

THE SCAMPS OF THE SCHOOL!

(See Inside for a Magnificent Long Complete Tale of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's.)

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



BUNTER ON THE BALL!

An Exciting Scene from the Grand Long
Complete Tale of Harry Wharton & Co.,
contained in This Issue. 9,2,18

LED ASTRAY!

By FRANK RICHARDS.

A Magnificent Long Complete Tale, dealing with the Early Adventures of Harry Wharton & Co. at Greyfriars School.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Bunter Interrupts the Game.

"P ASS, you duffer!"

"Kick, kick!"

"Go it, Wharton!"

"On the ball, Bob!"

"What a lot of rot this football is!" murmured Billy Bunter, as he stopped by the ropes round the junior ground and blinked at the excited players, who were being watched by groups of equally excited juniors. "And this isn't a match at all, only a blessed Form practice!"

"On the ball!"

"Go it!"

"I say, you fellows! I say, Wharton!"

"Go it!"

"Clear, there!"

"Play up!"

"Wharton—I say, Wharton! Nugent says—"

"Go it!"

Billy Bunter stepped over the ropes, and advanced towards the players. There was a yell from a dozen voices:

"Get off the ground!"

"Get out!"

"Buzz off!"

"Oh, really! I say, you fellows—"

"Get off!"

"Junk!"

"I've got a message for you, Wharton—"

The ball flew past Billy Bunter, and there was a rush of players after it. The fat junior thought an earthquake had happened for a moment.

He found himself lying on the ground, blinking up at the blue sky, and wondering how on earth he had got there.

The rush of players had passed over him, leaving him like a wreck left by receding waves.

Billy Bunter sat up. He blinked round the field, and mumbled indignantly:

"Beasts! Blessed if I deliver any rotten message now! Nugent can come and deliver his rotten messages himself!"

And Bunter ambled towards the edge of the field. There was a roar:

"Look out!"

Bunter blinked round.

As he did so a swooping football caught him fairly under the chin, and sent him whirling.

"Ow! Yow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well stopped!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ow, ow! My neck's broken! I'm killed!"

"Oh, oh, oh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Harry Wharton ran up, laughing. He was afraid that the fat junior might be really a little hurt, and he lifted him up.

"Sorry, Bunter! What on earth did you get on the field for?"

"Ow!"

"Where are you hurt?"

"Yaroorh! My backbone's dislocated, and my jugular vein is sprained! I've got a pain in my head, and another in my heart, and an ache in my leg!"

"Then you're a hopeless case, and it's no good wasting time over you," said Bob Cherry. "Let him alone, to die in peace, Wharton, and let's get on with the game."

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"Buck up!"

"I say, Wharton, I've got a message for you from Nugent. He's detained in the Form-room, and wants you to go and see him."

"Oh, rats!"

"He says it's important."

"Oh, all right!"

"Hang it! You might offer a fellow a little assistance, after you've nearly crippled him with your beastly football!" grunted Bunter, as Wharton turned to go.

Harry Wharton did not even seem to hear him.

"You fellows keep on," he said, "I'll buzz across and see what's the matter with Frank."

"All right!"

"I say, Wharton—"

But Wharton was already gone. The ball was in play again, and Billy Bunter skipped off the field to avoid further catastrophes.

Wharton ran lightly towards the House, only staying a moment to throw a coat over his football clothes. He hurried into the Form-room, and found Nugent there. The junior had seen Wharton coming, and he had turned to the door of the Form-room to meet him.

"Sorry to trouble you, Harry, old son," said Nugent, as Wharton entered, "but I'm in an awful fix. Quelch caught me fighting with Bulstrode, and he's detained me for the afternoon. My minor has gone out with Carberry and Loder and Carne."

Wharton's brows set a little.

He had been prepared to like Dick Nugent for Frank's sake when the youngster came to Greyfriars. But it was a hard thing to do. The youngster had many good qualities, but he was so spoiled, so wilful, and unreasonable, that it was not easy to deal with him.

He gave his major a great deal of unnecessary trouble, and though Nugent did not seem to resent it himself, Harry could not help doing so. Harry's opinion was that a sound licking every now and then would do Nugent minor worlds of good; but he did not care to say so to his chum.

Harry was not surprised to hear that Dick Nugent was in trouble again. The chief difficulty in the matter was that when Nugent minor was in trouble of this sort he preferred to remain in it, and strongly resented any attempt to get him out.

"Fagging for them, I suppose?" said Harry abruptly.

"Yes. You know what it means, fagging for those cads," said Frank anxiously.

"They've gone to the Golden Pig or the Green Man, or some such place, for a certainty—drinking, smoking, and playing cards. And they've taken Dicky with them."

"Great Scott!"

"Bulstrode knows where they are. I was going to look for Dick, but Bulstrode wouldn't tell me where the cads were gone. And I punched his head, and then Quelch dropped on us."

Wharton set his teeth.

"If Bulstrode knows, he shall be jolly well made to tell!" he exclaimed. "But what do you want us to do, Frank? If you're detained, you can't go after young Dick."

Nugent shook his head.

"No, I can't. Will you go, Harry?"

"Dick won't listen to me. He won't listen to you, for that matter. What good would it do, Frank?"

"You could make him leave them, Harry. You could take him away by force if necessary. If you don't go I shall make a run for it, and risk Quelch."

"You needn't do that, Frank. I'll go, if you like. But where are they?"

"Bulstrode knows."

Wharton shut his teeth hard.

"Then Bulstrode shall tell us! I'll take

some of the fellows along in case Carberry & Co. cut up rusty."

"Thanks awfully, Wharton! It's rotten for me to be stuck here like this, but—"

"That's all right. We'll do our best. You can rely on us to that extent, anyway," said Harry quietly.

"I know I've no right to bother you about my minor," said Nugent, colouring. "But—"

"Yes, you have! If you can't bother a chum, who can you bother?" said Harry, with a smile. "I'll buzz off now and see about it."

"Thanks again!"

Harry Wharton quitted the Form-room with a nod. He left Nugent pacing anxiously to and fro with a worried wrinkle on his young brow.

Bulstrode was in the Close talking to Stott and Skinner as Wharton came out, and the captain of the Remove walked directly over to him. Bulstrode looked at him cautiously, prepared for trouble at once by Harry's expression.

"You know where young Nugent has gone?" said Wharton.

Bulstrode shrugged his shoulders.

"How should I know?"

"You told Nugent you knew."

"Well, suppose I do?"

"I want to know. I'm going to look for him. Will you tell me where he is?" said Harry, as civilly as he could.

"I don't see why I should."

"You should, out of common decency and civility."

"Well, I won't, then!" said Bulstrode angrily.

"I've no time to fight with you now, Bulstrode, and I don't want to get detained for the afternoon as Nugent has done," said Wharton quietly; "but you are going to tell me where Nugent minor has gone with Carberry."

"Are you going to make me?" said Bulstrode, with a sneer.

"Yes, I'll call some of the fellows, and we'll duck you in the fountain, and then frog-march you round the quad!" cried Wharton.

Bulstrode hesitated. He could see that Wharton was in earnest. He would have had no great objection to a fight, which would probably have got Wharton into trouble as well as himself, but he strongly objected to a fagging.

"Oh, I don't know that I need keep it secret!" he said sulkily. "It's no business of mine, of course."

"Well, where is he?"

"I heard Carberry say something to Loder about meeting at the Waterside Inn, that's all."

Wharton knitted his brows.

The Waterside Inn was about half a mile down the Sark, and was well-known to be one of the most shady places in the county.

He had heard that Carberry sometimes frequented the place to meet a betting set there, and he was not surprised to hear that the three choice spirits of the Sixth were gone there now; but to take Nugent minor there—a lag of the Second Form—a lad of little more than twelve years!

Wharton's eyes gleamed with anger and indignation.

"Thank you!" he said quietly.

He hurried away in search of his chums. It was no good his going alone to the inn; the bullies of the Sixth would be more likely than not to duck him in the river, and he would return unsuccessful after all.

Bulstrode shrugged his shoulders.

"The chap who undertakes to look after

Nugent minor will have his hands full," he remarked. "I don't envy Wharton."
And Skinner and Stott said together "What-ho!"

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

On the Track.

"I SAY, you fellows—"
"Oh, buzz off now, Billy!"
"Yes; but I say—"
"Rats!"

Harry Wharton, Bob Cherry, Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, and Mark Linley were going down to the gates of Greyfriars.

Billy Bunter, who never seemed to miss anything, in spite of his short sight, spotted them as they went down to the gates, and came ambling after them as fast as his fat little legs could carry him.

"Look here, you fellows!" exclaimed Bunter, keeping pace with the sturdy stride of the Removites by breaking into a rapid trot. "Look here! I'm coming with you!"

"Oh, go and eat coke!"
"Oh, really, Wharton! I think it's jolly mean of you to go and have a feed on your own without inviting a fellow in your own study!"

"We're not going to have a feed."
"Then where are you going?"
"Nowhere that matters to you! Run away and play!"

Billy Bunter declined the invitation. He trotted along beside the chums of the Remove, puffing and blowing from his unaccustomed exertions.

"I say, you fellows," he gasped, "I really—"
"We'd better go by boat," Harry Wharton

"Now, you stay there, and don't bother!" said Bob.

"Yaroooh!"
"Shove off!" said Harry.
Bunter blinked at his chums as they prepared to shove the boat off. He was little given to sticking to the truth himself, and as a result he was constantly suspecting others of untruthfulness.

He was more convinced than ever now that there was a feed in prospect, and that the chums of the Remove intended to leave him out of a picnic on the island in the river.

But William George Bunter, the ventriloquist of Greyfriars, was not to be got rid of so easily.

"Wharton!"
It was a sudden, sharp voice—the very tones of Mr. Quelch, the master of the Remove.

Harry Wharton looked round, for the moment not suspecting Bunter.

"Yes, sir?"
"Where are you taking that boat?"
"We are going to row down the river, sir."

Wharton made the reply, but he stared blankly round as he did so. Mr. Quelch was not in sight, and there was no one near Billy Bunter, who had picked himself up.

While Harry was scanning the bank in search of the Remove-master, Bunter slipped into the boat, and plumped himself down in the stern seat.

"Get out!" roared Bob Cherry.
"I—I say, you fellows, I'm coming with you!"

"Where on earth is Quelch?" exclaimed Harry Wharton in perplexity. "He can't be in the boathouse."

Mark Linley smiled.

constitution, Bob Cherry, and any violent exercise is likely to do me a great deal of harm!"

"Then sit still and shut up!"
"Oh, really, Cherry—"
"Shut up!" roared Bob.

And the Owl of the Remove relapsed into sulky silence.

The boat, in the current and propelled by the oars, glided swiftly down the river, and the school was soon lost to sight. Deep, dark woods, mostly leafless now and bare, lay round the shining river.

Ahead, a spiral of smoke rose over the trees, and it indicated the Waterside Inn. The juniors were soon in sight of it—a little, old, rambling building with quaint chimney-pots and red tiles.

"Well, there's the place!" said Bob Cherry.

The oars were taken in, and the boat floated down gently till it was opposite the inn. Wharton steered it into the shadow of the trees and bushes that grew along the path on the bank.

Billy Bunter blinked in surprise at the chums.

"I say, you fellows, you're not going to have a feed at a place like the Waterside Inn, are you?"

"No, ass!"
"Then what are you going there for?"
"That's our business!"

Bunter blinked indignantly at the Removites.

"Do you mean to say that there isn't going to be a feed, after all?" he exclaimed.

"Ass! Didn't we tell you so?"
Bunter simply glowered with indignation. "And you've brought me all this way for nothing—catching a cold on a beastly chilly

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said. "It will save time, and a pull on the river will be ripping."

"Good!"
"Oh! I suppose you're going to have a picnic on the island, Wharton?"

"No, you young ass!" said Harry impatiently. "We're going to look for somebody, that's all! It's nothing to interest you!"

"Well, I suppose I can come in the boat, if I like?" said Bunter sulkily. "I can steer, you know."

"You can't steer!" said Bob Cherry bluntly. "And you jolly well can't come in the boat! Go and eat toffee!"

"Look here, if one of you chaps could lend me five bob off a postal-order I've got coming to-night—"

"Br-r-r-r!"

"I don't want to put it down to the account, you know. I want to start fresh with you fellows on a basis of ready cash—"

"Oh, do shut up!"

Wharton and Mark Linley dragged a boat out of the boathouse, and it was run into the water. The chums jumped into it, and Billy Bunter was following, when Bob Cherry gave him a gentle poke in the chest with the end of an oar.

Billy Bunter gave a tremendous gasp and sat down violently on the plank landing-stage.

"Ow!"

"I think Bunter could explain," he remarked.

Harry turned wrathfully to the fat ventriloquist. He understood at once now.

"Is that another of your tricks, you young ass?" he exclaimed.

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"Look here, we're not going for a feed or a picnic, and you may as well jump out. Don't be a silly ass!"

"I'd rather come with you fellows, you know."

Bob and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh were now shoving off. Billy Bunter clung on to the gunwale with a determined grip, and Wharton gave it up. The boat glided out into the river, and floated down towards the Waterside Inn.

Bunter shivered.

Wharton was steering, and the others were rowing. Bunter sat idle, and there was a cold wind blowing on the river.

"I say, you fellows, I'm c-c-cold!"

"Did you expect to find it like July?" said Bob Cherry.

"It's generally cold on the river at this time of the year."

"Any of you got a coat?"

"No."

"I think some of you might have brought a coat. You'll make me catch my death of cold between you!" grunted Bunter.

"Take an oar, and keep yourself warm!"

"You know jolly well I've got a delicate

river!" he exclaimed. "I must say I'm surprised at you Wharton!"

"Oh, shut up!"

"Look here—"

"Another word, you young ass, and I'll shove you over the side!" growled Bob Cherry, making a movement towards the fat junior.

"You'll give the alarm!"

"The alarm!"

"Yes, Shut up!"

The juniors made the boat fast to the willows. Harry Wharton silently pointed out a second boat that was already moored there. They knew it was a Greyfriars boat at a glance.

"Not much doubt about their being here," remarked Bob Cherry.

"No, it's certain now."

"But where are they—and young Nugent?"

"Hark!"

From an open window close by the juniors came a well-known voice. It was Carberry's.

"Nap!"

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Chucked Out!

HARRY WHARTON & CO. drew close together under the window, silent, and breathing hard.

The black-sheep of the Sixth were there, without doubt. Was Nugent



"Look out!" Bunter blinked round. As he did so, a swooping football caught him fairly under the chin, and sent him whirling.

minor with them? And, if he was, how were they to get him away?

There was a mumble of voices from the room. Cigarette-smoke was floating out at the open window. After a few minutes Carberry's voice came again:

"Good! Cash up!"
"That's the last of my tin!"
Wharton started as he heard that voice—Nugent minor's.

"That's young Dick!" he muttered.
"And he's gambling with those blackguards!" muttered Bob Cherry, his face hardening. "The young rascal! He wants a licking badly!"

"It would serve them right to bring the beaks down on them, just as they are, only a fellow can't speak!" muttered Harry angrily. "The cads! Anyway, I'm going to have Nugent minor out of that!"

"How?"
"Well, I'll ask him to come first!"
"If you show yourself in there, there'll be trouble, Harry! Carberry will be wild, and you know what beastly bullies they are!"

"Still, I think I shall try."
"Oh, all right!"
"You fellows lie low for a bit."

"I say, Wharton—"

"Shut up, Bunter!"

Harry Wharton stepped up to the window-sill, and looked into the room. For the moment he was not observed. He saw the glasses on the table, the haze of cigarette-smoke, the cards, and the money.

He saw the grinning faces of the three seniors, and the dismayed countenance of Nugent minor. The boy had consistently lost all the time, and he was in debt to Carberry now, and still losing.

"Dick Nugent!"
Harry Wharton's voice made the occupants of the room jump.

All of them turned their heads and stared towards the window.

Wharton put his hand on the sill, and vaulted lightly into the room. Carberry, Loder, and Carne stared at him in angry amazement.

"You cub!" exclaimed Carberry. "What do you want here?"

"I want to take that kid out of your blackguardly company," said Harry, eyeing the bully of the Sixth unflinchingly.

Carberry started to his feet.

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"What! What's that?"

"You heard what I said. Nugent minor, will you come?"

Carberry clenched his hands, and moved forward, but Carne restrained him.

"Hold on, Carberry! Let the kid take his choice."

"All right. Are you going with Wharton, Nugent minor?"

Dick Nugent's eyes gleamed.

"No!" he exclaimed hotly.

