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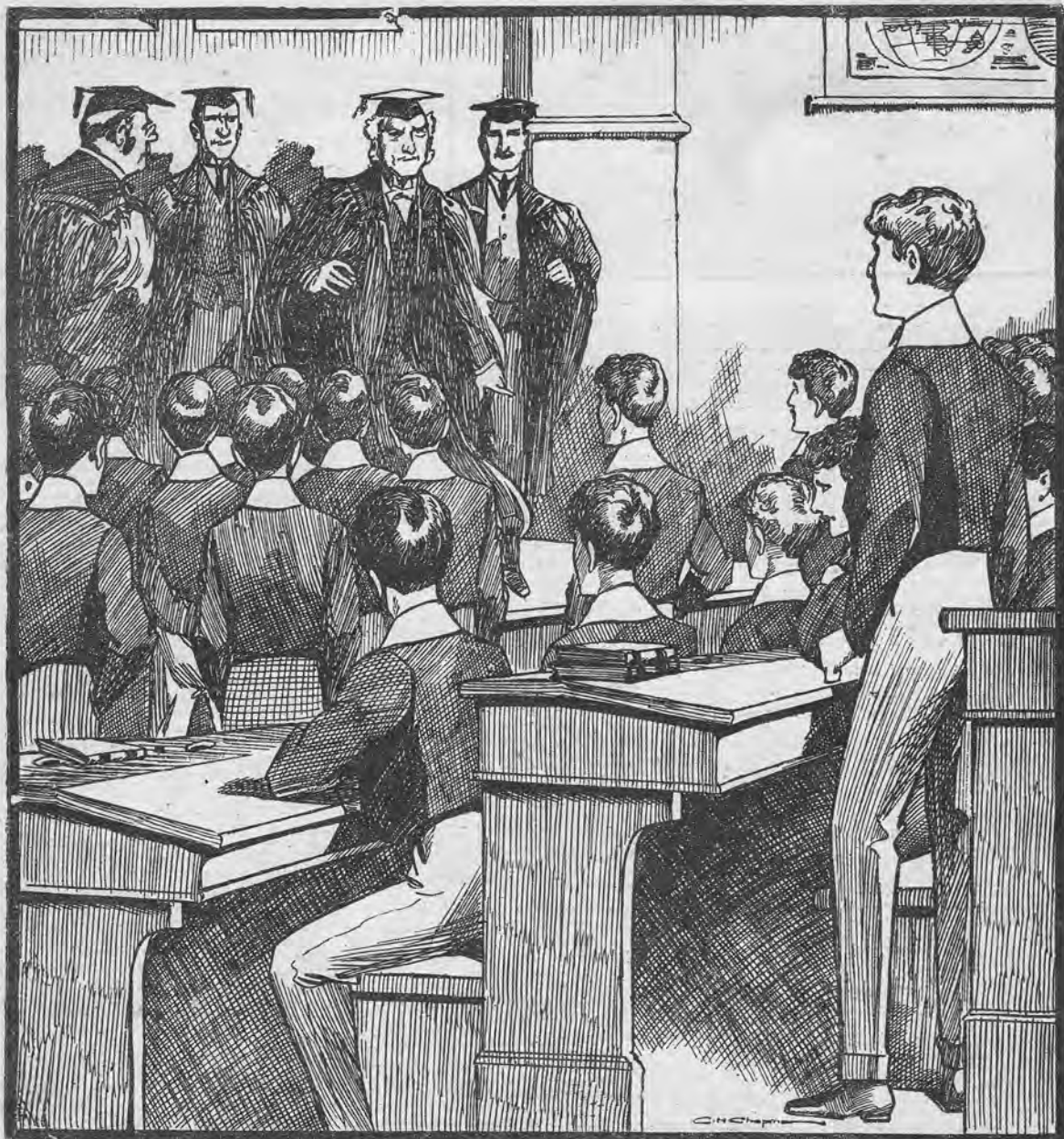
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Week Ending
October 4th, 1919.

No. 37.
New Series.

Popular

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



BOB CHERRY'S PROTEST!

(A Dramatic Incident in the Magnificent Long Complete School Tale of Greyfriars in this issue.)



Mark Linley's Sacrifice!

A Grand Long Complete Story, dealing with the Adventures of the Boys of Greyfriars School.

By FRANK RICHARDS.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

A Startling Discovery.

LET'S cook the fatted calf!" said Bob Cherry. The Famous Five of the Remove had just finished a game of football in the Close when Bob sprung that brilliant suggestion.

"Harry's in funds," continued Bob, "and I don't see why we should encourage him to be a miser. He's got twenty quid in his desk. Just think of all the nice things one can get for twenty quid! Why, even Billy Bunter would be able to buy sufficient food with it to keep him at least a couple of hours!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" "I agree with the worthy and esteemed Bob," said Hurree Singh, "that we should cook the fatted calf!"

"Hear, hear!" said Frank Nugent. "For the past fortnight we've either been having tea in Hall or feasting off a stale sardine! It's high time we had a properly-organised spread."

"Let the red wine flow freely!" said Bob Cherry.

He meant "ginger-pop," of course.

Harry Wharton, who had come into possession of twenty pounds, as a result of his repeated contributions to the "Greyfriars' Herald," smiled cheerfully.

"I'm quite willing," he said. "But I don't think we ought to confine the feed to ourselves. We'll invite Squiff and Peter Todd and Mark Linley and Smithy."

"And Tom Redwing and Dick Russell," added Johnny Bull.

"If Russell comes, Onivy must come, too!" said Bob Cherry. "They're like the Siamese twins. It's no use inviting one and leaving the other to gnaw a bone on the mat."

"There will be room for both!" said Wharton, laughing. "For an outlay of five quid we ought to get quite a respectable quantity of tuck. Mrs. Mimble isn't a profiteer."

"Follow your uncle!" said Bob Cherry.

And the Famous Five adjourned to Study No. 1, to clear it up before issuing invitations to their guests.

The study had been left in rather a litter.

The Famous Five were all on the staff of the "Greyfriars' Herald," and manuscripts were strewn about on the table and the floor.

The guests would not be particular; but, as Bob Cherry pointed out, they couldn't eat pirate serials and editorials, substantial though these contributions were.

When the task of clearing-up was completed, the question of making purchases arose.

"Trot out the merry fiver, Harry," said Bob Cherry, "and we'll come along with you to the tuckshop, and give you our counsel and advice!"

"Yes, rather!"

Harry Wharton threw up the lid of his desk.

"Do you mean to say you left the lid of your desk unlocked?" hooted Johnny Bull.

Wharton nodded.

"My hat! Talk about putting temptation in people's way! Fancy leaving twenty quid lying about spare!"

"It wasn't lying about spare!" said Wharton. "It was in an envelope."

"Sealed up?"

"No!"

"You champion ass!"

"I echo that sentiment," said Frank Nugent. "Only this morning Harry was ragging Mauly for leaving money about. And now he goes and does the same thing himself!"

Harry Wharton groped in the desk for the envelope.

He fished it out at length, and noted, with a tremor of apprehension, that it was not quite so bulky as it was when he first placed it in the desk.

Hurriedly Wharton took out the bundle of notes and counted them.

"Two—four—six—ten! My only aunt! What the merry dickens!"

"Anything wrong?" growled Johnny Bull.

"I should jolly well say so! There were twenty notes here originally, for one pound each. And now there are only ten!"

"What!"

"Is this a leg-pulling stunt, Harry?" inquired Bob Cherry.

Wharton shook his head.

"Ten of the notes have taken unto themselves wings!" he said.

"Great pip!"

The Famous Five exchanged glances of bewilderment and dismay.

They hesitated to think that there was a thief in the Remove—that somebody had deliberately abstracted the notes from Harry Wharton's desk.

But what else could have happened?

It was no use insisting that Wharton was a careless ass. That would not assist in solving the mystery.

There was a long pause in Study No. 1. Then Bob Cherry said:

"Of course, somebody took the notes for a joke!"

"Oh, of course!" said Nugent. But there was a strange uncertainty in his tone.

"I expect Bunter's borrowed them," said Johnny Bull. "It's just the sort of idiotic thing he would do!"

"I shouldn't like to think that Bunter stole them—" began Wharton.

"Who's talking about stealing?" growled Johnny. "It's quite likely that this fits in with Bunter's idea of a first-class jape."

"Bunter may have borrowedly abstracted them, with the intention of returnfully replacing them," said Hurree Singh.

"That's so," said Bob Cherry.

Harry Wharton looked grave.

"We must question Bunter," he said.

"I say, you fellows—"

At that precise moment a fat face, adorned by a pair of spectacles, appeared in the doorway.

"Come in, Bunter!" said Wharton.

The fat junior promptly obeyed. The occasions on which he was actually invited inside a study were few and far between.

"Thanks, Harry, old pal!" he said. "You want me to do some cooking for you—what?"

Wharton frowned.

"Have you been up to any larks?" he exclaimed.

"Eh?"

"Have you removed anything from my desk?"

Billy Bunter bristled with indignation.

"Oh, really, Wharton! Are you accusing me of burgling something?"

"We know you of old, porpoise!" growled Johnny Bull. "You've never been able to understand the difference between your property and anybody else's."

"Look here, Bull, you rotter—"

"Have you been in this study to-day?" asked Bob Cherry, in the manner of a prosecuting counsel.

"Yes," said Bunter. "I'm in it now."

"I don't mean now, ass. I mean before this."

Billy Bunter blinked at Bob Cherry through his big spectacles.

"Why should I want to come in here?" he said. "I noticed when I looked in this morning that you had nothing in your cupboard—not even a crust of dry bread!"

"Then you were in here this morning?" exclaimed Wharton sharply.

"Nunno!"

"But you've just said you were!"

"That—that was only a figure of speech, you know," said Bunter feebly.

The Famous Five consulted with each other for a few moments.

"It looks jolly suspicious," was Frank Nugent's verdict.

"I think it would be advisable to search the fat worm," said Johnny Bull.

"Hear, hear!"

Billy Bunter backed towards the door.

"I refuse to be searched!" he protested.

The alarm in the fat junior's tone strengthened the juniors' suspicion.

"Turn out his pockets!" said Wharton tersely.

Billy Bunter squirmed and struggled as five pairs of hands seized him and pinned him down.

"Yow! Gerroff me chest!" he spluttered.

The Famous Five took no heed. They started to ransack Billy Bunter's person in the hope that the ten pounds would come to light.

From one pocket Bob Cherry produced a sticky mass of toffee, buried in the depths of which was a penknife.

"My knife!" howled Johnny Bull.

"Oh, really, Bull—"

Johnny Bull made a grab at his property, which had been missing for some days, and the search continued.

Quite a number of articles were turned out of Billy Bunter's boxing pockets.

There was a box of crayons, the property of Frank Nugent. There was a current copy of the "Boy's Friend," belonging to Harry Wharton. And there were numerous odds-and-ends, which had somehow filtered into the fat junior's possession.

But of the missing ten pounds there was no shadow or sign.

Billy Bunter's sole source of revenue appeared to be a French coin with a hole in it, a couple of battered halfpennies, and a grubby penny stamp.

"Nothing doing!" said Bob Cherry.

But Harry Wharton was not satisfied yet. "Just cut along to the tuckshop, Franky," he said, "and find out if Bunter has been there to-day, and, if so, how much money he spent."

Frank Nugent nodded, and hurried on his errand.

He was back again in a few moments.

"Well?" said Wharton.

"Bunter's certainly been to the tuckshop to-day," said Frank. "He tried to bag some jam-tarts on tick from Mrs. Mumble, but she wasn't having any. He didn't spend any money, for the simple reason that he had none to spend."

"In that case," said Johnny Bull, "it couldn't have been Bunter who burgled your desk, Harry."

The captain of the Remove agreed.

Had Bunter stolen or "borrowed" the ten pounds, he would have given the show away by spending money like water at the school tuckshop. The fact that he had not done so, and that he had practically no money on his person, seemed to indicate that the juniors would have to look elsewhere for the thief—or, as Bob Cherry termed him, the practical joker.

"You can go, Bunter!" said Wharton.

"Yes, that's all very well!" grumbled the fat junior, buttoning up his waistcoat, which had been ripped open during the search. "I ought to get some compensation for this. It's what they call unlawful arrest in the police-courts!"

"You seem to know a good deal about the police-courts!" said Bob Cherry, with a grin.

Billy Bunter blinked wrathfully at the Famous Five.

"Unless you choose to give me some compensation," he said, "I shall go to Quelch and tell him that I've been wrongly accused of rifling Wharton's desk!"

"My hat!"

The Famous Five were rather startled.

Billy Bunter was a sneak and a worm, and several other things besides; but he was in the right on this occasion. If he liked to be nasty, he could make things very unpleasant for Harry Wharton & Co.

The captain of the Remove produced a shilling, and tossed it to the fat junior. Billy Bunter caught the coin with his nose.

A further shilling, thrown by Hurree Singh, he fielded with his chin.

"Yaroooooh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Billy Bunter gathered up the two shillings, and waited expectantly for more, on the lines of Oliver Twist. But no more came.

"Mean beasts!" he snorted. "Is this all the compensation I'm going to get?"

"You can have a couple of thick ears thrown in, if you like!" said Bob Cherry, in a burst of generosity.

Billy Bunter did not wait for the thick ears. He pocketed the money, and rolled out of the study.

When he had gone the Famous Five looked at each other with grim faces.

"We're no forerider," said Johnny Bull.

"Not a scrap!" said Nugent.

"Somebody's been following in the footsteps of Raffles," said Bob Cherry; "but it isn't Bunter—for a wonder!"

"The money must have been taken," said Harry Wharton, on reflection, "during morning lessons."

"How do you make that out?" asked Nugent.

"I put the envelope in my desk just as the bell rang for lessons," said Wharton. "I was pressed for time, and couldn't stop to lock the desk. Just after lessons, as you remember, I came to my desk to get a football-lace. I noticed that some of the things had been shifted about, but I didn't worry. I naturally concluded that one of you fellows had been here."

"But—but who could possibly have taken it during lessons?" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "There are the maids; but, then, all the sweeping up was done early this morning."

Hurree Singh gave a sudden start.

"I would conductively draw your attention to the fact that there was one fellow absent—fully not present during the whole of morning lessons," he said.

"My hat!" said Nugent. "What's Inky driving at?"

"Carr, if you remember, was permissively allowed to take a stroll in the esteemed fresh air."

"So he was!" said Wharton. "But then, Carr wouldn't come here."

"I hate the fellow!" said Johnny Bull, in his blunt way. "He's caused no end of trouble since he's been at Greyfriars. He's several sorts of a cad, to my mind, but he's not a thief."

"He may have taken the notes for a joke," suggested Bob Cherry hopefully.

"That sort of joke," said Johnny Bull grimly, "lands a fellow in prison!"

"Of course," said Wharton, "there's not a scrap of evidence against Carr, barring the fact that he was absent from the Form-room part of the morning. All the same, it wouldn't be a bad idea if we kept him under observation a bit."

"To my mind," said Frank Nugent, "there are a thousand-and-one reasons why Carr should have helped himself to the notes."

"Leave out the thousand, and name one," said Bob Cherry.

