—"

"Go and eat coke!" called back the Bounder.

"I say, you're jolly well going to be sacked when you get back!" roared Bunter. "Serve you jolly well right, you beast! Do you hear? Sacked! Yah!"

The boat pulled on, and Billy Bunter's dulcet tones died away astern. The Famous Five glanced at Smithy—and Marjorie and Clara gave him startled looks.

"What did that fat ass mean?" exclaimed Nugent.

The Bounder laughed.

"Does Bunter ever mean anythin'?" he drawled.

"Only Bunter's rot?" asked Miss Clara.

"Just that!" assented the Bounder. "As Inky would say, the rotfulness is terrific. Dear old Bunter's always talkin' out of his jolly old hat."

Marjorie gave him a rather quick glance; but the Bounder's face was smiling and careless. The subject dropped, and Bunter was forgotten, as the boat pulled on.

But when, later, the two girls had been landed at Cliff House, and the Remove fellows were pulling back to Greyfriars, Harry Wharton tapped the Bounder on the shoulder, with a very grave face.

"Look here, Smithy, is there a row waiting for you at Greyfriars?" he asked.

"Sort of, I fancy."

"But not—" Wharton caught his breath. "Smithy, old man! Not what that fat chump said—not the sack?"

"Even chances, I think!" drawled the Bounder; and he shrugged his shoulders, and said no more.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

The Sack for Smithy?

TOM REDWING was waiting for his chum when he came in. The Bounder, leaving the Famous Five putting up the boat, walked up to the House, with his hands in his pockets, humming a tune.

That trouble awaited him at the school the Bounder had no doubt. He had not needed Bunter to tell him that.

But he was quite cool. Smithy's hasty and truculent temper often landed him in trouble;

but he had, at least, plenty of nerve to face it when it came. He noticed now that a dozen fellows looked at him and exchanged glances. Tom Redwing joined him with a clouded face.

Redwing had been up to Hawkscliff that afternoon, and had seen nothing of his chum since dinner. But he had got back before Smithy, and had heard what was on.

The Bounder gave him a nod and a grin.

"You're lookin' worried, old bean," he said lightly. "Anythin' happened?"

"I hear there's a fearful row on, Smithy! Two or three prefects have been looking for you."

"I'm honoured!" said the Bounder gravely. "Sixth Form prefects don't often run after Lower Fourth men."

"I've seen Loder—"

"Always a pleasure to see jolly old Loder, isn't it? What does his nose look like?" asked the Bounder, with interest.

"Then it's true?" said Redwing.

"What's true?"

"I've heard a dozen fellows saying that you punched Loder's nose."

"Not guilty!" said Vernon-Smith, shaking his head. "You can deny that rumour, old bean; official!"

Redwing looked relieved.

"You didn't punch his nose, then? It looks as if somebody has—I've seen him—a nose like a ripe tomato. You didn't punch it?"

"No!" yawned the Bounder.

"Kicked it!"

"Wha-a-at?" gasped Redwing.

"Landed the heel of my boot on it," drawled the Bounder. "Not my fault. Loder grabbed one foot, and got the other on his boko. Loder asks for these things, you know. He really begged for it—and got it!"

Redwing looked utterly dismayed.

"Oh, Smithy, you ass! That will mean going to the Head! Loder's down on you, and he won't lose a chance like this!"

"No, I suppose he won't!" agreed Smithy. "He's been watchin' me like a cat for days. Now he's got me!"

"Oh, here he is!" Coker of the Fifth came up to the two juniors in the quad. "Here you are, young Smith—"

"Here I am, old Coker!" assented the Bounder.

"What's this I hear about your punching a prefect?" demanded Coker. "Did you give Loder of the Sixth that nose? He's got a nose like a squashed strawberry. I've heard that he told Wingate you did it. That right?"

"Right as rain!" admitted the Bounder.

"Well, my hat!" said Coker.

Smithy sauntered on, leaving Horace Coker staring.

Temple, Dabney & Co. of the Fourth rushed up as they saw Smithy.

"I say, Smithy!" gasped Cecil Reginald Temple.

"Loder's got a prize nose!" exclaimed Dabney.

"They say you did it!" said Fry.

"Did you?"

The Bounder grinned. Evidently Gerald Loder's damaged nose was already famed through the school. No doubt plenty of eyes had fallen on it when Loder walked it in.

"Guilty!" grinned Vernon-Smith. "Like jolly old Coriolanus, alone I did it."

"Oh gad!" said Temple. "I say, you'll be sacked for bashing a prefect on the boko!"

"Loder asked for it!" explained the Bounder. "It wouldn't have been polite to refuse, when he asked, would it?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Smithy walked on with Redwing; and a moment later Hobson of the Shell rushed up, breathless with eagerness.

"I say, Smithy, did you squash Loder's nose?" he gasped. "I say,

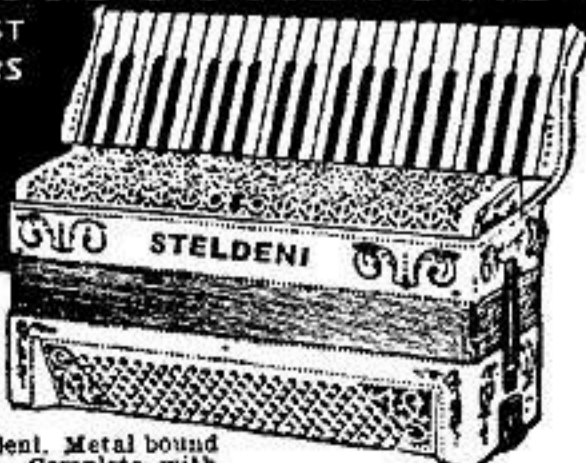
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"If I had packed a spirit-stove, I should pack in matches along with it," said Vernon-Smith. "I should think anybody would who wasn't a blithering idiot!" "If he happened to smoke cigarettes!" said Miss Clara Trevlyn crushingly. "Thanks for the matches—we don't want any of the cigarettes!"

serve him jolly well right if you did—but did you?"

"I did!"

"Oh crikey!" said Hobson.

"The fellows seem fearfully interested in Loder's nose, Reddy," remarked the Bounder, as he sauntered on. "I think——"

"Vernon-Smith!" It was Wingate of the Sixth this time. He gave the Bounder a grim look as he called to him.

"Yes, Wingate," said Smithy meekly. "Do you want to hear about Loder's nose? I cannot tell a lie; I did it with my little hatchet."

"Ha, ha, ha!" came a howl from a dozen fellows.

"You young ass!" said Wingate. "You're to go to your Form-master at once!"

"Oh, good! Always a pleasure to see Quelch!" yawned the Bounder, and he strolled into the House.

He gave Redwing a cheery nod, and walked away to Masters' Studies. Mr. Quelch, the Remove master, had evidently heard of the happening, and wanted to know. Indeed, there were few at Greyfriars who had not heard of it by this time.

Nobody seemed to be wasting much sympathy on Loder. The startling state of his nose seemed to evoke more merriment than sympathy. But there was no doubt that the general opinion was that Herbert Vernon-Smith was booked for serious trouble. Opinion was divided, whether it would be the "sack" or only a flogging. It could not fail to be one or the other—and it was possible that it would be both!

Smithy was quite well aware of it. But he had the nerve to face the music. If he was going, he was going with his chin up, as he would have expressed it himself. Nobody was to see the

Bounder of Greyfriars show the white feather.

He tapped at Mr. Quelch's door, and entered. He found the Remove master looking very grim.

"Oh!" said Mr. Quelch. "You have returned, Vernon-Smith."

"Yes, sir!" said the Bounder meekly.

"Where have you been?"

"On the river, sir, with Wharton and his friends."

"Oh!" Mr. Quelch looked a shade less grim. Perhaps he had not expected to hear that the scapegrace of his Form had been so harmlessly and innocently engaged. "Vernon-Smith, there has been a great deal of talk about something that has happened this afternoon. I have spoken to Loder, of the Sixth Form, and he states that he intends to place the matter before Dr. Locke."

"Indeed, sir!"

"I shall not, therefore, deal with it!" said the Remove master. "But you will give me your account of what has happened. Loder has stated that he caught you bullying a boy of your own Form, and sent you into the House—that you left in direct defiance of his authority, and kicked him savagely when he attempted to stop you."

"That isn't quite correct, sir! I was not bullying Bunter. And Loder knew it, too."

"Vernon-Smith, were you, or were you not chasing Bunter with a cricket stump in your hand?" exclaimed Mr. Quelch.

"Well, yes, sir—I admit I lost my temper, but——"

"Did you or did you not leave the House after a Sixth Form prefect had directed you to wait?"

"I waited half an hour!" said the Bounder sullenly.

"Yes or no?"

"Yes."

"Did Loder detect you climbing the

Cloister wall, and did you refuse to return when he ordered you to do so?"

The Bounder breathed hard.

"Yes, sir!"

"Did you kick him when he was pulling you from the wall?"

"He was swiping me with his cane, and I kicked out."

"That will do, Vernon-Smith!" said Mr. Quelch. "I desired to know how the matter stood. As I have said, I shall not deal with it myself, as it will come before your headmaster to-morrow. You may go."

The Bounder left his Form-master's study without another word. His brow was dark as he walked away to the Rag. That brief interview made him realise, rather more clearly, the position in which he stood. It was plain that he was condemned in his Form-master's mind. Quelch had no use for reckless rebelliousness.

A crowd of fellows in the Rag turned towards Smithy as he entered that apartment. Harry Wharton & Co. had come in, and they eyed Vernon-Smith rather anxiously.

As he met the sea of inquiring eyes the cloud left the Bounder's brow, and he assumed an air of smiling carelessness. Nobody was going to see him flinch.

"Seen Quelch?" asked Harry.

"Oh, yes; I've had a little chat with the old bean," answered the Bounder lightly.

"Whopped, or what?" asked Wibley.

"Oh, no! Up before the Big Beak in the mornin'!" yawned the Bounder. "Quelch washes his hands of me!"

"You're going up to the Head?" asked Squiff.

"Just that!"

"I say, you fellows, that means the sack!" squeaked Billy Bunter.

There was little doubt of it in the

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Remove. Probably there was little doubt of it in the Bounder's own mind. But outwardly, at least, Smithy gave no sign of caring a straw; and he had the satisfaction, at least, of making the fellows wonder at his nerve.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Smithy's Last Chance!

"FAG!"

It was Loder of the Sixth who called; and Tubb of the Third came along to his study almost in fear and trembling.

Tubb had the pleasure—or otherwise—of fagging for Loder. Never had his duty been more unwelcome than it was this special evening.

Ever since the episode of the afternoon Loder's temper—never amiable—had been on the boil, so to speak.

Fellows who saw the state of his nose—red and raw from the Bounder's heel—attributed his temper to the state of his "boko." But, as a matter of fact, it was not his damaged nose of which Loder was thinking.

He had, in fact, almost forgotten the damage to his nose, though until it mended other fellows were not likely to forget it.

He had been thrashed—thrashed like a fag, or, rather, like a dog, by the man he loathed and detested: the man who, as he believed, had let out the secret that James Loder, the convict of Blackmoor, was his cousin; the man he had bitterly disliked ever since he had come to the school as games master.

His feelings towards the Bounder were bitter enough—but they were as moonlight unto sunlight, as water unto wine, compared with his feelings towards Stephen Lagden.

Vernon-Smith was a cheeky junior whom he could punish. The games master was a man who had thrashed him, and whom he could not touch.

It was useless to lay any complaint before the Head on the subject of Lagden's interference. In his rage he had struck at the games master with his ash; and such an action as that placed him entirely out of court.

The man had thrashed him, and he could do nothing—nothing above-board, at all events. He had to take that thrashing—not in the slightest degree comforted by the knowledge that he deserved it.

Tubb of the Third looked into the study with a scared face. He did not want to come near Loder in his present temper.

"D-d-d-d-did you call, Loder?" quavered Tubb.

Loder gave him a black scowl.

"Yes! Find Vernon-Smith of the Remove and tell him to come here."

"Oh! Yes, Loder!" gasped Tubb, greatly relieved to find that it was only a message, and that he could get away.

The fag disappeared; and Loder of the Sixth resumed pacing his study. There was a twinge of pain in his damaged nose; but he hardly heeded it.

There was more than a twinge in his back, where his own ashplant had fallen, hard and heavy, in the hefty hand of the games master.

Loder was, in fact, aching from that thrashing. Never since he had been a Lower boy had Gerald Loder had such a licking. It was not only the twinges of pain that enraged him—the pain was nothing compared with the humiliation. He writhed as he thought of that.

All the school knew of what Smithy had done; but Loder had said no word of what Lagden had done. He did not

want the school to know that he had been thrashed by the games master, if he could help it. The master, of course, was not likely to say a word on the subject. Vernon-Smith, who had witnessed that thrashing, was likely enough to tell all Greyfriars about it, however. Loder could picture the glee with which the Lower School would hear such news; indeed, he could picture the covert grins on the faces of his own friends in the Sixth.

He stopped his pacing and stared round at the door as there was a tap, and the Bounder appeared.

Vernon-Smith had received the message from Tubb, and arrived. But he did not enter the study. He stood in the doorway and looked at Loder—coolly, with a sardonic grin on his face.

"Come in, you young fool!" snarled Loder.

"Thanks—I'll stand here for a bit," drawled the Bounder. "If you've sent for me to whop me, Loder, you can forget it. Quelch says I'm going up to the Head in the morning. You're not going to whop me as well."

Loder gave him a bitter, savage look—which did not disturb the Bounder's cool equanimity. He meant what he said. If he were going up to the headmaster for judgment, he had nothing more to fear from Loder, who would have done his worst; and he made that clear.

The prefect's hand strayed to the ashplant on his table. But he withdrew it.

"Come in, and shut the door!" he said. "I'm not going to whop you, you young scoundrel. You're going to be sacked to-morrow."

"If I'm going to be sacked, I'm certainly not going to be whopped!" said the Bounder coolly.

He came in and shut the door, as bidden. But he eyed the bully of the Sixth very warily.

But it was not, clearly, a "whopping" that was intended. Loder left the ashplant where it was. He stood facing the Bounder, his hands driven deep into his pockets.

Smithy wondered what was wanted, if it were not a whopping. Had Loder decided to hand out "six," and let the matter go at that, the scapegrace of the Remove would have been glad enough. But he could see that it was not that. He had suspected that Loder intended to give him a thrashing to go on with, as it were; but it was not that, either. He could only wonder what it was.

"I dare say you know how you stand, Vernon-Smith!" said Loder at last. "You go up before Dr. Locke in the morning on the charge of assaulting a prefect—and that means the long jump."

"Possibly!" assented the Bounder. "Is that what you've sent for me to tell me?"

"I've sent for you to tell you that perhaps I may not take the matter before the Head at all!"

"Eh?"

Smithy stared.

"Don't I speak plain?" snapped Loder.

"Oh, quite! Look here, Loder, what the dickens are you driving at?" demanded Vernon-Smith. "If you want me to take six, instead of going up to the Head, I'll take it like a lamb, and be glad of it. You know that. Is that what you mean?"

"No!"

"Well, what the thump do you mean, then?"

Loder rubbed his damaged nose.

"I mean that, cheeky young scoundrel as you are, I'll let you clean off, in certain circumstances," he said slowly.

"You're the man to let a fellow off

when you've got him in a cleft stick," said the Bounder with sarcastic scorn. "I've been a silly fool, and landed myself right in your claws. You've been watching for a chance, and now you've got it. You're going to make the most of it. What's the good of gammon?"

"You young fool!" said Loder contemptuously. "Do you think I care two straws whether you're kicked out of Greyfriars or not?"

"Well, yes, I do!" said Smithy. "But if you don't, all the better. Blessed if I can make you out, anyhow."

"What do you know about Lagden?"

"Eh?"

"Cough it up! You know something about that rotter, as I'm perfectly well aware. I want to know what it is. Cough it up, and you can walk out of this study, and never hear anything more about what's happened to-day."

"Oh!" gasped the Bounder.

He understood now.

He was only a pawn in the game. Personally, he did not matter at all, so far as Loder was concerned. It was the games master who was the object of Loder's concentrated bitterness and hatred.

Vernon-Smith stood silent.

"You know where you stand!" went on Loder. "You've done enough to get yourself sacked. It rests with me to put it before the Head, or not, as I choose. Now, what do you know about that man Lagden?"

Smithy did not answer.

"I think you'd better answer!" said Loder grimly. "It will go hard with you, if you don't. From what I heard you saying to Redwing in the Cloisters a week ago, you and some other juniors saw the man hanging about this neighbourhood before he came here as games master. You said to Redwing that he was not Stephen Lagden, the man who had been a master at Okeham School, and that you knew it. According to you, the man is an impostor, who has come here in another man's name. That was what you said."

"I didn't know you were listening," sneered the Bounder.