"Your brother asked me to fetch you, Dick," said Harry quietly.

"My brother be hanged! I'm not coming!"

"Good for you," said Loder. "The kid's got spirit!"

"Well, you've had your answer, Wharton," said Carberry, with a sneer. "I've a jolly good mind to give you a licking for your cheek; but—well, there's the window. Get out!"

Wharton did not stir.

"Are you going, you young fool?"

"Not without Dick Nugent."

"I tell you I won't come!" cried Nugent minor shrilly. "I'll do as I like. I won't be ordered about by my brother or you either. Mind your own business!"

"It is my business to keep a silly kid out of the hands of a set of blackguards like these rotters," said Wharton.

Carberry, Loder, and Carne were on their feet in a moment.

"Well, you will have it," said Loder. "Collar him!"

"Let me alone, you cads! I—"

"Collar him!"

The three seniors grasped Wharton at once. He struggled fiercely, but he was, of course, helpless against so many, and he was dragged to the window.

"Chuck him into the river!" said Carberry.

"Good! Ha, ha, ha!"

Wharton was pushed upon the window-sill, and the three bullies tried to fling him across the path into the water. But he clung to the sill, and as they let go, he dropped upon the riverside path instead.

Dishevelled and red and angry, he picked himself up there, and glared back at the window, at which the bullies of the Sixth stood grinning at him.

"Hallo, here's the whole family, I see!" exclaimed Carberry, as he caught sight of the other juniors on the path.

"You cad!" exclaimed Wharton. "You would look pretty sick if we told at Greyfriars what we had seen here."

Carberry laughed.

"You'd have to prove it, my boy."

"I wish the Head would come along and catch you, that's all."

"Thanks. Good-bye!"

The Sixth-Form bullies, laughing, left the window, and the juniors looked at one another ruefully. They went back to their boat to consult.

Wharton put his collar straight, and dusted his clothes. His face was set and hard. He could be very determined, not to say obstinate, and his temper was fully roused now. He was determined not to return to Greyfriars without Nugent minor.

"Well, we don't seem to be getting much forrarder," Bob Cherry remarked ruefully.

"I say, you fellows—"

"Oh, shut up, Bunter!"

"But I've got a suggestion to make," said the fat junior, blinking at them. "It was what Wharton said about the Head that put it into my mind."

"Well, what is it? Quick!"

"You know what a splendid ventriloquist I am—"

"Oh, blow your ventriloquism!" said Bob Cherry crossly.

"The blowfulness is terrific," murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Yes; but I could imitate the Head's voice, you know—"

Harry Wharton started.

"By Jove! That's an idea!"

"Well, even babbling idiots have good ideas sometimes," said Bob Cherry grudgingly. "It wouldn't be a bad wheeze."

"It's a good one. Bunter can hide in the ivy close to the window," said Mark Linley.

"They won't see him, and it will be easy."

"Good!"

"Oh, I have lots of good ideas," said Bunter, who swelled like the frog in the fable at a word of commendation. "If it wasn't for jealousy in my own study, you'd hear more of them. I—"

"Oh, ring off!" said Harry abruptly.

"Look here, it's a good dodge, and if you succeed in giving these cads a good scare, I'll stand you a dozen tarts in the tuck-shop!"

"Good! Mind, it's a bargain!"

"Honour bright!"

"I'll work it!" said Bunter confidently.

And the Greyfriars ventriloquist approached the window.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

A Scare for the Smart Set!

"CARBERRY!"

Carberry gave a faint gasp.

"The Head!"

"Carberry! Loder! Carne! Is it possible? Can I believe my eyes?"

It was the very voice, to the life, of Dr. Locke, the revered Head of Greyfriars. The three seniors were on their feet, with pallid faces.

Public disgrace and expulsion from the school—that was what that discovery meant!

Carberry stood for a moment with his knees knocking together, and then he made a wild bolt for the door. Loder and Carne followed him.

They were outside the room in a twinkling.

Dick Nugent, startled and frightened and irresolute, remained standing by the table.

"Nugent minor!" the terrifying voice went on.

"Oh, sir!"

"What are you doing here?"

"I—I—I—"

"Wretched youth!"

Dick started. It was not like the doctor to speak like that, and he was surprised, too, that the Head was not to be seen. Why was he speaking through the window and keeping out of sight?

Dick stepped desperately to the window to see the worst.

But Billy Bunter was equal to the occasion.

"Return at once to the school, Nugent minor!"

"Yes, sir!" gasped Dick.

He looked out of the window.

The Head's voice was heard no more, neither was he to be seen. Dick stood there looking out, his face white, and his heart beating like a hammer.

Meanwhile, the three seniors were in a more unhappy frame of mind than the fog.

They had rushed out of the room, knocking against each other in their haste, but once outside they stopped.

"What's the good of bolting?" said Loder savagely. "We're known."

"He's seen us," said Carne.

"We've got to prove a confounded alibi somehow," said Carberry savagely. "After all, the room was shady, and he never even put his head in. If we could work up an alibi, we could make him think he was mistaken, perhaps, with a little hard swearing."

"Jolly hard swearing would be wanted, I should say, to make him believe that. Why, he spoke to us all three by name."

"Yes; but it's a chance," said Carberry desperately. "You know he's shortsighted, and if we can get to Greyfriars before him we can get up some sort of a proof that we never left the place all the afternoon. Ionides will swear we were in his study."

"Well, it's a chance."

"Come on, it depends on getting back to the school before the Head."

"Going, young gentlemen?" said a fat, red-faced man, meeting the seniors in the tiled passage, and looking at them in surprise.

"Yes, Hanway," said Carberry hurriedly. "We've been spotted. Some confounded ill-luck brought Dr. Locke walking along the river-path, and he somehow spotted us through the window."

Mr. Hanway, the host of the Waterside Inn, whistled softly.

"That's bad, young gents."

"Yes, rather. If he comes in, you're to swear blind that we haven't been here."

The landlord grinned.

"Trust me for that, Master Carberry."

"Come on!" said Carberry. "If the coast's clear, we can get to the boat. If not, we shall have to take a cut through the woods."

The three seniors hurriedly left the house. In their selfish concern for themselves they had utterly forgotten the presence of Nugent minor in the inn. As a matter of fact, they had completely forgotten the fact's existence.

Carberry put his head out of the gate on the river path, and cautiously looked round. Dr. Locke was not in sight. Whether he had stepped into the room by the window, or gone round to the main entrance of the inn, did not matter, the coast was clear for the moment, and they had a chance to cut across to the drooping willows where the boat was moored.

"Quick!" muttered Carberry.

The three seniors ran across the path into the willows. Then Carberry uttered a howl of angry alarm:

"The boat!"

"My hat! It's gone!"

They halted by the water's edge in dismay. Carberry's furious glance swept up and down the bank. The boat was not there; but the next moment he caught sight of it out in the river. There on the broad bosom of the Sark floated the empty boat, towing to another in which four juniors sat.

Harry Wharton & Co. sat in their boat grinning at the furious seniors on the bank. They had taken the boat out into the river, and a dozen yards of deep water separated them from the angry seniors.

"Look!" muttered Loder. "There's the boat!"

Carberry gritted his teeth.

"I can see it!"

"Those young cads have got it!"

"Wharton!" called out Carberry as loudly as he dared, for he was in terror of the Head hearing his voice. "Wharton!"

"Hallo!"

"Hush! Bring back that boat!"

"Eh?"

"Bring that boat back!"

Wharton put his hand to his ear as if he could not quite catch the subdued voice of the Sixth-Former.

"Eh? What did you say?"

"Bring that boat here," said Carberry, in a shrill whisper.

"Speak louder!"

"Hush!"

"Eh?"

"Hush, I say!"

"What for?"

Wharton almost shouted the words, and Carberry cast a fearful glance round.

"Hush, you fool! The Head!"

"What?"

"The Head's here!"

"Bosh! The Head's at Greyfriars!"

"I tell you he's here!" said Carberry, in agony. "Bring back that boat, there's a good chap. We've got to get away. We shall be expelled. Don't you understand?"

Wharton shrugged his shoulders.

"Serve you jolly well right! All the better for Greyfriars!"

"The betterfulness will be terrific."

Carberry ground his teeth. He would have liked to hurl a torrent of abuse at the juniors, but he dared not. The Head might come in sight round the corner of the inn at any moment.

"Wharton! Don't be a cad! You see we're in a fix. Bring back the boat like a decent fellow. I—I'm sorry we chucked you out of the window."

Wharton appeared to relent.

"Are you all sorry?" he asked.

"Yes, yes, yes!"

"Let the others speak for themselves," said Wharton coolly. "Are you sorry, Loder? Are you sorry, Carne?"

"Yes, yes!" grunted the two seniors. "Yes, we're sorry."

"Are you awfully sorry?"

"Yes," said the seniors together, between their teeth.

"Are you awfully, fearfully sorry?"

"Ye-es."

"Oh, all right! You can have the boat, then!" said Wharton disdainfully. "You wouldn't make me eat humble pie like that if I were going to be expelled fifty times. Your blessed Smart Set doesn't seem to have much backbone. But perhaps Smart Sets don't go in for backbones. The best thing you fellows can do is to leave off being smart, and start being decent. Shove the boat over, kids!"

The juniors pulled to the shore, and sent the seniors' boat drifting in.

Carberry, Loder, and Carne sprang into it eagerly, and pulled away without a word to the Removites.

The chums watched them, with a grin. The ventriloquial wheeze had worked out even better than they had ventured to anticipate.

Dick Nugent dropped from the window to the path, and scuttled away into the wood. Harry called to him, but he did not hear, and he was lost to sight in a moment. Bob Cherry burst into a chuckle.

"I think that kid's had a scare that will do him good," he murmured.

"What-ho!"

"Bunter! Bunter!"

Billy Bunter came out of the ivy with a cheerful grin upon his fat face. The fat junior was very pleased with himself.

"I say, you fellows, that was ripping, wasn't it? You don't often come on a chap who can ventriloquise like that."

"Blessed is he that bloweth his own trumpet!" grunted Bob.

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"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"But you did jolly well," said Bob. "I'll give in to that. Even a silly, fat, conceited duffer can do some things."

"Look here, I—"

"Jump into the boat!" said Harry. "Let's get back to Greyfriars. I think we've fairly done the Smart Set this time, and Bunter has earned his tarts."

And the chums agreed that he had.

"A dozen?" said Bunter, as he stepped into the boat.

"Yes."

"Twopenny ones?"

"Yes," said Harry, laughing.

And Bunter's face, beamed like a full moon.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Rogues in Council.

CARBERRY of the Sixth walked up and down his study, his hands deep in his trousers pockets, his brows corrugated with troubled thoughts. His eyes gleamed under his bent brows.

Carberry was anxious.

He had reached Greyfriars in safety with Loder and Carne. Now he was trying to think out what course he had better pursue.

That the Head had seen him at the Waterside Inn seemed to admit of no doubt.

What was to come of it?

Carberry had often sailed very near the wind, but this time it seemed to him that all must be up, and that Greyfriars was destined to lose his company. What he could possibly save him now?

The door of the study opened, and Carberry stopped, casting a quick and apprehensive glance towards it. He fully expected to see the imposing form of Dr. Locke.

But it was only Loder who entered.

Loder looked quickly round the study, as if he expected to see the Head there, and then drew a deep breath of relief and came in.

"Seen him yet?" he asked.

"Who?" asked the prefect, though he knew perfectly well to whom Loder was alluding.

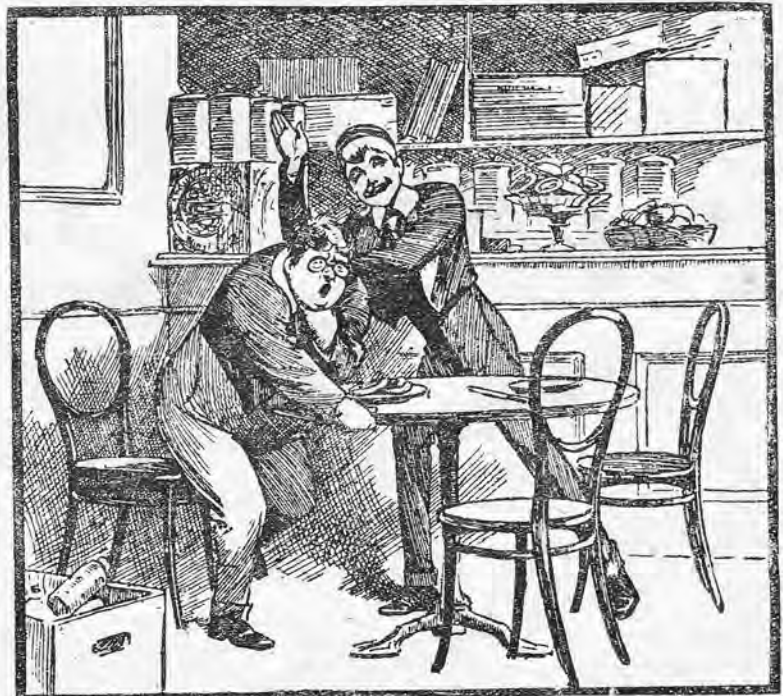
"The Head."

"No."

"I haven't, either."

"And Carne?"

"I don't know. He's gone to change his clothes. He thinks a change of appearance



"Hallo, hallo, hallo! He's choking!" exclaimed Bob Cherry, and he began to thump Bunter on the back to relieve him. But Billy Bunter began to choke and splutter worse than ever. "Ow! Yow! Groo!"

may be some good. The Head can't have seen us very clearly through the window there."

"But he called us by name."
"We shall have to brazen it out somehow," said Loder desperately. "Can't we work up some yarn about going there to look for some junior who was out of bounds?"

Carberry started.
"By Jove! I never thought of that!"
The door opened again, and the two rascals looked round guiltily. Carne came in with a worried and troubled face.

"Have you seen him?" he asked, as Loder had done.

"No."
"What is he lying low for?" said Carne gloomily. "It's rotten! I'd rather have it out and done with, and know the worst!"

"This gives us time," said Carberry. "We may get out of it yet. I suppose Dr. Locke hasn't got back to Greyfriars yet, as a matter of fact. He wouldn't get here as quickly as we did, you know."

"He's here," said Loder.

"How do you know?"

"I asked Wingate."

"You ass!" exclaimed Carberry. "You've given us away."

"I haven't! I didn't say anything about the Head being out. I simply asked Wingate if he knew where he was. He said he was in his study."

"Oh, good!"

"Then he has come back," said Carne. "He must have got over the ground pretty quickly. What is he lying low for? Why hasn't he sent for us, or come here?"

"Can't make it out."

"It means bad business. My only hat! What will the people at home say if we get sacked?"

Carberry laughed bitterly.

"You two won't be sacked. I shall be. I'm a prefect, and he will reckon that makes it worse. I suppose it does. You two will be made an example of somehow, and I shall be expelled."

"I suppose you're right."

"We've got to get out of it somehow," said Carberry. "It's no good waiting for the thunderbolt. We've got to face the music. Now, then, what is the story we're to tell? We must all hang together, and have it right to a hair's-breadth. We're jolly lucky to have time to think. Is it a case of mistaken identity? Did the Head mistake others for us when he looked in at the window? We might get in for it to swear that we were here all the time."

"In for it wouldn't. He'd tell any number of lies, but he wouldn't run the risk of that."

"Then the only chance is a yarn that a junior was supposed to be there, and we went to look for him," said Carberry. "I went as a prefect, as in duty bound, and you two fellows came to help me in case there should be any trouble with the rascals at the Water-side Inn."

Loder and Carne could not help grinning.

"Well, that's jolly good!" said Loder. "But the Head must have seen us at the table—with the cards on it, too."

"And then, if we were there innocently, why did we scoot?" exclaimed Carne, shrugging his shoulders. "We ought to have stopped and explained to the Head."

Carberry snapped his teeth.

"Hang it, that's a fresh difficulty! Can't you fellows think of something? Can't you use your heads? Why did we buzz off like that?"

"Because—because we were so taken aback."

"Idiot! Why should we be so taken aback if we were there innocently?"

"It's a blessed problem!" groaned Loder. "I give it up. Suppose we make a clean breast of it to the Head, and say we're devilish sorry."

"And get expelled."

"Looks like that, anyway."

"We've got to get out of it, I tell you. We were there with laudable motives, looking after a junior who had gone astray," said Carberry. "That's settled. The only thing to explain is why we buzzed off when the Head called through the window. It's a pity we didn't think of this at the moment, but then we should never have had the nerve to brazen it out then. Why did we buzz off—"

"The kid was going, and we went after him," suggested Loder.