"Well, he's been gambling with Ponsonby, and getting head over ears in debt. I understand. For the last few days he's been mooning about as if he found that life wasn't worth living. In a moment of desperation, you know, he might have been driven to theft. That sort of thing's happened before. After all, theft is only the next step to gambling."

Frank Nugent's remarks made a profound impression.

The slender suspicion which had existed against Dennis Carr of the Remove ripened into something far more tangible.

What was more natural than to suppose that the wretched junior, saddled with a debt which he could not pay, had resorted to theft as being the only way out?

"Now I come to think of it," said Johnny Bull, "Carr was standing near the letter-rack when the twenty quid arrived for Wharton. He saw Mauly cash the cheque. That might have set him thinking. Under the pretence of being ill, he got himself excused from lessons, and that gave him the opportunity he wanted. He came along here, and helped himself from Wharton's desk. If that line of reasoning happens to be wrong, then I'm prepared to apologise to Carr on my bended knees!"

There was a long silence in Study No. 1.

It was only too obvious that the money had not been taken for a joke. It had been wilfully and deliberately stolen—and the evidence against Dennis Carr was steadily mounting up.

"Shall we tax him with it?" asked Nugent, at last.

Wharton shook his head.

"We'll watch him," he said. "In that way we shall soon get to know whether we're on the right track or not. If he's guilty, he'll give the show away sooner or later."

Having come to this decision, the juniors

set about preparing the feed. There was still ample money left for this purpose.

The guests were duly invited but, somehow, the affair was not a marked success.

It was not the loss of the money that worried the Famous Five, though that was serious enough. It was the fact that there was a thief on the premises—a snake in the grass—a fellow who had no scruples in tampering with another person's money.

Harry Wharton & Co. kept up a forced conversation; but no one was sorry when the proceedings came to an end.

In less than half an hour the news of the theft had spread through the Remove.

Billy Bunter had been eavesdropping at the keyhole of Study No. 1, and the fat junior lost no time in acquainting the other fellows with what had happened.

There was a flutter of excitement in the Remove; and everyone waited expectantly for the thief, whoever he was, to be brought to book.

THE SECOND CHAPTER. Black Suspicion!

"THIEF!" The word, printed in capitals on a piece of cardboard, stared Dennis Carr in the face as he entered his study that evening.

Lord Mauleverer and Sir Jimmy Vivian were "at home," doing their prep. They did not look up as their study-mate entered.

For a moment Dennis Carr stood and glared at the offending placard, which stood on the mantelpiece.

It was not intended for Mauly; that was obvious. And it was equally obvious that it was not intended for Sir Jimmy Vivian.

It was meant for Dennis Carr!

The junior's pale face grew paler, and he clenched and unclenched his hands.

Lord Mauleverer and Sir Jimmy went on working.

"Does either of you fellows know who is responsible for that?" exclaimed Dennis, pointing to the placard.

Sir Jimmy shrugged his shoulders. Lord Mauleverer shook his head.

"It refers to me, I take it?" said Dennis.

Lord Mauleverer looked at his study-mate coldly.

"If the cap fits, wear it!" he said.

"What do you mean?"

"What I say!"

Dennis Carr advanced a pace into the study, and he seemed to be on the point of hurling himself at Mauly.

But he refrained. After all, the word on the placard could be applied with truth to himself.

He was a thief—not fit to live and move in the society of Mauly and Sir Jimmy.

Hopelessly in debt with Ponsonby, of High-cliffe, he had found a way out, by stealing ten pounds from Harry Wharton's desk.

Dennis had squared his debt with Ponsonby—but at what a cost!

He had sacrificed his honour. He could no longer look the world in the face. The burden of guilt was heavy upon him.

The sight of the placard not only annoyed, but frightened him.

Had he been found out already?

It certainly looked like it.

Yet how could anyone know that he was the thief? He had stolen the money at a time when the coast was clear—when his schoolfellows were in the Form-room. Not a soul had seen him enter Study No. 1; not a soul had seen him leave it.

And yet, within an hour or so of the discovery of the missing currency notes he was branded as the thief!

Dennis was very frightened, but his annoyance was greater than his fright.

Striding towards the mantelpiece, he snatched the placard down, tore it into fragments, and threw them on the fire.

Then he sat down, and attempted to tackle his prep.

But it was impossible to concentrate upon work.

The wretched boy's brain was in a turmoil. As he sat at the table, propping his head between his hands, he seemed to hear accusing voices buzzing around him.

"Thief! Thief! You're a thief!"

The words rang in his ears like a hideous chorus.

Prep was impossible.

Dennis pushed his books to one side, and glanced round the study.

How he envied Lord Mauleverer and Sir Jimmy, sitting there placidly working, with

nothing on their minds—nothing to worry them and to consume them with remorse!

In common with Harry Wharton & Co., they evidently suspected Dennis. The latter did not need to have any detective ability to see that. They made no attempt to enter into conversation with him; and, had they not suspected him, they would certainly never have allowed anyone to place that offending placard on the mantelpiece.

Dennis Carr continued to sit at the table, staring before him with unseeing eyes.

His thoughts were far from pleasant ones. In his mind's eye he saw himself openly accused at a public assembly in Big Hall.

He saw the Head's stern, set face as he pronounced sentence of expulsion. He saw himself cast out of Greyfriars—scorned and shunned by all.

Looking still farther ahead, he saw a grim-looking parent waiting for him in London.

Probably he would be horsewhipped and set to work in his father's office. And this was the most appalling prospect of all, for Mr. Carr was a hard taskmaster. He was not one of those men—all too common in these times—who favoured a six-hour day, regardless of the consequences to the country. He was an energetic, hard-working man; and he expected others to follow in his footsteps. Working in his father's office, Dennis reflected, would be equivalent to a term of penal servitude.

The voice of Wingate of the Sixth roused him from these dismal reflections.

"Bed-time, your kids!"

"That's a blessing, anyway!" remarked Lord Mauleverer; but he was not speaking to Dennis.

The juniors joined the procession which was trooping up to the Remove dormitory.

There was only one topic of conversation that evening—the stolen notes.

Some of the remarks which Dennis Carr heard whilst he was undressing made his ears burn.

"I say, you fellows," said Billy Bunter. "I don't claim to be a Sexton Blake, or anything like that, but I guess I know who bagged those notes!"

"You mean to say it wasn't you?" exclaimed Squiff, in surprise.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, really, Field—"

"Fancy Bunter letting somebody else steal a march on him!" said Bolsover major. "Did you ask the merry thief to go halves with you, Billy?"

And there was a fresh outburst of laughter.

"This is a serious matter," said Billy Bunter. "Jolly serious—especially for the thief! Of course, I should hesitate to accuse a fellow unfairly, but when you come to take everything into consideration, you've got to admit that things look very black against a certain fellow. I won't mention any names, but if Carr isn't the thief I'll eat my hat!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Dennis Carr, a slim-looking figure in his pyjamas, stepped forward.

"What's that?" he said sharply.

Billy Bunter stood on his dignity, and on his Eton jacket at the same time, and blinked at Dennis.

"Go away!" he said. "I don't want any associations with a common thief!"

"You fat worm! Do you realise what you're saying?"

"It's true!" said Bunter, emboldened by the knowledge that the majority of the Removites shared his opinion. "You can deny it till you're black in the face, but we won't believe you!"

"Speak for yourself, 'Bunter,'" said Mark Linley quietly. "I, for one, refuse to believe Carr guilty!"

There was a buzz of indignation at Linley's remark.

"Shame!"

"Dry up, Linley!"

"It's a bit too thick when it comes to backing up a thief!" said Skinner.

Dennis Carr spun round upon the cad of the Remove.

"Do you insinuate that I stole Wharton's money?" he demanded hotly.

Skinner chuckled.

"I've insinuated as much already," he said. "Didn't you see the neat little placard I stuck up in your study?"

"So it was you! You cad!"

"Names don't hurt me!" said Skinner.

"No; but perhaps this will!"

So saying, Dennis Carr fairly hurled himself upon Harold Skinner.

The attack was so sudden and so totally unexpected that Skinner went down like shaft before the reaper.

THE PENNY POPULAR.—No. 37.

Dennis Carr, in a royal rage, waited for him to rise. Harry Wharton & Co. did not interfere.

Skinner rose quickly enough, with an unusual turn of courage. He had seen Bolsover major thrash Dennis Carr, and he made the fatal mistake of supposing that he could do likewise.

There was a shock in store for Skinner, however.

Dennis sailed in, hitting out right and left.

Skinner stood up to him this time, but he received heavy and relentless punishment.

"Biff! Thud! Biff! Thud!"

The dormitory was in an uproar.

Half the fellows were out of bed, and the other half sat up in their beds and urged Skinner to put his "beef" into it.

That was all very well; but not many fellows could have stood up to Dennis Carr at that moment with any measure of success. Dennis was fighting like an untamed animal.

Skinner was soon very much the worse for wear. His nose was bleeding profusely, his right eye had put up the shutters, and his jaw felt as if it had come into collision with an earthquake.

Harry Wharton was just debating whether he ought to stop the unequal contest, when there was a sudden stampede of juniors to their beds, and a stern voice exclaimed:

"Boys! What does this disturbance mean?"

"Quelch!" gasped Billy Bunter, in awestruck tones.

"Your assumption is correct, Bunter!" said the Form-master, with asperity. "It is Quelch, as you choose to call me!"

At any other time the juniors might have laughed. But they did not laugh now. Mr. Quelch's expression was almost terrible in its wrath.

"Carr! Skinner!" he rapped out. "Cease this display of hoodlunism at once!"

Skinner ceased willingly enough. He had had enough fighting to last him for a whole term.

But Dennis Carr, seemingly oblivious to the Form-master's presence, fought on. He pursued Skinner past several beds, hitting out lustily as he went.

Finally, the cad of the Remove collapsed in a sprawling heap at the feet of Mr. Quelch.

"Carr!" thundered Mr. Quelch. "How dare you disobey my commands! Are you demented, boy?"

Dennis Carr pulled up, panting and breathless.

His face was flushed, his eyes were gleaming. He was almost beyond control.

"Any fellow who dares to call me a thief," he said, "will have to answer for it!"

Mr. Quelch's wrath became mingled with astonishment.

"What do you mean, Carr? Am I to understand that Skinner called you a thief?"

"Yes, sir!" said Skinner, picking himself up and caressing his bruised jaw. "He stole ten pounds from Wharton's desk!"

"It's a lie!" said Dennis hoarsely.

Mr. Quelch looked searchingly at Skinner.

"That is a very serious statement to make, Skinner!" he said. "I trust you are able to substantiate it!"

"It's like this, sir," said Skinner. "The money must have been stolen during morning lessons. Wharton's proved that much. And the only fellow who left the Form-room during the morning was Carr."

"That does not necessarily mean that Carr stole the money!" said Mr. Quelch. "It would be grossly unjust to convict any boy on such slender evidence. In fact, it is not evidence at all. It is merely a supposition."

"I haven't finished yet, sir," said Skinner.

"Carr was in debt, and he was desperately hard up for the money. He's been gambling, and he had to raise the cash somehow, or run the risk of being expelled. He shammed illness in the Form-room this morning, and you told him to take a walk in the fresh air. The only sort of walk he took was to Study No. 1."

There was conviction in Skinner's tone—conviction, coupled with a hatred of the fellow who had just thrashed him.

Mr. Quelch was certainly impressed. He turned to Dennis Carr.

"Is it true that you have been gambling, Carr?"

"I decline to answer," muttered Dennis.

Mr. Quelch frowned.

"You cannot decline to answer any question put to you by your Form-master," he said. "Is it correct that you gambled, and got into debt?"

"I decline to answer," repeated Dennis firmly.

There was a murmur from the Removites.

They were amazed at the extent of Dennis Carr's audacity.

"Your refusal to answer my question, Carr," said Mr. Quelch, "leads me to believe that Skinner's statements are correct. If the charges were false, you would speedily refute them."

Dennis was silent.

"The matter will not rest here," said the Form-master. "I shall place the facts before Dr. Locke, and leave him to take such action as he thinks fit. I presume it is correct that you have been robbed of ten pounds, Wharton?"

"Quite correct, sir," said the captain of the Remove.

"And the money was stolen during morning lessons?"

"Yes, sir."

"Carr took it, right enough, sir," said Billy Bunter. "He's going to be a professional burglar when he grows up!"

"I am not asking for your opinion on the matter, Bunter!" said Mr. Quelch, drily. "You will take a hundred lines for insolence!"

"Oh, crumbs!"

"Go to your beds at once, Carr and Skinner!"

Skinner obeyed promptly—Dennis Carr with reluctance.

"If there is any further disturbance in this dormitory," said Mr. Quelch, "the entire Form will be punished!"

And with that the Form-master withdrew.

When his retreating footsteps had died away on the stairs, there was an excited buzz of conversation in the dormitory.

"The Head's going to take the matter up," said Bob Cherry. "Now look out for squalls and cataracts!"

"There's certainly going to be trouble for somebody!" said Bolsover major.

By "somebody," he meant Dennis Carr, of course.

Dennis lay wide-awake, but he neither listened to, nor took part in, the conversation.

He was absorbed with his own melancholy reflections. After his bout of fistfights with Skinner, the reaction had set in, leaving him more dejected than ever.

At the time of stealing Wharton's money he had not anticipated falling under the ban of suspicion. Yet he had done so—with a vengeance!

Practically every fellow in the Remove believed him guilty. He did not need to listen to their conversation to deduce that much.

And now the Head was going to be informed, and Dennis would be subjected to a severe cross-examination.

Would he survive the ordeal?

Dennis doubted it. He was a clever fellow in many ways, but not clever enough to convince the Head of his innocence.

The shadow of expulsion was already hanging over his head. The same fear which had haunted him during prep haunted him now. He could not shake it off. And it was useless to attempt to compose himself to slumber. Sleep and a guilty conscience did not go hand-in-hand.

For hour after hour Dennis Carr lay tossing on his bed.

He had spent terrible nights before, but none so terrible as this.

Strange, fantastic shadows seemed to loom before his eyes. The trumpeting snore of Billy Bunter added no pleasure to the general effect.

Finally, just as the first grey gleams of dawn came in at the high windows, Dennis dropped into a doze.

The rude clanging of the rising-bell awakened him to another day of harrowing torture and suspense.

If the crash was to come, Dennis wanted it to come quickly. He wanted to know the worst. Anything was better than this intolerable suspense.

Throughout the morning none of his schoolfellows spoke to him. Mark Linley made an effort to do so, but Dennis could not bear to meet Mark's honest gaze, and he escaped.

When morning lessons were over the Famous Five cycled to Highcliff. They wanted to ask Pensonby a question.

The cad of the Highcliff Fourth was run to earth in his study. He jumped up in alarm as the Famous Five entered. The advent of Harry Wharton & Co. to Highcliff usually meant war.

"Don't be alarmed!" said Wharton contemptuously. "We're not going to scrag you, much as you deserve it!"



Dennis Carr, fighting like an untamed tiger, and oblivious of the approach of Mr. Quelch, pursued Skinner past several beds, hitting out lustily as he went. Finally, the cad of the Remove collapsed in a sprawling heap at the feet of Mr. Quelch. (See page 4.)

"What do you want here?" asked Ponsonby, still very uneasy.

"We understand that Carr, of our Form, was in your debt," said Wharton. "Is that so?"

"Yes."