"Never mind that," said Loder quietly, though his eyes gleamed. "If the man is, as you've said, a spoofing impostor, it's your duty, as a Greyfriars fellow, to help bowl him out, and show him up. You know that."

Vernon-Smith was silent.

"By keeping his rotten secret, whatever it is, you're making yourself a party to his rascality," went on Loder.

"The man isn't a rascal," muttered the Bounder. "He's a jolly good sort, as he showed this afternoon."

Loder's eyes blazed; but he went on quietly:

"I looked into the matter at the time. I got a photograph of Lagden, and showed it to a man who ought to have known his face. I thought that that would settle it. What are you grinning at, you young rascal?"

"Oh, nothing! Carry on!"

"Well, it didn't settle it!" said Loder. "I came to the conclusion that you had been pulling my leg. But I—"

"Why not stick to that?" asked Smithy.

Loder shook his head.

"I've thought it over since," he said. "You never knew I was in the Cloisters at that time. You never knew what I heard you say to your pal Redwing. I've thought it out, and I feel sure of that."

The Bounder stood silent.

"Who the man is, and how you found him out, I don't know," said Loder.

"But I'm sure of this much—you've seen him, before he came here, when he wasn't called Lagden. But I can't go to the Head with that. There's got to be some sort of proof against the man. You're going to tell me what you know. It's your duty! You know that. You've refused to do what you know to be your plain duty. Well, I'm going to make you do it! That impostor isn't going to carry on at Greyfriars if I can stop him!"

Loder paused for a reply. But Herbert Vernon-Smith did not speak.

"Well, what have you to say?" demanded Loder.
"Nothing."

Loder compressed his lips.

"You know, or, at least, think you know, that a man has come here in a false name, spoofing your headmaster, and you're keeping his secret for him!" he said. "Very well, if that's your game, Vernon-Smith, the sooner you're kicked out of the school the better! You've got until after morning school to-morrow to think it over! Now get out!"

Vernon-Smith hesitated a moment. Then, still without speaking, he left Loder's study. His face was sombre as he went. Loder had given him a last chance—to take, or to refuse. And whether he was going to take it or refuse it, the Bounder only knew.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.
A Boot for Bunter!

"I SAY, you fellows—"

"Get out!"
"But I say, Loder—"
"Blow Loder!"

"And Walker!"
"Blow Walker!"

Study No. 1 evidently did not want to hear about Loder and Walker. Billy Bunter blinked in at the doorway of that study, apparently full of news; but his news seemed to be at a discount in that study.

Harry Wharton picked up a Latin grammar, and Frank Nugent a dictionary. Both took aim.

"But, I say, you fellows!" persisted Bunter, with wary eyes and spectacles on the grammar and the dictionary, "I say, I heard Loder say to Walker— Beast!"

Bunter dodged as the grammar flew.

Harry Wharton laughed.

"What did Loder call Walker a beast for?" he asked.

"Eh? He didn't! I was calling you a beast! I say, they were talking in the quad, you know, and they never noticed me. Not that I was listening, of course—not the sort of thing I would do. I happened to be on the other side of a tree, and Loder said— Yaroooh!"

The dictionary flew, and Bunter did not dodge in time. It landed on his podgy chest, and he sat down in the doorway of Study No. 1.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Hand me that dic, Bunter!" said Nugent. "I shall want it for prep!"

"Ow! Beast!" roared Bunter. "I jolly well won't tell you now! Wow!"

"Don't!" agreed Harry Wharton. "Buzz off, before you get the inkpot! You fat worm! It's all your fault Smithy's landed in a row!"

"How is it my fault?" demanded Bunter indignantly, as he scrambled up. "I never asked him to get after me with a cricket stump, did I? Think I wanted him to? He made out that I'd had his cake, just because I was coming out of his study, and he saw a few crumbs on my waistcoat, and the cake was gone. Smithy's got a low, suspicious mind. I say, you fellows—"

"Get out!" roared Wharton and Nugent together.

Billy Bunter was not popular at the moment. The whole trouble, which looked like resulting so terribly serious for the Bounder, had been started by the fat Owl's grub-raiding. Certainly Bunter had never foreseen such serious results when he snaffled Smithy's cake in Study No. 4.

"I never had that cake, you fellows!" said the fat Owl. "It was just Smithy's rotten suspicious mind! Just his rotten temper! Getting after a fellow with a cricket stump, and chasing him all over the school just because of a silly cake! I wouldn't have touched it if I'd known that he was going to make such an awful fuss about it. Not that I did touch it, you know. I never went into his study at all. I was in the Rag when Smithy saw me in his study!"

"Oh crikey!"

"I—I mean, when he didn't see me in his study. But I say, you fellows, I was going to tell you about Loder."

"Buzz off!"

"Smithy's going to be sacked to-morrow," went on Bunter cheerfully. "I can't say I'm sorry—chasing a fellow with a cricket stump, and all that. But I say, I can

(Continued on next page.)

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tell you that Loder would be jolly well sacked, too, if the Head knew! He, he, he!"

"You thumping idiot! What do you mean?" asked Harry, staring at the fat Owl.

Billy Bunter grinned.

"I know what I know," he answered. "If you'd heard what he said to Walker of the Sixth in the quad——"

"We don't happen to be behind trees when fellows are talking," said Frank Nugent sarcastically.

"Oh, really, Nugent! It was quite by chance, of course. I never saw them confabbing and wondered what they were talking about. I stopped to tie up my shoe-lace. And Loder said: 'Don't you chuck that inkpot at me, you beast!'"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"He said he was going out by the Sixth Form lobby door," said Bunter. "He said he would go, whether Walker came or not, at eleven. What do you think of that?"

"Oh, roll away, fathead!" snapped Wharton.

The captain of the Remove did not share Billy Bunter's deep interest in other fellow's affairs, and he certainly did not want to hear anything about the proceedings of the black sheep of the Sixth.

"Well, look here!" said Bunter. "Think what a jolly good chance it is of a rag on Loder. He's going to break bounds to-night, whether Walker goes with him or not. What about going down to his study?"

"Fathead!"

"Loder's going at eleven, and you can bet that he won't be back before twelve," said Bunter. "What about pouring a bottle of ink into his bed, for him to flop into when he comes in?"

Harry Wharton laughed.

"Ripping idea!" he agreed. "You do it!"

"Well, I—I don't exactly want to do it," said Bunter. "I—I think I mayn't wake up. I sleep pretty sound, you know. Suppose you do it, Wharton?"

"Fathead!"

"It's perfectly safe," urged Bunter. "If there were any risk, of course I'd do it myself like a shot. You know me. Loder will be out of bounds. Why, even if he caught you at it, he'd hardly dare make a fuss at that time of night. He would be afraid of something coming out—see? Safe as houses. And look what a beastly bully he is. Only the other day he whopped me like anything, and Lagden butted in and stopped him. And I never did anything. He thought I'd pulled his leg on the phone, and it was Smithy all the time. I say, I'll get a bottle of ink for you to mop into his bed, Wharton. I know where Fishy keeps his bottle of ink."

"You fat clump!"

"Oh, really, Wharton—— I say—— Yarooop!" roared Bunter, as a sudden kick from behind landed on his tight trousers, and he pitched head foremost into the study. "Whoop!"

Bump!

The fat Owl of the Remove landed on his hands and knees, roaring. Herbert Vernon-Smith looked in at the doorway. It was the Bounder who had come along, and landed that hefty kick.

"Ow! Beast! Wow!" roared Bunter, sitting up, spluttering. "Smithy, you beast! Wharrer you kicking me for, you swob? Wow!"

Vernon-Smith did not explain why

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he was kicking Bunter. He stepped into the study, and recommenced. The hapless fat Owl squirmed and roared.

"Smithy!" exclaimed Harry Wharton.

"Chuck it, Smithy!" said Nugent, frowning.

"Yarooop! I say, you fellows! Yoo-hoop!" roared Bunter. "Ow! Beast! Keep off! 'Tain't my fault you're going to be bunked, is it, you rotter? Yaroooop!"

Perhaps the Bounder thought that it was. Anyhow, he seemed to derive solace from kicking William George Bunter. He kicked, hard and often, and the fat Owl rolled and roared.

Harry Wharton jumped up and caught the Bounder by the shoulder. He dragged him back from the wriggling fat Owl.

"Nuff's as good as a feast, Smithy!" he said quietly. "Chuck it!"

The Bounder gave him a fierce look.

"Hands off, you fool!" he snarled.

"Cut, Bunter, you fat ass!" snapped Nugent; and he pushed Bunter out of the doorway, while the captain of the Remove held the Bounder back.

"Ow! Yow! Beast! Wow!" roared Bunter, as he fled.

Frank Nugent threw the door shut after him. Wharton released the Bounder's shoulder as Smithy wrenched.

"Keep your temper, Smithy!" said the captain of the Remove. "I should think you'd had a lesson about that to-day already."

"It was that fat rotter caused the whole trouble!" snarled the Bounder.

"It was your rotten temper caused the whole trouble!" answered Wharton directly. "Bunter has snooped tack often enough without such a fuss being made about it. Why the dickens can't you keep your temper, like any other fellow?"

Vernon-Smith gave him a black look. It was an hour since he had seen Loder, in the latter's study, and that hour had been spent in painful and harassed reflection by the fellow who stood within the shadow of expulsion. Vernon-Smith's temper had not been improved by his reflections.

"You silly fool——" he said.

"Oh, go it!" said Harry resignedly.

"If it's any comfort to you to blow off steam, don't mind me!"

The Bounder's angry eyes gleamed at him. But he calmed down. Perhaps he realised that his truculent temper had already been his undoing that day. Anyhow, he had not come to Wharton's study for a row.

"Oh, bother the fat fool!" he said impatiently. "Never mind Bunter! I'm up against it, as I suppose you fellows know."

"We're sorry," said Nugent.

"Fat lot of good that will be to me, if I'm bunked from the school to-morrow!" snapped the Bounder.

"My dear chap——"

"Look here, I came here to speak to you, Wharton. I want some advice—and as head boy, captain of the Form, model character and general Great Panjandrum, you're the man to give it!" said the Bounder with a sneer.

Wharton coloured. But he kept his temper. He was going to be as patient as he could, at all events, with the fellow whose last day at Greyfriars that might be.

"I'll do anything I can, Smithy," he answered quietly.

"Will you get out for a bit, Nugent?" said Vernon-Smith.

Frank laughed.

"You put it so civilly," he remarked.

"Quite a pleasure to get out when you're here, Smithy."

And Frank left the study, and shut the door after him.

Harry Wharton looked inquiringly, and not very pleasantly, at the Bounder. He was willing, more than willing, to do anything he could; but he did not see why Smithy could not speak before his chum. But he had made up his mind to be patient and as helpful as he could, and he waited for the Bounder to speak.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

A Startling Story!

HARRY WHARTON waited—but the Bounder did not seem in a hurry to speak. He moved restlessly about the study, his hands in his pockets, and the captain of the Remove watched him in silence. Smithy came to a halt at last and stood scowling at him.

"I've seen Loder!" he grunted. "He's offered to chuck it and let me off—on conditions."

"My hat! That's a good offer!" said Harry, in great surprise. "It's not much like Loder, though. What do you mean by conditions?"

"If I help him score over Lagden—our jolly old games master. You know how Loder loathes him. Well, this afternoon he chipped in when Loder was pitching into me, and the fool struck him. Lagden thrashed him with his own ash. You can guess what Loder feels like. He doesn't care two straws about me, one way or the other, if he can get at Lagden. See?"

"Blessed if I do! He can't hurt Lagden—and you can't help him. You're talking in riddles!"

"Oh, you're a fool!"

"Thanks!"

"You don't know who Lagden is?"

"Eh!" said Harry blankly. "I should imagine he was Lagden!"

"Then you'd be wrong—he isn't!"

That statement was so astonishing that the captain of the Remove made no rejoinder to it. He simply stared at Vernon-Smith.

"I'm the only one that knows, so far!" muttered Smithy. "I knew him the day he came. Don't you remember that day you noticed him, and thought you'd seen somebody like him?"

"I remember."

"Well, it wasn't somebody like him you'd seen—it was the man himself," muttered the Bounder. "Mind, this is a secret. I'm telling you this because I want your advice—I just don't know what to do. It's not to be gabbled all over the school."

"I'm not a fellow to gabble all over the school I hope. And I don't begin to understand what you mean, if you mean anything."

"Have you forgotten the Blackmoor convict? James Loder, No. 22, of Blackmoor?"

"No. What about him?"

"He's Lagden."

Harry Wharton gazed at the Bounder.

"Are you mad?" he asked.

"Oh, don't be an ass!"

"Well, if you're not——"

"Listen to me! I knew Lagden the day he came. The day before that, you remember they were after the convict—he grabbed that fool Coker's boat and got away on the river—we got after him——"

"I remember all that; but——"

"I was knocked into the river, and



"You know something about that rotter Lagden," said Loder grimly. "Cough it up! You know where you stand. You've done enough to get yourself sacked. It rests with me to put it before the Head, or not, as I choose. Now, what do you know?" Vernon-Smith stood silent, thinking.

the convict stopped for me. I was going down when he got me. He saved my life. He was on the run, with hardly a chance of getting clear, yet he stopped to pull me out of the water. A chap can't forget a thing like that."

"It was awfully decent of him," said Harry. "He can't have been a bad man, convict as he was. I was very sorry to hear that he had been injured in a motor accident afterwards—"

"He wasn't!"
"He was, you ass! He's lying at Courtfield now, still unconscious, from the latest accounts—"

"That man's not the convict."
"You're dreaming, Smithy. The police must know whether he's the convict or not—he was dressed in the broad arrows—"

"I don't know what happened on Courtfield Common that day. I know that James Loder, No. 22, came here in Lagden's clothes, and under Lagden's name, calling himself our new games master."

"Smithy!"
"It must have been Lagden who was knocked down by the car, and No. 22 changed clothes with him while he was unconscious, I should say."

"Impossible!"
"Oh, don't be an ass!" snarled the Bounder. "I tell you I knew the man the day he came, and I've known him ever since."

"I tell you it's impossible!" gasped the captain of the Remove, utterly taken aback, and almost wondering whether Vernon-Smith was wandering in his mind.

"The man who calls himself Lagden here is the convict of Blackmoor!" said Vernon-Smith. "As another man was picked up in his convict clothes, he must have changed with him. As he came in Lagden's clothes, and as the

real Lagden never came at all, it's clear that the man in the prison hospital is the real Lagden. You've heard that the man they got was disfigured in the accident—they only knew him by his convict clothes—and he can't speak, as he's suffering from concussion. As soon as he's able to speak, it will all come out."

"I can't believe it, Smithy! What reason—"

"I tell you I knew the man. He knows that I know, too," said the Bounder moodily. "He knows that I've kept it dark because he pulled me out of the river. I can't give him away after that."

Harry Wharton stood silent. He could see that Smithy believed what he said; but he could not believe a word of it himself. The statement was a little too startling for that.

"You don't believe me?" sneered Vernon-Smith. "Well, it's true. I shouldn't have told you a word about it, or anybody else, but—I don't know what to do. Loder's got on to it! I don't mean that he suspects who the man is—that hasn't even crossed his mind. But he jolly well knows that Lagden is a spoofer!"

"How can Loder know—"

"It's my fault, I suppose!" growled Smithy. "You remember. I had a detention on the day of the St. Jim's match. I wanted Lagden to speak to Quelch, and get me off, and I went to him and let him know that I knew who he was. I told him that one good turn deserved another."

"And what the thump did he do?" gasped Wharton.

"He turned me out of his room, by the neck!"

"I should jolly well think he did!"
"Well, that's how I came to be,

speaking to Redwing about it later. I was pretty wild, and I said to Reddy that I knew the man was a spoofer, and not Lagden at all, and could give him away if I liked—and that cur Loder was listening to every word I said—"

"Oh!"
"You know it was Loder got me off detention that day. Do you know why? It was because he wanted my help to show Lagden up!"

"Oh!" repeated Wharton
"Well, I was sorry afterwards. I could have bitten my tongue out for what I'd said!" growled the Bounder.

"Luckily, I'd said nothing about the man being the convict. Loder hadn't got on to that!" Vernon-Smith laughed sardonically. "He doesn't know that the man is his jolly old Cousin James from Blackmoor."

"It can't be so—"
"Oh, don't be a fool—it is so! I was sorry afterwards, as I've said, and I made Loder believe that I'd been pulling his leg all along the line. That's why the blighter has been down on me. But—"

"Well?"
"Well, now Lagden's thrashed him, he's at it again. He never quite believed that it was all leg-pulling. He's so jolly keen to get a handle against Lagden that he's ready to catch at straws. That's why he sent Tubb to call me to his study an hour ago. If I can tell him enough to give him a chance at Lagden, he's going to let me off. If not, I go up to the Head in the morning—and it's ten to one it means the sack. What's a fellow to do?"