"H'm!"

"Well, I can't think of anything better than that."

"It will have to serve," said Carberry, after THE PENNY POPULAR.—No. 279.

a moment's thought. "Now, as to the kid who was there—the young blackguard we went to rescue from his low associates. I wish we could make out that it was Wharton."

"No good. He was with the other fellows."

"We must make it somebody—who? You see, whoever we pick on in a hurry, may be able to prove that he was somewhere else."

"My hat!"

"What's the matter?"

"What about Nugent minor?"

"Nugent minor!"

"Yes! He was there, you know—was really there."

Carberry's gloomy face lighted up.

"Splendid!"

Not a single scruple did the end of Greyfriars feel in thus planning to sacrifice his dupe to his own safety. If the sacrifice of the fag was necessary, it would not cost Carberry one pang.

"My word!" he said. "That's a ripping scheme! We went there to save Nugent minor, and he can't deny having been there. The people at the inn would bear witness, if necessary. That's the story. Mind you stick to it. We had reason to suppose that Nugent minor was getting into bad habits. What reason, quick?"

"Found him smoking once."

"Good! Found him smoking behind the gym," said Carberry. "That happens to be true, too, which is an advantage. Always shove in as much truth as possible when you're telling a crammer. Walking down the towing-path, we heard a familiar voice in the place, and stepped in at the window to see what was there—eh? Found Nugent minor playing cards with a set of rascals—were trying to point out to him the error of his ways, when the Head dropped on us."

"You ought to be a lawyer, Carberry, old man!" said Loder admiringly.

"It's settled," said Carberry, with a sigh of relief. "Thank goodness we had a scapegoat."

"What price the kid, though?" said Carne, in whom all conscience did not seem to be so dead as in Loder and Carberry.

"What do you mean? What about him?"

"It's rough on the kid, that's all."

Carberry sneered.

"Don't be an idiot, Carne. It's no time to begin that rot when it's a question of saving ourselves from being sacked. Besides, he will only be flogged, and we can make it up to him afterwards somehow."

"Yes; that's all right."

"The question now is, whether we ought to wait to be called up by the Head, or go to him frankly and explain," said Carberry thoughtfully. "Which should we do if we were innocent in the matter?"

"Explain to him, of course," said Loder.

"Then we'll go, or, rather, I'll go, and explain as a prefect, and you fellows can be ready to back me up if necessary."

"Good!"

And Carberry, considerably relieved in his mind, but nervous still, made his way to the Head's study, little dreaming that the Head of Greyfriars as yet did not know a single syllable about the matter, and that he would receive his first enlightenment from the lips of Carberry himself.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Bunter's Tarts.

"TWO PENNY ones," said Billy Bunter. The chums of the Remove had strolled into the tuckshop at Greyfriars. They were completely satisfied with the result of their expedition in search of Nugent minor.

The fag had escaped, but the party at the inn had been broken up by means of Billy Bunter's ventriloquism, and the cads of the Sixth had been thoroughly scared, and Dick Nugent himself had received a lesson that would probably last him for some time.

Harry Wharton was anxious to go to Frank in the Form-room, and tell him what had happened, but Billy Bunter had to be satisfied first. Bunter felt that he had earned his tarts, and he didn't want any delay in the matter.

"A dozen, Mrs. Mimble, please," he said, with dignity. "Twopenny ones, please."

Mrs. Mimble made no motion to take the order till she had glanced at Harry Wharton, and received a nod from him in confirmation. Then she set out a plate of tarts.

Bunter eyed them with keen appreciation.

"Jolly good," he said, taking the first one, and removing nearly half of it with a single bite. Billy Bunter was not an elegant

eater when he was hungry. "Aren't you fellows going to have some?"

"Certainly," said Bob Cherry, helping himself from the plate.

Bunter looked at him in alarm.

"Here, hold on!"

"Eh?"

"You let my tarts alone!"

"Why, you just invited me to have some," said Bob, eating the tart serenely. "You must be off your onion, Bunter!"

"I—I meant, weren't you going to buy any," said Bunter.

"Oh, you should have explained yourself," said Bob, taking another tart from the plate. "You should make your meaning clear. Thanks!"

"Look here—"

"You see, I've accepted your invitation now," said Bob, taking a third jam tart, while Bunter even left off eating in his deep indignation and alarm. "When I accept a chap's invitation, I always try to do justice to the feed, you know."

"You—you—"

"I must say these are jolly good tarts," said Bob Cherry, between big mouthfuls. "Let's have a race, and see who can eat the greater number. This is my fourth."

"You—"

"Here goes for the fifth—"

"You let my tarts alone!" shouted Billy Bunter. "Here, Wharton—I say, Wharton—"

But Harry Wharton was walking out of the tuckshop, laughing. He was going to the Remove Form-room to see Nugent. Billy Bunter remained in the shop with Bob Cherry and the plate of fast-diminishing tarts.

Bob Cherry was evidently in earnest. He was starting on the sixth tart before Bunter was on his fourth. The fat junior wasted no more time in vain expostulations. He started bolting the tarts to make sure of what were left. Jam tarts are palatable articles of diet, but it does not do to bolt them too rapidly. Something went down the wrong way, and Billy Bunter began to choke.

"Gro-groo-groooh!"

"What's the matter, Bunter?"

"Groo-oh-oh-oh!"

"What a row to make when a chap is eating tarts!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "What's the matter?"

"Groo-oh!"

"Are you talking Esperanto?"

"Grooh!"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! He's choking!" exclaimed Bob, apparently noticing the fact for the first time, and he began to thump Bunter on the back to relieve him.

The thumping, however, seemed to have an opposite effect to that intended, for Billy Bunter began to choke and splutter worse than ever.

"Ow! Yow! Groo— Yaroo! Groo! Ugh!"

"Slap, slap, slap!"

"Ow! Stop it! Yah!"

"I'm trying to make you better."

"Groo-oh!"

"Oh, it's no good trying to help a chap like you!" said Bob, as Bunter squirmed away out of his reach.

"Gerrooh!"

"Any more tarts?"

"You beast!" howled Bunter, finding his voice at last. "You've scoffed them. I'm not going to have my tarts scoffed."

"But you invited me—"

"Yah! My tarts—"

Bob Cherry chuckled, and threw a shilling on the counter.

"Give Bunter some more tarts, Mrs. Mimble, please."

"Certainly, Master Cherry."

"It was only a joke, Bunter," said Bob.

"I only wanted to see how you would look if you had to share the tommy."

Bunter blinked at him.

"Of course, you know, I'd share my last crust with a chum, Cherry," he said, as he helped himself from the plate Mrs. Mimble pushed across the counter.

Bob Cherry grinned.

"Oh, all right! I'll begin again!"

"Ow—oh—er—you see, I—I said my last crust," said Bunter hastily. "I shouldn't mind sharing my last crust with you. I didn't say tarts, though."

"You fat humbug!"

"Oh, really, Cherry! There's a difference between crusts and tarts, I suppose?"

Bob Cherry laughed, and quitted the tuckshop, leaving Billy Bunter to an uninterrupted feed.

Bob made his way to the Remove Form-

room, where he found Wharton and Nugent. Frank was chuckling over Harry's account of the discomfiture of the Smart Set.

"But where is Dick?" Nugent asked, becoming grave.

"Oh, he's come back all right," said Bob Cherry. "I say, isn't your detention up yet, Frank?"

"Another quarter of an hour."

"Good! Then we'll go and get tea ready." "Right-ho! If you see my minor—"

Nugent hesitated. "Well, what about him? Do you want me to give him a licking for going to the Waterside Inn?" asked Bob Cherry. "I don't mind in the least."

Nugent laughed.

"No. I want you to ask him to tea in Study No. 1."

"Oh, certainly!"

Wharton and Cherry left the Form-room, and while Harry obtained some supplies for tea, Bob Cherry looked round Greyfriars for Nugent's minor. But he did not find him. He looked up and down the passages, in the Second Form-room, in the gym, in the junior common-room, but Nugent's minor was not to be seen.

Had he not returned to Greyfriars?

Bob Cherry wondered.

Was it possible that he had been so scared by the supposed discovery by the Head that he was absenting himself from the school?

Bob Cherry looked a little worried as he made his way to the study in the Remove passage, where he found tea ready, and Wharton and Nugent and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh ready for it.

Frank Nugent looked up quickly as he came in.

"Have you seen my minor?"

"No; he doesn't seem to be about," said Bob Cherry. "I suppose he will turn up."

And then Nugent looked worried, too.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Carberry Wishes He Had Not Spoken.

"COME IN!"

Carberry felt a tremor run right through him as the deep voice of the Head of Greyfriars bade him enter the study.

The cad of the Sixth hesitated a moment, and then, bracing himself, as it were, for the ordeal, he opened the door, and went in.

Dr. Locke was seated at his writing-table, with papers before him, and a pen in his hand, and was evidently busy.

He looked up, however, as Carberry came in, patiently, and laid down his pen.

"Well, Carberry, what is it?"

Carberry could not help staring a little.

The Head seemed to have been busily occupied, and to be quite unaware of any cause of uneasiness on the part of the prefect.

How was it that the doctor had returned so rapidly to the school, and had settled down to his work so comfortably?

Carberry was surprised, and more surprised than ever at the perfectly ordinary and non-chalant manner of the Head.

"If you please, sir."

The Head looked at him over his glasses.

"If this is a matter of importance connected with your duty as a prefect, I am willing to give you some minutes, Carberry," he said. "Otherwise, I am very busy at the present moment, as you see."

"It is important, sir."

"Go on; explain."

"I—I am afraid," you have been under a wrong impression with regard to Loder and Carne and myself," said Carberry, stammering. "I wished to correct that impression; that is all, sir."

The Head looked straight at him.

"I do not understand you."

"I—I mean, sir, I hope you will not judge

by appearances, because I had put myself in a suspicious position by doing my duty as a prefect."

The Head did not speak for a moment. He adjusted his glasses, and looked at the prefect keenly, and moved his revolving-chair a little so as to face directly the Sixth-Former.

"Explain yourself, Carberry."

"Certainly, sir! I—"

"To what matter are you referring?"

"The affair at the Waterside Inn, sir, of course," said Carberry, in wonder. "You have not forgotten it, sir? If I had thought you regarded it as trifling, I should not have come here to explain. I was afraid you had jumped to a wrong conclusion regarding my presence there."

"Your presence there?"

"Yes, sir."

"When were you there?"

"This afternoon, sir."

"You were at that disreputable place," exclaimed the Head—"that place, which has been distinctly placed out of bounds, to the knowledge of the whole school?"

Carberry was more and more astonished. The Head spoke as if it were news to him—as, indeed, it was.

"You—you saw me there, sir," stammered Carberry.

The Head almost jumped.

"I saw you there?"

"Yes, sir."

"You must be dreaming, Carberry! What makes you imagine that I saw you at the Waterside Inn this afternoon?"

"You—you spoke to us through the window, sir," stammered Carberry, more and more astounded as the strange interview proceeded. "I—I thought you had come to a wrong conclusion about us, and—"

"You think I was near the inn this afternoon?"

"You spoke to us, sir."

"Nonsense! I have not left the precincts of the school to-day at all."

Carberry staggered.

"It—it was not you, sir?"

"Certainly not!"

"But—but you spoke—"

"Nonsense! You did not see me, I presume?"

"No, sir; but your voice—"

"I suppose someone imitated my voice, for an absurd joke," said the Head. "If I knew who it was, I should cane him for impertinence!"

"Oh, sir, it—it was all a mistake, I see!" stammered Carberry. "It's—it's all right, sir!"

And the prefect turned towards the door. If ever a fellow felt like kicking himself hard, it was Carberry at that moment. He had broached the subject to the Head without the slightest necessity; he himself had set the doctor on the track.

He would have given worlds to be safe outside the Head's study. But he had an inward premonition that Dr. Locke would not let the matter drop now, and he was right. His hand was on the handle of the door, but the Head's voice stopped him.

"Stop!"

Carberry turned back.

"Yes, sir."

"I must know something further of this matter, Carberry. You say that you and Loder and Carne were at the Waterside Inn this afternoon—a disreputable place out of bounds, where the boys of this school are strictly forbidden to go. You say that you went there to do your duty as a prefect. I must know more, and it must be investigated."

Carberry groaned inwardly.

But he was in for it now. There was nothing for it but to brazen the matter out, and tell the story that had been agreed upon between Loder and Carne himself. Nugent's minor was to be the scapegoat.

"Very well, sir. If—if you left the matter

in my hands, sir, I think I could deal with it as a prefect."

"I must know the particulars first."

"Well, sir, we had reason to think that a junior was getting mixed up with the set there, and I thought I ought to look into it. I had caught the kid smoking, and he had been seen near the Waterside Inn, too. I thought I would stroll down there and look for him, and, if he was there, bring him away. I thought I would cane him, and then the matter could drop without any fuss."

"Did you find him?"

"Yes, sir."

"A junior belonging to Greyfriars was there?"

"Yes, sir."

"Loder and Carne had gone with you, you say?"

"I thought I had better take them, sir."

"Why? A junior was not likely to resist a prefect, I presume?"

"No, sir; but there is a rough gang of fellows at the Waterside, and I thought it would be safer to have a few friends with me. I might have been ducked in the river."

"Yes; that is true. And you found the junior you suspected?"

"Yes, sir."

"What was he doing?"

"I am afraid he was gambling, sir."

"You are not sure?"

"No, sir, as he nipped away the moment he saw us. Then I heard your voice—I mean, the voice I took for yours, and—"

"The junior escaped?"

"Yes, sir."

"But not before you had recognised him?"

"No, sir."

The Head was silent for some moments. He sat with his eyes on the prefect's face, gazing at him as if he would read his innermost thoughts.

"Carberry," he said, at last, "before you tell me the name of the junior in question, I must make an observation. There is a junior in the Remove Form against whom I know you have a prejudice. You have twice, at least, brought charges against him which have been proved to be unfounded. If the junior you are about to name is Harry Wharton of the Remove I warn you to be careful. I shall look upon any charge you make with the gravest doubt."

Carberry bit his lip.

"It is not Wharton, sir."

"Ah!"

"Neither is the junior in the Lower Fourth at all."

The Head looked relieved.

"Very good, Carberry; you may go on. Who is the boy?"

"Nugent's minor, sir, of the Second Form."

Dr. Locke started.

"What! A Second Form boy?"

"Yes, sir."

"You are quite certain of what you say, Carberry?"

"Loder and Carne are witnesses, sir, if required; but I hardly think that Nugent's minor will have the nerve to deny the truth."

"Very good. Is he in the school now?"

"I suppose so, sir."

"Then find him, and send him to me at once; or, rather, I will send someone else to look for him. You remain within doors, in case I should send for you."

"Certainly, sir."

And Carberry rejoined Loder and Carne in his study. The Head sent for Nugent's minor, but Nugent's minor was not to be found.

He had disappeared as though into thin air.

The juniors searched high and low for him without success. Had he run away from school, or was he only hiding in the vicinity? These questions cannot be answered here. They belong to another story.

THE END.

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

"THE SCAPEGRACE OF THE SECOND!"

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THE UNWELCOMED GUESTS!

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THE FIRST CHAPTER.

A Study Raid.

TURN your giddy wealth out, my sons, and let's see what you're worth!"

Tommy Dodd, of the Modern side at Rookwood School, made this demand of his chums Tommy Cook and Tommy Doyle as he dived his hands into his own pockets.

"That's my little lot!" responded Tommy Cook promptly, as he laid seven halfpennies and two pennies on the study table.

"And that's mine!" exclaimed Tommy Dodd, putting beside Cook's little heap of coppers a threepenny-piece and a halfpenny.

"Now then, Irish!" went on Dodd, turning to Tommy Doyle, the third member of the trio of Modern chums. "You have it in your power now, my son, to save the whole giddy party."

"Begorra, but I can't!" groaned the Irish junior, as, with a long face, he produced four pennies and a farthing.

"D'you mean to say that's all you've got?" demanded Tommy Dodd, in mock astonishment.

"Faith, an' it's more than ye've got yerself, ye spalpeen!"

"That's nothing to do with it! How d'ye think we're going to get a respectable meal with that magnificent sum? Let's see. How much is it altogether?"

Tommy Dodd picked up all the money from the table, and counted it out.

"One-an-a-penny-farthing!"

"My hat!"

"Faith—"

"And not a solitary crumb in the cupboard!"

The Modern chums always had to pool funds to get in a small store of food just before their allowances of pocket-money were due from home.