"To what extent?"

"Look here," blustered Ponsonby, "I don't see why I should be cross-examined like this, begad!"

"You'll answer our questions," said Bob Cherry, "or we'll strew the quadrangle with little bits of Ponsonby!"

"Yes, rather!"

"Carr owed you ten pounds, didn't he?" said Wharton.

Ponsonby nodded.

"He didn't owe it all to me," he said.

"Some of it was Gaddy's."

"And has Carr settled up?"

"Yes."

"When did he do so?"

"Yesterday, at six o'clock. You seem to be thirstin' for quite a lot of information," said Ponsonby.

The Famous Five exchanged grim glances. The theft of Wharton's money had taken place on the morning of the previous day; and in the evening Dennis Carr had handed ten pounds to Ponsonby.

The chain of suspicion was strengthened into one of certainty.

"If you can identify the numbers of the notes, Harry," said Johnny Bull, "there will be no further room for doubt."

"Fool that I was, I didn't take the numbers!" said Wharton.

"That's a pity!"

"We can do nothing more here," said Nugent. "Let's get back to Greyfriars. If I stay in this study another two ticks I shall be tempted to take a flying kick at Pon!"

"Same here!" said Bob Cherry.

The Famous Five took their departure, much to Ponsonby's relief.

They were satisfied now that Dennis Carr was the thief; and not one of them would have been sorry to see him cast out from the school in disgrace.

"What a worm the fellow is!" said Bob Cherry. "Why, Bunter's a paragon of virtue compared with him! He deserves to be slung out of Greyfriars on his neck!"

"Don't worry!" said Wharton. "He will be!"

THE THIRD CHAPTER. In the Depths.

DENNIS CARR was pacing to and fro in the Close when the Famous Five came in, pushing their bicycles.

Harry Wharton halted beside the wretched junior.

"We've been making inquiries about you, Carr," he said, "and there isn't a shadow of doubt in our minds that you stole that money."

Dennis caught his breath.

"I—I—Where have you been?" he muttered.

"We've been to see Ponsonby. He says you squared up a debt with him last night. And the amount of the debt was ten pounds!"

"And you think I settled up with your ten pounds?"

"What else is a fellow to think?"

"It's not true!" said Dennis wildly. "This is a plot—a beastly conspiracy—to ruin me!"

"That sort of talk won't save you," said Wharton coldly. "If the money wasn't stolen from my desk, where did you get it?"

"From my pater!"

"I don't believe you. You had already run through your allowance of pocket-

money, and your pater wouldn't have advanced such a sum as ten pounds."

"Oh, come along, Harry!" called Bob Cherry impatiently. "Don't stop talking to that outsider! We'll settle his hash later!"

Wharton passed on, leaving Dennis Carr alone with his thoughts, which were blacker than midnight.

Hope was dead in the breast of the unhappy junior. At every step he encountered accusing glances. The shadow of impending expulsion loomed nearer. At any moment Dennis expected to receive a summons from the Head.

"Oh, what a fool I've been!" he muttered over and over again.

But there was no consolation in this reflection.

He had only himself to blame for this sorry crisis in his affairs.

If he had kept straight—if he had been normally decent, like other fellows—this would not have happened.

But he had chosen to plunge down-hill, and he was surprised at the rapidity of his descent.

Breaking bounds, smoking, gambling, theft!

That was his record for the last few weeks—and he could no longer doubt that the sequel would be expulsion. He had plunged recklessly through the labyrinth of folly and vice, and he must pay the penalty.

There were too many accusing eyes in the Close for Dennis Carr's comfort. He turned on his heel, and went into the building.

As he passed the notice-board in the hall, he saw Wingate of the Sixth affix an announcement to it.

"NOTICE!"

"There will be a General Assembly in Big Hall to-day at four o'clock.

(Signed) HERBERT H. LOCKE,
Headmaster."

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So it had come at last!

He—Dennis Carr—would be the central figure at that general assembly. He would be taxed with theft, he would break down under rigorous cross-examination; his name would be struck off the school register, and he would leave Greyfriars for ever.

With stumbling footsteps, Dennis passed on to his study.

Mauly and Sir Jimmy were not there.

Dennis threw himself into the armchair, his head throbbing wickedly, his hands tightly clenched.

And here Mark Linley found him half an hour later.

"Dennis, old fellow—" he began.

"Don't!" said Dennis hoarsely. "Don't talk to me like that. I can't stand it!"

Mark walked over to the armchair, and stood beside the huddled, shrinking form of his chum.

"You're taking this far too deeply to heart," said Mark, trying to speak lightly. "Why worry to this extent? You've got nothing to fear—nothing whatever. Throw your head back, and square your shoulders, and show the others that you're innocent! Why, you're shrinking away like a guilty thing!"

Dennis Carr groaned.

"I am guilty!" he said.

"What! You—you mean to say—"

"That I stole Wharton's money? Yes, I did! And I suppose you'll turn me in now, like the rest?"

"I shall do nothing of the sort," said Mark Linley. "But—but whatever possessed you to do a thing like that? You must have been mad!"

"I must have been!" muttered Dennis.

There was a long silence in the study.

Outside, a dark pall hung over the sky, and presently huge drops of rain began to spatter against the study window.

There was a storm breaking. And Dennis Carr reflected bitterly that at four o'clock, in the packed Hall, another storm would break.

"Can't you replace the money?" asked Mark Linley at length.

"Impossible! I've parted with it to Ponsonby."

"You disregarded my warning," said Mark, with reproach in his tone. "I urged you, if the temptation to steal came upon you, to trample it down."

"I know!" said Dennis brokenly. "But I—I couldn't! I was haunted by the thought of what Ponsonby would do. He was going to write to my pater, and that would have finished me altogether."

"You would at least have kept your honour!" said Mark.

"Yes; but it's too late to talk of that now. Oh, Linley, what shall I do? I can't face the scene in Hall; I can't bear the thought of expulsion! I—I'm going mad, I think." Denis pressed his hand to his throbbing temples. "I can't brazen it out. The Head's only got to put one or two leading questions, and it's all up with me! I shall be bred out of the school in disgrace—ruined for life! I've pictured it a thousand times over. The last couple of days have been a slow nightmare. I've suffered agonies!"

Dennis broke off with a sob.

Mark Linley began to pace up and down the study.

He wanted to save his chum—he longed to save him—but how was it to be done?

At the General Assembly the wretched junior would certainly be bowled out, and his school career would come to an untimely end.

"If only I had another chance!" muttered Dennis Carr. "I'd take jolly good care not to go to the dogs again. I'd play with a straight bat—I'd work my way into a decent position. But now it's too late—too late!"

And the unhappy junior flung these words from him, a couple of lines of poetry flashed into Mark Linley's mind. He realised their bitter truth.

"Of all the sad words of tongue or pen

The saddest are these—It might have been!"

Mark glanced long and intently at Dennis Carr without speaking.

He was Carr's chum.

Even though Dennis had proved himself a thief, Mark was still his chum. The Lancashire lad realised that there were a hundred-and-one excuses to be found for Dennis Carr. He had not been himself when he had stolen Wharton's money. His mind had

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been in a ferment. He had been a prey to all sorts of wild fears. And he had honestly and sincerely intended to replace the money when possible.

If only Dennis could get clear of this sorry business he would go straight. Mark felt convinced of that. Dennis Carr was an extremist. When he went wrong he went the whole hog, so to speak. If he decided to go straight, he would not swerve for one instant from the right path.

Was he to be denied another chance?

Was he to be cast out in disgrace, with no opportunity of making good?

"He must be saved somehow," thought Mark. "How can I call myself his chum, if I allow him to be kicked out without raising a finger to help him?"

Dennis Carr was utterly selfish in his trouble. He thought of himself first, last, and all the time.

The pangs his father would suffer—the crushing knowledge that his only son was a thief—did not worry Dennis at this juncture. He was thinking solely of himself, and Mark Linley knew it. But Mark could make allowances. He knew that selfishness was a common vice; he knew, also, that Dennis Carr had several good points which more than balanced this weakness.

After a few moments' thought Mark Linley stepped across to Dennis, and laid his hand on the junior's shoulder.

"I'm going to see you through," he said quietly.

"But—but you can't! How can you?"

"There is only one way," said the Lancashire lad, his face grim-set.

"And that is?"

"I must acknowledge myself to be the thief."

Dennis Carr stared. For the first time he was properly able to sound the depths of Mark Linley's friendship.

Mark was prepared to sacrifice himself—to suffer shame and disgrace—for another!

"Oh, Linley!" faltered Dennis, his voice nearly breaking. "You can't do it! I should be a beast to let you. I can't stand by and see you make a sacrifice of that sort."

"But you must!" said Mark Linley. "It's the only way out. Expulsion won't mean so much to me as it means to you. I can work—in fact, I shall be happy to work; but you—you'd be on your beam-ends."

Dennis Carr looked at Mark Linley with a new light in his eyes.

"I didn't believe that there was such a thing as genuine friendship in the world," he said. "But I see different now. You're a real brick, Linley. All the same, I can't let you take this step."

"You must!" repeated Mark.

"But I should never be able to repay you—"

"You would repay me by turning over a new leaf—by going straight and keeping straight. I insist upon shouldering the blame. The sack's a nasty ordeal, but I shall survive it. You wouldn't."

Dennis Carr wavered. Hope returned to him in full flush.

Here was his chance. His school career need not be ruined, after all.

He would be given a fresh opportunity—at Mark Linley's expense. But, then, Mark would soon survive the ordeal of expulsion. He would go back to his Lancashire home, and work for his living, as in the old days. And in hard work he would forget—or try to forget—what had gone before.

"God bless you for this, Linley!" said Dennis fervently. "You'll be saving my life!"

And then he relapsed into despondency. "The Head will never believe you were the thief!" he said.

Mark Linley smiled faintly.

"Oh, yes, he will. I shall make my confession sufficiently convincing."

"But the fellows—"

"The fellows won't have a say in the matter at all. The Head will pass judgment, and the affair will be over and done with."

"I shall be persecuted afterwards—"

"You'll soon live it down. The fellows will be a bit riled at first, especially if they think the innocent is suffering for the guilty. But they'll soon forget all about me. These things blow over surprisingly quickly."

"You've quite made up your mind to take the blame?"

"Quite!"

"Then there's nothing more to be said," muttered Dennis, "except this—that you're the whitest fellow who ever lived!"

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

The Sacrifice!

BIG Hall was packed. All the Greyfriars fellows, from the Sixth Form down to the midgets in the First, were in their seats.

The masters, standing in a solemn row on the raised platform, looked down upon a sea of faces.

On the stroke of four the Head swept in with rustling gown.

Bob Cherry had warned his schoolfellows to look out for "squalls and cataclysms," and his prophecy seemed to be justified, for the Head's expression was decidedly stormy.

"I have assembled the school together," began Dr. Locke, facing his charges, "in order to investigate the matter of a theft."

Dennis Carr's heart beat quickly. He would have given anything to be elsewhere at that moment.

"It appears," the Head went on, "that Wharton, of the Remove Form, received a cheque for twenty pounds, in payment of contributions to the 'Greyfriars Herald.' Wharton cashed the cheque, and placed twenty notes for one pound each in his desk. In the course of morning lessons yesterday ten of those notes were stolen."

All eyes turned instinctively to Dennis Carr.

Dennis tried his hardest to look unconcerned, but the effort was a failure.

"A grave affair of this nature," said Dr. Locke, "requires to be investigated up to the hilt! In the interests of justice the culprit must be brought to book. I need hardly add that, when discovered, he will be expelled with ignominy from this school!"

There was the uneasy shuffling of feet.

To the average fellow a public expulsion was not a pleasant sight to witness.

"The culprit, whoever he may be, will save a good deal of trouble by making a voluntary confession at the outset," said the Head. "If he fails to do this other methods must be taken to establish his guilt. I call upon the boy who committed this theft to stand forward!"

Skinner, who was seated next to Dennis Carr, gave that junior a sudden push.

Dennis, by way of retaliation, trod on Skinner's foot, and the cad of the Remove gave a howl of anguish.

"Varoooooh!"

"Silence in the Remove!" snapped Mr. Quelch.

Skinner subsided; and the Head waited for the culprit to come forward.

He waited in vain. There was no movement from the serried ranks of fellows.

"Come!" said Dr. Locke impatiently. "The guilty party need not imagine he is safe from detection. By remaining silent he is merely prolonging the inevitable."

"Own up, Carr!" growled Bolsover major.

"Yes, own up, you cad!" came an impatient murmur from the Removites.

Dennis Carr remained seated. His face was pale and set; he was nearly breaking down under the strain. "Why didn't the Head buck up and get it over?" he reflected.

"I will give the culprit one more chance to confess!" said Dr. Locke.

Silence! A pin might have been heard to drop in Big Hall.

"Very well," said the Head at length. "I shall have to resort to other measures. Stand forward, Dennis Carr!"

There was a buzz as the fellow mentioned rose to his feet and advanced down the gangway of the Hall.

The Head fixed his gaze upon Dennis.

"As you must be aware, Carr," he said, "you are suspected of having stolen Wharton's money. The suspicion may or may not be unfounded. That remains to be seen."

Dennis lowered his eyes. He could not trust himself to meet the Head's searching gaze.

"To begin with," said Dr. Locke, "you were in debt, I believe, to the extent of ten pounds?"

"That's so, sir."

Dennis Carr's voice scarcely rose above a whisper.

"Have you discharged your debt?"

"Yes, sir."

"How did you obtain the money to do so?"

"I got it from my father, sir."

"That is a falsehood, Carr!" The Head's voice rang sternly through the Big Hall. "I have already communicated with your father by telegram, and he assures me that he has sent you no money for some time past. He states that you have played ducks and drakes with your allowance, and he suspects that you have been getting into bad company. He spoke of cutting off your allowance of pocket-

money altogether. It is impossible, therefore, that you could have obtained the ten pounds from him!"

Dennis Carr said nothing. He tried to speak, but his tongue seemed to cleave to the roof of his mouth.

Then there was a sudden stir in the ranks of the Remove as Mark Linley left his seat and advanced towards the platform.

The Head frowned. "Linley! What does this interruption mean?"

"Before this goes any farther, sir, I feel I ought to confess."

"Confess! To what?"

"To being the thief, sir."

"Bless my soul!"

There was a startled exclamation from the Head and a buzz from the assembly.

"Marky's mad!" muttered Bob Cherry.

"Mad as a March hare!" agreed Frank Nugent.

Very pale, and with determination in his bearing, Mark Linley stood in front of Dennis Carr, as if he were defending him in a fight.

Dennis's heart rushed out in gratitude to his chum at that moment.

"I do not understand you, Linley," said the Head at length. "Do you seriously mean to say that you are responsible for the theft of Wharton's money?"

Mark Linley nodded his head.

"This is extraordinary!" murmured Dr. Locke. "If Carr did not steal the money, how is it he was in a position to pay Ponsonby, of Highcliffe, the sum of ten pounds?"

"I gave it to him, sir."

"Linley!"

"I knew that Carr was in debt—I knew that he stood desperately in need of money—so I decided to help him out. Immediately after lessons yesterday morning I went to Wharton's study and took the ten pounds from his desk. I then handed the money to Carr. He did not know at the time that it had been stolen."