Harry Wharton stood silent, staring at the Bounder.

His brain was almost in a whirl. He did not—and could not—believe

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what Smithy had told him. Yet the Bounder's savage earnestness almost carried conviction.

Vernon-Smith eyed him moodily.

"What would you do?" he asked. "Mind, I know he's the man. He never admitted it in so many words, but what he said was as good as an admission. I believe that he was an innocent man, and that the wrong man was sent to Blackmoor for that robbery at Okeham. And he saved my life, you know that. I can't give him away—I can't. But—what would you do?" And as the captain of the Remove still stood silent, he added savagely: "Can't you speak?"

"I don't quite know what to say," answered Harry slowly. "I can't swallow all this, Smithy; it's too steep. But I suppose you believe it. Well, if the man's really got such a secret, it's a matter for your own conscience whether you give him away or not. Loder's got nothing to do with it."

"Only that he can get me sacked, as I've been fool enough to play into his hands," growled the Bounder. "And he will let me off if I give Lagden away."

Wharton's lip curled.

"That's not a reason for giving a man away!" he said. "If you believe that he is the convict, that's a reason for giving him away, no doubt. But giving him away to save your own skin isn't playing the game."

"So that's your advice?"

"Well, you asked me," said Harry. "If you believe that the man is the Blackmoor convict, it's up to you to tell Inspector Grimes where he can get him. If you think you ought to keep it dark, because he pulled you out of the river, I don't say you're wrong. I dare say I should think the same in your place. But Loder doesn't come into the picture at all. Giving a man away for the sake of law and justice is one thing. Giving him away to save your own skin is quite another. That's all I can say."

Vernon-Smith stood scowling at him.

If it was advice he wanted from his Form captain, he had received it. But it did not help him much.

"Is that the lot?" he snarled.

"I can't say any more except that you should act exactly as if Loder had never spoken to you on the subject at all!" answered Harry.

"A fat lot of good that is to me!"

The Bounder turned to the door and jerked it open. He tramped out into the Remove passage, and slammed the door after him.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

Billy Bunter Finds a Cats paw!

"COMING down, Smithy?"

"No!"

"Like me to stay?"

"No!"

Tom Redwing quietly left Study No. 4.

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Prep was over in the Remove.

Herbert Vernon-Smith had not touched his preparation. It was useless, if he was going to be turned out of Greyfriars on the morrow, as seemed probable. Neither was he in a mood for it.

He roamed about the study, with a black brow, in a bitter, savage temper, while Redwing worked with a clouded face. He was obviously relieved when his chum went down after prep; he wanted to be alone.

Redwing could not help him. Nobody could help him. He was "for it," and he did not feel inclined for company in the Rag. In the public eye, Smithy kept up a manner of careless indifference; but he threw the mask aside when he was alone. Whatever outward aspect he might keep up, he was not indifferent—he was overwhelmed with dismay.

After Redwing was gone, the Bounder continued to move restlessly about his study. Not for the first time, his truculent temper, and his reckless defiance of authority, had landed him in a scrape—and this time it looked like the finish. His luck hitherto had always held good—and he had come to have a blind faith in his luck. But it looked as if his luck had let him down now.

He had hoped, vaguely, to get some help from Wharton; but the captain of the Remove could only advise him to act as his conscience dictated—which was no help. Whether it was right or wrong to keep the Blackmoor convict's secret, because the man had saved him from the river, Smithy hardly knew—and, in truth, he cared little. He had, at all events, kept it; and there would never have been any suspicion of "Mr. Lagden" had not Loder overheard the words he had uttered to Redwing in an angry, unguarded moment.

He had not even the comfort of regarding Gerald Loder as the "villain of the piece." Loder, it is true, hated the games master, and was keen to cause him trouble if he could. Since that thrashing in the wood by the Sark his bitterness was redoubled. Nevertheless, if the man was an impostor, at the school in a false name, Loder was within his rights—indeed, within his duties—in endeavouring to get at the truth. He was using questionable measures, but he was using them in the belief that Vernon-Smith knew a guilty man's secret and refused to make the truth known.

The Bounder, in fact, knew that he had himself to blame, and himself only. If he wanted to keep the man's secret, he should never have uttered those angry words which Loder had by chance overheard.

Neither would his fate now have been in Loder's hands, except by his own reckless fault.

But the knowledge that he had himself to blame did not help him. What was he going to do? That was the question.

Two or three fellows looked into the study when the Remove were going down after prep, but a scowling face did not invite them to stop, and they passed on. The Bounder was left alone, with his black and bitter thoughts.

When at length his study door opened again, he glared round at it—and his glare became almost ferocious as he saw that his latest visitor was Billy Bunter.

The fat Owl did not come in. He eyed the scowling Bounder warily through his big spectacles.

"I say, Smithy, old chap—" he began.

Vernon-Smith looked round the study for his cricket stump. Bunter was asking for it, and in the Bounder's present temper, he was not likely to ask in vain.

"I say, old chap, don't be shirty!" urged Bunter. "Tain't my fault you're going to be sacked to-morrow, you know. You can't expect to kick a prefect on the boko and nothing said, can you, old fellow?"

Smithy stepped towards the shelf where the cricket stump lay.

"Keep your temper, old chap!" continued Bunter. "I say, I should think you'd be jolly glad to pay Loder out, considering that he's going to have you up before the Big Beak to-morrow. Those ticks in Study No. 1 funk it; but you ain't a funk, Smithy, old bean."

The Bounder withdrew his hand from the shelf and looked at Bunter. The remotest chance of "paying Loder out," as Bunter expressed it, was sufficient to interest him.

"What do you mean, you fat idiot?" he snarled.

Billy Bunter grinned. "Paying Loder out" was a very attractive idea to the fat Owl of the Remove; but a natural anxiety for the safety of his own fat skin prevented Bunter from taking the matter in hand personally. The fat junior was, in fact, in search of a catspaw! And he had safely calculated that, in the present state of affairs, Vernon-Smith was the fellow to jump at the chance.

"I say, old chap!" Bunter made a step inside the study, and lowered his voice mysteriously. "I say, suppose a fellow heard a fellow tell a fellow that a fellow—"

"You gabbling ass!"

"Oh, really, Smithy! I can jolly well tell you that I jolly well did!" said the fat Owl. "And look what a chance it is, with the beast out of the House after eleven to-night—"

The Bounder eyed him. He was not unacquainted with the manners and customs of the black sheep of the Sixth. His eyes gleamed.

"Cough it up, you fat fool!" he grunted.

"Well, what about a bottle of ink in his bed while he's gone out?" grinned Bunter. "Or a jar of jam, what! Fancy his face when he comes in and slips into bed, and gets all over ink and jam—what? Ho, he, he!" Bunter chuckled. "Safe as houses, old bean! Loder said quite plain that he was going at eleven, whether Walker went or not. See?"

"How do you know?" breathed the Bounder.

Billy Bunter could see that he had no farther to look for his catspaw. Smithy was "on" this!

"I heard him!" explained Bunter. "You see, I dropped my penknife, and stooped to pick it up on the other side of the elm. That's how it was. So I heard everything they were saying. Quite by accident, of course. I'm not a fellow to listen, I hope. I wonder what the Head would say if he knew? He, he, he!"

The Bounder's eyes glittered.

"He said he was going by the lobby—you know, the lobby at the end of the Sixth Form passage, Smithy. At eleven, see? Well, after he's gone, the coast will be clear. A fellow can do anything he likes in his study while he's gone. Jam and ink in the bed—and what about some pickles? Toddy's got a bottle of pickles—you can bag it—see? I say, fancy Loder's face when he

shoves his feet into the pickles! What? He, he, he!"

The Bounder laughed.

"Leave it to me!" he said.

Bunter nodded and grinned.

"Right-ho, Smithy! I knew you'd be on, as Loder's going to get you bunked to-morrow! Sort of farewell jape on him, what? He, he, he!"

"You fat fool!"

"Oh, really, Smithy——"

"Get out!"

"Beast!"

Bunter got out. Smithy had been glad to extract that information from the Peeping Tom of the Remove—but he looked rather disposed to handle the cricket stump, all the same.

Left alone once more, the Bounder grinned, a savage grin. He had little doubt that Bunter had it right—Loder of the Sixth was going out of bounds that night. Anyhow, it would be easy to make sure, later.

And if Loder of the Sixth went out of bounds that night, he had Herbert Vernon-Smith to reckon with. The Bounder was not thinking of a jape, such as jam and pickles put in the prefect's bed during his absence, like the fat and fatuous Owl of the Remove. Darker thoughts were in Smithy's mind.

If this was true—if he was able to catch Loder out—the bully of the Sixth would be sorry for having cornered so dangerous a customer as the Bounder of Greyfriars. If Smithy was sacked on the morrow, and went, he would not go alone. He would be sacked in company—and the fellow who would keep him company would be Gerald Loder, of the Sixth Form!

The Bounder was smiling when he went up to the Remove dormitory with the rest of the Form that night. But it was not a pleasant smile.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

Shut Out!

ELEVEN strokes boomed dully through the misty October night. In the Greyfriars dormitories silence and slumber reigned.

In the Remove dormitory, fellows were fast asleep, and the deep and steady snore of Billy Bunter rumbled like the roll of distant thunder. But there was one fellow who was not asleep.

Never had Herbert Vernon-Smith been more wakeful.

As the last stroke from the clock-tower died away the Bounder sat up. He slipped quietly from his bed and dressed in the dark. Silent, in rubber shoes, he crept to the door.

The dormitory door opened and shut without a sound.

Outside all was dark. At that hour all Greyfriars had turned in, unless a master or two might be sitting up later in his study. Staircases and passages were plunged in deep darkness.

Darkness and silence had no terrors for the Bounder. He crept away by passage and staircase, silent as a spectre. The quarter chimed while he was on the stairs. A few minutes later he glided on tiptoe along by the Sixth Form studies. Sixth Form studies were bedrooms at night, and at that hour every Sixth Form man should have been in bed and asleep. The Bounder trod very lightly past the doors. At Walker's door he paused and listened.

All was dark and silent there, as was natural at that hour. Vernon-Smith silently opened the door a few inches and listened intently, and caught the breathing of a sleeper within.

He closed the door again without a sound. Walker was in at all events; if

Loder had gone his pal had not gone with him.

On tiptoe the Bounder crept on, and stopped at Loder's door.

It was as dark and silent as the rest. Noiselessly the Bounder opened the door a few inches, as he had done with Walker's. He listened with intent ears; but no sound of breathing within reached his ears this time.

His eyes gleamed like a cat's in the gloom.

If Bunter had heard aright, and if the blackguard of the Sixth had not changed his plans, Loder was gone. But the Bounder had to make sure. He was almost sure; but he had to be quite sure.

For full five minutes he stood in the darkness, listening lest, after all, the bully of the Sixth should be there in bed. But not the faintest sound came to his ears from within.

He stirred at last.

Quietly, softly as a cat, he stepped inside the study. He knew where Loder's bed was in the alcove, and he approached it stealthily, listening for a sound. There was no sound.

If Loder was there he was sleeping soundly and very silently. Smithy knew now that he was not there. But he had to make assurance doubly sure by the evidence of his eyes.

There was a sudden gleam as he turned on a tiny electric torch. His eyes glittered at an empty bed.

He shut off the light at once. There was no doubt now. Gerald Loder was out of bed, out of the House, at nearly half-past eleven o'clock at night!

"By gad!" breathed Vernon-Smith.

He groped to the window.

He knew, from Bunter, that it was by way of the lobby at the end of the passage that Loder had gone—undoubtedly leaving a door or window unfastened for his return. But it was quite likely that he might have left his window unfastened, too, as a second string to his bow in case of accidents.

He could hardly afford to take even the remotest risk of being shut out for the night. For the penalty of "breaking out" at night at Greyfriars School was expulsion—and especially for a fellow in the position of a prefect there would be no mercy. If Loder was detected, Loder would be expelled from Greyfriars the following day.

That was the risk he was running—the risk he had run a good many times. Now he was running it once too often.

Smithy's hand glided over the window.

The Sixth Form studies were on the ground floor, but the windows were high from the ground. It was possible, though not easy, to climb in from outside. But it was not possible if the window was fastened.

The Bounder grinned, a mocking grin, as he found that the catch was open. Evidently the black sheep of the Sixth had left his study window unfastened in case of some mischance.

The Bounder snapped the catch shut. There was no ingress by that window now. Smithy made quite sure of that. Then he crept softly from the study and down the passage to the lobby at the end.

In that lobby there was a door and a window. It was intensely dark there, but a glimmer from Smithy's torch showed him that the bolts on the door were withdrawn. The little window was fastened; it was by the door that Loder had gone, and he had left it unlocked and unbolted for his return.

With a steady hand Smithy shot the bolts and turned the key in the lock. He laughed softly.

When Loder of the Sixth came back he was going to meet with a surprise—

a startling surprise. The Bounder could imagine his dismay and terror when he found himself shut out of the House, faced with absolutely certain discovery. And he had no pity.

His work was done now. Silently, like a fitting spectre, he made his way back to the Remove dormitory.

All was dark and silent there, as he had left it. He had been absent hardly more than a quarter of an hour. He shut the door, crept back to his bed, and began to throw off his clothes.

"Smithy!"

He started violently as his name was uttered in a low voice. He stared round, and saw that Tom Redwing was sitting up in bed, peering at him in the gloom. He caught his breath.

"You ass!" he muttered. "You startled me! Did you wake up when I went?"

"Yes."

"Well, don't wake the whole dorm!" grunted the Bounder.

"You must be an ass, Smithy!" muttered Redwing. "If you'd been caught out of the dorm, it would dish any chance you may have left."

The Bounder chuckled.

"I wasn't caught," he answered, "and I can tell you, Reddy, I've rather improved my chances for to-morrow."

"By playing a fatheaded jape in Loder's study?" asked Tom. "I suppose that's what you've been at—I've heard Bunter's gabble. You can only have made matters worse, Smithy!"

"That's all you know!" said the Bounder, with a mocking grin. "A fellow who's taken before the Head on the charge of resisting and kicking a Sixth Form prefect is pretty certain to be booked for the sack—unless——"

"Unless what?"

"Unless that jolly old prefect is up for the sack himself at the same time!" said the Bounder viciously. "Is Loder going to report me to the Head while he's getting the sentence of the sack himself? Quite likely the Big Beak won't be interested in reports from a prefect he's expelling from the school for breaking out at night. What do you think?"

Redwing started.

"What do you mean, Smithy? You're mad! Loder's not up for the sack, is he?"

"He will be—in the morning, after a night out!" sneered the Bounder. "He's out of bounds now, and he can't get back into the House, unless he can squeeze through a keyhole, or drop down a chimney!"

"Smithy! You've shut him out!"

"Just that!"

"Oh!" gasped Redwing.

"I rather think that improves my chances for to-morrow!" sneered the Bounder. "Anyhow, if I'm going, Loder will catch the same train—and that's a comfort! We'll go in company!"

And the Bounder chuckled again as he turned into bed.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

The Game's Up!

GERALD LODER dropped from a wall, grunted, and tramped through the misty darkness towards the House.

Midnight had chimed. Not for the first time, the black sheep of the Greyfriars Sixth heard the chimes at midnight.

His face was sullen and overcast as he tramped towards the House. An hour in the company of his sporting friends, in the stuffy atmosphere of the

back parlour at the Cross Keys, did not seem to have cheered Loder of the Sixth.

He had lost money; he was tired and sleepy, and he was not in a good temper. His chief wish, now, was to get to bed and go to sleep, and he wished that he had done so a couple of hours earlier.

He skulked along by the House, reached the door of the Sixth Form lobby, and turned the handle.

The door did not open.

He scowled savagely and wrenched at it. But the door did not give a fraction of an inch, and it very quickly dawned upon Loder that it was fastened inside.

He gritted his teeth.

Some officious fool had come along, found the door unfastened, and secured it. That was his conclusion.

He was glad, very glad, to remember that, unlikely as the chance was, he had guarded against it. He crept away to his study window.

The night was dim and misty, but there was a glimmer of starlight. He looked about him warily and uneasily.

No one was likely to be up at that hour of the night. But if, by any chance an eye looked from a window, he was in danger of being seen. There were masters' rooms over the Sixth Form studies—Quelch's, Lagden's, Prout's. Prout was not a sound sleeper, and he often sat up with a book. A swift upward glance, however, showed Loder that the windows were all dark.

Quickly, he reached his own window.

It was not easy to clamber on the high sill, but he managed it, and kneeling there, he pushed at the sash.

As he had left the catch unfastened inside, the sash should have risen under the pressure. But it did not rise.

He muttered savage words between his teeth. What was the matter with the rotten thing? He pushed and pressed, and pressed and pushed, till his fingers were aching. But the sash remained immovable.

He stopped at last, panting for breath. His rage was deep, but deeper than his rage was his terror.