But on this occasion the result was anything but satisfactory, and they were faced with the problem of obtaining Saturday afternoon tea with "one-an-a-penny-farthing."

"Can't be done!" declared Tommy Dodd, after a moment's consideration. "We've got no bread, butter, tea, or sugar, to say nothing of cake or any other special items."

"What the merry dickens are we going to do, then?" demanded Tommy Cook.

"Sure, an' it's a fine fellow ye are, Dodd, to get us in a fix like this! How can three men get enough for a meal with one-and-a-penny-farthing?"

"Two men and an ass, you should have said!" retorted Tommy Dodd witheringly. "And what d'you mean by saying I've got you in a fix?"

He turned upon Tommy Doyle as he spoke. "No offence, Tommy darlin'!" said the Irish junior, backing away. "But ye might have told us grub was running low."

"Well, I didn't know, you ass! Besides, am I supposed to look after your feeding arrangements as though you were a tame rabbit?"

"Ha, ha, ha! For goodness' sake leave off arguing, you two fatheads!" exclaimed Tommy Cook. "The question is: What are we going to do?"

Tommy Dodd looked thoughtful for a minute or two, then a grin spread itself over his face.

"Much as I regret to suggest it," he said, with mock seriousness, "I fear it will be necessary to obtain our teas right from the camp of the enemy."

"Next time ye speak, if ye can't say something sensible, don't speak at all, ye spalpeen!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tommy Dodd and Tommy Cook stared at

Tommy Doyle, who stood and stared at them in amazement.

"Next time you speak, don't say anything at all!" mimicked Tommy Dodd. "You howling ass!"

"Oh, leave him alone!" laughed Tommy Cook. "What's the wheeze?"

"Well, it's no wheeze at all," answered Tommy Dodd. "We've got to get something to eat from somewhere, and the most likely place is the end study. That's all."

The end study was the one occupied by Jimmy Silver & Co., the Classical chums of the Fourth, and the great rivals of the Modern juniors.

"Right-ho!" said Tommy Cook. "Let's come and scout round at once."

So saying, the three juniors sauntered out of their study and stealthily advanced along the corridor leading to the Classical side.

"We'll slip into that empty study opposite theirs," said Tommy Dodd, "until we find out whether they're in."

"Good!"

The Modern chums had only just entered when the door of the end study opened and the Fistical Four emerged.

Tommy Dodd & Co. held their breath as the Classical juniors passed. Then, as they turned off the corridor towards the stairs which descended to the quad, Tommy Dodd breathed a sigh of relief.

"We're in luck!" he whispered. "Now for the giddy grub!"

Tommy Dodd stepped out from the empty study, followed by Tommy Cook and Doyle, and a moment later the three chums entered the study shared by Jimmy Silver & Co.

Tommy Dodd darted towards the cupboard, and uttered an exclamation of satisfaction as he opened the door.

"By Jove!" cried Tommy Cook. "They've laid in their supplies for the week!"

This certainly appeared to be the case, for the shelves were stacked with provisions.

"Sausages, too!" exclaimed Tommy Doyle. "We shall get a decent tea after all!"

"Don't count your chickens before they're hatched," said Tommy Dodd. "Here—Hullo, what's that?"

Tommy Dodd's sudden exclamation had been caused by the sound of rushing footsteps in the passage.

Tommy Cook and Tommy Doyle rushed to the door, and looked out into the corridor.

"My hat! Classical bounders!" yelled Tommy Cook. "Come on!"

He and Tommy Doyle darted down the passage as the Fistical Four came racing towards the end study.

Tommy Dodd, however, had just been in the act of loading himself up with provisions, and he hesitated, loth to seek safety without the spoil.

That hesitation proved fatal.

Just as he scuffled to the door, shedding packages as he went, Jimmy Silver & Co. raced up.

"My hat! Caught like a rat in a trap!" Jimmy made a dash at Tommy Dodd as he made the exclamation.

Tommy Dodd dodged and ducked, but Lovell cut off his escape.

"No, you don't, you bounder!" he muttered. "Collar him, you fellows!"

The command was unnecessary. The other three pounced upon the Modern junior like

cats on a mouse, and he went to the floor with a crash.

"Back up, Moderns!" screamed Tommy Dodd, struggling furiously.

In an instant the door of the empty room was flung open, and Tommy Cook and Doyle burst out.

But they were just too late.

The Fistical Four flung Tommy Dodd back into their study, and the door banged to and was locked just as they hurled themselves upon it.

"Well, I'm hanged!" exclaimed Tommy Cook. "Fancy him getting nabbed like that!"

Cook and Doyle had not seen what had occurred, for they were waiting behind the door of the empty study, ready to bang it in the faces of the Fistical Four when Tommy Dodd had dashed in.

Hearing Jimmy Silver & Co. rush up the passage towards their study gave them the idea that Tommy Dodd had escaped.

Tommy Cook beat on the door of the end study with his fists and his boots.

"Biff! Bang!"

"Let him out, you rotters!" he yelled.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yah! Spalpeens!" howled Tommy Doyle.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bang, bang!"

"If you don't open the door—"

Tommy Cook broke off suddenly. There was a sound of running feet along the corridor.

The two Modern juniors each gave a terrific kick at the door, as a party of about half a dozen Classics pelted up to the scene of action.

Then there were howls and yells in the corridor as the Classics fell upon the two Moderns.

A frenzied scuffle ensued, and after a few minutes the two chums broke away and ran for their lives along the corridor, followed by the Classical juniors.

Meanwhile, inside the end study Tommy Dodd had made a valiant stand against the Fistical Four.

But his efforts were doomed to failure.

"Sit on him, you fellows," commanded Jimmy, "while I find a bit of rope to tie him up with!"

Lovell, Newcome, and Raby promptly plumped themselves down on the unfortunate Tommy Dodd, who still made determined efforts to struggle.

"Gerroff!" he spluttered. "Y-your k-killing me!"

"Get on with it, then!" retorted Lovell, bouncing on his chest.

"Here we are!" said Jimmy Silver, producing a length of rope. "Just hold him tight while I truss him up!"

Tommy glared and gritted his teeth.

"I'll—I'll make you suffer for this!" he blurted out, as Jimmy Silver forced his arms behind his back.

"Right-ho!" answered Jimmy complacently. "Let's know when you're going to do it!"

"Be quiet, you Modern bounder!" exclaimed Lovell, giving him a shake.

"That's done his arms!" muttered Jimmy. "Now for his feet!"

Tommy Dodd was twisted round, and his ankles were secured together.

"Ha, ha, ha! How do you like that, you giddy pilferer?"

Tommy Dodd's savage expression showed what he thought of it. He glowered at his captors, and presented a wild and weird spectacle.

His hair was standing upright, and if looks could have been made to kill, Jimmy Silver & Co. would have expired on the spot.

"Just put him on his knees!" ordered Jimmy Silver, dropping into an armchair and surveying the furious junior with a critical air.

The rest of the Fistical Four stood round

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and indulged in loud bursts of merriment as they gazed upon him.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You silly asses!" hissed Dodd.

Jimmy Silver assumed an air of mock solemnity.

"It's very wrong, you know, Doddy, to rob fellows of their food," he said. "At the same time, of course, it's very touching to know that there are three poor little asses in the school who are hungry."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We really haven't got the heart to send you away empty," went on Jimmy Silver considerably, "so we will make you a present of the grub you have mauled about."

"Nobody would want to eat grub that had been fingered about by a Modern!" put in Lovell, making a wry face.

"No fear!"

Jimmy Silver picked up a string of sausages which had been dropped by Tommy Dodd among other things.

Twisting them into a loop, he hung them round the infuriated Modern's neck, like a chain of office.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

A roar of mirth rang out from the Fistical Four as Tommy Dodd squirmed and twisted violently in an effort to rid himself of the adornment.

"The champion ass of Rookwood!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver. "Special mark of distinction!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You beastly rotters!" screamed Dodd. "Rush! You forget yourself, sir!" said Jimmy solemnly, dabbing a jam tart on to the end of Dodd's nose.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Oh, dear! I shall die with laughing in a minute!" howled Raby.

"We shall really have to ask you to clear out now," said Jimmy Silver, "as we have many other things to attend to."

"You—you—" spluttered Tommy Dodd. But he got no further, for Jimmy gave him a push with his foot that sent him rolling off his knees.

"See if it's all clear outside!" he commanded.

Raby opened the door and looked out.

"All serene!" he exclaimed.

"Right! Pick him up and put him in the passage, then lock the door!"

In another moment Tommy Dodd was ushered into the passage, and none too gently.

Then the Fistical Four retreated into the study once more.

A distant burst of laughter came to their ears as the door was locked.

It was Cook and Doyle, Dodd's own chums, who were looking round the corner at the other end of the corridor.

"Come here, you giggling fatheads!" yelled Tommy Dodd, boiling with wrath. "Cut me loose, for goodness' sake!"

The two Tommies came to his rescue, but they were absolutely unable to control their mirth at the sight of their leader.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The sound of their laughter floated in to the Fistical Four, who were themselves doubled up with glee.

THE SECOND CHAPTER. Quits.

THE cords which bound Tommy Dodd's arms and legs were cut in an instant, and his first act was to remove the string of sausages from his shoulders and swipe his chums with it.

"You burbling asses!" he exclaimed angrily. "Nothing to laugh at, is it?"

He then removed the jam from his nose, the tart having fallen off when he was pushed out of the end study.

"I'm going to get level with those bounders by hook or by crook!" declared Tommy Dodd, entering the empty study again to straighten himself up.

"What are you going to do?" asked Tommy Cook, restraining a grin with difficulty.

"I know what I'm going to do!" growled Tommy Dodd. "And you fellows have got to back up this time!"

"We should have backed up last time," retorted Tommy Cook in injured tones, "but we didn't have a chance!"

"Too slow!" muttered Tommy Dodd. "That's what's the matter with you two! Goodness knows where you'd be without me!"

"Well, come on with the wheeze," snapped Tommy Cook, "and not so much chin-wag!"

"What's the scheme?"

"We're going to walk right down the cor-

ridor, and make plenty of row, so that those bounders will think we've gone. Then we'll creep back and wait in here till they go out."

"What next?"

"Wait a minute, fathead; I'm coming to that!" snapped Tommy Dodd, whose temper had suffered severely as a result of his ordeal.

"When they go out, we'll follow 'em, and when they get to the quad, we'll fall on 'em unexpectedly and give 'em the licking of their lives!"

"Sure, an' supposing they don't go out in the quad?"

"Oh, shut up, fathead!"

"If we attack 'em in here," exclaimed Dodd, "we shall have about twenty more of those Classical idiots pouring down on us!"

"Quite so! Come on, then!"

The three chums stepped out of the empty room, and with loud footsteps marched along the corridor.

"Now come back," muttered Tommy Dodd; "and not a sound, mind you!"

Tommy Dodd & Co. crept back as quickly as possible, and entered the empty study again.

Dodd left the door open about an inch, just to keep a watch on the door of the end study.

"Faith, but we might have to wait here

"Shut up, you idiot!" hissed Dodd. "You'll

heard the voices of Jimmy Silver & Co. at the bottom, just passing out into the quad.

"Come on!" whispered Tommy Dodd. "It's a nearly dark now, and just right for our wheeze."

As they entered the quad they could just discern the dim figures of the Fistical Four walking towards the tuckshop.

"We'll wait over there by the wall," said Tommy Dodd, "and nab 'em coming back."

"Good egg!" exclaimed Tommy Cook.

The three chums made for a shadowy position by the school in readiness for the return of the foe.

At that moment Towle, Lacy, and Wadsley of the Modern Fourth approached, and Dodd stopped them and related what had occurred.

At the mention of grub they pricked up their ears, for their larder was in little better supply than Tommy Dodd & Co.'s.

The three Modern juniors at once promised their support in any wheeze against the Classical chums, so together the half dozen Moderns laid in wait.

In about ten minutes the Fistical Four were heard returning. It was now too dark to see anyone at a distance.

"All ready?" whispered Tommy Dodd.

"Rather!"

In another minute the Fistical Four were passing close to the spot where trouble was waiting for them.

"On the ball!" yelled Tommy Dodd, bursting forward.



"Oh, dear! I shall die with laughing in a minute!" exclaimed Raby, as he surveyed the helpless Modern junior. "You—you—" spluttered Tommy Dodd.

go and upset the whole giddy business with your long tongue!"

Tommy Doyle relapsed into sulky silence. He wasn't keen on this wheeze at all.

He was just imagining having to wait in the disused study for about an hour, when the door of the Fistical Four's study was opened and the Classical chums emerged.

Jimmy Silver turned the key in the lock, and then the four of them moved down the passage.

"Shh!" cautioned Dodd.

The three Moderns held their breath, while Jimmy Silver & Co., still discussing and laughing about the punishment they had inflicted upon the Modern leader, passed by.

Tommy Dodd peeped out, and to his surprise and delight he observed that Jimmy was carrying a large handbag.

"They're going to the tuckshop to lay in for a big feed!" he exclaimed, turning to his chums with a grin of joyful anticipation.

"Now's our chance!"

The Classical chums had turned out of the corridor to the stairs, and Tommy Dodd emerged, followed by his chums.

"Careful, now!" he warned, creeping along.

They reached the staircase safely, and

The Fistical Four swung round, but before they had time to realise what was happening the half-dozen Moderns, led by the infuriated Tommy Dodd, were upon them.

"Got you, you bounder!" howled Tommy Dodd, singling out Jimmy Silver for his personal attention.

In a moment there was indescribable chaos in the murky quad.

The crowd of juniors was struggling and swaying backwards and forwards, feet were scraping along the ground, and there were continuous thuds as one after another went down.

"Back up, Classics!" yelled Lovell excitedly.

But there was no answer. Most of the Rookwood juniors were indoors.

They were certainly not on the alert for cries for help from the quad.

"Got you, you bounder!" exclaimed Tommy Dodd, as he still frantically struggled with the leader of the Fistical Four.

Lovell, Raby, and Newcome were on the ground, each struggling furiously with the Moderns, who were endeavouring to sit on them.

Then someone went to Tommy Dodd's assistance, and Jimmy Silver went down with

A bang, the two juniors falling on top of him.

The Fistical Four were defeated!

It was inevitable, for not only were they outnumbered, but they had been taken completely by surprise.

The Fistical Four were out of breath.

The Moderns had bumped down upon them so heavily that they were completely winded.

Tommy Dodd, always quick to seize an advantage, jumped up, and, grabbing up the bag which Jimmy Silver had dropped, made for the door of the Modern side.

"Come on, you fellows!" he yelled. "Run for it!"

And the Moderns ran, leaving the Fistical Four sprawling on the ground.

THE THIRD CHAPTER. Honours with the Classics.

WHILE the Moderns were falling to on the captured grub, the Fistical Four were holding a council of war in the end study.

"I've got an absolute tiptop inspiration!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver suddenly, with an eager light in his eyes.

"Good egg!"

"A fellow's always at his best in adversity," said Lovell encouragingly, with mocked solemnity.

"Let's have it, then!" demanded Newcome. "But it'll have to be a good one to do those rotters in the eye for this!"

"Give me a sheet of notepaper first," said Jimmy Silver, sitting down at the table and picking up a pen.

"What the dickens d'you want a sheet of notepaper for?" exclaimed Lovell, in surprise.

"Never mind; just produce the goods," answered Jimmy Silver, with a grin. "I'll show you what it's for in a minute."

Without further question the notepaper was produced, and Jimmy Silver commenced to write.

The other Classical juniors stared at each other in astonishment, but they were content to leave matters in Jimmy's hands, for he rarely failed them in a crisis.

For a minute or two the pen scratched over the paper, then the leader of the Fistical Four looked up with a grin and handed a short note to Lovell.

Lovell gazed upon it in astonishment, and Newcome and Raby, who were looking over his shoulder, uttered exclamations of amazement.

In a disguised handwriting they read:

"The Laurels, Latham.

"Mr. Jones presents his compliments to Master Thomas Dodd, and begs to inform him that if he is the son of Mr. James Dodd, the City stockbroker, he will be pleased to meet him and two of his friends at tea on Wednesday afternoon at five o'clock."

"Jolly good wheeze!" exclaimed Lovell.

"Always put your trust in Uncle James," said Jimmy Silver.

The letter for Tommy Dodd duly turned up on Monday morning, and there was great excitement in the Modern chums' study.

"By Jove!" cried Tommy Dodd. "This is a bit of luck for us! But—but I never knew my guv'nor was acquainted with the chap."

"You don't suppose your guv'nor tells you all his business, do you?" said Tommy Cook. "But, all the same, I wonder old Jones hasn't written before."