A murmur of amazement ran through Big Hall.

Mark Linley's explanation of the theft seemed perfectly feasible; but there were some who could not and would not believe it. Bob Cherry would cheerfully have vouched for Linley's honour with his life; and other members of the Famous Five were equally certain that the Lancashire lad was innocent.

The Head, however, was impressed.

"Are those the true facts of the case, Linley?"

"Yes, sir."

It was a lie on Mark Linley's part, of course; but it was a white lie.

"But what was Carr's motive in telling me that he had received the ten pounds from his father?" exclaimed the Head.

"He said that to shield me, sir," said Mark.

"I helped to get him out of his scrape, and now he's trying to help me."

The Head's keen eyes scrutinised the two juniors who stood before him.

So great was Dennis Carr's relief that he now stood erect, his eyes fearlessly meeting those of the Head. He no longer conducted himself like a guilty person. In fact, he gave the impression that he was innocent, and had been greatly wronged.

Mark Linley, on the other hand, looked the picture of guilt. His eyes were riveted to the floor, his shoulders stooped. He was playing a part—the part of the self-confessed thief; and he was playing it to life.

The Head was not impressed. He was convinced. And so were the masters.

Harry Wharton & Co. were convinced, too, but not that Mark Linley was the thief.

Mark's explanation was clever, and his acting was perfect. But the majority of the Removites refused to believe him guilty.

Dr. Locke consulted for a few moments with Mr. Quelch and Mr. Prout. The two masters were seen to nod their heads gravely.

Finally, the Head turned to Mark Linley.

"You have descended to the meanest and most contemptible of all offences—that of stealing!" he said. "Several excuses can be found for you. You did not steal the money for your own selfish gain. You stooped to theft in order to assist a schoolfellow out of a tight corner. As I say, several excuses can be found for you, but no amount of excuses constitute a justification. Stealing—no matter from what motive—is a most reprehensible practice; and it is impossible—quite impossible—to allow a thief to remain at Greyfriars! Mark Linley, you will pack your belongings at once, and prepare to leave this school by the next train!"

No sooner had the sentence been delivered than Bob Cherry jumped to his feet.

Bob's eyes were flashing, his voice was hotly indignant.

"Shame!" he exclaimed.

The Head made an angry gesture.

"Sit down, Cherry! Sit down at once! You forget yourself, sir!"

Bob remained on his feet. His voice, vibrating with passion, rang through the Hall.

"This is a trick! A shabby, low-down trick! I can't quite get the hang of it yet, and I can't for the life of me understand why Mark Linley should want to take up such an absurd yarn. But I know this—that Mark Linley is no thief, and you've no right to expel him!"

"Cherry!"

"It's infamous!" hooted Bob. "It's against all laws of fairness!"

And the other members of the Famous Five shouted "Hear, hear!" in no uncertain voice.

The Head's brow was thunderous.

"Cherry! Do you not realise whom it is you are addressing?"

"I only realise," retorted Bob, throwing caution to the winds, "that Linley's innocent! Either he's shielding Carr from sentimental motives of friendship, or he's been tricked into making this confession! To my mind, there isn't a shred of evidence against Linley! He didn't touch the money! Tell him, Marky—tell him you didn't!" concluded Bob in a desperate appeal to his chum.

But Mark Linley remained silent.

"Loyalty to a friend is very commendable, Cherry," said the Head, his voice softening a little. "But when that friend, on his own confession, is a thief—"

Bob Cherry's self-restraint, already at a low ebb, vanished completely.

"It's untrue!" he shouted. "It's untrue, and monstrously unjust! I don't care if you sack me for saying it! Linley's my chum, and I'm not going to hear him called a thief!"

The Head motioned to Wingate.

"Kindly remove Cherry from the hall," he said. "He is not responsible for his utterances. I will deal with him later."

Wingate strode towards the furious junior.

"Come along!" he said quietly, but with a firmness there was no mistaking.

Bob Cherry seemed on the point of offering resistance. But at that moment the reaction set in, and his excitement changed to wretchedness.

Slowly he turned, and passed out of Hall with a heavy step, and with Wingate's strong grasp on his arm.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Good-bye to Greyfriars!

YOU are expelled! Your name shall be expunged forthwith from the school register!"

Even Mark Linley, courageous as he was, shivered a little on hearing this relentless sentence.

"As for you, Carr," continued the Head, "I shall arrange to have you kept under observation. You have not shown up at all well in this matter. I should be quite in order in punishing you in like manner to Linley, for having gambled and broken bounds. As you are comparatively a new boy, however, I shall not take this step. But I want you clearly to understand that you will not be given another chance."

"Very good, sir!" said Dennis.

He inclined his head, and caught sight of Mark Linley stumbling towards the door.

A wave of remorse rushed in upon the unhappy Dennis.

What had he done?

He had allowed Mark Linley to suffer in his stead.

A sudden impulse came upon him to cry out and prevent the injustice while there was still time.

But the voice of the tempter—the same voice which had driven him to theft—addressed him now.

"Let him go! Let him go! He can stand it—you can't! He can go back to his mill and work for his living, and be contented. But you—you, if you give the show away now, will be blighted for life! Keep your mouth shut, you fool! A word from you now would spoil everything!"

So the word was never spoken; and Dennis Carr, in his supreme selfishness, allowed Mark Linley to shoulder the burden of his guilt and to go to his fate.

"The school will now dismiss," said the Head.

And, rank by rank, file by file, the fellows trooped out of Big Hall.

Bob Cherry was then sent for by the Head, and severely reprimanded. The Head let it go at that. He saw that Bob's grief was great, and he was not a little touched by the

junior's persistent devotion to Mark Linley.

Meanwhile, with heavy, dragging steps, Mark Linley had proceeded to his study to gather together his few belongings.

He had kept his promise to Dennis Carr. He had sacrificed all his hopes, sunk all his ambitions, in order that another might be saved from disgrace.

Would the game prove to be worth the candle, Mark reflected, or would Dennis Carr, as soon as his benefactor was gone and forgotten, resume a life of dissipation and waywardness?

There was a tap on the door of the study, and Dennis himself came in.

"Linley!" His voice shook a little. "You're the best pal a fellow ever had! How can I hope to repay you for what you've done for me to-day?"

"By keeping to your promise, and playing the game," said Mark quietly. "I don't suppose I shall find my new life all honey, but it will buck me up to know that you, at Greyfriars, are doing your level best to live down the past!"

"You can rely on me," said Dennis. "I'm not likely to play fast and loose after this! I'm going to put my back into it, and win a decent position in the Form. But—but I wish it wasn't at your expense!"

Mark Linley completed his packing, and stood up.

"Good-bye, Carr, and good-luck!"

Dennis put out his hand, and hurriedly drew it back again.

"I'm a worm!" he muttered. "A rank outsider! I'm not fit to shake hands with a fellow of your stamp!"

"Rot!"

And Mark Linley grasped Dennis by the hand.

"Good-bye!"

"Heaven bless you for this, Linley!"

Dennis Carr could say no more.

A mist swam before his eyes as he watched Mark Linley gather up his case, take a last longing look round the study, and stumble out into the passage.

When Mark had gone, Dennis threw himself into the armchair. Seldom had anyone seen the passionate, wayward boy give way to grief; but the tears were streaming down his face at that moment, and his frame was shaken with sobs.

Mark Linley passed on into the Close.

He could not bear the thought of parting from his chums. He would have preferred to write to them from the humble Lancashire home.

But when he reached the school gates, Bob Cherry came running up.

"Marky! Marky, old man!"

Mark halted.

"I—I can't believe that you're going!" said Bob Cherry huskily. "The world seems to be upside-down, somehow! I can't understand it all. But I know this—that you're innocent, and, what's more, you'll come back! You've got loyal pals to fight against this injustice—and we will fight against it, whatever happens!"

Mark Linley's lips trembled.

"Thanks, Bob, old chap—thanks! You always have stood by me, and it's like you to be loyal to the last. I'll write you as soon as I get home. I—I can't say anything more now, except good-bye!"

And then, in hurried, broken sentences, Bob Cherry bade farewell to the fellow whose friendship counted for more than tongue could utter or words express.

Bob Cherry and Mark Linley had been closer to each other—had meant more to each other—than any couple at Greyfriars.

And now the dark shadow of parting hung over them both.

Fate had severed them; but nothing could sever their friendship—a bond, which would endure till death, and perhaps beyond.

Almost blinded with tears, Bob Cherry watched Mark Linley as he passed through the old gateway.

Gosling, the porter, who had come out of his lodge to see what was happening, promptly withdrew again. Even the crusty old porter was touched by the scene which had confronted him, and he saw that any interference on his part would amount almost to sacrilege.

The footsteps of Mark Linley died away on the road.

He was gone—cast out from the school for the sake of another!

And there were several aching hearts in the Remove that evening, and many eyes were misty, as a result of Mark Linley's Sacrifice!

THE END.

(Another fine story of Harry Wharton & Co. next week, entitled "The Shadow of Expulsion.")

THE PENNY POPULAR.—No. 37.



JIMMY SILVER'S PARROT!

A New Long Complete Story
of JIMMY SILVER & Co., the
Chums of Rookwood.

BY OWEN CONQUEST.



THE FIRST CHAPTER. Buying the Parrot!

JIMMY! Jimmy Silver, captain of the Classical Fourth at Rookwood, stopped as he was leaving the class-room after Mr. Bootles, the Form-master, had dismissed the Fourth for the day.

It was Newcome who called, and with him were Raby and Lovell, the three juniors who shared Jimmy Silver's study in the Classical House.

"Hallo, my pippin!" said Jimmy Silver cheerily.

Newcome, Raby, and Lovell came up. "Lovell's got a nice fat remittance from his guv'nor," said Newcome. "He suggests we go out this afternoon and blow it. What say you?"

"I says 'What-ho!'" chuckled Jimmy Silver. "There's no footer this afternoon, so we are free to do what we like!"

Lovell nodded cheerfully. "Then we'll hop into Latcham this afternoon," he said. "And have a jolly good feed before going into the pictures. How will that do, you chaps?"

"Top-hole!" said the Co. "And immediately after dinner the four chums left Rookwood, and stepped out for Latcham.

Latcham was the nearest town to Rookwood, Coomb being only a small village that lay half a mile from the school. Coomb, nevertheless, kept a good tuckshop, and the juniors were glad enough to go down to the village for a short time in the evenings, when they were unable to go so far out as Latcham.

It was a beautiful afternoon, just cool enough to make a sharp walk pleasant, and the Fiscal Four stepped out at a good rate.

Latcham was reached, and Jimmy Silver & Co. made straight for a restaurant they had visited before, and which they knew could turn out a good feed.

"Your guv'nor's a good chap," said Jimmy Silver heartily, as a plate of chicken was placed before him.

Lovell chuckled.

"I think I'll write him a long letter, telling him the joys that fat remittances bring to four fine young chaps like us," he said.

"Perhaps that'll work another fiver down!" "Praps it won't!" growled Newcome. "These blessed profiteers make paters think more and more before sending dutiful sons fivers!"

The juniors tucked into the feed with a heartiness that was remarkable considering the fact that they had only a couple of hours before sat down to their dinner.

At last they were satisfied, and, leaving Lovell to pay the bill, Jimmy Silver & Co. left the restaurant. Lovell joined them a few minutes later, a contented smile on his lips.

"Jolly fine!" he said, with a grin. "I wish the pater would send a little bit of crisp paper every half!"

"So do we!" said the Co. heartily.

It was too early for the juniors to go to the pictures, so they strolled round the town looking in the shop-windows. Footballs and cameras attracted their attention more than any other articles displayed for sale—until they turned into a little arcade.

Here they were greeted with the shrill shrieks of many birds. The screeching of the parrots that were in cages hanging outside a small shop was positively deafening.

"My hat!" said Jimmy Silver, holding his fingers to his ears. "Did you ever hear such a row?"

"Never!"

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"I say, you chaps, let's turn back!" Jimmy Silver shook his head. "No, I'm jolly fond of parrots!" he said. "Let's go and see if any of the beggars can speak!"

The juniors would rather have turned into a quieter neighbourhood, but Jimmy Silver, with his fingers still held to his ears, walked quickly to the nearest cage.

A fine-looking parrot stared solemnly down at him.

"Jimmy, Jimmy, Jimmy!" it screeched. Jimmy Silver nearly fell to the ground in astonishment.

"M-m-my hat!" he gasped. "D-d-did you hear that, you chaps?"

Raby, Newcome, and Lovell nodded.

"Seems to know you!" said Raby.

"Old friend of yours, Jimmy?" asked Newcome.

"Jimmy, Jimmy, Jimmy!"

Jimmy Silver grinned.

"I wouldn't mind buying that little chap," he said. "I guess he'd do as an alarm-clock for the dormitory. I can imagine that parrot screeching my name out early every morning!"

"Yes, and I can imagine that parrot getting several boots hurled at his napper!" snorted Newcome. "Come, you chump!"

Jimmy Silver turned to the parrot again. It looked down at him even more solemnly than before.

"Jimmy, Jimmy! Don't interrupt!" screeched the bird.

Jimmy Silver chuckled.

"He's a clever little chap," he said. "I wonder how much he would cost?"

Raby looked at Newcome and Lovell, and the two juniors nodded their heads emphatically. In a moment Jimmy Silver found himself seized, and before he could prevent it, he was whirled to the end of the arcade.

"Leggo, you chumps!" he growled. "I tell you I'm going to buy that blessed parrot!"

"Your mistake!" said the Co. in unison. "You're not!"

Jimmy Silver set his teeth obstinately.

"I jolly well am!" he said firmly. "I'm not going back to Rookwood without that parrot!"

Raby, Newcome, and Lovell looked at one another in dismay. When Jimmy Silver spoke in that tone, it was useless to try and argue with him.

"Well, you are a silly ass!" said Newcome slowly, and with emphasis. "Of all the mad-headed idiots, you're the maddest!"

"Thanks!" said Jimmy Silver coolly. "Just wait a minute, you fellows, and I'll go and see how much the shop johnnie wants for it!"

Jimmy Silver found the shopkeeper wanted only twenty shillings for the bird, and, having that amount in his wallet, Jimmy Silver promptly paid it over.

"As fine a bird as you ever did see, young sir," said the shopman, as he took the cage from its hook. "Speaks almost like a human being!"

Jimmy Silver took the big cage, and walked down the arcade to where his chums were awaiting him.

"Jimmy, Jimmy! I am surprised!" screeched the parrot. "Jim—"

"So are we!" snorted Newcome. "Of all—"

"Don't interrupt!" said the parrot, his voice rising to a shriek. "Jimmy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Jimmy Silver. "There you are—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" cackled the bird. "Don't interrupt!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the juniors. It was extremely funny to hear the small voice of the bird as it broke into their conversation. Even Newcome, Raby, and Lovell

found themselves laughing, despite their objection to Jimmy Silver having bought the bird.

"Ha, ha, ha!" shrieked the parrot. "What a rotten place! Don't interrupt!" Quite a small crowd gathered round the parrot, and the juniors and the Fiscal Four thought it time to make a move.

They walked down the street hurriedly, Jimmy Silver carrying the cage by the ring at the top. For a time the bird remained silent, as it stared solemnly about him.