He knew that the window must be fastened—fastened inside since he had left the House. Otherwise it would have opened.

Who had fastened it?

There was only one answer to that question, in Loder's startled mind. A servant might have made a late round of the House, found an unfastened door, and bolted it. But no servant could have gone into a Sixth Form study, where a Sixth Form man was supposed to be in bed, and fastened the window. This meant—it could only mean—that his absence had been discovered, and that he had been shut out!

Loder slipped from the sill, and stood leaning on it, weakly. All was known—and his game was up!

That was his terrifying thought. He had risked it often enough, for the sake of his blackguardly pursuits, and now he had risked it once too often. He was shut out of the House—and all was known.

He suppressed a groan.

A master had spotted his absence, and now was sitting up, waiting for him to knock at the door. The Head himself, perhaps. It seemed to Loder that the blood turned to water in his veins.

For long minutes, he stood leaning on the stone sill, a prey to despair. In his mind's eye, he saw the scene of the morrow—the Head's stern, scornful face, and heard the grim sentence: "You are expelled, Loder." What else had he to expect? As a prefect, he had

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been trusted, and all the more, because he had been trusted, there would be no mercy for him. In a matter of hours, he was going to be kicked out of the school—sent home in disgrace to face his father!

He groaned.

He hardly knew how long he stood there. But he pulled himself together at last.

His first thought, on finding himself shut out, was that all was discovered, and that a master was waiting for him—that there was nothing to be done, but to knock, and give himself up. But it dawned on him that there was not a light at a single window—and a master sitting up for him would certainly not have sat in the dark.

He felt a throb of hope.

Someone had shut him out. But if it was not a master, there was a chance yet. Who else could have done it, he could not begin to guess. No one knew of his intention of breaking out that night except Walker—and Walker assuredly could not have played such a trick on him. Someone must have found it out, somehow, and played this deadly trick on him—some enemy—and he knew only too well that he had made himself many enemies. But if it was not a master, he still had a chance—if he could only get in.

Could he, somehow, get into the House?

He clambered on the window-sill again. He had heard of window-catches being forced back by the blade of a knife slipped between the sashes. He could try it, at any rate.

He opened a penknife and tried. The blade slipped between the sashes; he felt it grate on the catch within. But the catch was strong, and the sudden snap that followed was not the snap of an opening catch, but of a breaking blade.

Loder breathed hard.

He tried again with the other blade of the penknife. For several long minutes he worked that blade between the sashes, pressing on that obstinate catch—in vain. Again there was a snap.

With feelings too deep for words, Gerald Loder slipped the penknife, with both blades broken, back into his pocket. It was useless.

He dropped from the window-sill.

That brief hope had left him. What was he to do now? It was a cold night, but the perspiration was thick on his forehead.

There was a last, desperate resource—to tap at Walker's window, in the hope that Walker might awaken and let him in. Walker, if he awakened, certainly would let him in, but would he awaken without sufficient noise to awaken others?

The Sixth Form studies were close together—and above were the masters' rooms. If Wingate woke up—Loder shivered at that idea. Wingate was head prefect, and it was his duty to hand over any Greyfriars man breaking out at night; and he was a man to do his duty. Or if Prout woke, or Quelch—or worse still, Lagden, who occupied Larry Lascelles' old rooms!

In a state of wretched, shivering funk, Loder stood undecided, while the stroke of one boomed through the October night.

He made up his mind at last.

He crept to Walker's window, reached up to it, and tapped with his knuckles on the lower panes.

Tap, tap, tap!

Walker, he knew, was rather a sound sleeper. He dared not tap loudly, but he knew that those light taps would never wake Walker, if he was asleep.

By some happy chance, he might be awake, however!

Tap, tap, tap!

There was no such happy chance. Walker, evidently, was fast asleep. In sheer desperation, Loder tapped more loudly.

Tap, tap!

There was no sound from Walker. But, to Loder's utter horror, there was the sound of a window opening above him!

That tapping had not reached Walker's ears, but it had evidently reached other ears—the ears of a lighter sleeper, or of a man who, perhaps, had not been asleep.

At the sound above him, Loder's heart missed a beat. His hand dropped helplessly to his side, and he stared upward with haggard eyes.

He had no time even to scuttle away out of sight. The window above him was open; a head leaned out.

The October night was dim, but there was starlight enough for him to recognise the games master. It was "Stephen Lagden" who was looking down at him. "Who is that?" came a quiet voice.

Loder did not answer. He could not speak. He could only stare, dumb, at the handsome face that glimmered in the starlight.

But he did not need to answer, for the games master's next words told that he knew.

"Loder! Is that you, Loder?"

Loder could only stare—dumb.

The games master gave him a long, searching look. Then he spoke again, in low, quiet tones:

"Wait! I will come down!"

The window closed.

Loder leaned on the stone wall and groaned. The game was up now; there was no hope for him. The leaden minutes passed, and then, faintly, he heard the sound of an opening door.

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

Friend or Foe?

NO. 22 of Blackmoor, known at Greyfriars School as Stephen Lagden, stepped out from the door of the Sixth Form lobby.

His handsome face was very grave in expression.

Loder of the Sixth came almost tottering towards him in the starlight. There was a quiet contempt, with a touch of compassion, in the games master's face as he looked at him.

It was past one in the morning, but the games master had not been sleeping. There were problems on the young master's mind of which no one knew—no one, at all events, except Vernon-Smith of the Remove. In the silent hours he had lain wakeful, thinking, and the tapping from the window below had come sharp and startling to his wakeful ears.

He was not, perhaps, surprised to see Gerald Loder out of the House at that late hour. He had not been long at Greyfriars, but he had been there long enough to observe something of the black sheep of the Sixth and his ways.

Indeed, the fact that Loder was—little as the prefect dreamed it—his cousin, had disposed him to take a friendly interest in the Sixth Former, in the first place. That he had soon found to be impossible.

Now, as he stood looking at the black sheep's haggard face, in the dim glimmer of the stars, he felt a touch of compassion for the wretched fellow. He knew what this meant to Gerald Loder—the sudden and disgraceful end of his school career; a journey home on the morrow to face his father. And No. 22,

being the nephew of Loder's father, knew Major Loder, and knew what it would be like to face the hard, grim, unbending man with a story of having been kicked out of school in disgrace.

Loder had made himself his enemy. He disliked the fellow, and he despised him—as a bully and as a blackguard. Nevertheless, blood was thicker than water. Gerald Loder, though he did not know it, was his cousin. Major Loder, upon whom the blow would also fall, was his uncle. Thoughts which Loder did not suspect were passing through the young master's mind.

"So it is you!" he said, in very quiet tones. "I need not ask you if you have been out of bounds. You are returning to the school—after midnight."

Loder gave him a black, bitter look. In his despair and misery his hatred of the young master flamed up.

"You're glad of this!" he muttered. "You've got me! I dare say you were on the watch, spying. Was it you who bolted the door on me? I suppose it was."

"I have been in my room since half-past ten," said the games master coldly. "If someone shut you out, it was not I."

Loder gave a savage sneer.

"A lot your word is worth!" he muttered. "I know you! You gave it away in the school that that beastly convict, James Loder, was my cousin, though I asked you to keep it dark, and you said you would. I'm likely to believe you!"

"I have already told you that I said nothing to a single soul on the subject of your relationship to the Blackmoor convict, Loder. It was found out in some other way."

No. 22 smiled faintly as he spoke. Had Gerald Loder known his name, he would have known that "Mr. Lagden" was not likely to talk on the subject of James Loder if he could help it.

"Let me go in!" snarled Loder. The games master's stalwart figure blocked the doorway. "You've caught me. You've only got to pass it on to the Head to get me turfed out of Greyfriars. You'll be glad of the chance, I know that. Now let me go in."

The games master did not stir.

"I shall not be glad of the chance, Loder," he said, very quietly. "I am sorry—more sorry than I can say!"

"Are you?" sneered Loder. "Well, if you're sorry you can give me a chance by keeping it dark!" He laughed savagely and scoffingly. "It rests with you. You can keep it dark if you like."

"That is what I was thinking of."

Loder started violently as he heard that quietly spoken reply. He stared searchingly into the grave, handsome face before him.

Not for a moment had he imagined that this man would think of sparing him—that this man would be anything but glad to hand him over to what he deserved, and see the last of him.

He scanned the handsome face eagerly, almost breathlessly, with a glimpse of hope.

"You mean that?" he muttered.

"I shall have to think. But—but"—the games master spoke slowly—"I am unwilling, for reasons you would not understand, to see you kicked out of the school, as would certainly happen if your headmaster knew of your proceedings this night. Whether I am justified in allowing you to pass into the House, and saying nothing of what I know, I cannot feel sure."

His brows were wrinkled in troubled thought. Loder gave a gasp.

He forgot that he was this man's

enemy; forgot everything but that there was a chance for him if the man would be silent.

"Give me a chance!" he breathed. "I've been a fool—a reckless fool! Think I don't know that? Give me a chance. What's happened to-night will be a lesson to me. I'll be jolly careful to toe the line after this! Oh, give me a chance—just a chance!"

His voice trembled with eagerness.

"If you mean that—" said the games master slowly. He scanned the Sixth Former's face.

Loder was in earnest—for the time, at least. When the effect of this terrible scare had worn off, no doubt it would be a different story. But for the time Loder was sincere. He would have agreed to anything, promised anything, only to get out of this fearful scrape.

"Give me a chance, and you'll see!" he muttered. "I know I've been a fool. Never again—never! Give me this one chance!"

"If I keep silent about this," said the games master quietly, "I am taking a great responsibility. Can I trust you to keep your word?"

"Yes, yes, yes!" breathed Loder. "Oh, yes, yes, yes, I tell you! Do you think I want to go through this again?"

"I imagine not!" said the games master, with a faint smile. "If I can trust you, if this warning will not be lost on you, Loder, I may be justified in saying nothing of what has occurred."

"I—I swear!" muttered Loder huskily.

"Your word is enough, if you keep it. I will take your word and trust you," said the games master. "You may go in."

He stepped aside from the doorway. Loder passed him and entered. He hurried away at once to his study without another word.

The games master followed him in and closed and secured the door. Then,

(Continued on next page.)

GREYFRIARS INTERVIEWS

This week's clever effort by the Greyfriars Rhymester is devoted to

MARJORIE HAZELDENE.

Harry Wharton & Co.'s girl chum at Cliff House School, and sister of Peter Hazeldene of the Remove.



(1)

And now, just for a week or two,
I do not have to interview
Some big and brutal blighter who
May kick me without warning;
I've dealt with Greyfriars, A to Z,
I've told you what they all have said,
So now I'll try the girls instead,
I started it this morning.

(2)

Cliff House lies, as its name implies,
Upon the cliffs just where they rise
To precipices huge in size,
Which often look alarming;
And Marjorie was standing there,
Her face flushed by the ocean air,
The wind was blowing through her hair,
And making her look charming.

(3)

Her brother Peter, as you know,
Is in our Form at Greyfriars, so
We see her pretty often, though
We're not too fond of Peter.
He isn't an attractive sort,
He's sulky, and his temper's short;
But Marjorie's a ripping sport,
We all delight to meet her.

(5)

Where cliffs are steeper than a wall
On which no chimpanzee could crawl,
There samphire grows, or not at all,
An awful flower to gather.
That's why the flower is such a prize
In every nature student's eyes.
If Marjorie required supplies,
I'd get them for her! Rather!



(8)

The sight of silver did the trick,
He roped me safely in a tick,
And said: "Now down you go and pick
The flower wot you are after!
You're safe enough while I'm up 'ere,
Just 'old the rope and keep it clear.
I won't let go of it—no fear!"
Said he, with hearty laughter.

(4)

She smiled quite cheerily at me,
"I'm glad you've come along," said she,
"You're just the boy I want to see!"
At which I smirked politely.
"You see," she said, "I want to get
Some samphire, and to my regret
I've found none near enough as yet."
"I'll find some!" I said lightly.

(6)

I saw some samphire growing where
A rock was poised mid sea and air.
I told her I would climb down there.
She swiftly stopped me going.
"You won't," she answered with a frown.
"Unless you want to tumble down
Six hundred feet or so, and drown,
You'll leave it where it's growing!"

(7)

A coastguard, looking kind of sad,
Came up and said: "'Ave you gorn
mad?
Keep back orf them there cliffs, my lad,
Or I'll be on your collar!"
"Look here!" I said. "You've got a
rope,
And you could help me down the slope.
It's safe enough with you, I hope."
I gave him half-a-dollar.



(9)

He didn't, and I'm glad of that!
I picked that samphire, but, my hat!
I'd hate to be an acrobat
If that's how they get battered.
I felt quite giddy for an hour,
My legs were left without their power,
But Marjorie had got her flower,
And that was all that mattered!

slowly and silently, he went up the stairs to his room.

Gerald Loder breathed freely at last when he was safe inside his study. He turned in in the dark, but it was long before he slept.

He had been scared—deeply scared. Even now he could hardly believe that he was safe out of that terrible scrape. Why had the man spared him? Loder could not understand. True, Lagden had promised nothing. It was open to him, if he thought fit, to report the matter to the headmaster in the morning. But Loder knew that he did not intend to do so. The man he hated, the man he suspected, had spared him, and not only spared him, but saved him! The very last man at Greyfriars whom he would have expected to extend him a helping hand had pulled him through. Why?

It was a puzzle to Loder, but it was an immense relief to him. He slept at last, and was still sleeping when the rising-bell clanged out in the autumn morning. It was not till the bell rang for prayers that Loder awakened, as Walker opened his door and called in to him, and he turned out, still tired and sleepy, and late for breakfast.

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.

A Surprise for Smithy!

CLANG, clang!
The early sunrays glimmered in at the windows of the Remove dormitory. Bob Cherry sat up in bed; but for once Bob was not the first out in the Remove. Herbert Vernon-Smith jumped from his bed at the first clang of the rising-bell.

The Bouncer was anxious for early news that morning. Exactly what had happened in the night he could not know, but he had no doubt that Gerald Loder had been caught out of bounds after midnight, and no doubt of what the result would be.

The Removites turned out, and many curious glances were cast at Smithy. That morning, after third school, he had to go up to the headmaster for judgment, and few fellows doubted that that interview would mark the finish for the Bouncer at Greyfriars School.

But Smithy seemed quite cool and self-possessed.

Whatever his inward feelings might be like, he was not the fellow to show a sign of weakness. He was first out of the dormitory, and he whistled as he went.

"Smithy's got a nerve!" remarked Skinner, when he was gone. "Bet any man here ten to one in doughnuts that it's the long jump for him to-day!"

"Oh, shut up, Skinner!" snapped Redwing.

Redwing was not long in following his chum down. He joined him in the quadrangle, where he found the Bouncer sauntering, with his hands in his pockets.

Smithy gave him a nod and a grin.

"I wonder when we shall get the news, Reddy?" he remarked. "I wonder who let Loder in last night? Quelch, perhaps! Fancy Quelch's face if he had to come down and let a man in just before the milk in the morning!"

And he chuckled.

"You think Loder was spotted?" asked Redwing.

"I know he was, fathhead! Must have been! Think he could squeeze in through a keyhole? They got him all right!"

Redwing nodded slowly. There seemed hardly a possible doubt on

the subject. Loder had been shut out of the House; and if he had got in at all, he must have knocked to be let in, and that was a complete show-up.

If that was what had happened, Greyfriars School was going to hear the news that morning that a prefect of the Sixth Form was up for the "sack."

Such an item of news would create a tremendous sensation, quite putting the affair of Vernon-Smith into the shade.

Smithy was looking forward to it with vindictive satisfaction.

As he had told Redwing, it improved his chances. Loder's report to the Head, in ordinary circumstances, meant the sack for the reckless rebel of the Remove. But with Loder himself sacked, the position was a very peculiar one.

It was quite probable that the Head would listen to no report from a prefect he had to expel from the school. In any case, the report would carry much less weight, in the circumstances.

It seemed to Smithy that the outlook was hopeful, if only Loder had been spotted and was up for the long jump. And about this, so far, the Bouncer had no doubt.

Other fellows came out—fellows of all Forms—but Loder of the Sixth was not among them. Smithy wondered whether he had been locked up in the punishment-room till the Head should deal with him.

When the bell rang for prayers Loder did not appear, and that settled the matter, in Smithy's mind. It did not occur to him that the explanation was that Loder, tired out by loss of sleep and nervous strain the previous night, was still in bed and cutting early chapel.

At the same time, Smithy could not help noticing that there was no sign of anything unusual going on.

If a Sixth Form man was booked for expulsion, the other members of that Form could hardly be unaware of it—at all events, the other prefects. But the prefects did not look as if anything unusual was on the carpet.

After prayers Smithy noted Wingate, Gwynne, and Sykes talking together in the quad, and passed near enough to catch a few words. But they were not discussing Loder or a coming sensation; they were talking football, and the Bouncer grunted in angry perplexity as he walked on. Surely Wingate, the captain of Greyfriars, must know what was on—if anything was.