"Very likely he's only just found out I'm here."

"It's a gentleman he is," declared Tommy Doyle, "to invite all three of us, and it's meself that'll be very pleased to accept."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

News of the invitation soon travelled round Rookwood. Tommy Dodd & Co. took good care of that.

Jimmy Silver & Co. were in the seventh heaven of delight at the way in which the scheme had caught on.

Tommy Dodd & Co. waited with unconcealed impatience for Wednesday, and at last the great day arrived.

Wednesday afternoon was a half-holiday, and immediately after dinner the three chums went up to the dormitory to get ready.

There was quite an appreciable crowd at the school gates as they wheeled out their bikes, and a cheer went up as they started off.

When they had disappeared down the road the Fistical Four broke into rars of laughter, which made the Modern juniors who were hanging about look at them a little suspiciously.

THE PENNY POPULAR.—No. 279.

But the crowd soon dispersed, and nothing more was thought of the matter.

Meanwhile, after an uneventful ride, Tommy Dodd & Co. came within sight of the Laurels, and jumped off their machines.

The bicycles were propped up against the hedge, and the three juniors proceeded to make themselves spick and span.

Then, somewhat nervously, the Modern chums ascended the wide stone steps up to the front door.

With one more glance over himself, Tommy Dodd pulled the bell, and the juniors stood in the porch, waiting.

"Come in, young gentlemen!"

Tommy Dodd started.

The door had opened quite noiselessly, and a portly butler was standing back for them to enter.

The juniors stepped inside, and the butler in loud, officious tones demanded their names.

There was the faintest flicker of a smile on his face when he heard that they were all Thomases.

"Step this way, please!"

Tommy Dodd & Co. followed the butler along the thickly-carpeted hall.

Then he suddenly threw open the door of a room from which came the sound of many voices and laughter.

"Master Thomas Dodd, Master Thomas Cook, and Master Thomas Doyle!" announced the funkey in stentorian tones.

Immediately the voices within the room ceased, and all eyes were turned towards the door.

The Modern chums felt decidedly uncomfortable as they gazed upon the company, for no one seemed to be making any move to receive them.

Tommy Dodd coughed, and took another step forward, and then an elderly, fussy little man with a red face pushed his way to the fore.

Tommy Dodd & Co. shuffled their feet uneasily.

"Pon my soul," went on the florid gentleman, in angrier tones, "what do you young rascals want here?"

"We've come, sir," said Tommy Dodd feebly.

"Come!" ejaculated the man, his face turning a florid hue. "Can't I see you've come? If you're attempting to be impudent—"

"No, sir—certainly not, sir!" faltered Tommy Dodd uneasily. "We've come to tea, sir."

"How dare you come here?" roared the man. "I didn't ask you to tea! I don't even know you! I've never seen you before, I—"

"I'm Thomas Dodd, sir," said the leader of the Modern juniors, colouring slightly.

"I don't care who you are!" raved the man, stamping his feet in his annoyance.

"You're a perfect stranger to me, and—"

"I may be, sir, but—"

"Don't argue with me, you insulting boy!" snapped the man. "You've had the effrontery to enter my house without being asked. You young rascals! Begone this instant!"

Tommy Dodd shifted uneasily from one foot to the other, but he made no attempt to take his departure.

"I'm very sorry, sir, if you've forgotten—"

"Forgotten! I've forgotten nothing!" roared the man.

"But really, Mr. Jones—"

"Mr. Jones!" ejaculated the man. "How dare you call me Mr. Jones? Jones!" he grunted. "My name's Earnshaw!"

"Phew!" gasped Tommy Dodd. "I—I—"

Tommy Cook and Tommy Doyle backed slowly towards the door. They had not exactly fallen in love with the expression on the man's face.

The latter stamped his feet on the floor.

"You are either an insulting young rascal," he roared, shaking his fist at Tommy Dodd, "or else you're a fool! Who told you to come here?"

"You sent us an invitation, sir."

"Nonsense!"

Tommy Dodd drew forth the invitation he had received, and handed it to the man.

The latter took it, and glared at the inscription.

"Hang you!" he exclaimed at length. "Haven't I told you my name isn't Jones?"

"Ye-e-e-es," murmured Tommy Dodd nervously. "But—"

"Young idiot!" growled the man. "Somebody's played a trick on you, and you've been too foolish to see through it." He turned to the butler, who was standing in the doorway, holding his hand to his face to

hide a grin. "Jenkins!" he bawled. "Show these children out at once!"

Tommy Dodd gasped. To be called children was the last straw.

"I beg your pardon, sir," he said calmly, "but we're not—"

"Turn them out, Jenkins! Turn them out!"

The butler took a firm hold on Tommy Dodd's collar.

"Better come quietly, young gents," he advised, as he dragged the Modern junior out into the hall.

"Let go, you rotter!" yelled Tommy Dodd, fast losing his patience.

"I don't want any of your sauce, young man," said Jenkins gruffly. "Come along, and don't have so much of it!"

"Look here—"

"Hi! Walters," shouted Jenkins, "lend a hand!"

"What-ho!" said Walters, a fellow-servant, as he came rushing up.

Tommy Cook and Tommy Doyle were just preparing to go to their leader's assistance when they were grasped violently by the new-comer, and forced towards the door.

The three Modern chums struggled furiously, but the two men were of powerful build, and were quite capable of handling them.

They forced the juniors towards the door, and then flung them unceremoniously out into the grounds.

Jenkins shook his fist at them as they picked themselves up.

"If you ain't gone in two minutes," he exclaimed, "I'll come and give you the 'iding of your lives!"

"Oh! Yow! Yarooogh!" roared Tommy Dodd, and his chums responded with:

"Yarooogh!"

They walked slowly towards where they had left their bicycles, grumbling discontentedly.

"Well, I'm blowed!" remarked Tommy Dodd dismally. "I never expected this."

"Neither did I," agreed Tommy Cook. "But how the dickens did we come to make a mistake?"

"Fathead!" snorted Tommy Dodd. "We haven't made a mistake!"

"But how—"

"Oh, you dense idiot! Can't you see this is a jape?"

"A jape?"

"Yes," said Tommy Dodd; "and we've fallen into it like a lot of silly fools."

"Phew!" gasped Tommy Cook, the truth dawning on him. "Surely you don't think Jimmy Silver—"

"Who else would have thought of such a wheeze?"

"My hat!"

With faces that bore looks of deep annoyance and wrath, the Modern juniors mounted their bicycles, and started on the return journey to Rookwood.

Not a word did either of them utter all the way. Their feelings were too deep for words.

They reached the gates of Rookwood at last.

They were just considering themselves lucky in not coming into contact with any Classical juniors, when from out the porter's lodge emerged Jimmy Silver & Co., and several other Classical fellows.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Jimmy Silver hilariously. "Had a good time, Duddy?"

"Couldn't they stand your faces?" demanded Lovell.

"What did they kick you out for?" asked Newcome.

"Yah! Classical cads!" exclaimed Tommy Dodd wrathfully.

"Poor old Duddy!" sighed Jimmy Silver. "What a pity he's so soft! He has to give the Classical side best every time!"

"Br-r-r-r!"

With that expressive snort Tommy Dodd shoved his bicycle in the shed, and tore towards the Modern House. Tommy Cook and Tommy Doyle followed suit quickly.

Neither of them wanted to be chipped any more about the way in which they had been treated as unwelcome guests!

THE END.

Next Friday's Grand Long Complete Tale of Jimmy Silver and Co. is entitled:

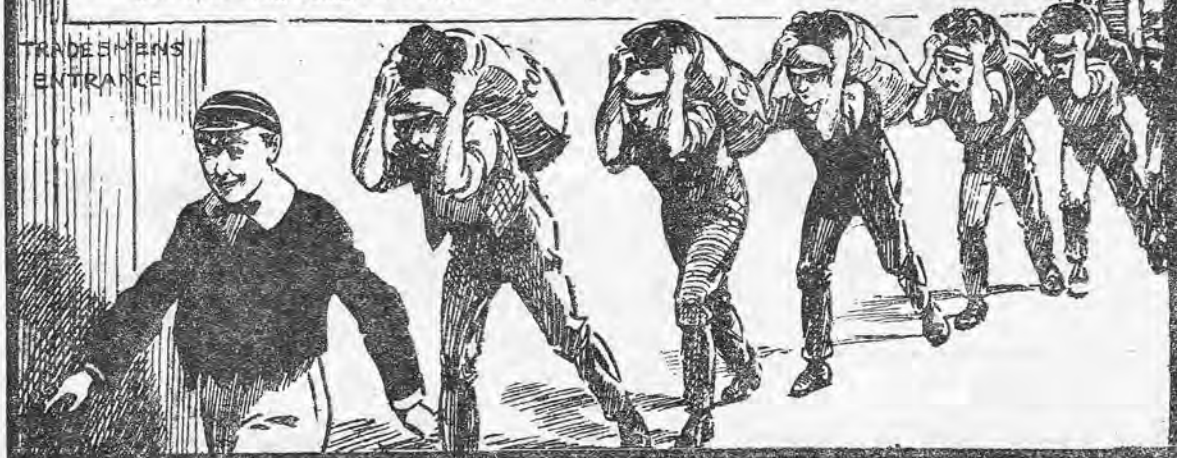
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THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Not Quite a Success.

"QUIET!" murmured Tom Merry of the Shell at St. Jim's.

Manners and Lowther were not making a sound, but Tom Merry was leader, and as leader it was, of course, his business to give directions.

The chums of the School House were stealthily making their way into the New House.

There was intense rivalry at St. Jim's between the juniors of the two Houses. Hence it will be deduced that Tom Merry & Co. were not exactly on a peace mission.

Lowther grunted.

"Quite yourself, you ass!" he said. "Don't jaw!"

"Look here, Monty—"

"Look here, fathead—"

"Shut up!" murmured Manners. "Don't rag now! Looks as if we've really got a chance of scoring off Figgins & Co. If we're careful."

It did look like it. It happened that the New House fellows were holding a meeting of the New House Junior Dramatic Society in the common-room. From that apartment came a buzz of voices, but the door was closed. The passages and the stairs were deserted. The raiders were in luck.

They tiptoed up the New House stairs, and gained the Fourth-Form passage. There was no one in sight. Some of the study doors were open, and the juniors could see into them; but the studies were untenanted.

"They're holding some giddy meeting downstairs!" murmured Tom Merry. "This is simply a slice of luck, my infants!"

"Unless Figgins & Co. are downstairs with them, and we can't screw them up!" grunted Lowther.

"H'm!"

Tom Merry had not thought of that for the moment. He paused outside Figgins' study door.

The juniors were soon reassured. As they listened outside the door, they heard a sound of someone moving inside the study. It was unmistakable—they could hear papers being moved on the study table, and a shuffle of feet.

"They're here!" murmured Tom.

And Manners and Lowther nodded.

"Buck up with the screws! They might open the door any minute!" murmured the captain of the Shell.

"Leave it to me!" said Lowther.

He produced a gimlet from his pocket, and began to bore into the door with a steady hand, silently. He drove the gimlet through the edge of the door slantwise into the jamb.

Then he withdrew it, and inserted the screw, and applied the screwdriver. Lowther made hardly a sound as he worked. In a couple of minutes the screw was driven home to the head.

The Terrible Three chuckled silently. It would have required a great deal of

force to get that door open without the screw being withdrawn. And the raiders were not finished yet.

Lowther knelt close to the door, and drove the gimlet in again, this time slanting through the door to the floor beneath. A screw was speedily driven into the hole made by the gimlet. Lowther, rather red with his exertions, rose to his feet with a triumphant grin.

"They won't get that door open in a hurry!" he murmured. "May as well give 'em a few more, to make sure, though."

"Cave!" murmured Tom Merry.

He had caught sight of a junior coming up the stairs. It was Redfern of the Fourth, and he was coming up, all unconscious of the fact that there were School House fellows there.

The Terrible Three backed out of sight, and slipped into a study of which the door was open. They hoped the junior would pass on; but as soon as they were in the study, Tom Merry made a discovery.

"I—I say, this is Reddy's study!" he murmured.

"Oh, my hat! You ass—"

"Well, you didn't notice—"

"I'm not leader!" grunted Lowther. "I think—"

"Shush!" said Manners.

Redfern's footsteps came along the passage. It was possible, of course, that he was not coming to his study. If he passed on, all would be well. If he came in he was certain to discover the raiders.

The Terrible Three crammed themselves behind the door and waited. If the alarm was given, it would not be easy for them to get out of the House; a single yell from Redfern would alarm the crowd of juniors below. They listened breathlessly to the approaching footsteps.

The footsteps paused outside the study, and Redfern came in. The door was half open, and Redfern pushed it wide open as he entered. There was a sound of a loud crack as the door collided with Manners' head, and a yell from Manners.

"Ow!"

Redfern jumped.

"Why—what—who— Hallo! School House cads! My hat!"

"Collar him!" gasped Tom Merry.

The Terrible Three leaped at the New House junior. To collar Redfern, lock him in his study, and bolt—that was the programme.

But matters did not go according to programme.

Redfern was a particularly wide-awake youth. He made a backward spring through the doorway into the passage, and the Terrible Three tumbled over one another instead of Redfern.

The next instant Redfern was tearing along the passage towards the stairs, and bawling at the top of his voice:

"Rescue! School House cads! Rescue!"

He went down the stairs three at a time.

"Run for it!" gasped Lowther.

The Shell fellows ran down the passage. They descended the stairs by means of the banisters, with a wild whiz, and rolled over one another in the hall below. Redfern had the door of the common-room open, and was shouting to the juniors' meeting there.

There was a rush of feet.

"School House cads! It's a raid! This way!"

A crowd of New House juniors came swarming out. Foremost among them was a tall, slim junior, and after him came a decidedly plump youth—and the Terrible Three gasped as they recognised Figgins and Fatty Wynn. And Kerr, the other member of the famous Co., whom the raiders had believed to be screwed up in their study, came dashing out after them, followed by the crowd.

"M-m-m-my hat!" gasped Tom Merry.

They had screwed up Figgins' door. Somebody was in Figgins' study. But Figgins & Co. evidently weren't. Figgins & Co. were here—rushing at them with warlike looks. There was no time to think out the problem then. The Terrible Three made for the doorway; and the New House crowd made for the Terrible Three.

Three juniors bounded down the steps together—twenty boots came crashing behind to help them go! Three wild yells awoke the echoes.

"Oh!"

"Ow!"

"Yah!"

Three raiders rolled over one another outside the House.

"After them!" roared Figgins.

Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther picked themselves up in a twinkling, and ran. After them rushed the New House crowd, determined to capture them and avenge the raid of their quarters. The Terrible Three dashed across the quadrangle as if they had been racing on the cinder-path.

"Collar 'em!" yelled Figgins. "We'll teach 'em to raid our House! We'll—"

"Rescue!" shouted Blake; and the Fourth-Formers dashed to the aid of the Terrible Three.

There was a collision of the two parties in the quad, and the New House pursuers had to stop. For a few moments there was a tussle, and then the Terrible Three and their rescuers retreated into the School House; and the New House crowd, after delivering a series of yells and cat-calls, returned to their own side of the quad. In the School House, Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther gasped breathlessly, and Blake & Co. grinned.

"Lucky for you we were on the spot!" chuckled Blake. "They'd have wiped up the ground with you!"

"I can't understand it!" gasped Tom Merry. "We've screwed up Figgins' door—and there was somebody in the study! Of course, we thought it was those bouders! It must have been somebody else!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There is somebody at Piggy's study!"

THE PENNY POPULAR.—No. 279.

window!" said Kangaroo of the Shell, who was looking out of the window. "I can't see who it is—he's too far off—"

"Get your glasses, Gussy!"

The juniors rushed up to Study No. 6. They were very curious to know whom it was that the Terrible Three had screwed up in Figgins' study. Arthur Augustus produced his handsome opera-glasses and focused them upon the study window in the distant House. Then he staggered back.

"Oh, cwmbs! Oh, scisnhs! Oh, cwikey!"

"Who is it?" yelled Blake.

"Watty!"

"Oh!"

It was Mr. Ratcliff, the Housemaster of the New House, whom the raiders had screwed up in Figgins' study! And the silence of their utter dismay fell upon the hapless raiders! To screw up the rival juniors in their study was a howling joke. But to screw up a Housemaster, and a particularly bad-tempered Housemaster at that—

"Well," said Jack Blake, apparently essaying the role of Job's comforter—"well, I must say you chaps have really been and gone and done it now!"