But it was not for long. In a few minutes he was screeching at the top of his voice, and it was a very loud screech. Children followed the juniors, calling it "Pretty Polly!" to which the parrot promptly retorted with his "Don't interrupt!"

"Here, let's hop in the pictures!" said Newcome hastily. "We shall have the whole of Latcham following us soon!"

"Better take that parrot back, Jimmy!" said Raby hurriedly.

Jimmy Silver shook his head firmly.

"No!" he said. "He's coming back to Rookwood with me!"

The rest of the Co. shrugged their shoulders, and crossed the road to where the one picture-show that Latcham boasted was built.

The doorkeeper eyed the parrot doubtfully, but did not stop the juniors as Lovell paid for the tickets, and they passed the lad who stood at the entrance to the hall.

The parrot fortunately ceased to screech as it found itself in darkness, for there was a picture being shown as the juniors entered the hall.

"Good job he's shut up!" said Newcome, with a sigh of relief. "If he starts shrieking in here, we shall get buzzed out on our necks!"

The juniors were shown to a seat by an attendant, and they sat down and almost forgot the parrot in their enjoyment of the thrilling drama of the Wild West that was being thrown on the screen.

But Jimmy Silver had not forgotten the parrot entirely. At the back of his mind he had an idea that he would soon hear the bird screeching his name out at the top of his voice, and visions of his three chums and himself being thrown out of the hall came constantly before him.

The picture finished, and the lights were switched on from the operator's box. The parrot was blinking solemnly about his strange surroundings, but beyond making a noise that sounded uncommonly like a human being muttering, took no notice of the juniors.

Before the screen there appeared the stout form of a man in evening-dress. He held a piece of music in his hands, and was evidently just going to sing a song.

The pianist played the introduction, and the singer took a deep breath that was audible throughout the hall, and commenced his song.

He had not a bad voice, and the audience listened with appreciation. But suddenly there broke out the shrill screech of Jimmy Silver's parrot.

"Jimmy! Jimmy!" it shrieked. "What a rotten place!"

Manfully the singer went on with his song, but the shrill, ear-splitting shriek of the parrot could be heard all over the hall.

"Jimmy! Jimmy! What a rotten place!" Jimmy Silver, very red in the face, stooped so that his lips were near the bars of the cage.

"Shut up, you silly fathead!" he whispered fiercely. "You'll get us chucked out!"

"Ha, ha, ha! Don't interrupt! What a

rotten place! Ha, ha, ha!" shrieked the parrot.

"Shurrup!" said Jimmy Silver furiously.

The parrot, apparently taking offence at the curt tones in which his owner spoke, snapped viciously at Jimmy Silver's face with his beak.

"Don't interrupt! Ha, ha, ha!"

The singer stopped, and patiently waited for the bird to stop its screeching. But the parrot refused to stop, and Jimmy Silver had no option but to take it outside.

He disappeared behind a curtain at the end of the hall with the cage, the parrot still shrieking at the top of its voice.

"What a rotten place! Don't interrupt!"

Lovell and Raby and Newcome exchanged glances, and, leaving their seats, hastily followed Jimmy Silver out of the hall.

They found their leader outside on the pavement, the centre of a little group of children that had gathered to bestow admiring glances upon the screeching parrot.

"You fathead!" said Raby sulphurously.

"You dummy!" snapped Newcome.

"You chump!" growled Lovell. "You've spoiled the whole blessed show!"

Jimmy Silver turned to them cheerfully.

"Hallo, you chaps!" he said calmly. "What have you come for?"

Raby choked.

"Because we look about the biggest set of asses in the blessed world!" he said fiercely. "I've a jolly good mind to kick that blessed cage to smithereens!"

"Don't you kick my parrot!" said Jimmy Silver darkly. "I'll buff you if you do!"

The crowd around them had grown, and the juniors could do nothing without making a bigger fuss than had already been caused.

"Wait until we get to Rookwood!" muttered Lovell. "We'll bump you, and your blessed parrot as well!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" shrieked the parrot.

"There you are!" said Jimmy Silver, with a chuckle of amusement. "Even the parrot laughs at you!"

"Come on, you—you—you—"

Words failed Lovell, and he turned on his heel and stepped out in the direction of Rookwood, closely followed by Raby and Newcome.

Jimmy Silver brought up the rear with the parrot in its cage, a cheerful grin on his face.

The last words Latcham ever heard that parrot say were:

"What a rotten place! Ha, ha, ha! Don't interrupt!"

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

More Trouble!

"NOW, you fathead!"

It was Raby who made that remark.

The chums of the Fourth had reached Rookwood after an uneventful walk from Latcham, and Jimmy Silver had placed the parrot on the study-table, with a sigh of relief.

The cage had seemed light enough when he first started for Rookwood, but it felt decidedly heavier when he reached the study, and was only too glad to stand it on the table.

Raby turned to his leader as he spoke, but Jimmy Silver did not look at all alarmed at the threatening tones in which Raby spoke.

"Hallo, old bean!" he said cheerfully.

"You cheerful dummy!" hooted Raby.

"You stashed up the whole giddy afternoon!" Jimmy Silver looked shocked.

"Oh, come!" he said remonstratively. "You chaps must admit it was jolly funny when the little beggar started to shriek 'What a rotten place!' as soon as the chap in evening-dress commenced to sing!"

Raby tried hard not to grin, but the remembrance of the incident in the hall was too keen. His face gradually lost its angry expression, and a grin curled at the corners of his lips.

Jimmy Silver laughed lightly as he saw the anger disappear.

"I think we've had a ripping time!" he said. "Lovell certainly ought to have a vote of thanks, but I think this parrot of mine takes the biscuit!"

"That blessed parrot is going to cause more trouble yet!" said Newcome slowly. "You mark my words!"

"Ha, ha, ha! Not so bad! Not so bad!" screeched the parrot suddenly.

The juniors chuckled.

"Hallo! Something else now!" said Jimmy Silver. "I wonder if there's any end to his vocabulary!"

"Jimmy! Jimmy! Nurse wants you!"

"M-m-m-my hat!" gasped Jimmy Silver. "I hope the silly chump soon forgets that sentence, at any rate!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the juniors. "That is funny, if you like!"

"Not so bad! Don't interrupt! Jimmy! Jimmy!"

Jimmy Silver looked at the parrot doubtfully.

Hitherto its vocabulary had been limited to a few sentences. But he was now showing that he knew far more than they had first supposed.

"I don't want to do you any harm, Poll Parrot," said Jimmy Silver warningly. "But if you go shouting about that my nurse wants me, there's going to be dead parrot laying in the study!"

"Ha, ha, ha! Not so bad! Not so bad!" screeched the parrot.

Jimmy Silver flushed, and his chums chuckled.

"It seems to me that the parrot belonged to some kiddie," said Jimmy Silver. "I suppose it was sold, but the kiddie managed to teach it a few things before it went."

"Don't interrupt! Not so bad! Not so bad!"

"Still thinking of taking it up to the dorm, Jimmy?" asked Raby innocently.

Jimmy Silver shook his head emphatically.

"No jolly fear!" he said quickly. "The beggar might start yelling that nurse wants me!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the juniors.

"Ha, ha, ha!" mimicked the parrot.

The juniors roared afresh. Even if he was likely to cause trouble the parrot was certainly amusing.

But as the night drew on the parrot became quiet, and when the juniors eventually went up to the dormitory they left the bird sleeping on its perch.

They fed it next morning with biscuits and scraps of meat and bread from the breakfast-table, and quite a crowd of juniors came to see Jimmy Silver's parrot.

The captain of the Fourth was in keen distress lest the bird should suddenly start screeching that his nurse wanted him, but beyond informing the juniors that it was not so bad the parrot remained silent.

The bell rang for morning classes, and the juniors hurried away to their studies to get their books before going to the Form-room.

Jimmy Silver & Co. snatched up their books and departed for the class-room.

No sooner had they disappeared round the corner of the corridor than Peele, the sneak of the Classical Fourth, ran to Jimmy Silver & Co.'s study. He opened the door, darted inside, and closed it behind him noiselessly.

The next moment he had opened the door of the parrot's cage, and leaving it wide open, he hastened to the class-room.

Mr. Bootles, the kindly little Form-master, was already at his desk, and he glanced remonstratively at Peele as he came in. But Peele, though he flushed slightly, made no attempt to excuse himself for being late.

Gower and Lattrey, who sat on either side of him, looked eagerly round.

"All right?" whispered Gower.

"All serene!" murmured Peele. "The door of the cage is wide open."

"Exit the parrot!" chuckled Lattrey.

"Silence!" rapped out Mr. Bootles. "We will now take a lesson in algebra!"

There was a slight groan from the juniors. Needless to say, they disliked algebra. But the little Form-master's word was law, and the juniors settled down at their lesson.

The scratching of pens had been proceeding for nearly half an hour before there came a startling interruption.

"Jimmy! Jimmy! Nurse wants you!"

It was the parrot!

Jimmy Silver's eyes nearly dropped from his head as he swung round to the window, from whence the screeching of the bird had come.

"M-m-m-my hat!" he gasped.

"Jimmy! Jimmy! Nurse wants you!" shrieked the parrot. "Not so bad! Not so bad!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors simply roared with laughter once they had got over the first surprise. Mr. Bootles simply stared. He could do nothing else.

"You bouncer!" shouted Jimmy Silver, completely forgetting that he was in class.

Mr. Bootles suddenly found his tongue.

"Silver!" he rapped out. "Is that parrot your property?"

"Yes, sir!" said Jimmy Silver, without looking round.

His eyes were watching the parrot, dreading what he might say next.

"Then please take it back to its cage!" said the Form-master.

"Ha, ha, ha!" shrieked the parrot. "Not so bad! Jimmy! Jimmy!"

"Be quiet, you ridiculous creature!" snapped Mr. Bootles. "Silver!"

"Don't interrupt! What a rotten place! Jimmy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"M-m-m-my stars!"

The juniors roared with laughter, and even Mr. Bootles was forced to laugh. The parrot, perched on the window-frame, winked solemnly round the class-room, dipping his beak into its feathers as it pruned itself.

It looked up suddenly, and his voice rose to a deafening shriek.

"Jimmy! Jimmy! Nurse wants you! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the juniors.

"Oh, Jimmy!" panted Newcome, sobbing with laughter. "Oh, my hat!"

Mr. Bootles rapped on his desk with his pointer, but he could do nothing to still the uproarious laughter of the juniors.

The door opened suddenly, and Dr. Chisholm, headmaster at Rookwood, strode into the class-room, with bowing gown and frowning brow.

"Mr. Bootles! Sir! What does this mean?" he demanded warmly.

Mr. Bootles flushed.

"Ahem! It is that ridiculous parrot, Dr. Chisholm," he said quickly. "It appears—"

"Don't interrupt! What a rotten place!" shrieked the parrot.

The Head positively jumped.

"W—who—who does it belong to, Mr. Bootles?" he stammered, striving hard to refrain from laughing.

"Silver, sir," said Mr. Bootles.

"Jimmy! Your nurse wants you!"

"Ha, ha— Ahem!" choked Dr. Chisholm.

"That is a remarkable parrot, Silver."

"Yes—yes, sir!" stammered Silver. "But I'm blessed if I know how he got out of his cage, sir!"

"Really, Silver—" began the Head.

"Don't interrupt! Not so bad! What a rotten place!"

Even the presence of the Head was not sufficient to stop the juniors from a great roar of laughter. For the Head to be told not to interrupt even by a parrot, which had no respect for the headmaster of Rookwood, struck the juniors as being funny in the extreme.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Dr. Chisholm flushed.

"Silence! Do you hear me! Silence!" he rapped out.

The juniors, struggling hard to keep down their laughter, gradually settled down into silence.

"You must take that bird back to the cage, Silver!" said the Head sternly. "And if it escapes again, I shall have to send it away from the school!"

"Y-y-yes, sir!" stammered Jimmy Silver.

He looked doubtfully towards the parrot. It was all very well for the Head to tell him to take the bird back to its cage, but it had to be caught before such a proceeding could happen.

Jimmy Silver left his place in the class, and walked cautiously towards the bird. The parrot eyed him solemnly as he approached, but showed no signs of flying away.

"Good old Poll!" said Jimmy Silver softly.

"Come to Jimmy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" screeched the parrot. "Not so bad! Nurse wants you!"

There was a suppressed gurgle from the juniors, and Jimmy Silver's face assumed the colour of a beetroot. Even the Head had to hide a smile with his hand.

"Good old Poll!" said Jimmy Silver fiercely.

"Wait until I get you, you beast!"

"What a rotten place!" shrieked the parrot.

Jimmy Silver's hand shot out, but the parrot dodged to one side, and snapped viciously at his hand.

Jimmy Silver withdrew his hand as quickly as he had shot it out!

"My hat!" he said. "How on earth am I going to capture the rotter?"

"Silver! If you would only stop making those ridiculous remarks, and confine your attentions to capturing that bird, you would perhaps more quickly get back to your lessons!" snapped Dr. Chisholm.

Jimmy Silver looked round helplessly.

"He won't come to me, sir!" he said dismally. "I only bought him yesterday!"

But Tubby Muffin, the fat junior of the Classical Fourth, came to the rescue. He dipped his hand in his pocket, and produced

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a biscuit. Tubby always had something to eat in his pockets.

"Here you are, Jimmy!" he said. "Try it with a biscuit!"

Jimmy Silver took the biscuit, and held it temptingly towards the parrot. For a moment the bird blinked doubtfully at it, then sidled slowly towards it.

A moment later, and Jimmy Silver held it firmly in his hands.

"What a rotten place!" screeched the parrot, its voice rising to a high-pitched scream. "Don't interrupt!"

"Take it to its cage, Silver!" commanded the Head.

And Jimmy Silver left the class-room to obey orders.

There were no more interruptions from the parrot that morning, and Mr. Bootles proceeded with the lessons.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

The Last of the Parrot!

"JIMMY! Jimmy!"

The name was screeched out by the parrot in Jimmy Silver's study. But the juniors were having tea in their dining-hall. They usually had tea in their own study, but Lovell wanted to save his money until the coming Saturday, to provide a big feed after the football match which was taking place in the afternoon.

"Jimmy! Jimmy!"

Jimmy Silver & Co. heard the shrill screeching as they came up the passage, and hurried to the study, grinning.

"That blessed bird will get on my nerves!" said Jimmy Silver, as he opened the door of the study. "Shut up, you silly chump!"

"Ha, ha, ha! Not so bad! What a rotten place!"

"Shurrup!" roared Jimmy Silver & Co. in unison.

The parrot subsided into silence. Perhaps it could not make out what the juniors were trying to impress upon it. It stared solemnly at them whilst they cut up some cake they had brought from the dining-hall.

The juniors found it a difficult matter to do their prep and put up with the shrill screeching of the parrot at the same time. Many were the dark threats of violence hurled at the bird, but they had no effect.

Bulkeley, the captain of the school, came round to see lights out in the studies, and to hustle the juniors up to their dormitory.

The parrot, as he had done the night before, grew tired as the night wore on, and when Jimmy Silver turned out the light he was quite quiet.

But the lights had not been out in the dormitory for an hour when Jimmy Silver woke up with a start.

"Jimmy! Jimmy! Jimmy!"

It was the shrill screeching of the parrot that had awakened him, and Jimmy Silver was all alert in a moment.