Mr. Quelch and Mr. Capper passed under his eyes, walking in the quad before breakfast; but when he caught a word from them, it was only on the subject of the weather.

When the breakfast bell rang, and the Greyfriars fellows went in, Billy Bunter grabbed at the Bouncer's sleeve, and blinked at him inquiringly through his big spectacles.

"I say, Smithy, did you rag Loder's study last night?" asked the fat Owl. "I was going to stay awake, but somehow I dropped off. I say, did you put the jam and pickles in his bed?"

"Idiot!"

"Oh, really, Smithy! I say, Loder's late this morning! He cut prayers," said Bunter. "He's done that before, though. I say—"

"Oh, shut up!"

Smithy jerked his arm away and went moodily into Hall. He was beginning to have a doubt. When he took his place with the Remove for breakfast he glanced up the Hall at the high table where the prefects sat.

Loder had not come in. But the other Sixth Form men looked just the same as usual. If there was anything

"on," they clearly knew nothing of it.

Then there was a footstep at the door, and a late-comer walked up to the prefects' table and dropped into a seat there.

The Bouncer caught his breath.

It was Gerald Loder.

Smithy rose from his seat, staring at Loder. Evidently the black sheep of the Sixth was not in the punishment-room or separated from the rest of the school in any other way.

He looked a little pale, as if he had had a bad night's rest, but otherwise he was quite normal.

Most certainly he did not look as if he was "up for the sack." The Bouncer stood staring at him blankly.

"Sit down, Vernon-Smith!" snapped Mr. Quelch.

Quelch breakfasted with his Form, and he was seldom in his bonniest mood early in the morning. On this especial morning he was more acid than was his custom. The prospect of an expulsion in his Form was not pleasing or gratifying to Henry Samuel Quelch. He snapped at the Bouncer.

But Smithy, his eyes fixed on Loder, was deaf to his Form-master's voice. Loder was sitting there at breakfast, late for his morning meal, but tucking into eggs and bacon with an appetite that he certainly would not have displayed had he been booked for a painful interview with the headmaster and the "boot."

Something had gone amiss. The Bouncer realised that now. Against all probability, against all certainty, the black sheep of the Sixth had somehow got out of the trap.

"Vernon-Smith, do you hear me?" rapped Mr. Quelch. "Sit down at once!"

Vernon-Smith sat down, with so savage and bitter a look on his face that all the Remove fellows glanced at him.

He had failed.

He knew that now.

Loder had not been spotted. Smithy had counted on success as an absolute certainty. He had never doubted it, and he had failed. Loder, somehow, had pulled through, and the Bouncer's last chance was gone.

When the fellows went out after breakfast Billy Bunter hooked on to the Bouncer again. Billy Bunter was anxious to know whether that "rag" had taken place or not.

"I say, Smithy—" began the fat Owl.

Why the Bouncer kicked him, Billy Bunter did not know. But he knew that the Bouncer did.

"Ow! Beast! Ow! Wow!" roared Bunter, in anguish and indignation.

The Bouncer tramped out, scowling, into the quad.

When the bell rang for classes he went into the Remove Form Room with the rest. Mr. Quelch gave him rather a grim look. The Bouncer, savage and sullen, was in a mood for trouble. But his Form-master passed him over very lightly in class, and Smithy knew why, only too well. The Remove master was thinking that it was very likely Vernon-Smith's last day in that Form-room, and Smithy, reading his thoughts, wondered bitterly whether he was right.

THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER.

A Friend in Need!

"**C**OME in!" said the games master.

He was seated at his window, looking out into the quadrangle, crowded with fellows in break, when a tap came at his door.



Loder's heart missed a beat at the sound of a window opening above him. He ceased tapping on Walker's window and stared upward to see the new games master looking down at him. "Loder! Is that you, Loder?" said Stephen Lagden. "Wait! I will come down!"

He glanced round, and raised his eyebrows a little as he saw that it was Vernon-Smith of the Remove who had come in.

The Bouncer, as he caught the expression on the young master's face, smiled sourly. He knew that Mr. Lagden was thinking of his last visit to that room a week ago. On that occasion the Bouncer had given a very plain hint of what he knew, and he had been unceremoniously turned out of the room, with a hand on his collar. Whatever Mr. Lagden was, or was not, he had made it clear that he was not a man to take insolence from a cheeky schoolboy.

"Well, what is it, Vernon-Smith?" asked the games master quietly.

"I want you to help me—if you can, sir!" said Smithy.

He saw the young man knit his brows. "I hope that does not mean, Vernon-Smith, that you are here to repeat your impertinence?" said the games master, raising his voice a little.

"No, sir!"

"I am glad of that! If I can help you in any way I shall, of course, be glad. What can I do?"

"I don't know that you can do anything, sir. But—if you can, I want you to. I suppose you know how I'm fixed."

"I have heard that you are in some trouble, Vernon-Smith. I hope that it is not very serious."

"Only as serious as the sack!" said Smithy, bitterly.

The games master's face became very grave.

"You know what happened in the wood yesterday, sir," went on the Bouncer. "You chipped in to stop that rotten bully—"

"There is no need to speak of that, Vernon-Smith, neither must you use such expressions in speaking to me of a prefect."

"Oh, all right! Well, you may have noticed that Loder had a damaged nose," said Vernon-Smith. "He tried to stop me from going out, and got the heel of my boot on his nose. I'm to go before the Head after third school—that's the time when the Big Beak sits in judgment. Loder's going to call it an assault on a prefect, and get me sacked."

"What else could he call it, Vernon-Smith?" asked the games master, very quietly.

Smithy was silent for a moment or two.

"This is surely not a matter in which I can intervene, Vernon-Smith," went on the games master, as Smithy did not speak. "I have no authority or influence outside games. Your Form-master—"

"That's no use! The fact is, I've been a fool, and put myself in the wrong," said the Bouncer, with a burst of frankness. "I've got a rotten temper, and I've never learned to keep it in hand; it's landed me in trouble before, and now it's happened again."

The games master smiled faintly.

"I have no doubt that that is the case, and I am glad you can realise it," he said. "I hope very sincerely that matters may not be so bad as you fear. There may be extenuating circumstances you may plead to your headmaster—"

"There are, sir—but I can't mention them to Dr. Locke."

"Why not?"

The Bouncer paused.

"Well, I can't, sir," he said. "But you might speak to the Head, perhaps, and put in a word for me. It's no good asking Quelch. You know that Loder is a brute and a bully, as you had to chip in and stop him. That might help. And—and if you knew—"

"If I knew—what?"

"I'll tell you, sir, and I think you'll see that it's up to you to do anything you can. I could get off, if I liked, if I chose to go to Loder now, and do what he wants."

"What does he want?"

"He wants me to tell him anything I know about our new games master," said Vernon-Smith, very quietly.

"Mr. Lagden" sat still. There was a long moment of silence.

"You had better make yourself a little clearer, I think, Vernon-Smith," said the games master, speaking at last, in a quiet, even tone.

"Very well, sir. One day last week, like a fool, I was speaking to my pal Redwing, about something I never meant to mention. No harm would have come of that—Reddy wouldn't repeat a word of it. But that cur, Loder, was listening—and he heard!"

The games master compressed his lips.

"What did he hear?"

"He heard me say to Reddy that I'd seen our new games master before he came here, and that he wasn't called then by the name he bears now."

There was another long silence.

"Loder's been chewing on that ever since," went on the Bouncer at last. "I suppose you know that he dislikes you, sir. I made him believe for a time that I was pulling his leg—never mind how—but it was no use. Since you licked him yesterday, he's got on to it again. He's got it fixed in his head that you are here in a false name, and he thinks I can tell him the facts. I've only got to go to him and tell him, and he will let the whole thing drop, as far as I'm concerned."

"And you have refused to tell him what you think you know?"

"Yes."

Another long silence.

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Vernon-Smith stole a look at the games master's face. It expressed nothing but deep thought. No. 22 of Blackmoor had learned how to hide his thoughts and his feelings.

"And why, Vernon-Smith, do you not go to Loder, and tell him what he desires to know?" asked the games master at length.

"Because that Blackmoor convict pulled me out of the river, sir!" said the Bounder steadily. "Because I feel that I should be an ungrateful cur to give him away."

"If you believe that a guilty man is hiding in this school, under an assumed name, it is your duty to give him away, as you express it, Vernon-Smith."

"Do you think so, sir?"

"I certainly do."

"Well, if you come to that, I don't believe that No. 22 of Blackmoor was a guilty man," said Vernon-Smith. "A guilty man wouldn't have acted as he did. I don't understand it all; but what I believe is, that the police got the wrong man in the first place, and that they've got the right man now."

"Indeed!"

"When I spoke to you on this subject before, sir, you said that to your own knowledge, that man at Courtfield is the man who committed the robbery at Okeham."

"That is true, Vernon-Smith!"

"That can only mean one thing, sir. I believe what you said, and there's an end."

"I understand."

The games master sat silent again.

"Don't think I've come here, like I did before, with the idea of making any use of this," went on the Bounder. "I was a fool—I could have cut out my

tongue afterwards for what I said to you. You turned me out of the room—and it served me jolly well right. It's not that at all. But if you can put in a word for me, I think you might do it, sir, after what I've told you. It's not as if Loder was a fellow like Wingate or Gwynne—he would be sacked himself, if the Head knew him as well as some of the fellows know him."

"I am glad you have told me this, Vernon-Smith," said the games master quietly. "I shall speak to Loder on this subject. I have, owing to certain circumstances, some little influence with him. I think you may depend on it that Loder will take no further action in this matter."

The Bounder opened his eyes—wide.

"Now that I know how the matter stands, Vernon-Smith, I feel fully justified in intervening," said the games master. "You may leave this to me—I think I can arrange the matter. Leave it at that."

Vernon-Smith looked at him blankly.

He had hoped, vaguely, that the games master might speak to the Head, and that it might have some effect. That was all he had hoped—and it had been a very faint hope.

"You—you think Loder will listen to you, sir?" he asked, in amazement.

"I think so, Vernon-Smith."

"But—but—"

"Leave it at that!"

"Very well, sir!"

The Bounder went out of the room utterly astonished. But though he did not begin to understand, he was reassured. Somehow—he could not imagine how—the man was able to see him through; he was not a man to speak

idly, and raise false hopes. Herbert Vernon-Smith went out into the quad as if he was walking on air.

THE SIXTEENTH CHAPTER.

The Bounder's Luck!

"L ODER!"
"Well?"
"I wish to speak to you. Please walk with me a few minutes."

Loder of the Sixth was with Carne and Walker, in the quad, when the games master came out of the House and spoke to him.

He eyed the young master with subdued hostility. What had happened the previous night had not softened Loder's feelings towards the man he bitterly disliked. If anything, his dislike was intensified by the knowledge that he was in the power of the man whose enemy he chose to be.

"Oh, all right!" he said ungraciously.

He left his friends, and walked away by the elms with the games master. He was wondering, with a palpitation of the heart, what he was going to hear. So far, nothing had been said about his escapade, and he had no doubt that the man was going to keep silent about what he knew. Now a doubt smote him.

"Well, what is it?" he muttered. "You—you did me a good turn last night. I know that. You're not going to give me away—now?"

"I am going to speak to you about Vernon-Smith, of the Remove."

Loder caught his breath.

"Vernon-Smith! What about him?"

"I think there are some extenuating circumstances in that junior's case, Loder, and that, upon reflection, you may decide not to report him to his headmaster for his conduct yesterday."

"If he's been telling you—" breathed Loder.

"We need not go into that. With any other prefect of this school I should not dream of interfering," said the games master. "If Wingate, or Gwynne, or Sykes considered it his duty to report a junior in a matter involving expulsion, I should not think of intervening. With you it is different. You are well aware, Loder, that if the facts were known, you would stand before your headmaster to-day to receive the same sentence as Vernon-Smith!"

Loder licked his dry lips.

"You—you're not going—" he muttered.

"I told you last night that I should give you a chance, Loder, on your promise to amend in the future! I think it is up to you to give that junior a similar chance. I hope that you can see this for yourself," said the games master gravely.

Loder looked at him.

Never had his feelings towards the man been so bitter. But he had to toe the line, and he knew it.

"Very well," he muttered. "I—I will do as you ask, of—of course. Let it go at that."

"Thank you, Loder!" said the games master in the same grave, quiet tone. "Then I may take it that the affair of Vernon-Smith is at an end, and that he will not be called before his headmaster?"

"Yes!" said Loder between his teeth.

"Very good!"

The games master walked away with a nod. He joined Wingate and Gwynne, and stood chatting with them till the bell rang for third school. At a little distance some of the Remove were punting a footer about, and the Bounder was



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joining in the punt-about with a face as cheery as that of any fellow in the Remove. Smithy was smiling when he went in with the Form for third school that morning.

"Well, some fellows have got a nerve," remarked Skinner. "Looking forward to seeing the Big Beak, Smithy?"

"He, he, he!" from Bunter.

The Bounder laughed.

"I mayn't be seeing the Big Beak, after all," he said carelessly. "Loder may have got over his tantrums by this time. His nose looks a little better this morning."

"His temper doesn't!" remarked Bob Cherry. "I spotted him in the quad, and he was scowling like a demon in a pantomime."

"The scowlfulness was terrific," agreed Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "The esteemed Loder seemed to me to be terrifically infuriated."

"Oh, bother Loder!" said Smithy. "Who's afraid of the Big Bad Wolf?" And as Mr. Quelch came along to let his Form in, Smithy went in with the rest, evidently in a cheery mood.

Every fellow in the Form was interested in Smithy during that "school." Every fellow knew what was to follow it: when the Head sat in his study to judge delinquents reported to him—Smithy the most serious delinquent of all. But the Bounder certainly looked like a fellow without a care on his mind.

The Bounder's nerve was well known, and nobody expected him to show the white feather. Most of the Remove concluded that this was merely a display of Smithy's well-known nerve.

Mr. Quelch glanced at him several times with rather a puzzled glance. When the Remove were dismissed he called to the Bounder.

"Vernon-Smith!"

"Yes, sir!"

"You will remain in the House, Vernon-Smith, till you are called in to the Head!"

"Very well, sir," said the junior, with a glimmer in his eyes. And he followed the juniors out of the Form-room.

He strolled into the Rag, a good many of the Removites following him there. Every moment they expected a message from the Head that Vernon-Smith was wanted.

But the message did not come!

The Bounder knew that it would not come. In what mysterious manner the games master had been able to prevail on Loder to let the matter drop he did not know and could not guess. But he knew that it was so.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo, there's Loder!" exclaimed Bob Cherry, glancing from the window of the Rag. "Jolly old Loder's not with the Head!"

A dozen fellows stared out at Loder. He was walking in the quad with Carne of the Sixth. His nose, still red and rather swollen, glowed in the autumn sunshine. His face did not express good temper. But there he was—evidently not with the Head.

"Loder can't have forgotten!" said Harry Wharton, quite puzzled.

"The forgetfulness is not likely to be terrific, considering the state of his esteemed and ridiculous boko," remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"What the dickens does it mean?" asked Tom Redwing, puzzled but greatly relieved.

"I told you it was all right, fathead!" answered the Bounder.

"Ye-es; but—"

"Right as rain! Dear old Loder's letting it drop!" grinned Smithy.

"Loder's not the man to let it drop," said Redwing, shaking his head. "Still, it looks like it. I can't make it out."

"Blessed if I can, either!" said Bob Cherry. "Quelch told Smithy to wait in for the Big Beak to send for him; but the Head will be going to lunch pretty soon. Loder can't have seen the Head; and if he hasn't—"

"He hasn't!" drawled the Bounder.

"Well, why hasn't he, then?" asked Skinner.

Smithy shrugged his shoulders.

Harry Wharton gave him a very curious look. He had not forgotten Smithy's startling statement in Study No. 1. The Bounder caught that look and understood it, and laughed.

"I haven't seen Loder," he said. "Haven't spoken a word to him since yesterday. The dear man's changed his mind without any help from me."

"Blessed if I catch on, then!" said Harry. "I should have thought that Loder was the very last man at Greyfriars to let a fellow off—without a jolly good reason, at any rate."

"With that tomato nose, too!" said Skinner in wonder. "It beats me! You're in luck, Smithy."

"The luckfulness is terrific."

That Loder had laid no report before the Head; that the Bounder was not to be called on the carpet, was pretty clear now. And it was quite certain when the dinner-bell rang and still nothing had transpired.

At the dinner-table Mr. Quelch gave Vernon-Smith a very long and very hard look. But he made no remark. He was probably as perplexed as his Form, but no doubt he was relieved that the question of an expulsion in the Remove was not, after all, to arise.