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

A Rat in a Trap!

THE New House juniors crowded up-stairs to see what damage, if any, had been done by the raiders. Figgins had half-expected that the uproar would have brought Mr. Ratcliff out of his study, which would probably have meant lines for all concerned. But there was no sign of the Housemaster, much to Figgins & Co.'s relief.

The juniors came up to the Fourth-Form passage, and Fatty Wynn turned the handle of his door. But the door did not open. There was a sound of a movement within.

"My hat!" exclaimed Fatty in amazement. "There's one of the bounders still here! He's locked himself in!"

"Phew!"

"Oh, good!" grinned Figgins. "There were more than three, then; and this chap couldn't get away in time. We'll make an example of him!"

"Yes, rather!"

Figgins knocked on the door and shook the handle imperatively.

"Let us in, you rotter!" he shouted through the keyhole. "We've caught you, you waster! We're going to make an example of you!"

"Figgins! How dare you?"

Figgins staggered back in horror.

He knew that voice.

There was no mistaking the rasping tones of Mr. Ratcliff, the master of the New House. Figgins simply gasped.

"RATTY!"

"Ratcliff!" murmured Redfern.

"Oh, my hat!"

There was an angry knock on the inside of the door.

"Let me out at once, Figgins! How dare you play this trick on your Housemaster? You wicked, ruffianly boy, I command you to let me out!"

"Mad!" muttered Redfern. "Quite dotty! How can we let him out when he's locked himself in? I've often thought Ratty was rather potty."

"Do you hear me, Figgins?"

"Ye-es, sir!" gasped Figgins. "I—I didn't know it was you in there, sir. I thought I was talking to some chap in the School House, sir."

"Nonsense, Figgins! You knew perfectly well that I was here! You deliberately locked me in the study!"

"I didn't, sir! I haven't been here at all—and the key's on the inside of the door," said Figgins. "I can see it in the keyhole! You must have locked the door yourself, sir."

"What! What! How dare you say anything so absurd? I—" Mr. Ratcliff broke off as he discovered that the key was indeed on the inside of the lock.

He tried to turn the key, and then made the further discovery that the door was not locked at all!

"Poor old Ratty!" murmured Kerr. "Fancy his going quite potty in his old age!"

Mr. Ratcliff shook his head from within.

"The door is not locked at all, Figgins! You are holding it from outside! I command you to open the door at once! I shall punish you severely for this!"

"The—door won't open, sir!" stammered Figgins. "Are you sure, sir, that you

haven't locked it? I don't see why it won't open if it isn't locked."

The screws that Monty Lowther had driven into the door were buried deep in the dark wood, and could not be seen without a special search for them. And it did not occur to Figgins for the moment that the door had been screwed up.

The angry Housemaster shook the door-handle furiously. But the juniors either could not, or would not, let him out, and he crossed to the window, in the hope of seeing some senior in the quadrangle whom he could call to his rescue.

Fortunately, Monteith, the head prefect of the New House, was just coming in, and Mr. Ratcliff shouted to him from the window:

"Monteith! Monteith!"

The prefect looked up in surprise at hearing his name shouted from above.

He stared in astonishment at the angry face of Mr. Ratcliff staring down at him from the window of the junior study.

"Did you call me, sir?" he exclaimed.

"Yes, Monteith! The juniors have fastened me up in this room!" said Mr. Ratcliff, breathing hard. "Will you come and release me?"

"Certainly, sir!" said the astonished prefect.

Monteith hurried into the House and up the stairs. He found a crowd of juniors all talking at once outside Figgins' door. The juniors were getting a little scared now. They could imagine what Mr. Ratcliff would be like when he was released.

"The young rascals!" Monteith exclaimed. "You will catch it for this! Open the door at once, Figgins!"

"I can't," said Figgins. "It seems to be fastened somehow. Ratty—I mean, Mr. Ratcliff—says he hasn't locked it; but it won't open."

Monteith tried the door. It remained fast.

"Are you sure it isn't locked, sir?" he said through the keyhole.

"Of course I am sure, Monteith!" rapped out the Housemaster. "Don't be foolish!"

Monteith turned red. He did not exactly like being told not to be foolish before a crowd of juniors. Some of the juniors grinned.

"Well, I can't open it, sir," said Monteith shortly.

"Are not the boys holding it?"

"No, they are not."

"Then it must be fastened in some manner from outside," said Mr. Ratcliff.

Monteith made a careful examination of the door. He felt over it, and felt the head of one of the screws driven in so deftly by Monty Lowther. Then he understood.

"It is screwed up, sir!" he said.

"My hat! Screwed?" said Figgins, in wonder. Then he burst into a chuckle involuntarily. He understood now what the School House fellows had done. They had screwed up the Housemaster in mistake for himself!

Monteith looked at him sternly.

"This is no laughing matter, Figgins! You will get into trouble over this!"

"I!" exclaimed Figgins indignantly. "I didn't do it! I hadn't the faintest idea the door was screwed up!"

"Then who did?"

Figgins did not reply. He knew very well who had done it, but he did not intend to say so. It was not his business to "sneak."

"Screwed up!" said Mr. Ratcliff, seeming to speak with difficulty. "The authors of this—this outrage shall suffer for it! Pray get a screwdriver, Monteith, and release me!"

"Very well, sir!"

The prefect hurried away, and returned with a screwdriver. He unscrewed first one and then the other of the screws. Then the door swung open, and Mr. Ratcliff strode forth, with rustling gown and flaming face.

"Now," he thundered, "which of you screwed up that door, knowing that I was in the study?"

There was no reply.

"Was it you, Figgins?"

"No, sir."

"I do not believe you. The assumption is that it was you, as I was in your study. And if no one else here admits having done this—"

Mr. Ratcliff paused, and swept his little steely eyes over the crowd of juniors, but no one spoke. "Very well, Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn, you will follow me to my study! I shall cane you most severely!"

"We didn't do it, sir," said Kerr.

"Silence!"

Mr. Ratcliff stalked away. The three dismayed juniors followed him. They were adjudged guilty, and there was no way of saving themselves, unless by giving away

the Terrible Three. And that did not even enter their minds. There was always warfare between the juniors of the two Houses, but it was always fair and loyal, and not a fellow on either side would have dreamed of "sneaking."

But just as the Co. were following Mr. Ratcliff into his study Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther arrived on the scene. They followed Figgins & Co. in. Mr. Ratcliff picked up a cane and turned round, and then stared in surprise at the School House fellows.

"What are you doing here?" he exclaimed harshly.

"If you please, sir—" began Tom Merry.

"Have you anything to say to me?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then you may wait till I have punished these juniors. Not a word! I decline to listen to you till I have punished these juniors!"

"But, sir—"

"Silence, Merry!"

"But it's about what you're going to punish them for, sir!" persisted Tom Merry desperately. "You see, sir, we—"

"Silence, I say!"

It really looked as if Mr. Ratcliff guessed what was coming, and did not want to lose his excuse for caning Figgins & Co. But Tom Merry was not to be denied.

"It was we who screwed up the study door, sir!" he said.

"What!"

"Figgins hadn't anything to do with it, sir," said Tom Merry. "We were japing Figgins. We heard somebody in the study, and thought it was Figgys, and screwed up the door."

Mr. Ratcliff breathed hard. He understood that the School House juniors had chivalrously come over from their House to cwn up as soon as they knew that their little joke was likely to get somebody else into trouble. But Mr. Ratcliff did not feel any admiration for such chivalry. He was only exasperated.

"You dare to admit this, Merry?"

"Yes, sir. We had no idea you were in the study."

"I do not believe you, Merry!" said the Housemaster, between his teeth. "I believe this is a trick to save Figgins and Kerr and Wynn from their just punishment. Doubtless, you hope that I shall let them off, and then hand you over to your own Housemaster, knowing that I do not approve of Mr. Ratcliff's leniency. Well, Merry, you will be disappointed. I shall certainly not leave you to your Housemaster. Your offence has been committed in my House. I shall take your punishment into my own hands."

Tom Merry flushed.

"We don't mind that, sir. We don't want you to report us to Mr. Ratcliff. But we didn't mean any harm, sir! We thought we were screwing Figgys up in the study—"

"Do not repeat that ridiculous story, Merry. I know perfectly well that this was a concerted trick among all of you."

"It was nothing of the sort, sir."

"Certainly not, sir," said Figgins.

"Silence!" said Mr. Ratcliff, his thin lips closing tight. "I shall cane all of you in turn. You are all equally culpable, to my mind. You first, Merry. Hold out your hand!"

There was nothing for it but to obey. The juniors went through the coming with feelings too deep for words. The injustice of it cut deeper than the cane. Any other master at St. Jim's would have accepted Tom Merry's explanation, and dismissed Figgins & Co. unpunished. Not so Mr. Ratcliff.

A victim once gathered into his net had little chance of escaping unscathed.

The six juniors were caned in turn. Then Mr. Ratcliff threw the cane upon the table, and waved his hand towards the door.

"You may go," he said, "and I trust this will be a lesson to you."

The juniors went without a word.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

A Big Order.

"CAUGHT it bad?" asked Blake sympathetically, as the chums of the Shell came back into the School House.

The Terrible Three groaned in chorus.

"Yes, rather!"

"Nevah mind, deah boys," said Arthur Augustus comfortingly. "You did the wight and pwopah thing in owain' up, you know, and gettin' Figgins & Co. off."

"But we didn't get them off," said Manners.

"Ratty pretended to think that we were all in the game together, and he licked them, too."

"Bai Jove!"

"Awful cad!" said Blake.

"Yass, wathah! I wegard Mr. Watchful as a wank outsideah, deah boys. Of course, I would have been beneath your dignity to wemonstwife with him!"

Tom Merry grinned painfully.

"It wouldn't have been any good, or we'd have chanced the dignity," he said. "But we'll make him sit up for it. How were we to know that he was spying in Piggy's study? He's licked us as much as if we'd sewered him up in his own study. He's a beast! But we'll make him sorry for himself, somehow."

"We jolly well will," said Monty Lowther, with a grimace. "Anybody in the prefects' room, do you know?"

"Most of the Sixth are on the river," said Blake. "What do you want in the prefects' room?"

"I want to use the telephone."

"Well, you can use it if the prefects are there, if you ask permission."

Monty Lowther grinned.

"But I don't want to ask permission," he explained. "It's a giddy little secret. I think I'll go and see if the room's empty." Monty Lowther walked away towards the prefects' room, and the other fellows, curious to know what idea the humorist of the Shell had in his mind, followed him. Monty Lowther tapped at the door and entered.

The room was sacred to the use of the members of the Sixth Form who had attained the rank and dignity of prefects, though other members of the Sixth sometimes used it. But juniors were quite barred, and the Fifth never ventured in.

There was a telephone in the room, which fellows were allowed to use after asking a prefect's or a master's permission. If there had been anyone in the room, Lowther had an excuse ready; but, fortunately, the Sixth were all out of doors. Monty Lowther looked cautiously round the room, and ascertained that the armchairs were all unoccupied.

"All serene!" he remarked, as he approached the telephone and took up the receiver.

"What's the little game?" demanded Blake.

"Listen, and you'll find out!"

On the shelf under the telephone was the telephone directory, and Monty Lowther glanced into it quickly. A voice came from the Exchange asking to know what number he wanted.

"1001 Wayland!"

Lowther waited patiently with the receiver in his hand. The other juniors regarded him in surprise; 1001 Wayland was the telephone number of Mr. Rutter, the outfitter and general provider in Wayland, from whom the juniors obtained most of their sporting requisites. A voice came through.

"Is that Rutter's?" asked Lowther.

"Yes."

"This is St. Jim's. Kindly book an order for Mr. Ratcliff, New House, St. Jim's!"

"Yes, sir."

"Three dozen cricket-bats, at fifteen-and-six, and one dozen of your special match cricket-balls as advertised," said Lowther.

"With pleasure, sir."

"Kindly deliver them to-morrow morning at half-past nine, as nearly as possible."

"Our van shall call at that time, sir. Can we supply you with anything else? We specially recommend our tennis racquets."

"No, thank you, that will do."

"If you would like me to send a specimen racquet—"

"No; the New House juniors make racket enough as it is."

"Eh?"

"I mean I'm not requiring any racquets at present. Kindly deliver without fail at half-past nine in the morning. Remember, Mr. Ratcliff—Horace Ratcliff, New House, St. Jim's."

"Certainly, sir."

Lowther rang off. Tom Merry & Co. stared at him blankly. The nerve of Lowther's proceeding simply took their breath away.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "You awful ass, Lowther! What will Watty say when they deliver those dozen cricket-bats and a dozen cricket-balls to-morrow morning?"

"I really don't know," said Lowther blandly. "But whatever he says, it will be interesting. I think." And he rang up again. "606 Wayland!" he said to the Exchange.

"Hallo, hallo! Is that Mr. Bunn's, the confectioner's?"

"Yes, sir."

"This is St. Jim's. Can you fulfil a large order at a very short notice—two hundred jam-tarts and one hundred pound-cakes—currant-cakes—by ten o'clock to-morrow morning?"

"Certainly, sir! My establishment could easily fulfil a larger order than that."

"Very well. Kindly deliver to Mr. Ratcliff, New House, St. Jim's, without fail, at ten o'clock to-morrow morning."

"Very well, sir! Thank you, sir!"

Lowther rang off. He gave the Exchange one minute's rest between the rounds, as he expressed it, and then rang up again. This time it was for Mr. Wiggs, the costumier and tailor and dealer in ready-made clothes in Rycombe.

"Hallo! Is that Mr. Wiggs?"

"Yes, sir."

"Is it Mr. Wiggs speaking?"

"Yes. What's wanted?"

"This is St. Jim's," said Lowther, disguising his voice as well as he could, for he had a personal acquaintance with Mr. Wiggs.

"Pillbury, the chemist. Hallo, hallo! Is that Mr. Pillbury?"

"Yes. Who is there?" came back on the telephone.

"This is St. Jim's. Kindly deliver twenty large-size bottles of cod-liver oil to-morrow morning, at half-past ten, to Mr. Ratcliff, New House, St. Jim's."

"Very well, sir."

"Drag him away!" gurgled Blake. "There will be an earthquake to-morrow if this goes on. Shut up, Lowther! Ring off, you ass!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'm ringing on," grinned Lowther, busy with the telephone again. "Thank you, miss! Will you give me 801? Thank you! Hallo, hallo! Is that Mr. Snorks?"

"This is Snorks."

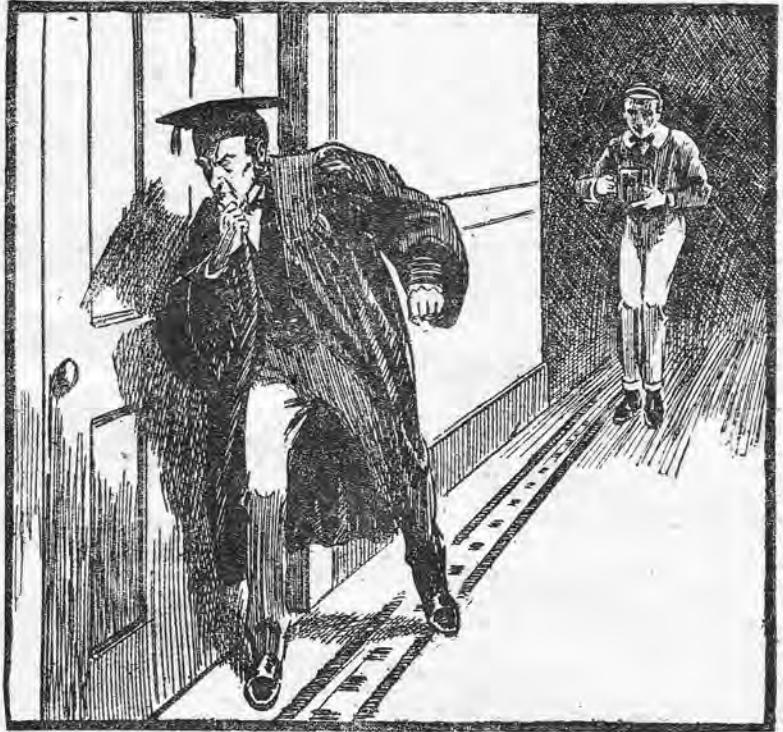
"Kindly deliver ten legs of mutton and twenty pork chops at a quarter to eleven to-morrow morning, personally, to Mr. Ratcliff, New House, at this school—St. Jim's."

"Very well, sir. A quarter to eleven?"

"Yes; as near as possible."

"Most certainly, sir."