Leaning across to the next bed, in which Raby was peacefully sleeping, he seized his chum by the shoulder, and shook him.

"Wharrer marrer?" growled Raby sleepily.

"Wake up!" said Jimmy Silver tersely.

Raby sat up in his bed, rubbing his eyes.

"What's the mat—?" he began.

"Jimmy! Jimmy! Jimmy!"

Raby broke off as the screeching of the parrot reached his ears.

"My hat! There must be something wrong!" he said quickly.

Jimmy Silver jumped out of bed, roused Newcome and Lovell, and slipped back to get into his trousers. The other juniors hastily followed his example, and the four juniors hastened from the dormitory.

"Jimmy! Jimmy! Jimmy!"

"The silly chump doesn't usually make a row at nights—at least, he was quiet enough last night!" said Jimmy Silver, as they ran down the stairs in their bare feet.

"Perhaps the study is on fire!" ventured Newcome. "Blessed if I know how it could catch alight, though!"

"Jimmy! Jimmy!"

The parrot's voice rose to a shriek, and the juniors put on a spurt; and, flinging the study door open, dashed in.

"Jimmy! Jimmy! Not so bad! Don't interrupt!" screeched the parrot, by way of greeting.

There was no sign of fire, and everything appeared to be as they had left it when they had gone up to bed.

Jimmy Silver felt for the matches, and lighted the gas. There was a gasp from the four juniors.

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"The window!" said Jimmy Silver. "I'm sure I pulled it down!"

The window-sash was up, and a gentle breeze was moving the blind to and fro.

"My hat!" ejaculated Raby. "I'm jolly sure you did!"

Jimmy Silver dashed to the window and looked out into the quadrangle. At first he could see nothing, for it was very dark, but when his eyes became accustomed to the light, he saw something move.

There was a ladder against the wall, the top nearly reaching to the sill.

"Look here, you chaps!" he exclaimed, turning to his chums.

The three juniors looked out, and they could distinctly make out the form of a man walking down in the quadrangle.

Jimmy Silver set his teeth determinedly.

"Come on, you fellows!" he said grimly. "We'll go and have a talk with that johnnie down there!"

The Fistical Four made their way down the corridor almost noiselessly, in their bare feet. Overhead there sounded the pitter-patter of other bare feet, but Jimmy Silver & Co. hurried on down the stairs without stopping to see who it was that had also been awakened by the screeching of the parrot.

They crept out into the quadrangle. Jimmy Silver taking the lead, and looked cautiously about them.

"No good rushing the chap, whoever he is," whispered Jimmy Silver. "He'll only take fright and bunk, and we can't very well chase him down the road without shoes on!"

He led the way round the corner of the building, where they could see the light still burning in their own study. But the ladder had gone!

"The ladder's gone!" whispered Newcome excitedly. "The giddy burglar must have been frightened by the noise the parrot was making, and is trying some other place!"

"That's it!" assented the others.

Jimmy Silver held up his finger warningly. "Shush! Don't make a row, you chaps!" he whispered. "You'll give the game away!"

"My hat! Look over there!" murmured Raby, pointing across the quadrangle.

The juniors peered through the darkness in the direction indicated by Raby's outstretched fingers.

Coming towards the house was the figure of a small, but sturdily-built man, who appeared to be staggering under a great weight. It was not until the man had almost reached them that the juniors were able to see that it was a ladder that the man was carrying.

"Rush him!" whispered Lovell excitedly.

Jimmy Silver clapped a hand over his chum's mouth.

"No! What's the good of doing that?" he demanded. "You chump! The ladder would get in the way—we should be knocking our shins to pieces if the fellow struggles. Wait until he's put the ladder down!"

Raby, Newcome, and Lovell saw the sense in Jimmy Silver's argument, and flattened themselves against the wall as the man passed within a dozen yards of them.

He passed Jimmy Silver's study, and went on to where a dim light was showing in another window. Against the wall, directly under this window, the man placed the ladder.

"He's going up to old Bootle's study!" said Jimmy Silver. "My hat! If we go for him now, he'll fall off the ladder and break his neck!"

The man had lost no time in mounting the ladder, and all hopes of catching him were for the moment dispelled. It would be folly to rush the man whilst he was on the ladder. That would only lead to an accident, as Jimmy Silver said.

They waited breathlessly, watching every movement of the man on the ladder. He was mounting the ladder with the unsteady tread of a man who was not used to ladders, and Jimmy Silver was quick to notice it.

"He's not been up many ladders!" he said, with conviction. "Look! See how he sways about!"

"He's reached the window," whispered Newcome excitedly. "Oh, the ass!"

The man had, indeed, reached the window. But he made no attempt to climb inside; he just lifted the sash, and then started to come down the ladder.

Jimmy Silver & Co. stared in amazement.

"My hat!" said Jimmy Silver. "The man's mad! What the dickens did he want to open the window for, and then come down again!"

"Collar him when he comes down!" said Newcome impatiently. "Let's have a look at him—but mind his jemmy!"

The juniors nodded in the darkness, and as they crept along the wall towards the foot of the ladder, the man was creeping down to the quadrangle.

"Get ready!" said Jimmy Silver, under his breath.

The man had only a few more steps to manoeuvre.

"Now!" shouted Jimmy Silver.

With a bound, the four juniors sprang upon the intruder, and bore him to the quadrangle with a bump.

"Ow!" gasped Newcome. "My hat! This blessed ground's hard!"

The man made no effort to struggle against his assailants. He lay on the asphalt, never lifting a hand to defend himself. Jimmy Silver peered down into the man's face, fearing that he had been seriously injured by the fall.

The next moment he stood up, his eyes nearly starting from his head.

"Bootles!" he gasped. "Oh, my hat!"

"Bootles?" echoed the Co.

"Y-yes!"

"My hat!"

The intruder was, indeed, Mr. Bootles, Form-master of the Classical Fourth. He sat up as he heard his name spoken in accents of acute surprise, and rubbed his hands across his eyes.

"Dear me!" he murmured. "Dear me! Goodness gracious me! What has happened?"

Jimmy Silver's eyes glinted for a moment, but he did not speak. There was something very peculiar about the tone in which Mr. Bootles spoke.

"My dear boys!" ejaculated Mr. Bootles. "Please tell me what has happened. My head is most peculiar—there seems to be many lights before my eyes!"

Jimmy Silver looked at his chums questioningly. They nodded, and the four juniors picked up their form-master and carried him into the house and up to his study.

A glass of water revived Mr. Bootles, but his face was still very white when he at last turned to the juniors.

"I'm afraid I have been walking in my sleep," he said apologetically. "I was reading a story of Sherlock Holmes, and I suppose I fell asleep. There was an incident in the story concerning ladders and windows, so I must have unconsciously imitated the methods of an admirable character in fiction."

There was no doubt that Mr. Bootles was innocent of any evil intent, and the juniors unhesitatingly accepted his story as being true.

"Please do not tell your friends of this—this terrible lapse, my dear boys," went on Mr. Bootles. "It is most alarming to me. I do hope I shall never do such a thing again."

Jimmy Silver & Co. promised not to speak about the incident to the juniors, and left the Form-master in a state of considerable anxiety.

Jimmy Silver & Co. returned to their study to turn out the lights before making for the dormitory again.

"The parrot is quiet at last!" said Jimmy Silver, as he opened the door. "I reckon it was mighty clever to shout for me—Oh, my hat! He's gone!"

The juniors stared at the cage on the table. The parrot had gone, and the door of the cage told how it had escaped again.

"Some rotter must have opened the door!" said Jimmy Silver, between his teeth. "I'll smash him to little bits if I can find out who did it!"

Nobody was smashed to little bits, for the simple reason that Jimmy Silver was never able to find out who had opened the cage door. The parrot was never seen again by the juniors at Rookwood, and for many days the study seemed strange without the shrill screeching of the bird.

Perhaps Peele could have told him how the door happened to become open.

THE END.

(Another fine story of Jimmy Silver and Co. next week, entitled "The Tricksters!")



THE FIRST CHAPTER.

The Prisoners of Pepper.

"THEY can't keep us here," said Fatty Wynn. "That was what the other man told the man in the stocks," replied

Kerr. "What are you talking about, duffer?" demanded Figgins.

"The man who wasn't in the stocks told the one who was that he couldn't be put there for the offence alleged against him—that's all!"

"Well, what about it?" "Fatty says that they can't keep us here. The man in the stocks answered that they had put him there. I answer that they are keeping us here."

"I mean," explained Fatty, "that they can't keep us here very long."

"That wasn't what you said," Kerr replied. Tempers were growing short among the prisoners of Pepper.

There were five of them—Figgins, Kerr, Fatty Wynn, Julian, and Kerruish—and all five of them had run away from St. Jim's. That is to say, all five were considered as runaways by the authorities.

But they did not so consider themselves. Kerruish was the only original runaway, as he would have been the first to admit.

Julian had gone after his chum. Kerr had insisted upon going with Julian. Figgins and Fatty had followed Kerr.

Kerruish would not go back, and so they had gone on with him.

More than half St. Jim's had been chasing the five, and they had had some very narrow escapes. Quite the narrowest had been that when the motor-car in which were Mr. Railton, the School House master, and Kildare and Darrel, prefects, had broken down within a hundred yards of them.

But now they were captured—not by anyone from St. Jim's, however, and not by fair means.

Mr. Pepper, the Rylcombe miser, had trapped them into the house of his friend, Mr. Looker, at the village of Blayds Hill, some thirty or forty miles from the school, and they were being held prisoners in an upper room there.

They had spent a very uncomfortable night, for there was only one bed, and even when they lay across it, there had not really been room for the five of them.

In the morning they had heard sounds of carpentering operations. After that they had been spoken to from outside their door by Mr. Pepper. He had told them that they were free to use the bath-room next to their room, and that they would find their breakfast outside their door.

They had, naturally, made a rush for the door. But they did not catch Mr. Pepper. He had slipped through a door which had not been there the day before, and that door shut them off from the staircase and the rest of the house.

An examination of it showed that it had been re-hung, which accounted for the noises as of carpentering. Apparently, in the past, some tenant of the house, desiring seclusion, had had his bed-room and bath-room, up in a corner, shut off. Probably Mr. Looker had taken down the door, finding it in the way. Now it had been replaced.

The bath-room made things easier for the prisoners. But they were no nearer escape. The windows of that apartment were as impracticable as those of the room in which they had been shut up. It faced the street, however, whereas the other room looked to the back of the house.

It was in the bath-room that the five were gathered now.

The window there was of ground glass, and it was impossible to signal to anyone through it. Thus far, too, they had not been able to get it open.

"There isn't any question of keeping us here very long, I take it," Julian said.

"They're sure to give us up soon."

"If we let ourselves be given up!" growled Kerruish.

They were all dead against that, though they would not so much have minded now giving themselves up. Kerruish had got over his sulky obstinacy, and was willing to return to St. Jim's. But no more than the others was he willing to be handed over by Mr. Erasmus Zechariah Pepper and his fellow-conspirator, the red-nosed and thin-legged Mr. Adolphus Looker.

"We're jolly well not going to let ourselves!" Kerr said resolutely.

At this moment there came a tap at the baize door, and all five moved from the bath-room to the corner of the landing.

"Hallo, there!" said a voice, that was not Mr. Pepper's.

"That's old red-nose!" said Kerr to his comrades.

A loud he called:

"Hallo yourself!" "Look here, Pepper's gone out for a bit, to collect some of his rents, an' I want a talk with you young gents."

"Well, you're having it, aren't you?" returned Julian.

"Pepper's an obstinate, greedy man!" said Mr. Looker hotly.

"That's not news to us," replied Kerruish. "He's told you about that reward, I s'pose."

"We've heard something about it," said Kerr guardedly.

"Fifty quid. An' how much do you think that pig—for he's no better—wants for hisself?"

"Forty-nine, fifteen, I should say," Kerr answered, grinning.

"You seem to know him pretty well. Tain't quite as bad as that, but it's bad enough. Look here, I've a proposition to make to you young gents—take it or leave it!"

"Make your proposition," Kerr said.

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Complete School Tale of
TOM MERRY & Co. at
St. Jim's.

"While that old shark's out, I'll get a motor-car an' run you back to your school, an' take the fifty quid—see. Only you've got to give me your promise as you won't say a word about old Pepper being in this here affair. You trust me to keep a tight hold of the dibs when once I lay my hands on 'em!"

"We don't trust you a yard!" snapped Figgins.

"What?" "Pepper's an old scoundrel, but you're worse! And we haven't any notion of being taken back like that—thank you!"

"Look here—"

"Let me talk to him, Figgy," said Kerr. "It's not much use getting your rag out. See here, What's-your-name, you're doing an illegal thing, and you jolly well know it! You've no right to keep us here—it's against the law. And, as for the reward you talk about, it's all flummery!"

"I've seen the bills with my own eyes!"

"That proves nothing. If you've any common sense, you'll just let us go, and be thankful to get off appearing in court for—"

"Don't I just see myself doing it! Do you take Adolphus Looker for a fool?"

"For that—and for a knave, too!" snapped Figgy.

"Hear, hear!" cried the other Four.

"What do you fancy you can do?" sneered Looker.

"We'll get out some way or other, and we'll go back to St. Jim's—when it suits us," answered Kerr.

"Get out, then!" roared Looker.

And the next moment they heard him clumping downstairs.

"A pretty pair!" said Julian. "They both believe in the reward, of course. One of them won't agree to give the other a fair share, and the other is ready to swindle the one out of the whole sum!"

"Fancy being given up by them!" sniffed Fatty.

"It sha'n't happen," said Kerr. "At least, it sha'n't happen so long as they fail to see that the simplest thing for them to do is to wire or telephone to St. Jim's that they've got us shut up here. They have thought of doing that, I should think, but they're holding off till they can settle about the divvy-up at the finish."

"You're sure there isn't any reward offered, Kerr?" asked Fatty, with some anxiety.

"As sure 'as one can be of anything that there is no absolute proof of," replied Kerr. "I think it's a dirty trick of someone's. Now, the Head and Railton don't play dirty tricks!"

"Might be Ratty," said Figgins.

He meant Mr. Ratcliff, the highly unpopular master of the New House, to which he and Kerr and Fatty belonged.

Kerr shook his head.

"I'll admit it might be," he said, "but

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I don't think it is. The longer we stay away the better it suits Ratty's books, because the blacker it makes the case against us seem."

"And it's all my fault!" groaned Kerruish.

"Ass!" snorted Piggy. "We're in it together, and it's no more the fault of one than another. They can't very well sack all five of us, I should say, and so they can't sack any of us. We're not going to say, 'Oh, please, sir, Kerruish went first, and we only went after him!'—not likely!"

They had gone back to the bath-room now, and Kerr and Julian were at work upon the window. They had not yet despaired of getting the lower sash up.

Mr. Looker did not appear to be a fanatic for fresh air. It must have been quite a long time since that window had been opened. Possibly Mr. Looker did not use the bath-room for ablutions at all. He only lived in the house, which was much too big for him, because he had not been able to find a tenant for it.

Messrs. Pepper and Looker were birds of a feather. If it had not been for that fact the five might have been taken back to St. Jim's under escort before this. Only the dispute between the precious pair had saved them from that indignity.

"Got it!" said Kerr suddenly.