It was a mystery to the Remove. Loder of the Sixth, for some unknown and mysterious reason, was displaying a forgiving leniency which no fellow at Greyfriars would have expected of Gerald Loder. But there it was—and that was that. Once more the Bounder's proverbial luck had held good and pulled him through.

THE SEVENTEENTH CHAPTER.

Cousin James!

"I SAY, you fellows—he, he, he!"

"What—"

"He, he, he!" gurgled Billy Bunter. "Loder—he, he, he! Oh crikey! He, he, he!"

Bunter was almost doubled up with merriment. He cackled, he gasped, he gurgled—he almost wept!

Harry Wharton & Co. stared at him, and then looked round in search of the cause of Bunter's extraordinary outburst of mirth.

So far as they could see, there was no joke on.

It was after class, two or three days since the affair of the Bounder and Loder. During those days Smithy had been "minding his step," as he described it; and if Loder was looking for another chance at him, he did not find it. The Famous Five were in the quad, and Smithy was with them; they were talking football, the special topic being the Highlife match which was now nearly due. But they ceased to discuss Soccer as Billy Bunter arrived on the spot, doubled up and exploding like a series of Chinese crackers.

Loder of the Sixth had come out of the House, in hat and coat—apparently intending to go out. But there was nothing of a particularly mirth-provoking nature about Loder, so far as the juniors could see.

"I say, you fellows, look!" gurgled Bunter. "I say—he, he, he! I say, look at Loder—he, he, he!"

"What's the matter with the burbling fat ass?" asked Vernon-Smith in wonder. "What's up with Loder, you bloated blitherer?"

"He, he, he! Did you do it, Smithy?"

"Did I do what, you fat ass?"

"You haven't been larking with Loder, surely, Smithy!" said Harry Wharton. "I should think he was safer left alone."

"Of course I haven't, fathead!"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "Coker's got it now! Look at Coker!"

The juniors looked at Coker. Coker was standing near the door, and Loder passed him, coming away from the House. Coker stared at Loder as he passed, and burst into a sudden roar:

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Harry Wharton & Co., and a dozen other fellows, gazed at Coker. What had caused that sudden roar from Horace was a mystery to them. Coker's mirth was as inexplicable as Bunter's.

Loder glanced at the yelling Fifth Former, but he did not, apparently, connect Coker's merriment with himself. He walked on, leaving Coker roaring.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Horace Coker.

"He, he, he!" cackled Bunter.

"What the thump—" exclaimed Frank Nugent.

Then there was a sudden yell from Temple, Dabney & Co. of the Fourth as Loder passed them. Cecil Reginald Temple, Walter Dabney, and Edward Fry burst into a howl:

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Those Fourth Form swobs have caught it now!" exclaimed Bob Cherry, in astonishment. "It's Loder; but what's up with Loder? I can't see—"

"He, he, he! Wait till he passes you!" chortled Bunter.

"Oh!" exclaimed Harry Wharton. He noticed that the fellows who roared had a back view of Loder as he passed them. "Is there something on Loder's back?"

"He, he, he!" gurgled Bunter. "His Cousin James—he, he, he!"

"His Cousin James on his back!" gasped Bob.

"He, he, he!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" came a roar from Hobson of the Shell, as Loder passed him. He had a view of the prefect's back, and what he beheld there seemed to have the same effect on Hobson as on Coker of the Fifth and Temple & Co.

It seemed to dawn on Loder by this time that these outbursts of merriment had something to do with himself. He paused, and turned round towards Hobson with an angry glare.

That movement brought his back towards the group of Removites. Then Harry Wharton & Co. had a view! And they roared:

"Ha, ha, ha!"

In the middle of Loder's back, hooked on to his jacket by a fish-hook, was a square of cardboard.

Evidently some fellow had brushed behind him, and hooked it on, unseen and unsuspected by Loder. The Sixth Form man was blissfully unconscious of it.

There was a picture drawn on the cardboard. It was that of a convict in broad arrows, with an extremely villainous-looking face. Underneath that interesting picture was written in capital letters:

"MY COUSIN JAMES!"

Harry Wharton & Co. laughed—they could not help it. Loder of the Sixth

was fearfully touchy on the subject of his Cousin James—No. 22 of Blackmoor. Indeed, it was his belief that "Mr. Lagden" had let out the truth about that relationship, which had started his feud with the games master. All the Remove knew that it was Skinner who had nosed it out; but Loder did not know that, and was not likely to learn.

Ever since Loder's convict cousin had been the talk of the school, Loder had been rather like a bear with a sore head. A whispered word on that topic was to Loder like a red rag to a bull. So it was rather extraordinary to see Loder walking in the quad, with that picture of his Cousin James on his back, for all the school to see.

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Bob Cherry. "Cousin James—ha, ha, ha!"

"Smithy, you ass—" breathed Nugent.

"Not guilty!" grinned the Bounder. "That jolly old picture looks to me like one of Skinner's artistic efforts. Loder licked Skinner yesterday!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Loder, having glared at Hobson of the Shell, walked on, frowning, and paused to glare at the hilarious Removites. His look showed that he would have been glad to whop the cheery Co. all round. Still, even a bully like Loder could hardly call fellows to account for laughing in the quadrangle. A fellow could laugh if he liked.

He glared at them and stalked on.

Then there was a roar from a crowd of fags as he passed them. Tubb & Co. of the Third shrieked.

Loder stalked on with a red and angry face. He stopped to speak to Walker of the Sixth, who was staring at him and at the laughing fellows, wondering what was up. Walker was not laughing. He had not seen Loder's back yet.

"Is there a smut on my nose, or anything, Walker?" asked Loder. "Those young ticks seem to have some joke on."

"No," answered Walker. "Blessed if I know what they're cackling at! Some sort of a rag, I suppose."

Loder nodded and walked on. Then, to his surprise and annoyance, there was a sudden howl from Walker—as that youth saw his back.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Loder spun round savagely. "You silly fool! What are you cackling at?" he snarled.

"Oh gad! Ha, ha—I say—ha, ha!—didn't you know that—ha, ha—" Walker gasped. "I say, your Cousin James—Ha, ha!"

"What?" roared Loder.

He made a stride at Walker, with his fist clenched. Walker jumped back.

"I—I say—" he gasped. "I mean you—"

"You cheeky cad!"

Loder stalked away savagely. His friends in the Sixth were generally tactful on the subject of his Cousin James. It was really hardly safe to mention that relative to Gerald Loder. Walker's nose had had a narrow escape.

"I—I say—" called out Walker. "I was going to tell you—"

Loder stalked on regardless. Walker was left grinning. About fifty other fellows were grinning, or chuckling, or laughing now. As Loder walked down to the gates, more and more fellows had a view of the striking picture on his back, and howls of laughter fol-

lowed him. Loder's utter unconsciousness of it added to the general hilarity.

"Mr. Lagden" was standing by the porter's lodge, speaking to Gosling. Both of them glanced at Loder as he came along, wondering what was the cause of the ripples of merriment behind him.

He scowled at the games master in passing, and then they saw, as he turned out at the gateway. The games master smiled, and then frowned, and old Gosling gave a rusty chuckle.

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Bob Cherry. "Loder's going out with that on his back! Somebody ought to tip him!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Loder's not safe on that subject!" grinned Johnny Bull. "Let him rip!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

But the games master hurried out of the gates after Loder. Evidently some playful, or vengeful junior had been jesting with the bully of the Sixth; but carrying that joke out of gates was really carrying it rather too far. The young master hurried after Loder, and overtook him as he stalked away towards Courtfield.

"Loder!" he called out.

The Sixth Former stalked on.

"Loder! Stop!"

The games master caught him by the arm and stopped him. Loder turned on "Mr. Lagden," with a blaze in his eyes.

"Leave me alone, confound you!" he snarled.

"I was going to tell you—"

"Don't speak to me! Keep your distance!" Loder gritted his teeth.

"Do you think you can hold it over my head what you found out the other night? It's too late for that. You've left it too long to make any use of it now. How are you going to explain not reporting it before? I'm not afraid of anything you can say—now!"

"I did not mean to refer to that, Loder, as you ought to know. I was going to warn you—"

"Keep your warnings!" sneered Loder. "You need a warning yourself, if what I heard the other day is correct!"

"Will you let me speak? There is a placard on your back!" exclaimed the games master impatiently. "Do you want to walk into the town with a ridiculous picture stuck on your back?"

"Oh!" gasped Loder.

He reached round to the back of his jacket, felt the cardboard, grasped it, and hooked it off. Then he stared at it, and at the sight of the picture of the convict in broad arrows, with the inscription underneath, his face crimsoned with rage.

"Who—who—who did that?" he panted. "I—I'll—"

He choked with rage as he tore the cardboard into fragments, and flung the pieces savagely into the road.

The games master, with a faint smile on his face, turned and walked back to the school gates.

Loder gave the back of his head a glare of the deadliest animosity, perhaps by way of thanks, and stalked on towards Courtfield.

When he reached the wayside seat at the corner of Courtfield common he halted, and sat down there. He glanced up and down the road, and then settled down to stare in the direction of the town, about a mile away across the green common. And a gleam shot into his eyes at the sight of a portly, stocky figure on the road—that of Inspector Grimes, of Courtfield.

lowed him. Loder's utter unconsciousness of it added to the general hilarity.

THE EIGHTEENTH CHAPTER.

What Smithy Heard!

"HALLO, hallo, hallo! Hold on!"

"What—"

"Jolly old Loder!" said Bob Cherry.

"Blow Loder!" growled the Bounder. "Let's keep on."

Harry Wharton shook his head.

A cheery bunch of cyclists came sweeping up the road from the school. The Famous Five, Smithy, Redwing, Peter Todd, and Tom Brown were in that cheery bunch. They would have swept on by the road over the common had not Bob Cherry spotted the Greyfriars prefect on the wayside seat at the corner.

Then there was a general jamming on of brakes.

Except on half-holidays, Courtfield town was out of school bounds, save by special leave. Rather regardless of that fact, the cheery juniors had started on a spin to Courtfield. Really there was no harm in it, so far as that went, but it happened to be against the rules—and rules were not to be lightly broken under the eye of a prefect like Loder. Only the reckless Bounder proposed to ride on regardless.

"Chuck it!" said the captain of the Remove tersely. "We don't want trouble with that brute."

"Oh, rot!" growled Vernon-Smith. "I don't see chucking it! Keep on and chance it!"

"For goodness' sake, Smithy, don't be such an ass!" exclaimed Redwing. "It's only a couple of days since you were expecting to go before the Head to be bunked! Do you want that all over again?"

"Oh rats!"

"Yes; don't play the goat, Smithy!" said Harry Wharton. "I don't know why Loder let you off last time, but—"

"Blow Loder!"

"Fathead! He will report the lot of us if we go out of school bounds. What's the good of asking for trouble?" exclaimed the captain of the Remove impatiently. "Let's turn off here and go round by Popper Court; that's within bounds and no harm done."

"Let's!" agreed Bob.

The Bounder grunted angrily, but he assented. The bunch of cyclists turned off at the corner of the lane on the edge of the wide common.

Loder had not looked towards them; his face, as he sat on the wooden bench, was turned towards Courtfield, his eyes fixed on a stocky figure that was coming along from the town.

But certainly he would have seen them had they ridden on and passed fairly under his nose; equally certainly he would have reported them for breaking school bounds—which would have meant lines, or detentions. Even the Bounder, on second thoughts, realised that it was useless to ask for avoidable trouble.

"What the dickens is Loder sticking there for?" said Peter Todd. "Looks as if he's waiting for somebody."

"One of his sporting friends, perhaps," grinned Bob. "A quid each way on Nobbled Nick for the Swindlem Stakes."

"Anyhow, we'd better keep clear of him," said Harry Wharton, laughing. "He can't have been pleased by that jolly old picture on his back, and he would hate a lot of fellows to barge in while he was chatting with a bookie."

And the juniors, grinning, turned the corner and rode on cheerily down Oak Lane, leaving the high road.

Herbert Vernon-Smith slowed down and dropped behind.

Loder was still sitting with his face



"Mr. Lagden has been suddenly called away, Mr. Grimes!" said Dr. Locke, tapping the note that lay on his writing-table. "I am afraid I cannot say when you will be able to see him. He tells me, in this note, that circumstances have compelled him to leave very suddenly. But he does not leave any address—" "Then he's bolted, sir!" said Inspector Grimes grimly.

towards Courtfield, without looking round, and it was easy to guess that he was expecting somebody to join him. And Smithy's keen eyes had picked up the stocky, portly figure that was coming down the road from the town.

The other fellows thought it quite likely that Loder was there to meet some sporting friend, at a safe distance from the school, but the sight of Inspector Grimes had put quite another idea into Smithy's sharp mind.

He was wondering whether it was by chance that the police-inspector was coming along to that corner while Loder was waiting on the wayside seat.

Smithy slowed still more, and the other cyclists shot ahead round a bend of the lane, leaving him behind. As soon as they were out of sight the Bouncer dismounted and parked his machine in a clump of willows.

Then he cut across a corner of the common, keeping his head low, to get a view of Loder again. Behind that wooden seat at the corner was a clump of trees, and the Bouncer was able to approach quite near unseen.

He wanted to know—and he was going to know—whether Loder of the Sixth had any business with the police-inspector. If he had, Smithy did not need telling what it meant. He glided quietly into the trees and came to a stop not more than a few yards from the bench where Loder sat. Peering out from his cover he watched Mr. Grimes drawing nearer.

Was he going to stop? The Bouncer felt almost sure of it, and soon he knew.

Mr. Grimes, as he reached the corner, came to a halt. Loder rose to his feet; and Smithy saw the inspector give him a keen, curious look. Then, with a curt nod, Mr. Grimes sat down, and Loder dropped on the bench again.

"Well, Master Loder," jerked Mr. Grimes, "here I am. I was surprised—

very much surprised—by your call on the telephone this afternoon. However, I—"

"I'm glad you've been able to come along, Mr. Grimes," said the Greyfriars prefect. "I couldn't speak freely on the phone, of course, and I can't very well come to the police station."

"If you have, as you stated, information for the police, I do not see why not," said the inspector.

"If I were sure, if I had proof—yes. But I haven't," muttered Loder. "I'm practically certain, but it may all be a mare's-nest. I'd rather keep clear of it if there's nothing in it. I don't want to risk a row with my headmaster. But I think you ought to know. If a man's passing in a false name, it's a matter for the police to look into, isn't it?"

"I should say so," answered Mr. Grimes, with a faint grin. "I should certainly say so. Well, I'm prepared to hear anything you may have to say, Master Loder, and I will judge for myself."

"You've heard of Lagden, our new games master at the school; I think you saw him the day he came, over the affair of that convict—"

"Mr. Lagden. Oh, quite! He found a convict injured on the road half a mile from this very spot, and flagged Sir Hilton Popper's car to convey him to the station. I have not seen him since."

"I dare say you never noticed him particularly; you'd be thinking of the convict chiefly, I dare say," said Loder. "But Lagden is the man I want to speak about. It's come to my knowledge that some juniors in the school saw him about this district before he was supposed to arrive here. It's understood that he came straight down from London, but several boys saw him about here the day before; and, from what one of them says, he was looking very

different at the time—so different, in fact, that some of the juniors who saw him did not know him again when he came to the school."

"Indeed!" said Mr. Grimes. He eyed Loder of the Sixth curiously. Mr. Grimes was a keen gentleman; he knew at a glance that there was personal dislike in this matter.

That, however, mattered little or nothing if there was anything in the information that was given.

"One of the boys," went on Loder, "stated in my hearing that Lagden was not the genuine Lagden at all, but another man who had taken on his name and come to the school in his place. If that's true, Mr. Grimes, it's a pretty serious matter."

"I should say so," nodded the inspector. "But a foolish and thoughtless schoolboy's talk, Master Loder—'Hem!'"

"The boy I mention is no fool; he's keen as a razor. I dare say you've seen him—young Vernon-Smith. He won't speak out about what he knows—"

"Why not?"

"I hardly know. But I know this—that the other day the man Lagden got him off a punishment he richly deserved. He may make it worth the young rascal's while to keep his secret, in one way or another. He is a rather unscrupulous young rascal."

"But, my dear Master Loder, if this man—this games master—has assumed the name of a man expected to arrive at your school, where is the man whose name he has taken?" asked Mr. Grimes. "Has nothing been heard of him?"

"Nothing—or the Head would know," said Loder. "I can't make that out—whether the man is acting in collusion with the real Lagden, or whether he's got rid of Lagden somehow."

Mr. Grimes coughed. He had taken

the trouble to walk a mile to see Gerald Loder; but the junior hidden in the trees behind the seat had an impression that Mr. Grimes believed that he had only his walk for his pains.

"If you'd see the man somehow, sir—" said Loder, feeling, perhaps, that he was not getting on. "He may be known to the police, if he is an impostor—"

"Oh, quite!" said Mr. Grimes. "After what you have said, Master Loder, I shall certainly make it a point to see this Mr. Lagden. A little conversation with him certainly can do no harm."