"Yank him away from that telephone," said Tom Merry faintly. "The—the awful



The Housemaster paused outside the door and bent his head to listen to what the juniors inside the study were saying. The sound of voices came from the interior, and Mr. Ratcliff in his excitement at his discovery failed to hear three sharp clicks along the passage.

"The last time I—er—passed your establishment, Mr. Wiggs, I noticed that you were—er—advertising a new line in reach-me-downs—I mean, in ready-made attire for boys."

"Certainly, sir! My guinea suits are a marvel for style, fit, wear, comfort, and elegance. They are fully equal to the thirty-shilling suits sold by rivals in Wayland."

"Quite so. Can you send me fifty of your guinea suits immediately, Mr. Wiggs? Can they be delivered by ten o'clock—ahem—I mean, a quarter-past ten, to-morrow morning, without fail—Mr. Ratcliff, New House, St. Jim's?"

"Certainly, sir! The sizes—"

"All of a size, please—the same size as the sample guinea suit outside your shop, Mr. Wiggs. I may rely upon you?"

"Absolutely, Mr. Ratcliff."

"Thank you! Good-bye!"

"You—you awful ass!" roared Manners, as Lowther blandly rang off. "Chuck it! What will Ratty say when they deliver fifty guinea suits to-morrow morning? My hat! Whom are you ringing up now, you frabjous ass?"

ass! Monty, old man, chuck it! You've done enough already to be flogged about ten times for."

"One more order!" said Monty Lowther. "Ratty ought to be laying in coals. It's good economy to buy your coals in the spring, you know, and save them up for the winter. You save a lot of money that way. 210 Wayland, miss, please! Thank you! Hallo, hallo! Is that 210 Wayland—Welscher & Co., coal merchants?"

"Yes."

"This is St. Jim's. Kindly tell me your lowest price for twenty tons of good house coal."

"We can do good house coal at nineteen shillings a ton at present, sir, taking twenty tons. We could make a reduction for a larger quantity."

"Indeed! A substantial reduction?"

"Fifty tons could be supplied for eighteen shillings a ton, sir—best quality house coal. These are our lowest prices. I may add that we defy competition."

"Very well. Make it fifty tons—only 18 shillings a ton."

require them to be delivered at a time when I can personally superintend the matter. Do, please, let your vans arrive here at eleven o'clock to-morrow morning."

"Certainly, sir; that can be arranged."

"Kindly deliver to Mr. Ratcliff, New House, St. Jim's, and send the invoice at the same time. I do not want any account to run."

"It shall be as you wish, sir."

"Thank you!"

Lewther rang off. He was turning over the leaves of the telephone-book, when his chums made a sudden swoop on him, and bore him off by force. He was rushed out of the prefects-room by main force.

"That's enough," said Tom Merry, laughing till the tears came into his eyes. "Anything after the fifty tons of coal would be an anti-climax. Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I fancy Ratty will be rather worried to-morrow morning, with so many tradesmen delivering their goods," said Lowther thoughtfully. "Still, it will be very nice for the Fifth to get rid of him for a bit."

Cutts of the Fifth came by as the Shell fellow was speaking. Cutts looked suspiciously at the grinning juniors.

"What have you young rascals been up to?" he demanded.

"Snuff!" said Lowther blandly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We've been doing you a favour, Cutts," said Lowther. "I say, Cutts, I've been thinking of a conundrum. Why are you and I like two famous comic papers? Because one's comic Cutts, and the other chaps!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Cutts of the Fifth did not laugh; he frowned and walked away. It was beneath the dignity of a lordly member of the Fifth to be "chipped" by juniors.

The Terrible Three chuckled gleefully; consoled for their licking by the anticipation of the surprise and rage of Mr. Ratcliff, when all those articles, so recklessly ordered by Monty Lowther, were delivered to him in succession on the following morning.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Prompt Delivery.

MR. RATCLIFF was looking a little sourer than usual as he went into the Fifth Form room the next morning. Mr. Ratcliff was Form-master of the Fifth, and the Fifth were not proud of him. Being a senior Form, they were exempt from caning, otherwise there would have been some smarting palms in the Fifth Form room that morning.

"Looks ratty, doesn't he?" murmured Lefevre of the Fifth as Mr. Ratcliff came in. "What's been upsetting his ribs, Cutts?"

Cutts shook his head.

"Blessed if I know! I know we're going to have a rotten morning."

"Silence here, please," said Mr. Ratcliff, looking round sourly. "Kindly remember that you are in the Form-room. This is not a junior Form kindly remember, and I decline to allow chattering and whispering."

The Fifth-Formers looked daggers at their Form-master. It was evident that Ratty was more ratty than ever that morning.

Lessons had hardly started in the Fifth Form room, however, before they were interrupted.

There was a tap at the door, and Taggles, the school porter, put his head in. Mr. Ratcliff looked round angrily.

"You should not come here when lessons are on, Taggles!" he said sharply. "You should know better, my man. Go away at once!"

"Werry well, sir," said Taggles sulkily; "but wot—"

"Kindly go!"

"Yes, sir; but wot am I to do with the cricket-bats?"

Mr. Ratcliff stared at him.

"Are you intoxicated, Taggles?" he rasped out.

"No, I ain't, sir," said Taggles very gruffly, "and I don't take it kindly, sir, that you should insinuate that I am, sir. The 'End, sir, is puffishly satisfied with my conduct; and if you ain't satisfied, sir—"

"If you are not intoxicated, what do you mean by coming here with a ridiculous question? I know nothing about cricket-bats. You know I take no interest in such frivolous things, or you should know."

"Mr. Rutter's man says as how he was instructed to wait for the money, sir."

"What! The money for what?"

"The cricket-bats, sir, and cricket-balls, wot you ordered."

THE PENNY POPULAR—No. 279.

Mr. Ratcliff seemed rooted to the floor.

"Cricket-bats! Cricket-balls! Ordered by me!" he stammered.

"Yes, sir; they've come."

"I did not order them!"

"Which Mr. Rutter's man says as how he was specially instructed to deliver them at 'ari-past nine this morning to you personally, sir."

"It is some idiotic mistake! Tell the man I have not ordered anything of the kind, and have had no communication with Mr. Rutter. They may be for Mr. Railton. I have no use for such nonsense. Tell the man to go away."

"Werry well, sir."

Taggles retired, shutting the door with more force than was really necessary; and Mr. Ratcliff, very much ruffled, went on with the Fifth. The Fifth were grinning. They suspected a "jape," and they were not sorry.

Five minutes later Taggles was back again. He knocked at the Form-room door and opened it, and looked in with a decidedly surly expression. The Fifth Form master glared at him as if he would eat him.

"Well, what is it?" he snapped.

"The man says as how there's no mistake, sir. The cricket-bats and things was ordered by you over the telephone yesterday afternoon."

Mr. Ratcliff breathed hard.

"Tell the man I did not order them!" he said. "Go away at once!"

Taggles grunted and went. Mr. Ratcliff swept his Form with a furious glance.

"There is no occasion for merriment in this ridiculous occurrence," he said. "The next boy who laughs will be reported to the Head for deliberate impertinence!"

And the Fifth-Formers tried not to laugh. The lessons went on. Mr. Ratcliff ragging the seniors with all his great powers in that line. He was just making Lefevre feel that life was not worth living in a world where there were such poets as Horace, and such Form-masters as Mr. Ratcliff, when Taggles looked in again. Lefevre, who would have welcomed an earthquake at that moment, was glad to see him. But Mr. Ratcliff was not. He had succeeded in confusing and tangling Lefevre to such a point that the Fifth-Former was in a state of utter misery, and naturally he did not like to be interrupted. He gave Taggles a savage glare.

"I told you not to return to me about those cricket-bats, Taggles. How dare you disobey my orders! I refuse to hear anything more about the matter! Mr. Rutter may take what measures he pleases. I will not hear a word about the matter! I—"

"Please, sir, the stuff's come from Mr. Bunn's."

"What!"

"The jam-tarts and cakes, sir."

"This—is this a plot!" gasped Mr. Ratcliff, as the Fifth burst into an irrepressible chuckle. "It is a vile plot! Do you mean to say, Taggles, that Mr. Bunn has delivered goods here in the belief that they were ordered by me?"

"Yes, sir. Two 'undred jam-tarts, sir, and one 'undred pound-cakes, sir."

"I refuse to accept the goods! Jam-tarts! Good heavens! Mr. Bunn must be mad! What can he suppose I want with two hundred jam-tarts?" shrieked Mr. Ratcliff. "Tell the man to take them back! Tell him to tell his master that he is a fool! Go away at once!"

"Yes, sir."

"Lefevre, you were laughing! Take a hundred lines! Cutts, how dare you laugh? Take five hundred lines! Take five hundred lines, Prye!"

And the Fifth did not laugh any more.

Mr. Ratcliff was raging. He could hardly control himself sufficiently to go on with the lesson. But by the time he had settled down another interruption was due. The school-porter put his head into the Form-room.

"If you please, sir—"

Mr. Ratcliff turned round with almost a yell.

"How dare you come here again, Taggles? Go away instantly!"

"But the clothes have come, sir."

"The—what?"

"The ready-made clothes from Mr. Wiggs, sir. Fifty of 'em, sir. The man has the bill, sir—fifty-two poun ten, sir."

"It is a wicked plot! I did not order them! Taggles, if anything more is delivered at the school for me, refuse to take it in. I have ordered nothing. Now go away, and do not come back. Do you understand?"

"Yes, sir," said Taggles.

Mr. Ratcliff mopped his perspiring brow.

"I—I shall leave you for a short time!" he

rapped out. "I feel too disturbed to continue the lesson. Lefevre, I leave you in charge here. If there is any neglect of your work, you will answer for it to me."

And Mr. Ratcliff strode out of the Form-room and slammed the door after him. The Fifth-Formers burst into a yell of laughter as soon as he was gone. In the passage Mr. Ratcliff came suddenly upon Taggles talking to Toby.

"He's mad," said Taggles—"mad as a 'atter! Hordered things right and left by telephone, and now he won't take 'em! Shouldn't wonder if they summonses him."

"Taggles!"

"Ho! I—I didn't see you, sir! You moves so quiet!" said Taggles.

"You were speaking of me, Taggles."

"Ho, no, sir! I was a-talking about the weather, sir," said Taggles. "Looks to me like more rain to-day, sir—don't you think so?"

Mr. Ratcliff did not state what he thought on that subject. Taggles retired, to send away Mr. Wiggs' man with the fifty guinea suits.

Mr. Ratcliff took a turn in the quadrangle to calm himself. He realised that he was the victim of a joke, and he had an uneasy suspicion that there was more to come. His suspicion was well founded.

A few minutes later he caught sight of the chemist's boy, from Mr. Pillbury's in the village, with a parcel outside Taggles' lodge, arguing hotly with Taggles. Mr. Ratcliff swept down upon them.

"What is it? What is it?" he demanded.

"Please, sir, I've brought the cod-liver oil, sir, and Mr. Taggles says it ain't hordered, sir," said Mr. Pillbury's boy.

"Cod-liver oil!" gasped Mr. Ratcliff.

"Yes, sir. Twenty large-sized bottles. Ordered by telephone yesterday."

"Take it away!" shrieked Mr. Ratcliff. "I did not order it!"

"But I took down the order myself, sir, when you was talking to Mr. Pillbury over the telephone, sir!"

"I did not order it, I tell you! It is an infamous plot! Take it away!"

The chemist's boy picked up his big parcel.

"Very well, sir. 'Ere's the bill."

"Take it away!"

"Will you pay now, sir?"

"Go!"

The chemist's boy cast an alarmed look at Taggles, and Taggles, taking advantage of the fact that Mr. Ratcliff's back was turned to him, tapped his forehead significantly. The chemist's boy whistled softly, understanding what that meant.

Unfortunately, Mr. Ratcliff turned round just in time to catch Taggles in the act. He gave the school porter a thunderous look.

"Taggles, what do you mean? What are you doing?"

"Scratchin' my 'ead, sir," said Taggles innocently. "No 'arm in that, sir, I 'ope!"

Mr. Ratcliff strode away without replying. He was almost at boiling-point. The chemist's boy shouldered his parcel and retreated, with the firm conviction that Mr. Ratcliff was mad, and he left Taggles with the same conviction.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Cheap Coal.

"HERE we are again!" said Monty Lowther genially.

At eleven o'clock the juniors were allowed out of the classroom for a quarter of an hour. They came trooping out into the sunny morning in great spirits. The Fifth were out, too, and the talk of the Fifth was very interesting to the juniors. It showed them that the jape upon the Fifth Form master had worked quite satisfactorily.

"The coal hasn't been delivered yet," Tom Merry remarked, with a glance at the clock-tower. "It's just eleven."

"Here they come!"

"Hurrah!"

The juniors crowded out into the road. A line of coal-vans were coming along, with grimy men upon them, and big dray-horses pulling along that huge consignment of coal for Mr. Ratcliff.

The juniors simply yelled at the sight.

The joke had spread among the juniors now, and nearly all the fellows who saw the coal-vans knew that their arrival was due to Monty Lowther's humorous activity with the telephone.

The vans drew up at the tradesmen's gate.

A huge, broad-shouldered, dusty giant

descended from the foremost van, and rang the bell. He looked in surprise at the yelling juniors. To the coalman there was nothing surprising or comic in the delivery of fifty tons of good house coal at eighteen shillings a ton. But to the St. Jim's juniors it seemed very funny indeed.

It was Toby, the page, who came down to the gate. Toby looked at the coalman, and at the coal-vans, and seemed surprised.

"I didn't know there was any coal hordered," said Toby. "It ain't for the School House, I'm sure of that."

The coalman consulted his bill.

"Mr. Ratcliff, New 'Ouse," he said.

Toby jumped. He had heard of the various articles that had arrived for the New House master that morning, and he thought he could guess what the arrival of the coal meant.

"Ow much is there?" asked Toby faintly.

"Fifty tons 'ouse coal," said the coalman.

"Fifty tons! My word!"

"Where am I to deliver it?" asked the man, rather surprised. "Didn't you know it was ordered?"

"That I didn't," said Toby, with a chuckle, "and I dare say Mr. Ratcliff didn't, either. My word! I'd better tell 'im afore you take it in, I think. Wait 'ere."

"Wot am I to wait for?" demanded the coalman. "We was told to get it 'ere at eleven o'clock without fail, and we've got to get 'ome to Wayland to dinner."

"I think there's a mistake."

"There ain't any mistake fur as I'm concerned," said the coalman. "Fifty tons of 'ouse coal at eighteen chillings a ton—and 'ere's the invoice."

"You wait 'ere," said Toby.

And Toby scuttled off. The coalman grunted. His mates, who had descended from their vans, grunted, too. They didn't see why they should have to wait. The juniors didn't see it, either, and they were willing to give advice.

"Better get the coal in," said Monty Lowther. "I'll show you the way if you like. You come this way to the back of the New House, and shoot it into the cellar. Quite simple."

"Thank you, sir!" said the coalman. "It'll take us a tidy time to empty that lot, and we've got other jobs for this arternoon, young gentleman."

"Draw it mild, Monty!" murmured Tom Merry.

Lowther looked at him in surprise.

"My dear Tom, surely you don't want this good man to waste his time. He's got plenty to do to deliver fifty tons of coal at a sack a time and get back to his dinner. It would be a shame if he were kept waiting for his dinner."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"This way," said Monty Lowther. "I'll show you where the New House coal-shoot is, and you can do the rest."

"Thank you kindly, sir!"

"Not at all. This way."

And Monty Lowther started off to show the way, followed by a long line of coalmen, each bending under the weight of a sack of cheap house coal at eighteen shillings.

The juniors looked on with great enjoyment.

"The New House ain't got accommodation for fifty tons of coal at once," murmured Kerr. "Forty tons is the limit."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I dare say they'll find room somewhere," grinned Blake. "If the cellars won't hold it, they can pile it in the garden."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Meanwhile, Toby was looking for Mr. Ratcliff. He found the New House master in his study in the New House, where he had retired for a nerve rest. He glared at Toby as that cheerful youth in buttons presented himself. Mr. Ratcliff would have glared at any visitor he had received at that moment.

"Well, what is it?" he snapped.

"If you please, sir, the coal's come!"

"The coal!" yelled Mr. Ratcliff.

"Yes, sir."

"What coal?"

"Fifty tons of 'ouse coal, sir, for the New Ouse."

"I did not order it! Tell the man to take it back! I refuse to take it! I refuse to bandy words on the subject! Tell the man to take it back! Do you hear?"

"Yes, sir," said Toby.