The catch of the window had refused to budge. But Kerr, using a broken penknife blade as a screwdriver, had loosened the screws that held it, and now the catch came away bodily in his hands.

Even then the sash, grown stiff with long disuse, was difficult to get up; and they were still shoving at it when the dulcet tones of Mr. Pepper hailed them from behind the green baize-covered door.

"Master Kerr!" called Erasmus Zechariah. "Well?" said Kerr, going out on to the landing, followed by the rest.

"Don't make too much row! Looker's only in the garden, an' he's got sharp ears. Now, I'm prepared to make a bargain with you young gentlemen."

"Hang your bargains!" snapped Figgins. "Oh, let him tell us what he proposes," said Kerr.

"It's simple enough. I'll unlock the door, and you can all skedaddle."

"Hooray!" cried Fatty Wynn. "I never thought you were such a sport, Mr. Pepper!"

"Sport!" snarled Pepper. "There's no sport about me, I warn you. I shall expect you all to give me your word to go straight to the station an' wait for me there. Moreover, you've got to promise not to lay hands on me, an' not to say anything about Looker when you get back. I'll take you back an' claim the reward. Is that clear?"

"Quite clear, thank you!" answered Kerr cheerily.

"Shall I open the door?" inquired Mr. Pepper.

"We'd be much obliged if you would," said Julian, with deceptive politeness.

"An' you'll give me your word of honour that—"

"Not likely!" snapped Figgins.

"What?"

"That's the answer! Go and think it over," said Kerruish.

"You young dogs! You—"

"I say, Pepper, where are you?"

It was the voice of Adolphus, and Erasmus Zechariah went in haste.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Joining Forces.

"WELL, there's your major, Franky, and Clive and Cardew and Durrance!"

It was Wally D'Arcy of the St. Jim's Third Form, who spoke thus.

With him, toiling up a steep rise some five miles from Blayds Hill, were Levison minor, Manners minor, Hobbs, Joe Frayne, Jameson, and Curly Gibson.

The quartet of Fourth-Formers had suddenly appeared at the top of the rise.

In a minute or two the two parties met. "Fancy meetin' you!" said Cardew.

"We thought you'd been rounded up, like the rest," Levison major said.

"Have the rest been rounded up?" asked Reggie Manners eagerly.

"They have, my son," replied Cardew.

"What! All of them—my major and all?"

"And my major?" inquired Wally.

"All of them," Cardew said. "We are the last roses of summer. It's a bit of a surprise to find that there are eleven of us, instead of only four."

"How did you hear?" Jameson asked.

"Met Tom Merry, Talbot, Lowther, and your major, young Manners," answered Clive. "Railton had captured them at Blayds Hill. And they'd found out that all the rest except us and you had already been sent back."

"An' naturally we thought you kids would have turned it up an' gone home of your own accord," Cardew added.

"Rats!" said Wally. "Catch us!"

"Tom Merry wanted to persuade us that we ought to go; but we couldn't quite see it his way," Ernest Levison said.

"Where did you chaps sleep last night?" asked Wally.

"At a very comfortable hotel, dear boy," replied Cardew.

"Where did you?" Ernest Levison inquired, with a sharp glance at his minor.

"Under a haystack," said Curly Gibson.

"We're not sissies—no, I mean syphons—that isn't right, either—"

"I rather fancy you mean sybarites, my noble kinsman," suggested Cardew.

"That's it, I dare say. We're not whatever it is, anyway."

"You look rather as if you'd slept under a haystack, Frank," Levison major said.

"It doesn't matter, does it?" returned Frank.

"What did Tom Merry want you to go back for?" Reggie Manners asked.

"Tommy was like the fox that had lost its tail, and wanted to make all the other foxes believe that tails were quite out of fashion," answered Levison major, grinning.

"I don't think it was exactly that," said Durrance. "I really think Railton had convinced him that we were all on the wrong tack."

"Well, I'm staying on that tack till I'm caught, or till we've caught those bounders," Wally said.

"What do they expect? What were we sent out for, I'd like to know?"

As Wally & Co. had not actually been sent out at all, but had taken advantage of a sarcastic speech of their Form-master's, which Wally had twisted into permission, whereas Mr. Selby had intended the contrary, this was a question which hardly needed an answer.

"Are Railton and those chaps prowling round in a motor to-day?" Hobbs asked.

"Haven't seen anything of them," replied Clive.

"You kids had better join up with us," said Levison major.

"Yes, you ought to be under someone's eye," added Durrance.

"No more than you!" snapped Wally.

"But we'll come along and take care of you, if you like," Reggie Manners said.

"Are you boss here, young Manners?" demanded Wally.

"No, I'm not. Nobody is. And if we go with them they're jolly well not going to boss us, so they needn't think it!"

That speech averted the wrath of Wally.

"We don't mind coming on those terms," he said.

"The company shall be a pure democracy, cousin Adolphus," drawled Cardew.

"I don't know what a democracy is, but I know I'm not going to be called 'cousin Adolphus' by you, Cardew, so you can chase it!"

"I will cheese it at once, Walter. May I call you 'Walter, by the way?'"

"Rats!" snorted Wally. "I say, Levison, which way are you fellows going?"

"Don't know that it matters much," Ernest Levison answered. "Clive's got a map. May as well have a squint at that, and then make up our minds."

The map was produced, and the upshot of their deliberations was that the whole party—eleven in all—rode towards Blayds Hill.

"That was where Thomas & Co. were nabbed yesterday," Cardew said. "The chances are all against Railton's tryin' the same place twice; an' as for the five we're supposed to be chasin'—well, they're likelier to be at Blayds Hill than at Bath or Birmingham or Bradford, an' that's about all there is in it."

As they rode into Blayds Hill, Joe Frayne caught sight of a copy of the reward bill which Racke and Crooke had caused to be posted.

"My 'at!" he said. And he jumped at once from his saddle.

The rest looked round, and saw him standing as if transfixed.

Then they also dismounted, and all read the bill.

Cardew's lip curled scornfully.

"If the old man or Railton has done this

thing," he said, "they're not what I took them for!"

"What did you take them for, Cardew?" asked Reggie.

"Two of the whitest men I ever met, kid! But this is dead off."

"I suppose one of them must have done it, though," said Clive doubtfully.

"Who else could?" Jameson said.

"Oh, lots of other people could," replied Cardew.

"It's rotten," said Ernest Levison slowly.

"Because, you see, everyone knows that four of those five haven't really run away at all."

"Wally," Durrance said, "when you saw those fellows, did any of you tell them that we all know now that Kerruish owned up to Ratty, and that none of us really has anything against him?"

The seven fags exchanged glances.

"Never thought of it!" admitted Wally frankly.

"We ought to have thought of it, though," said Curly Gibson. "It does make a bit of difference."

"Kerruish seemed all right—just like one of the others," Frank remarked. "I should have thought of it, I believe, if it hadn't been for that."

"I never give a thought to any difference between 'im an' the rest at all," said Joe Frayne.

"And, come to that, I never thought much about the difference between them and us," Hobbs said. "I dare say they call us run-aways at St. Jim's. It was all like a game of hare and hounds."

"Well, let's get a move on!" said Clive. "If we can find them we'll tell them that. Then perhaps they'll all be willing to side back with us, though I bet they won't be willing to own that they're caught!—It's about time we went back, really!"

They all knew that—even the reckless Cardew, even the most feather-headed of the fags.

The round-up of the day before had altered their position; and two nights away from the school without leave constituted a very grave offence.

So even Cardew forbore to gibe at Clive's speech.

And Durrance said:

"See here! Shall we agree to go back to-night, anyway?"

Levison major looked at Cardew. Cardew shook his head slightly.

"Cousin George can go back, if he likes," he said. "Sidney will go with him, no doubt. But if anyone else is stayin' out, I am; an' if anyone else isn't, I am, all the same!"

"Those bounders may have gone back by now," urged Clive.

Cardew shrugged his shoulders.

"Not quite good enough," he said. "When I know they've gone back, I'll go. But I've nothin' in the wide world against anyone's returnin' now who feels he'd rather; an' I shan't think any the worse of him for it, if my opinion matters to him, which seems unlikely."

"Frank—"

"I'm not going back till Cardew does, Ernie," said Levison minor. "You won't, either, I know that."

"And I shan't," Clive said quietly.

Nobody would, it appeared. So they moved on.

"Here's a teashop," said Durrance. "Might have something to drink and a scrap of grub to be going on with."

They were now almost exactly opposite the house of Mr. Adolphus Looker, and Wally, turning his back to the teashop, was contemplating that edifice with considerable interest.

Something in an upper window had caught his eye.

"Look there, Franky!" he whispered, pulling Levison minor round.

Frank looked.

"Red and white," he said. "Why, it's a St. Jim's cap!"

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Eleven to the Rescue!

THE efforts of the prisoners had only succeeded in raising the bath-room window-sash four or five inches.

Only two of them could get to work on it at one time, owing to its narrowness. Kerr and Fatty tried. Kerruish and Julian took a turn. Then Fatty and Figgie had a go.

Fatty strained and grunted; but it was a question whether he did half of the work. George Figgins was strong in the arms, and he put all he knew into it.

"Here she goes!" panted Fatty.

"Here she goes!" panted Fatty.

"Here she goes!" panted Fatty.

"Here she goes!" panted Fatty.

"Here she goes!" panted Fatty.

"Here she goes!" panted Fatty.

"Here she goes!" panted Fatty.

"Here she goes!" panted Fatty.

"Here she goes!" panted Fatty.

"Here she goes!" panted Fatty.

"Here she goes!" panted Fatty.

"Here she goes!" panted Fatty.

"Here she goes!" panted Fatty.

"Here she goes!" panted Fatty.

"Here she goes!" panted Fatty.

But she only went a very limited distance, and all they could do failed to effect more. They had been at it quite an hour, and were all fairly fed-up, when Kerruish cried: "Look there!"

All tried to crowd to the small aperture. Fatty and Kerr went down on their knees, and Julian and Figgins leaned over them. Kerruish, having seen, drew back.

There, in the street below, was quite a small crowd of St. Jim's fellows.

"I'm going to yell to them!" said Figgins.

"Don't!" Kerr said hastily.

"Why not, you fat-headed chump?"

"Don't yet, anyway. If we can attract their attention without that old snake in the grass, Pepper, and that land-shark, Looker, tumbling to it, we may get out of here all right."

"But we can get out, anyway, as soon as they know we are here, Kerr," Fatty said. "They'd see to that!"

"Are you sure they can? Think a minute! That's the worst of you chaps, you won't think!"

"I see what Kerr means," said Julian. "If they try to fetch us out by force those two old swizzlers may call in the police to stop them. Whether that bill is genuine or not, they think it is, and the police may think the same."

"I see!" Kerruish said. "And there's more than that to it. If the bobbies take a hand we're done to the wide! Once it's clear we're runaways, they would hang on to us, reward or no reward!"

"Well, what are we to do?" demanded Figg.

"Attract their attention without making a row about it, if we can," said Kerr. "See, young D'Arcy's looking up here!"

And Kerr collared the cap from the head of Fatty, and displayed it at the narrow slit of open window.

Down below Wally and Frank saw that cap. Next moment they saw a face they could not mistake—part of it, rather; but even a small section of good old Fatty's full moon of a countenance was enough to swear to.

"They're in that house!" said Wally, in wild excitement.

"Keep cool!" whispered Frank. "This is where we score over the rest of our crowd! You've twigged what my major and Cardew and all the others haven't; and we'll find out what it all means before we say anything about it to them."

"Good egg!" said Wally approvingly.

Nearly all of the adventurers had passed into the teashop, and Cardew was already ordering ginger-beer and pastry for the whole crowd.

But Joe Frayne looked round, saw that Wally and Frank still lingered outside, and went back to join them.

"What's up?" he asked.

"We've found them!" exclaimed Wally.

"Where?"

"Up there! That window—see?"

"I see all right. But what are the silly asses doing there?"

"That's what we've got to find out," Frank said.

He waved his hand to those above.

The section of Fatty's full-moon countenance disappeared. So did the cap. Now only two hands showed at the window—the hands of Kerr.

They moved quickly, making signs—the signs of the deaf-and-dumb alphabet.

"He says, 'Go round to the back, but be jolly careful!'" said Frank.

"I say, Franky, lucky you know that rot!"

"Tisn't rot, Wally!" replied Frank. "I've known it to be useful before to-day. Tell those chaps inside we'll be with them in a minute, or some of them will be coming to look for us."

Wally stuck his head into the shop.

"Be with you fellows in half a tick," he said.

Then the three hurried across the road, through the opening between the house of Looker and the baker's shop, and into Mr. Looker's garden, by a gate which they luckily found unfastened.

"Their bikes—see!" said Joe Frayne.

The five bikes were stood up against the wall inside.

Then a soft voice came down to them from a window on the first floor.

It was Kerr who spoke.

"Don't make a row!" he said. "Old Pepper and another boulder of his sort are somewhere close handy. They trapped us in here, and now they are keeping us prisoners."

"Like their giddy check!" said Wally.

"But we'll soon have you out! You trust to us."

"It's for the reward, I suppose?" Frank said, much more careful to keep his voice low than Wally had been.

"Yes," answered Kerr. "Do you kids know anything about that?"

"We've seen the bills. But Cardew says he can't believe that either the Head or Railton had anything to do with it."

"I don't believe so, either, Frank," Kerr said. "But those two old rotters do, and we should have been handed over before now if they hadn't got squabbling about dividing it up. Pepper wanted too much."

"Do you chaps want to go back, Kerr?" asked Joe Frayne.



"Here, what's going on here?" It was the voice of Mr. Pepper, and he accompanied his words with a sudden grab at Frank Levison's collar.
(See page 15.)

"We don't mind going, but we're not game to be taken back—not by anybody, if we can help it, kid!"

"Not even by us? We sha'n't ask for any reward, you know," said Wally, his eyes twinkling.

"Not even by you, dear boy!"

"Oh, I say, Kerr, there's something we ought to have told Kerruish when we saw you yesterday," Frank said.

Kerr drew back, and Kerruish showed himself in his place. Only one section of the casement opened readily.

The Manx junior looked down at Frank Levison's eager young face, and he remembered how Frank had tried to cheer him up when things were at their blackest, and how

Joe Frayne had stood by, full of sympathy, though wordless. Yes, and how Frank had told him of Wally's punching the heads of Reggie Manners and Jameson because they had hissed him.

Perhaps in all St. Jim's there was no one from whom he would rather have had the news he was now to get than from Levison minor, with Wally and little Frayne standing by. Kerruish could be sulky and obstinate; but at least he knew how to be grateful, and he was not likely to forget the fags' championship of his cause.

And somehow he guessed what Frank had to tell before it was told—guessed it from the flush on Frank's face and the shining of his eyes.

"I say, Kerruish, everybody knows now that you owned up to Ratty! We all knew it before we started out. Railton told Tom Merry, and said he might tell everybody. He thought it ought to be known."

"Thanks, Frank!" said Kerruish quietly. Figgins clapped him on the back. Kerr squeezed his shoulder. Fatty said: "Oh, I am jolly glad!"

Only Dick Julian said nothing, and made no sign. But for him there was no need of word or sign, for he had already known that foolish secret of his chum's.

"Now let's get to bizney," said Wally. "What's the matter with you chaps that you can't get out of that?"