"He was once a master at Okeham School, in Devonshire; you may have heard his name in connection with the— the convict—" Loder paused and coloured.

"No. 22 of Blackmoor! James Loder!" said Inspector Grimes. "Oh, certainly! It is the same Lagden, I remember. If necessary an inquiry could be made at Okeham. It was Mr. Lagden who caught the man Loder—hem!—the man James Loder in the act of robbery at Okeham School a year ago. A curious coincidence that the same man should have found him here and handed him over. Quite!"

"If he is the same man," said Loder. "But if he is an impostor, the real man would be known at Okeham—"

"Quite!" said the inspector thoughtfully. "It was a strange case—a very strange case. Mr. Lagden caught the man in the very act—but the man Loder accused Lagden of being the thief—each stated that he had interrupted the other in the robbery—but the stolen notes were found on James Loder when he was searched—a very peculiar case. Okeham is a very long way from here—I should scarcely be justified, on such very vague grounds. However, I will certainly make it a point to see Mr. Lagden at Greyfriars—a little conversation with the young man can do no harm in view of what you have said."

"You will not mention—" began Loder hastily.

Inspector Grimes smiled.

"I shall not mention you, Master Loder. The fact is, Mr. Lagden feels some interest in the convict, who now lies in the prison hospital at Courtfield, and he has once or twice inquired, on the telephone, whether the man has recovered sufficiently to speak.

"There is no reason why I should not drop in for a chat on the subject that interests him. Leave it to me, Master Loder. If you have any grounds for your doubts of the young man, you may rely upon it that the matter is safe in my hands."

"And you'll come—"

"I am at leisure now," said Mr. Grimes. "I will walk on to the school now."

And, after a few more words, the portly inspector bestowed another nod on Gerald Loder, and walked on in the direction of Greyfriars.

Loder, left on the wayside seat, watched him as he went, wondering what would come of it. But the junior in the trees behind the seat did not wonder—he knew. Quietly Herbert Vernon-Smith backed out of the trees and cut across to the spot where he had left his bicycle.

Harry Wharton & Co., on their spin round Popper Court Woods, missed the Bounder, and wondered why he had dropped out. They did not see him again; but Mr. Grimes, as he walked

to Greyfriars, saw him for a moment or two. Smithy passed the inspector on his bike, going all out.

THE NINETEENTH CHAPTER.

Too Late!

"MAY I speak to you, sir?"

"Mr. Lagden" glanced at the Bounder a little impatiently.

He was standing in the doorway of the changing-room, in conversation with some of the Sixth Form men there. He did not seem pleased to be interrupted.

"Later, Vernon-Smith!" he said curtly.

Then he glanced a second time at the Bounder curiously. Smithy was crimson and breathless after his ride at a desperate speed to get in before Inspector Grimes could arrive at the school. He panted as he stood there.

"If—if you'd come now, sir—it's rather urgent, sir!" said the Bounder. "Please do!"

The games master's eyes narrowed. "Very well," he said quietly; and, with a nod to the seniors in the changing-room, he walked away with Vernon-Smith.

"Now, what is it, my boy?" he asked curtly.

Smithy gave a swift glance round.

"Go to your room, sir—I'll come with you! For goodness' sake, don't lose any time! I'm not playing the fool—it's important! For goodness' sake, sir!"

The games master gave him a look. Then, without a word, he went away to his rooms, and the Bounder followed him. Every hour, at the back of his mind, was the thought—the fear—that the insensible man at Courtfield might recover and speak. Mr. Grimes little guessed the real reason of those kind inquiries on the telephone. Only too well the man who had been hunted knew the risk he was running by remaining where he was—yet he was unwilling to tear himself away from what was like a haven of peace and refuge to him. But he knew that the time must come—and he knew that, unless he was very warily on his guard, he might act too late.

The Bounder shut the door, and turned to him, panting.

"Now, what is it, Vernon-Smith?" asked the games master, in a quiet, even tone.

"I'm not going to beat about the bush, sir!" gasped Smithy. "I know you—and you know that I know! You pulled me out of the river—you've stood by me since—and I'm standing by you! I've got to warn you! Old Grimes—"

The games master drew a quick, deep breath.

"Are you speaking of Inspector Grimes, of Courtfield, Vernon-Smith?"

"Yes, sir! He's coming here!" panted the Bounder. "I passed him on the road—on my bike!"

"Well?"

The man was still cool and calm.

"He's coming to see you, sir! Loder—I heard Loder talking to him—Loder's told him—what he heard from me—you understand? He's coming here to see you—he doesn't believe Loder, I think; but—but—but—You know best whether you can face him, sir!"

The games master stood silent.

It was not what he had feared. The man at Courtfield had not spoken. Nothing was known. But—

"Old Grimes is no fool, sir. And—and—and—he must have had a description of No. 22, when the man was being hunted about here. He thinks he's got the man, I know—but—but—"

The games master's hand glided over his little moustache. That, and some other little changes, made him unlike the James Loder who had been sent to Blackmoor. In his single interview with Inspector Grimes, two or three weeks ago, he had passed muster.

But would he pass muster under a keen and searching scrutiny? He doubted it. The Bounder more than doubted.

"Loder's hinted to him that you may be known to the—the police, sir—Grimes never thought of anything of the kind when you saw him at the police station that time; but he will be thinking of it now. And—and—"

The Bounder broke off.

The games master smiled faintly. "Thank you, Vernon-Smith," he said.

"You may go."

"Very well, sir!" Smithy went out of the room and shut the door after him. He had given his warning—it was for No. 22 to act on it, or not, as he thought fit.

The young master stood very still when the junior was gone—thinking. Dared he risk it?

Inspector Grimes had no knowledge, no suspicion of the truth. He believed that he had No. 22 safe in his hands. "Mr. Lagden" was sufficiently unlike James Loder to be safe from a casual glance.

But if the inspector was taking the trouble, on Loder's information, to come to the school, to see him specially, it was no casual glance he had to expect. He had to expect the keenest, most searching scrutiny from a pair of very sharp eyes—eyes that had lately rested on the photographs of No. 22 circulated among the police. And if his likeness to the convict struck Mr. Grimes, as it certainly would on such an inspection, would not Mr. Grimes remember at once that the captured man had been disfigured by the motor accident, and known only by the convict garb he wore?

The game was up! No. 22 knew that now.

He knew that if he faced Inspector Grimes, alert and suspicious, he would be suspected, if not actually known; that he would be watched, while inquiries were made at Leggett & Teggers, and at Okeham—inquiries which could only result in absolute proof that he was not Stephen Lagden!

The game was up—and all that was left to the hunted man was to go while the going was still good—which, thanks to the Bounder's warning, he was yet able to do.

For two or three minutes he stood, thinking it out—undecided. Then, as soon as he had decided, he acted.

In five minutes more he had packed a suitcase; in another minute, written a note for the Head. A minute more, and he was descending the stairs, with the suitcase in his hand.

"Mauleverer!"

Lord Mauleverer, of the Remove, was crossing the landing. The games master called to him.

"Yaas, sir!" said Mauly, glancing round.

"I am called away rather suddenly, Mauleverer. Will you have the kindness to take this note to Dr. Locke?"

"Certainly, sir!"

The games master walked out of the House. His manner was quite casual, but his eyes were warily about him as he emerged.

In the distant gateway a portly figure appeared; he was only just in time.

Had he walked down to the gates, he would have met Inspector Grimes face to face; but he walked away in another direction, and the corner of the school library was quickly placed between him and the arriving police-inspector.

Mr. Grimes arrived at the House in happy ignorance of the fact that the bird had flown; ignorant, so far, that the man was his "bird" at all!

Trotter showed him in, and the inspector waited, while the House page went to call Mr. Lagden.

The Courtfield inspector sat and waited more interested in the coming interview than Loder of the Sixth supposed that he would be. For, though Mr. Grimes certainly had not had the faintest suspicion of "Mr. Lagden" in that interview two or three weeks ago, he had noted at the time that there was something vaguely familiar in his face.

That trifling circumstance he had dismissed from his mind; but what Loder had told him had recalled it.

He was very keen indeed to give "Mr. Lagden" a close scrutiny, and to ask him a few leading questions.

If the man, in fact, was known to the police—if his photograph had ever passed under Mr. Grimes' official eye—he would not fail to spot the fact, now that his attention was specially directed to the man. Mr. Grimes was quite sure of that—as sure as No. 22 had been.

Trotter returned. He came alone.

"I think Mr. Lagden's gone hout, sir," said Trotter. "He ain't in the 'Ouse now, sir!"

"Indeed! I will wait!" said Mr. Grimes. "Please inform Mr. Lagden that I am here immediately he returns."

"Yessir!" Trotter left him.

Mr. Grimes rose from his chair and walked to the window. There was suspicion in his mind now. True, the man might have gone out—he was not expecting a visitor. But it was a coincidence—and it was quite possible that he had seen the inspector arrive. Mr. Grimes wondered—while he waited.

He waited long. He saw a bunch of cheery juniors come in—Harry Wharton & Co. He saw Loder of the Sixth come in. Soon afterwards it was lock-up, and the gates were closed. Still Mr. Lagden had not come in.

Mr. Grimes was growing very restive by this time. He was due soon at his duties in Courtfield, and could not wait much longer. He did not want to leave without seeing Mr. Lagden, especially as a suspicion was strengthening in his mind that this man's absence was not a coincidence.

He rang at last, and Trotter appeared.

"Has not Mr. Lagden come in?" he asked.

"Not yet, sir!"

"Then I will see Dr. Locke!" grunted the inspector; and he was shown to the Head's study.

The Head of Greyfriars greeted him with his usual courtesy, tintured with a slight surprise.

"I desire to see Mr. Lagden, sir!" said the inspector. "In—hem—in connection with the affair of the convict, whom, you may remember, Mr. Lagden

handed over to us. He appears to be absent, but—no doubt you can tell me when I can see him."

"Dear me," said Dr. Locke, "that is somewhat unfortunate, Mr. Grimes."

"How so, sir?"

The Head tapped a note that lay on his writing-table.

"Mr. Lagden has been suddenly called away," he explained. "So suddenly that I did not even see him before he left."

"Left?"

"He sent me this note by a junior boy," said the Head. "It is—really—somewhat surprising, and a little disconcerting. I am afraid, Mr. Grimes, that I cannot say when you will be able to see him—he tells me in this note that circumstances have compelled him to leave very suddenly—he apologises for the inconvenience caused, but he does not mention any address."

Inspector Grimes set his lips.

"Then he's bolted, sir?"

"It appears so—yes."

"And gives no address?"

"None; but I have no doubt that Messrs. Leggett & Teggers will have his address, Mr. Grimes, as they secured him his post here."

"Oh, no doubt, sir!" said Inspector Grimes grimly. "No doubt!"

He took his leave of the Head, and went. As he left the House, a junior of the Remove watched him go—and grinned. But Mr. Grimes did not observe Vernon-Smith, and was quite unaware of what he owed to the Bounder of Greyfriars.

THE TWENTIETH CHAPTER.

A Startling Announcement!

"I SAY, you fellows—"

"Shut up, Bunter!"

"But, I say—"

"Quiet, ass! We want to hear the news!"

"But I say, Loder's coming!" squeaked Bunter.

And from the juniors assembled in Tom Brown's study, came the reply, with one voice:

"Blow Loder!"

It was a week since the sudden, and rather surprising, departure of Mr. Stephen Lagden, the new games master at Greyfriars.

A crowd of fellows had gathered in Study No. 2 in the Remove, to listen to the news on the wireless. It was raining, and Tom Brown's radio was a great resource in rainy weather.

Mr. Lagden's sudden departure had caused a good deal of surprise—though not to the Bounder, and perhaps not to Harry Wharton or Tom Redwing, in view of what Smithy had told them. Loder of the Sixth, perhaps, was not surprised, either—indeed, he had little doubt, or none, that he was the cause of that sudden departure—concluding that Inspector Grimes' visit had scared the "impostor" away from the school. Which was a source of very great satisfaction to Gerald Loder.

Most of the fellows had been sorry to lose the popular-games master. But as a week had now elapsed since he had gone, he was rather relegated to the backs of their minds.

At the present moment, gathered in Tom Brown's study, Harry Wharton & Co. were thinking chiefly of football news coming through. And when Billy Bunter, who was nearest the door, squeaked out the alarm that Loder was coming, there was a general growl of wrath.

(Continued on page 28.)

COME INTO THE OFFICE, BOYS AND GIRLS!

Your Editor is always pleased to hear from his readers. Write to him: Editor of the MAGNET, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. A stamped, addressed envelope will ensure a reply.

As usual, chums, there will be another grand extra-long yarn of Harry Wharton & Co., in next Saturday's MAGNET. This, incidentally, will be a request story featuring Frank Nugent and his scapegrace minor of the Second—"Dicky," the youthful "orther" of the bright and breezy "shockers" now appearing in the "Greyfriars Herald." As different as chalk is to cheese, these two characters have always had a great appeal.

Many readers have certain characters of whom they always like to read, and Frank Richards does his best to introduce them. It would be, of course, impossible to mention every character in each story. But don't think for one moment, that our prince of story-tellers is neglecting the lesser lights. You'll be learning how these are faring in future yarns.

Next Saturday's masterpiece

"HIS SCAPEGRACE BROTHER!"

is going to prove a real winner. Our talented author has excelled himself with a vengeance in this powerful and dramatic story. Dicky Nugent, as you all know, is a thoughtless young scamp who finds it easier to drift into trouble than steer clear of it. Next week finds him getting mixed up in the blackguardly ways of a certain shady member of the Fifth, to wit Stephen Price, who has narrowly escaped the "chopper" on more than one occasion. In the company of such a "big noise" as Price, Dicky goes from bad to worse, and trouble falls thick upon his shoulders. It is left to Frank Nugent to get his young brother out of the mire. Does he give the wayward youngster the thrashing of his life and then report Price? No; Frank Nugent has a different method, as you will learn when you read this peach of a yarn. Take my tip, chums, and trot round to your newsagent right now, and ask him to reserve a copy of next Saturday's MAGNET for you. And if you want to kill two birds with one stone, as the saying is, get a copy of this week's GEM and read:

"THE STONY FIVE!"

By Frank Richards,

a grand yarn, dealing with Harry Wharton & Co's. early schooldays. As the title suggests, the Famous Four and Billy Bunter are broke to the wide. The question of the hour is how to "raise the wind" for their immediate needs. Billy Bunter has his own original methods of doing this—methods which prove expensive to others. You'll get a good laugh out of this yarn, chums, take it from me!

Readers who are keen to possess a copy of

THE "HOLIDAY ANNUAL"

should take the precaution of ordering a copy now. Orders are pouring in from all over the world for this bumper Annual. Think of it, chums, 256 pages of rollicking fine school stories, humorous articles, sparkling verses, and numerous other features—all for the modest price of five shillings.

YOUR EDITOR,
THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,496.

"Shut the door!" said Harry Wharton.

Loder's footsteps were heard coming up the passage from the stairs. Bob Cherry slammed the door, and Nugent turned the key in the lock.

"Now carry on, Browney!" said the captain of the Remove. "If Loder knocks, we're all deaf, and can't hear!"

"The deaf-fulness will be terrific!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Brown grinned, and twiddled dials. The carefully elegant voice of the wireless announcer permeated the study.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" ejaculated Bob Cherry suddenly, as a familiar name was heard on the radio. "What's that?"

"Lagden!" exclaimed Harry Wharton blankly.

Bang, bang! came at the door.

"You young sweeps!" came Loder's roar.

"Shut up, Loder!" shouted Bob Cherry. "There's something about Lagden coming on the wireless. Keep your head shut!"

"Quiet! Listen!"

Loder ceased to bang and roar. If there was something about Lagden on the radio, Gerald Loder wanted to hear it, as well as the Remove fellows.

There was silence as the elegant accent went on from Tom Brown's loudspeaker. Every fellow listened breathlessly. Something had been missed; but they caught every word that followed:

"... for several weeks in a comatose condition, owing to concussion, sustained in a motor accident, but he has now recovered sufficiently to speak, and has made a very unexpected and extraordinary statement to the police. According to this statement the man is not, as was supposed, James Loder, the convict of Blackmoor, at all, but another man with whom the convict somehow contrived to change clothes. Owing to the disfigurement of his face no recognition was possible, and until now the man has been supposed to be James Loder—"

"He, he, he! Loder's Cousin James!" came a fat chuckle from Billy Bunter.

"Shut up, Bunter!"

"... states that his name is Stephen Lagden, a games master, engaged at a school in the locality—"

"Oh crikey!" gasped Bob Cherry.

"Quiet!"

"... formerly a master at a school where the convict, James Loder, was also a master. It appears that on his way to take up his appointment, he fell in with the escaped convict, but he remembers no more after being knocked down by a car. As he was found in the convict's garb, however, it is clear that Convict No. 22 must have changed clothes with him, possibly assuming his name, also, in order to effect his escape."