"Go at once! Not a word more! Go!"

Toby went. He hurried back to the gate, and, to his dismay, found that consignment of good house coal in the full process of delivery. A long line of coalmen followed one another to the New House delivering coals.

An obliging junior had slipped into the house, and opened the coal-shoot, and the sackfuls were descending into it one after another. Toby gasped at the sight.

"Look 'ere!" he exclaimed. "You're not to deliver that coal! Mr. Ratcliff says 'ow it wasn't hordered, and you're to take it back."

The coal foreman grunted.

"It was hordered, and my horders was to deliver it," he said. "And we've put in three tons already."

"Oh, my word!"

"Git on with it, mates; it's a tidy lot, and it'll take some time."

"You'd better keep the rest back—"

"Keep back nothin'," said the coalman rudely. "I'm hordered to deliver this 'ere coal, and I'm a-doin' of it."

And the coaly procession went on, and clouds of black dust rose from the recesses under the New House, as sack after sack was shot into the opening. Toby, at his wits' end what to do, rushed round the house again, and hurried to Mr. Ratcliff's study. The New House master received him with an angry frown.

"Well, what is it now?" he snapped.

"The coalman, sir—"

"Don't say another word to me about the coalman!" shouted Mr. Ratcliff. "I refuse to hear a word on the subject! Go!"

"But, sir—"

"Go! Leave this room!"

Toby had no choice but to go. He had done his best, and if Mr. Ratcliff refused to hear him he could do no more. He went.

Mr. Ratcliff sat down again, fuming. He was getting into a homicidal temper. But his repose was soon disturbed again. This time it was the New House housekeeper who came. She knocked at the door, and opened it without waiting to be told to do so, and flounced in.

Mrs. Kenwigg was a portly dame, and, as a rule, extremely dignified. But there is no denying or concealing the fact that her movements, as she entered the study, could only be described as flouncing. She was indignant, and she was annoyed.

"Mr. Ratcliff, sir—"

"My good woman, what is the matter?" said Mr. Ratcliff peevishly. "I trust you have not come to trouble me with household matters now? I am in no humour for it."

"That coal, sir—"

"Oh, dear! I have ordered them to take it back!"

"But they are delivering it!" shrieked Mrs. Kenwigg.

"What!" Mr. Ratcliff jumped up. "Delivering it?"

"Yes, sir!"

"I did not order it!" shrieked Mr. Ratcliff. "It is a wicked, infamous plot, and—"

"It is being delivered. They are shooting it into the cellar, and the cellar is overflowing!"

"Good heavens, I will soon put a stop to that!"

And Mr. Ratcliff rushed out of the study.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Mr. Ratcliff is Very Ratty Indeed.

"CAVE!"

"Ware rats!"

"Here he comes!"

The words passed among the juniors in a whisper as Mr. Ratcliff heaved in sight. The New House master looked excited. His scholarly cap was on a little askant, and his gown was flying in the wind. His face was red, and his eyes were gleaming.

"Man! Stop! Don't you dare to deliver that coal!" he exclaimed, as a burly coalman was shooting in a fresh sack.

Crash went the coal, and a cloud of dust arose. The Housemaster coughed and jumped back. The coalman looked at him stolidly.

"Tain't my business, sir," he said. "You'd better speak to my boss."

"Your—your what? Oh, your foreman, I presume you mean! Where is the man? Stop delivering that coal at once! Cannot you see that the cellar is full?"

"That ain't my business, sir."

"Are you a fool?" roared Mr. Ratcliff.

"No, I ain't," said the grimy man surlily. "and I don't allow nobody to call me one, sir, so don't you do it, that's all!"

"What man is in charge here? I insist upon seeing him! Where is he?"

"Ain't Wot's wanted?"

"Are you in charge of these men?"

"Yes, I am," said the coal foreman, not at all pleased by Mr. Ratcliff's bullying manner. "Wot's the trouble?"

"I did not order that coal. I forbid you to deliver it."

"You Mr. Ratcliff, New 'Ouse?"

"I am!"

"Then you're the gent as the coal's consigned to."

"I tell you I did not order it! If you do not immediately go away, I will telephone for the police, and have you arrested!"

The coalman looked dangerous.

"Look 'ere," he said. "I was hordered to deliver that there coal 'ere. If you want me to take it back, you say so, and I takes it back. That's all. You order 'ave said so afore any of it was delivered. Wot's been delivered you'll 'ave to pay for."

"I refuse to pay a penny. It is an infamous joke. I did not order the coal! I command you to take it back at once."

"Don't deliver any more, mates," said the coal foreman. "The gentleman 'as altered his mind. Get back to the vans."

The procession turned round, and the sacks were taken back.

"Now remove the coal you have already placed in my cellars!" commanded Mr. Ratcliff.

"Don't you talk silly!" said the coalman.

"What! What!"

"Ow can we git coal up outer the cellars?" demanded the coalman. "Wot's there will 'ave to stay there, and you'll be charged for it."

"Take it back at once!"

"Can't be done, sir!"

"I order you—"

The coalman, who was quite "fed-up" with Mr. Ratcliff by this time, turned his back on the Housemaster. It was quite evident that there would be no tip for the thirsty coalmen, and they were growing exasperated. Mr. Ratcliff rushed after the coalman and caught him by the shoulder.

"Will you take that coal back?" he shrieked.

"Ow can I?" roared the coalman, losing his temper. "Do you think I can go down on my 'ands and knees in your blooming cellar pickin' up lumps of coal?"

"I do not care how you do it, so long as you leave none of your coal here. I did not order it, and I refuse to take it. I shall not pay a penny."

"You can settle that with my bosses," said the coalman. "And off, please!"

"Will you take that coal away?"

"Don't be a hass!" said the coalman.

"You—you ruffian! You—you dare to address me—in that manner! I—I will have you arrested! I will—"

The coalman shook off Mr. Ratcliff's detaining hand, and strode away.

Outside the gate the men were loading up the vans again with the sacks of coal that had been taken down, and with the empty sacks that had been delivered. The foreman checked them off.

"You sign this 'ere paper?" he said to Mr. Ratcliff.

"What?"

"You sign for receiving three ton of coal—'ouse coal—"

"I will not sign it! I will not receive the coal!"

"It's delivered," said the coalman, "and you've got to sign for it, sir. I shall get into a row if I go back without it being signed for."

"I refuse to sign the paper! You are a fool—you are an idiot! I did not order the coal! Go!"

And Mr. Ratcliff stamped furiously away. The coalman stared after him in a slow, stolid way, evidently under the impression that he had to do with a lunatic. The man was in a great difficulty. To extract the coal from the cellar was a big task, and to go away with the paper unsigned meant trouble for him with his employers, especially after Mr. Ratcliff's declaration that he would not pay.

"It's a shame!" said Monty Lowther sympathetically. "I should appeal to the headmaster, if I were you."

"Ain't that dotty gent the 'eadmaster?" asked the coalman.

"Certainly not!" said Blake. "He's only a Housemaster. The best thing you can do is to see the Head."

"I'll show you the way," said the obliging Lowther.

"Thank you kindly! You're a young gentleman," said the coalman. "I should get 'auled over the coals, I tell you, if I went back without that paper signed. But I 'pose it will be all right, if the 'eadmaster signs it."

"Right as rain!" said Lowther. "This way! Hi, Toby!"

"Yes, Master Lowther?" said Toby.
"Show the gentleman in to the Head!" said Lowther. "Dr. Holmes has got to sign his paper."

"Oh, Master Lowther—"
"Buck up, Toby; you're keeping the chap from his dinner, and it's a shame."

"Oright," said Toby. "Foller me!"
The coalman followed.
Toby led the way to the Head's study. Dr. Holmes started up in amazement at the sight of the grimy man from the coal-yards.

"What—what—" he began.
"I want this 'ere paper signed, please, sir," said the coalman. "Coals ordered by Mr. Ratcliff, and he's changed his mind. Can't take back the three tons wot is delivered. The gentleman won't sign for the three tons, sir. I can't go back without my paper signed, sir. Might mean the sack for me!"

"I—I—I do not understand!" gasped the Head. "Do you mean to say that Mr. Ratcliff has ordered coals, and now refuses to take them—?"

"That's it, sir! Three ton was delivered by the time he changed his mind. Somebody have got to sign this 'ere paper."

"This is—this is extraordinary. I fail to understand it. My good man, surely there is some mistake," said the Head helplessly. "Toby, request Mr. Ratcliff to step over here!"

"Yes, sir."
"Wait a few moments, my good man. I have no doubt Mr. Ratcliff will be able to explain."

The New House master entered the study a few minutes later. He was still flaming with wrath, and he stared in surprise at the sight of the coalman in the Head's study. There was a little powdering of coal-dust on the carpet round the spot where the coalman stood.

"What does this mean?" gasped Mr. Ratcliff. "Have you dared to come here—?"

"I want this 'ere paper signed!" said the coalman stolidly.

"What is the meaning of this, Mr. Ratcliff?" the Head asked, with asperity. "It is a most extraordinary occurrence—most extraordinary and unpleasant!"

"It is a plot, sir—an infamous plot! Someone has been impersonating me on the telephone—ordering all kinds of things to be delivered to me by the tradesmen in Rycombe and Waylands!"

"Three tons of 'ouse coal is delivered, sir," said the coalman. "The gentleman didn't tell me not to deliver it till arter I'd delivered three tons!"

"I—I—I did not know the man was delivering it."

"The man is not to blame, evidently," said Dr. Holmes. "You had better sign the paper for the amount delivered, Mr. Ratcliff. After all, it will do no harm to purchase three extra tons of coal at this time. Please do as the man wishes."

There was evidently no other way of getting rid of the coalman, and Mr. Ratcliff realised it. He signed the paper with an exceedingly bad grace. Satisfied as soon as the paper was signed, the coalman departed.

"This is an extraordinary thing, Mr. Ratcliff," said the Head, when the grimy gentleman from the coal-yards was gone. "Who could have impersonated you on the telephone? Do you think it was someone at this school?"

"I think it must have been, sir. It is outrageous—unheard of! I am sure that it was a School House boy, and I think I could name half a dozen among whom the culprit could be found."

"It was evidently a foolish practical joke," said the Head. "But we cannot proceed on suspicion, Mr. Ratcliff. Unless you have a definite idea who is the culprit, I think it would be better to mention no names. Of course, you will make inquiries, and I will ask Mr. Ratcliff to do so."

And Mr. Ratcliff had to be satisfied with that.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Mr. Ratcliff Climbs Down.

"H A, ha, ha!"
"My hat! Ha, ha, ha!"
Tom Merry and Monty Lowther roared.

It was an hour since the coalman had taken their departure.

Tom Merry and Lowther were in the study. Manners was out somewhere with his camera, as usual, but the other two were quite adequately occupied in chuckling over the discomfiture of Ratty.

"Poor old Ratty!" said Monty Lowther. "He isn't up to our weight!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The chums of the Shell, as they roared with laughter, did not hear a faint creak in the passage. The door was half-open, as Manners had left it.

They did not know that Mr. Ratcliff was coming along the passage, and that he had heard their laughter, and their careless words, and stopped to listen.

That was quite Mr. Ratcliff's way.

The New House master was on the track. As he heard the juniors talking carelessly in their study, he lightened his footsteps, and came cautiously towards the door, to listen.

The Housemaster paused outside the door, and bent his head to listen, his whole attitude that of a spy. There was no one else in the passage, and, if he had heard a footstep, Mr. Ratcliff would have been on his guard at once, and would have changed his attitude promptly.

Quite unconscious of the eavesdropper just outside their door, Tom Merry and Lowther ran on.

"The old duffer will never let this rest," grinned Lowther.

"No fear!"

Mr. Ratcliff's eyes glinted; he had heard enough. In his excitement at making the conclusive discovery, he had not heard three short, sharp clicks along the passage. He burst into the study.

"So I have discovered you!" he thundered.

Tom Merry and Monty Lowther started up in dismay. They knew at once that the Housemaster had been listening.

Tom Merry faced him, his eyes gleaming with scorn.

"You have discovered what, sir?" he asked coldly.

"The author of the outrage with the telephone!" thundered Mr. Ratcliff. "You are condemned out of your own mouths! I have heard you discussing your wickedness. Follow me to the Head!"

Manners entered the study. He had his camera in his hand, and a genial smile upon his face.

"Follow me to the Head!" said Mr. Ratcliff harshly. "You had better come, too, Manners. I am sure that you were in the plot as well."

"Would you mind waiting till I've developed my photographs, sir?" asked Manners, with deadly politeness. "I've got some that would interest the Head very much. I took three snapshots just now in the Shell passage, sir—three really good interiors. The light from the end window, sir, was very good, and I am sure that the negatives will come out really fine. I snapped the door of this study, sir, and I had the good luck to snap it just when you were there—"

Mr. Ratcliff turned white.

Tom Merry and Lowther gasped. They understood!

Manners had come upstairs to return to the study just as Mr. Ratcliff was playing the eavesdropper outside the door of the study, and the amateur photographer of St. Jim's had had the great presence of mind to snapshot Mr. Ratcliff in the very act of playing the spy.

"You—you have photographed me, Manners?" gasped Mr. Ratcliff.

"Yes, sir—close to the door—very close, in fact, sir."

Mr. Ratcliff breathed painfully. He was quite satisfied for his own part with his own methods of getting information. But to be photographed in the act of playing the spy; to be shown up to all the school as an eavesdropper; to be branded in the public gaze—his head seemed to swim at the thought.

He was satisfied with his methods, but he knew that the Head would not be satisfied with them. And the negatives, developed, could be printed to any extent; there might be a flood of photographs distributed all over St. Jim's—Mr. Ratcliff in the character of spy!

It would be enough—more than enough—to compel him to resign his post at the

school. He would never be able to face and live down such a storm of derision and contempt as would follow.

"Give me that camera, please, Manners!" he stuttered at last, in a husky voice.

Manners looked surprised.

"My camera, sir!" he exclaimed.

"Yes; give it to me at once!"

Manners put his camera behind him.

"It's my camera, sir," he said.

Mr. Ratcliff made a forward movement, as if to take the camera by force.

Tom Merry and Lowther lined up grimly beside Manners. They had the whip-hand of Mr. Ratcliff now, so long as they kept the negatives.

They did not intend to allow the Housemaster to take the evidence out of their hands. He would never dare to report them to the Head when it was in their power to prove that he had played the spy at their study door.

"Do you dare to disobey me?" he thundered, in a last effort at bullying.

"It's my camera and my films, sir," said Manners.

There was a long pause.

"You—you are quite mistaken in thinking that—that I was listening at the door!" said Mr. Ratcliff at last thickly. He was consumed with fury at the necessity of humbling himself thus to the juniors. But there was no help for it, and Mr. Ratcliff had to climb down lest worse should befall him.

"Then the photographs won't do any harm, sir," said Manners demurely.

"The—photographs might lead to apprehensions," muttered Mr. Ratcliff. "I prefer to—to destroy them. I ask you, as a favour, to give me the negatives, Manners. Under the circumstances, I will overlook your conduct, and nothing more shall be said about the affair of the telephone or about what happened in my study this afternoon."

"You promise, sir?"

"Yes, I promise you that."

Manners exchanged a glance with his comrades. Mr. Ratcliff had been brought fairly to his knees, and the juniors could feel almost sorry for him.

Tom Merry and Lowther nodded assent to Manners' unspoken query, and the amateur photographer of St. Jim's opened the camera, took out the roll of films, and handed it to the Housemaster.

Mr. Ratcliff crushed it in his hand, and left the study without another word.

"Oh, my hat!" murmured Monty Lowther. "Manners, old man, you've saved the situation! It was great!"

Mr. Ratcliff's footsteps died away. He was seen to go; and a few moments later the chums of Study No. 6 looked into Tom Merry's study to learn what Ratty had wanted.

They were surprised to see the Terrible Three executing a wild war-dance round the table.

"Bai Jove!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, turning his eyeglasses upon the Shell fellows in astonishment. "Gwreat Scott! What the—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tom Merry. "Hear us smile!"

"Hurrah!"

"We've caught Ratty!" sobbed Monty Lowther. "This is the cat that killed the rat—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

They explained breathlessly. And then there was a yell of laughter from the chums of Study No. 6; and they joined in the war-dance of triumph.

Mr. Ratcliff kept his word. Probably his love for the Terrible Three was not increased by what had happened. But that was a trifle that did not trouble in the least the serenity of the scamps of the school.

THE END.

Next Friday's Grand Long Complete Tale of Jimmy Silver & Co. is entitled:

"THE HEAD'S COMMAND!"

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