"Oh, my hat!"

"Lagden!"

"Our games master!"

"Great pip!"

"Quiet! Let's hear!"

"This, however, is not the only extraordinary statement made by the man now lying in the prison hospital at Courtfield. He has made a full confession that he was guilty of the robbery at Okcham, for which James Loder was sent to three years' penal servitude at Blackmoor."

Every "Magnetite" should make a point of reading:

"THE STONY FIVE!"

By Frank Richards

the grand yarn dealing with the early adventures of Harry Wharton & Co. in the

G E M

Now on Sale. Price 2d.

"Oh gad!" gasped the Bunder. "I knew it! I jolly well knew it! The man was straight as a string. I knew he was! He can't help being Loder's cousin; but there's nothing else against him."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Quiet! Let's hear!"

"This confession is to the effect that it was not Lagden who caught James Loder in the act of robbery, but the exact reverse. But in the struggle that ensued, he contrived to slip the stolen notes into James Loder's pockets, where they were subsequently discovered on a search being made by the police. And this confession is officially taken as completely clearing James Loder, and establishing his innocence."

"Hurrah!"

"James Loder's present whereabouts are unknown; but if this announcement should reach his ears, he is requested to communicate at once with the authorities."

"And he was here a week ago!" gasped Harry Wharton.

"The man we called Lagden—"

"Our jolly old games master—"

"Loder's Cousin James—"

"Shut up! Let's listen!" howled Tom Brown.

The voice was going on, doubtless for the benefit of Convict No. 22, if he was listening.

"James Loder, lately known as Convict No. 22, of Blackmoor Prison, is requested to communicate with the authorities, and he may take it as assured that his name is cleared, and his innocence fully established."

"Bravo!"

The radio voice ran on with the prices of fat stock, which did not interest the Remove fellows, and Tom Brown shut off.

"Good news for Loder," chuckled Bob Cherry. "His jolly old cousin is all right—more credit to Loder, than Loder is to him!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Harry Wharton opened the door of Study No. 2. Loder of the Sixth stood there, an extraordinary expression on his face.

For his relative, Gerald Loder cared nothing; but he was undoubtedly glad to hear that that relative's name had been cleared, and that he need no longer squirm at the mention of his Cousin James. And it was a startling discovery to him that the games master, whom he had suspected and disliked, was his own cousin! Harry Wharton eyed the bully of the Sixth warily as he opened the door; but Loder unexpectedly smiled.

"Jolly good news, Loder!" said Harry.

And Loder nodded, and walked away to the stairs; his ashplant still under his arm.

THE END.

(Watch out next Saturday for another spanking fine yarn of Harry Wharton & Co., entitled: "HIS SCAPEGOAT BROTHER!" featuring Frank Nugent and his troublesome minor "Dickie." You'll enjoy every line of it!)

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A MIDNITE MISTERY!

Another "Eggsiting" Instalment
of DICKY NUGENT'S Hilarious Serial:
"UNDER SNARLER'S THUMB!"

Soon after morning lessons on the following day a furtive figger in cap and gown mite have been seen slinking stethily along the Fourth Form passidge. As a matter of fakt, he was seen; Jack Jolly & Co. happened to turn up just as he reached Snarler's study. At the sound of Jack Jolly & Co's cheery voices the furtive figger wheeled round—to reveal the well-known fetchers of Doctor Birchermall himself. There was a hunted look on the Head's face. As the Co. drew nearer, it changed to an eggspression of baffled rage, while his twisted lips mouthed a furious oath. "Bust it!" he growled. In desperation, he flattened himself against the wall. But if he was hoping to evade Jack Jolly & Co.'s notices in that way, his hopes were doomed to disappointment. Jack Jolly spotted him right away—and stared at him in open-mouthed astonishment. "What's the idea, sir?" he asked. "Playing 'Puss in the Corner' on your own? Or are you meerly using the wall as a back-scratcher?" "Neither!" growled the Head. "As a matter of fakt, just at present I'm—er—studying studies. Do you happen to know where Snarler is at the moment?" "I fancy I saw him walking towards the tuckshop, sir," grinned Merry. "Do you want to inspect his study, then?" "Nunno! Perish the thought!" said the Head hastily. "I wouldn't dream of entering Snarler's study in his absence. Whatever you do, don't suggest to him that I ever thought of such a thing, will you?" Jack Jolly & Co. looked at each other eggspressively. They couldn't help thinking that Doctor Birchermall's pekuliar behaviour fitted in with the suspishuns they had already formed, that he was in some misterious way under Snarler's thumb. But, natcherally, they couldn't voice their thoughts to such an important personage as the Head. "Rely on us, sir," said Jack Jolly. "We shall be as mum as oysters." "Thanks awfully, Jolly!" Then the Head gave a sudden violent start and pointed eggstedily to the winder at the end of the passidge. "Bless my sole! Just look at that aeroplane!" he cried. Not wishing to miss anything, Jack Jolly & Co. made a rush to the winder.

To their utter amazement, they arrived to find that there was no sign of an aeroplane outside! Turning round again, they were even more mistified to find that the Head had vanished! "What the merry dickins!" gasped Bright. "It's a ruse!" said Jack Jolly. "A ruse to distract our attention while he sneaks into Snarler's study!" "My hat!" "See if I'm not right!" went on the leader of the Fourth; and he led the way to Snarler's study and bent down to have a peep through the keyhole. Sure enuff, there was Doctor Birchermall in the middle of the study, hurriedly turning over the contents of Snarler's desk. "He's searching for something!" whispered Jack Jolly. "And it looks as if he has found it, too!" Listening with bated breath the juniors heard the Head utter a gloating chuckle from within the study. "Aha! Here it is!" they heard him mermer. "I've got the all-important foto! But I'm afraid I shall have to look elsewhere for the remainder of the evidence. I'm positive Snarler has found another hiding-place for the negative!" The Head then closed Snarler's desk and made a move towards the door. "Run for it!" hissed Jolly, hurriedly leaving the keyhole; and Jack Jolly & Co. broke into a run—and didn't stop running till they were safely down in the quad. By a strange chance, the very first person they met in the quad was the Head's charming dawter, Molly Birchermall. Jack Jolly promptly seized the opportunity to speak to Miss Molly about her father's eggstraordinary conduct. "Spare a minnit, Miss Molly?" he asked. "Two, if you like, Jolly!" replied Miss Molly in her rippling, mowsical voice. "What's the trouble?" "It's about your father—the Head!" Miss Molly's brow clouded.



"Pop again? I'm getting very worried over him. I can't make out what's the matter with him lately." "Same here, Miss Molly," said Jolly, with a simper-thetiock grin. And then he told her of the strange incident in the Fourth Form passidge. Miss Molly's eyes gleamed with interest as she listened. "Really, one mite almost think pop was off his nut," she tinkled, when Jolly had finished. "But if he is, then there is method in his madness. You have actually seen him nicking something that duzzont belong to him; and I, for my part, have had a request from him to knit him a black mask and lend him my pocket torch!" "Can it be possibul," asked Jolly slowly, "that your father is a berglar?" "Tears glissened in Molly Birchermall's bright eyes. "I refuse to believe it," she said tremulously. "No Birchermall worthy of the name would ever descend to berglary. Forgery or black-mail—yes; but berglary—never!" "Then why does he want a mask and pocket torch?" demanded Merry. Miss Molly smiled through her tears as a bright idea struck her. "Perhaps he's going to a fancy-dress ball," she trilled, "They say that old people are becoming more frivolous nowadays; and, after all, pop was only ninety-nine last birthday." "Let's hope you're right, Miss Molly," grinned Jack Jolly. But after the Head's charming dawter had departed and left the Co. alone again, Jolly had to admit that he wasn't grately impressed by the fancy-dress ball idea. "It's far more likely that mask and torch have got something to do with the negative the Head's so anxious to find," he said. "I suggest that we three and Fearless keep awake to-night to see if anything happens."

"Good wheezo!" Frank Fearless was only too glad to join in the vigil, when they told him about it. So that nite, in the Fourth Form dorm, four juniors remained awake long after the rest were in dream-land. That was what they thought, anyway. But in actual fakt, there was one other fellow who kept them company—namely, Sid Snarler, the cadd of the Fourth. Whether it was merely a case of trubbled consnatch on his part or whether Snarler smelt a ratt nobody ever knew. But Snarler kept awake. Bang! It was the first stroke of midnite crashing out from the old clock-tower at St. Sam's. As it died away there was a faint "click" from the direction of the door. Jack Jolly & Co. strained their eyes in the darkness and saw the door slowly open, to admit a sinnister-looking figger wearing a mask and carrying a small pocket torch! Breathlessly they watched the midnite marawder. He closed the door behind him and tiptoed across the dorm, his hob-nailed boots making hardly a sound on the parkee flooring. A gleem of light peered the darkness as he switched on his torch. It settled on the foot of the bed in which Snarler lay, faining sleep. Jack Jolly & Co. watched from their beds, scarcely daring to breathe. They had made up their minds not to butt in—but in that resolve they had reckoned without Snarler of the Fourth! The man in the mask leaned over the bed-rail and dived his long, claw-like hand into one of the pockets of Snarler's trowsis, which were hanging there. The next moment Snarler sat up in bed with a yell. "Help! Perlice! Berglars!" he roared. There was an ordible gasp of fear from the man in the mask. He switched off his torch and hezzitated for a moment; and then, as Snarler jumped out of bed, he turned tail and fled. In a trice Jack Jolly & Co. were also out of bed. They didn't altogether approve of the idea of a berglar raiding the Fourth Form dormitory in the middle of the nite; but, at the same time, they

had no simperthy to waste on Snarler, and they intended to make sure that the man in the mask was given a sporting chance to escape. Bang! Thud! Wallop! In the darkness Snarler collided violently with Jack Jolly & Co. All five then crashed to the floor with a terriffick bump! "Woooooop!" "Yarooooo!" Then somebody switched on the dormitory lights, and Snarler jumped up again. "Quick! We'll just catch him!" he yelled as he dashed to the door. But no masked berglar was in site when Snarler reached the doorway. Instead, it was the mejetick figger of Doctor Birchermall that was standing outside in the passidge—and he was no sign of a mask or the Head's skollary fizza! "Snarler! Boys! What is the meaning of this?" he cried in his most awe-inspiring voice. Snarler eyed the Head very suspishusly. "Please, sir, there was a masked berglar in the dorm, and—" "Masked berglar fiddlesticks!" snorted the Head. "You have been dreaming, Snarler! Return to bed at once, all of you! I'll kindly see that the lights are switched off!" "Certainly, sir!" grinned Jack Jolly. With that the bringe episode of the midnite raid on the Fourth Form dorm ended. Snarler, returning to his bedside, eggssaminid his pockets and found there a certain fotograflick negative still intact. With a grust of satisfaction, he turned into bed again and was soon fast asleep. Snarler's sleep that nite mite not have been so sound had he known that a while later Fearless crept out of bed and eggsschanged his preshus negative for another belonging to Fearless himself! But Snarler didn't know that. That discovery was to follow later on—and in the meantime Snarler slept the sleep of the unjust!

(Don't miss the last rollicking instalment of Dicky Nugent's funny serial in next week's "Herald".)

The GREYFRIARS HERALD

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SECRETS of a MAKE-UP MAN!

By WILLIAM WIBLEY

A theatrical costumier and make-up expert like myself sees a good deal that others miss. I dare say I share more secrets with Greyfriars men than anyone else in the school. When a chap wants a black eye painted out, or wants his appearance altered in any way, I'm the man to do it. So, naturally, at times I come up against some rather confidential business. It's nothing for me to have a chap burst into my study gasping out: "Quick! There's a crowd after me! Touch me up so they won't recognise me, will you?" I never ask questions. I just get out false whiskers, some crepe hair, grease-paint, and perhaps a pair of coloured spectacles, and set to work—and in a brace of shakes I turn him into a different fellow altogether. What a rumpus there would be if I told half of what I know! Why, on one occasion a well-known senior called on me and asked me to disguise him as a window-cleaner. Half an hour later most of the valuables in the School House had vanished! Another time a Removite wanted to be made up to look like Sir Hilton Popper. I made a lifelike job of it—and, within a few minutes of his leaving me, Greyfriars was agog with the news that Sir Hilton Popper had chased Mr. Quelch round the quad with a hunting-crop! The tales I could tell! But I'd better not tell them. Secrecy is part of the stock-in-trade of a make-up expert! (We hate to say it about an old pal, dear readers, but on this occasion it strikes us forcibly that Wib. is best taken with a grain of salt!—Ed.)

THE QUESTION of the MOMENT at GREYFRIARS —ARE YOU A "STIKER"?

In the last week or two "stiking" has become a regular craze at Greyfriars. "Stiking," by the way, in case you don't know it already, is hiking on stilts. Skinner set the fashion some little time ago, and has been the enthusiastic leader of the Greyfriars "stikers" since. A "Greyfriars Herald" interviewer, calling on him yesterday at the wood shed, found him busily engaged in repairing a stilt with all the enthusiasm of a mere novice. "Would you like to say a word to our readers on the aims and objects of 'stiking,' old chap?" asked the "G. H." interviewer. "Delighted!" grinned Skinner. "'Stiking' is really only hiking with the risks taken out of it." "My hat! You don't say so?" "Fact! Ordinary hiking is a dangerous pastime," said Skinner seriously. "But 'stiking' is as safe as houses. Bends in the road, for instance, have no terrors for the 'stiker'—he sees the oncoming traffic over the hedges! And he doesn't get wet feet, either, and—oh, but there are too many reasons to give in full. Can you walk on stilts?" "Well, I can, but I've just remembered an important appointment and I—" "Forget it and come out 'stiking'!" grinned Skinner.

How it happened the "G. H." man can't quite say, but somehow or other he found himself staggering down Friardale Lane on stilts side by side with Skinner. "Safe as houses, what?" chortled Skinner. Hardly had he said that when there was a deafening roar and Coker appeared in the lane, doing 50 m.p.h. on his motor-bike and coming straight towards the "G. H." man! "Jump out of the way, you fat-head!" shrieked Skinner. Our interviewer took one giant stride. Before he could bring the other leg up level, Coker had flashed under the arch made by the two stilts and was away again—with no damage done on either side. "Phew!" gasped the "G. H." man. "Didn't I tell you?" chuckled Skinner. "I said all along that hiking on stilts was safer than plain hiking, didn't I?" "Yes, but look here!" Further argument, however, was stopped by the sudden appearance of a herd of cattle being driven down the lane. The next five minutes was one of the most exciting five minutes our interviewer had ever spent. He tells us that for real

discomfort he can't roughly recommend walking on stilts and getting tangled up in a bunch of cattle. In the end he and Skinner escaped by stepping over a stile into a field. There they found Bolsover. Bolsover, who was in a playful mood, pretended to mistake them for a couple of overgrown grasshoppers and started chasing them. And eventually he grabbed the "Herald" man by the stilts and brought him down in a bed of stinging nettles. Since when our interviewer has been a confirmed anti-"stiker"! Bolsover, by the way, disclaims all liability for this state of affairs. He says he was only "pulling his leg"!



H. VERNON-SMITH ASKS and ANSWERS the QUESTION:— WHAT'S THE GOOD OF A GREYFRIARS EDUCATION?

After reading my recent article on the Old Boys our Head admires, Stott of the Remove bumped into me, and remarked that a Greyfriars education didn't seem much of an advantage, anyway. I was shocked—nay, disgusted, as 'Lonzy Todd used to say. Fancy any fellow doubting for an instant that a Greyfriars education is helpful to him in after-life! I can tell you for a fact that I've heard plenty of cases where a Greyfriars education has paved the way to success. There's Dilgetts, for instance, the great maths scholar of years ago. While he was at Greyfriars he was always keen on "figures"—and now he's the owner of a famous "slimming" process! I hope that by this time I've said enough to convince Stott and any other sceptics that there's a great advantage in having a Greyfriars education! (We hope our readers will make allowances for Smithy. He gets taken like this now and again!—Ed.)

JOCULAR JOTTINGS

Clara Trevlyn recently surprised her Cliff House colleagues by winning a cash prize in an amateur lariat-spinning competition. Evidently a "lasso" can "rope in" the money! Mr. Larry Lascelles, who has been instructing juniors in musketry, says that Smithy's an excellent pupil. Smithy retorts: "It's all my eye!" Several readers have asked us how Mark Linley is getting on in a part-time job he has been tilling as assistant to a Courtfield chorist. We really can't say. When we asked the

chemist about it, he said: "I can easily 'dispense' with him!" At a recent Remove dorm foed "coffee," prepared by Rake, consisted of 50 per cent liquid and 50 per cent grounds. When Skinner suggested that it was just mud and water, nobody would have been in the least surprised if Rake had confessed that that was what he "sediment"!