Kerr explained briefly. "Well, it seems to me that our crowd has just got to get you out, and that's all about it!" Wally said.

"That's it!" replied Kerr. "How are you going to do it, though?"

"Can't tell you that all in a minute. We may have to ask the others."

"It wouldn't be a bad notion," remarked Figgins, with a touch of sarcasm. "There seems to be some sort of an idea on your side of the quad that Cardew and Levison major have brains."

"Haven't we, dummy?" "We won't argue that point, Wally," said Kerr. "Too grateful to you to talk quite candidly about it, you know."

Wally wondered whether that was a compliment.

"Where are the two old jossers?" inquired Joe Frayne.

"About the house somewhere. Watching each other, I fancy. Each of them has had a shot at getting us to go back with him alone, so that he could bag the whole reward," Kerr said.

"You'll come back with us if we get you out?" said Wally.

Kerruish was left to answer that.

"We'll come back all serene," he said. "Right-ho! We'll trot over and see the other fellows about what's to be done," answered Wally.

"Wait a moment!" Kerr said. "What's come of all the other bounders who were chasing us—Tom Merry and Blake and Kangaroo, and the rest of them?"

"The faces of the three juniors expanded into grins."

"Such a lark!" said Wally. "Old Railton and Kildare and Darrel have been chasing all over the blessed show in a motor-car after us, and they've rounded up everybody except our crowd and Levison major's lot. They got my giddy major—poor old Gus! And Reggie's major, too! I'll bet he was wild!"

"But they didn't get mine!" remarked Frank, with a touch of pride.

"We saw Tommy & Co. trapped," said Figgins, "and we knew about the car bizney. But we didn't know that they'd roped in so many. Well, there's some credit to you kids for dodging them."

The three hurried off now, not a moment too soon. Hardly had they closed the gate behind them when Mr. Pepper came out of the back door and looked about him with obvious suspicion.

"I'm sure I heard voices!" he muttered. Kerr's quick ears caught those words.

"We were talking!" he said from the window.

Mr. Pepper cocked his head up at Kerr. With his long, thin neck and lean face he bore a grotesque likeness to a vulture.

"Ah!" he ejaculated.

He scowled at Kerr, and was moving away, when the Scots junior called:

"I say, Mr. Pepper!"

"What do you say?" snarled the Rylcombe miser.

"Will you have that reward now or wait till you get it?" asked Kerr politely.

"Yah!" answered Mr. Pepper.

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Kerruish and Julian and Figgins and Fatty.

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THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

The Siege of the House of Looker.

"WALTER," said Ralph Reckness Cardew, "you are really quite the brightest child I ever met! I am proud to be related to you, however distantly."

"You're a silly ass, Cardew!" snapped Wally.

"Are we not relations?" murmured Cardew. Frank and Joe Frayne had allowed Wally to tell the story.

It had amazed the hearers, of course. Even after having seen that bill none of them had imagined such a contingency as this.

"We've got to get them out!" said Clive.

"Hearken to the wisdom of Sidney!" glibbed Cardew.

"Well, that's sense, isn't it, ass?"

"As far as it goes, dear Sidney. Unfortunately it goes but a short way. The question is—how are we going to get them out?"

"Oh, just barge in and swarm all over those two old bounders!" said Jameson.

"Not a bad notion, if it were only possible. But I doubt whether it's possible," returned Cardew.

"It might be if they don't know we're here," Ernest Levison said thoughtfully.

"But they do!" said Durrance.

"How do you know?" demanded Wally.

"They didn't find out through us, anyway. We were ever so careful."

"I've just seen them looking over a blind in one of those front rooms," Durrance replied.

"There they are again!"

All who had a view of the house opposite looked across, and saw the familiar face of Mr. Pepper, cheek by jowl with that of another person, not at all markedly his superior in point of looks.

"Which do you consider, Sidney, is really the ugliest specimen of the two?" asked Cardew.

"What's it matter?" returned Clive.

"It does not really matter, but I regard it as interesting. I incline to consider the other pretty gentleman as takin' the prize. But perhaps that's only because I'm used to the dear Erasmus."

"Oh, stop that rot, Ralph!" said Levison major.

"Let's clear out of this. We ought to have cleared directly these kids came in, before those two old handicoots spotted us. But if we go now they may think we've gone for good."

"An' they may not," murmured Cardew, signalling for the bill.

He paid up, and they went out, taking care not to look direct at the house opposite.

But out of the corners of their eyes some of them saw the greedy faces of Erasmus Zechariah Pepper and Adolphus Looker watching them over a dusty wire blind.

"We'll get outside the village and talk things over a bit," said Levison.

"If those fellows see us go they won't think we're deserting them."

So they rode forth from Blayds Hill, dismounted half a mile or so outside, and took counsel.

"There's something in Jampot's plan, I reckon," said Wally. "I don't a bit suppose that we are going to rush the old frauds so easily as he seems to fancy; but if one of us can get inside—"

"And let the others in!" put in Reggie Manners eagerly.

"Shut up while I'm talking, young Manners! But that's about the size of it. I say, Cardew, have those two old rhinoceroses—"

"Meanin', cousin Walter—"

"Pepper and the other chap, of course! Have they any right to keep our fellows prisoners?"

"No, Cousin Walter. It's against the Habeas Corpus Act, I know—an' it may be against trial by jury an' the Statute of Mortmain an' Magna Charta."

"Well, look here, they daren't call in the police if that's so, because that will be putting themselves in the wrong box. So we can do pretty much as we like—"

"If we can," put in Clive.

"Oh, we can, all serene! You bet we can! Just you leave it to Franky and me! We'll find a way in, if we have to go down a giddy chimney, and then we'll let you chaps in; and after that we'll make Pepper and the other old shyster sorry they were ever born!"

"I'm in this!" cried Reggie.

"You're jolly well not! We're not going to have it mucked up by you!" snapped Wally.

"Well, 'tisn't for you to say what we're going to do, anyway. There are older chaps than you here."

Wally glared at Reggie. That speech amounted very near to treason.

But what Ernest Levison said pacified the rising wrath of the Hon. Walter Adolphus D'Arcy.

"It's a good notion of Wally's," spoke Levison slowly. "And there's no reason why he shouldn't be in it, if we try it. But we can't let two kids like that go alone. Wally's hefty enough, but—"

"I suppose I'm not!" said Frank wistfully.

Wally and Reggie might scoff at the opinions of their majors, but what his major thought of him mattered very much to Frank.

"Yes, you are, kid," said Ernest. "And you shall come, banged if you sha'n't! But I really think two of us four ought to go, too, and, of course, I mean to be one of them."

"May I suggest—" began Cardew, with a feigned humility.

"That Clive's the other? Quite a good idea!" Levison chipped in.

"Quite, old top, but not my idea. I was about to suggest myself."

"Do you feel like getting down a chimney?" asked Levison.

"It is a very hot day, an' getting down a chimney hardly sounds a coolin' process. But I am ready for any fate."

"I'll go, you know, Ralph," said Clive.

"Or I," put in Durrance.

"No, dear boys—not I! I could not feel happy about the expedition if I were not in charge. The dear Ernest is not prudent enough, and Cousin Walter is absolutely reckless. They need cool heads like mine an' Franky's to check them."

The fags grinned. Cardew was cool enough, but that did not prevent him from being quite the most reckless fellow at St. Jim's.

"Better start at once," Levison major said. "The dodge is to get into the village without passing those windows. We can work round, I should think. Two fellows ought to stay here to look after the bikes—we can't take them. The rest should come along with us, because once we get inside, we shall need to be in pretty full force."

"Yes, that's all very well, but who's going to stay?" asked Hobbs. "I'm not willing, I tell you straight!"

"Draw lots," suggested Clive.

"You and Durrance in?" inquired Jameson.

Clive and Durrance nodded.

That went some way to satisfy the fags. They had imagined those two would stand on their seniority.

Lots were drawn with blades of grass.

The shortest two blades fell to Curly Gibson and Joe Frayne.

They were disappointed, naturally, but they took it well, which was more than Hobbs and Jameson and Manners minor would have done, while the relief of Clive and Durrance was great.

It was not a difficult matter for the nine to find their way round the village by the fields, and to come into it by the road by which they had entered before. Thus they drew up to the house of Looker without showing themselves to anyone watching from the front.

Except for the side door, the wall of the house which ran along the opening between it and the baker's premises was unbroken.

There was no window at all.

In that opening, sheltered by the baker's cart, the nine held further counsel.

They had tried the side door, of course, and also the garden gate through which the two fags had passed.

Both were locked.

It was evident that Messrs. Pepper and Looker were taking precautions.

By this time the sun had reached its highest point, and the dinner-hour had come.

The main street of Blayds Hill showed no sign of life. Savoury odours came to the nostrils of the St. Jim's fellows; but, apart from that, the place might have been dead or sleeping.

No savoury odour came from the house of Looker, but in the kitchen the master of the house and his dear friend Pepper were seated at a meal much of the sort to which the Rylcombe man was accustomed to at home—a meal of cold scraps, which looked as if they might have been retrieved from some wasteful person's rubbish receptacle.

Erasmus Zechariah thought Adolphus mean, and Adolphus had quite made up his mind that after this Erasmus Zechariah should never enter his domicile again. But the one could not well refuse to share his dinner,

and the other, though he sniffed at it disdainfully, was not in the least disposed to refuse taking his share.

There were iron spikes at the top of the gate; but that sort of thing does not keep out a boy who is determined to get in.

Wally was the first up, given a boost on Levison's shoulders. Cardew followed him, using very carefully the jacket which Wally had laid over the spikes—not so much out of anxiety for the jacket as for his own trousers. Then Frank Levison went, and, finally, Clive gave Ernest a back, and the four stood inside.

"Let me slip round and see what the old ripsnorters are after!" said Wally.

Levison major nodded, and the Third-Former vanished round the corner of the house.

He exchanged a grin with Fatty, at the upper window, and then proceeded to try the back door.

It was locked, which was what he had expected.

He stole up to the kitchen window and looked in.

Within five seconds he was back with the other three.

"Door's locked," he said, "and the old slysters are in the kitchen, grubbin' on cold potatoes. Now's our time!"

"Time for what, dear boy?" drawled Cardew.

"Why, to get on the roof and down a chimney, of course!"

Wally would have been quite disappointed had that method proved to be unnecessary.

Ernest Levison looked up at the walls.

"How are we going to get on the roof?" he asked.

"Climb!" replied Wally. "We couldn't ride our bikes up, even if we'd got 'em here, could we?"

"If there had only been a window in this wall," said Levison major, "we might perhaps have reached it from the top of the gate. Then one of us might have got on another's shoulders on the ledge. Even then, I don't think it would have been near enough the roof to be of any use."

Wally disappeared again for a moment.

"I can see a way," he said, coming back. "Those claps can't get out because the window's too small. But they can make a rope out of their bed-clothes that will help us up to the ledge—it's a good, wide one. If you climb on to the ledge, and then I get on your shoulders, I can reach the window above, I'm certain. And if I can't get in at that, I guess I can reach the gutter-pipe from it, and scramble up!"

Ernest Levison and Cardew looked at one another.

"It's quite a notion, Wally," said Levison, "but we can't have you taking all that risk, you know. Suppose you broke your neck?"

"Might as well be mine as anyone else's, fathead!" snorted Wally. "Anyway, we can't afford to waste time. I'll tell them to make the blessed rope!"

And again he disappeared.

"That kid seems to be taking command," said Levison major.

Frank grinned.

"That's Wally's way," he said.

"In this particular matter, however, Franky, Wally isn't goin' to have his way," Cardew said gravely. "Ernest, you are the right man for the window-ledge part—you're the most solid. But I'm goin' up by your shoulders."

"They're making it," said Wally, appearing again.

Figgins and the rest wasted no time. In two or three minutes a low whistle told the four that they were ready.

The improvised rope was dropped. Levison major went up it hand over hand to the ledge, while Fatty and Figgins and Julian held it.

He pulled himself up straight on the ledge, grasping with his right hand the inside of the window's framework, which gave him quite a good purchase. The left grip was not so good, but he made the most of it.

Now Cardew seized the lower end of the rope, while above Fatty grabbed Levison round the body, and Kerruish took Fatty's place. Kerr stood behind, directing operations.

"Here, I say! That's my job!" protested Wally.

"No, cousin Walter—no! Your neck is far too valuable to be thus risked!" replied Cardew.

And he began to swarm up.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER. Victory and Vengeance.

WALLY said wild things under his breath. But he had the sense to realise that this was no time for a struggle.

It was close quarters for both Levison and Cardew on the ledge, and the reckless dandy's climb to the shoulders of his chum was not without peril.

But, while Wally grumbled and Frank held his breath, Cardew went up, got to his knees, then to his feet, and gripped the ledge above.

Frank could hardly restrain a cheer, and Wally muttered:

"He's no duffer, I'll say that for him! And I'm not so sure I could have reached."

But Cardew had not got to the roof yet, though he had reached the ledge.

He looked down.

"After all, cousin Walter," he said, cool as ever, "your valuable neck will have to be risked. He must come up and get on to my shoulders, Ernest; there's no other way for it."

"My hat, it's risky!" said Levison.

"I'll hold tight to you, Levison!" Fatty said reassuringly.

"Oh, the risk isn't mine! I don't see how Cardew's going to get grip enough to hold up Wally, that's all."

"I can manage," Cardew said. "If Wally tumbles, it shan't be through me."

Where the two sashes of the closed window to which he clung met the upper one projected half an inch or so beyond the lower. Turning his hands up, and gripping with nails and finger-tips, Cardew held on. It meant temporary ruin to his carefully-kept nails; but he faced that dreadful necessity heroically.

Up went Wally, without a tremor.

"But I don't think I can reach that ledge," he said, when he stood beside Levison.

"Young ass! Why didn't you say that before you came up?"

"Can't we throw the rope up to Cardew?" Kerr suggested.

"How's he going to catch it?" snapped Levison.

"I think I can manage that by holdin' on with one hand," spoke Cardew from above.

The rope—a rather cumbrous affair of torn blankets—was passed out. Wally collared it, hung on to Levison, and tried to throw up an end of it to Cardew.

The first throw was hopelessly out of it.

"That's better!" said Cardew, with his head screwed round, as the second attempt took the rope within six inches of his outstretched hand.

And the third did it! Cardew grabbed, hauled up, and contrived to get the thing round his neck, with both ends dangling.

"Can't tie it," he said.

"I don't want it tied," answered Wally.

Frank Levison's eyes dilated as his chum seized the two ends, pulled himself up somehow, and grabbed Cardew's legs.

"Don't jerk!" said Cardew. "I'm holdin' on by my nails, y'know!"

"Right-ho!" came from Wally.

Only Frank could see what happened after that. He saw Wally swarm up Cardew's back on to his shoulders, and, poised thus precariously, gripping by one hand a rain-pipe that obviously would not bear any great strain, try the gutter-pipe under the eaves above him.

Frank's heart was in his mouth. The five in the room below wondered whether their escape was worth all this risk. Levison major's face was drawn and white. Only Cardew and Wally seemed cheery and unconcerned.

"Here! What's going on here?"

It was the voice of Mr. Pepper, and the grubby hand of that gentleman grabbed for Frank's collar as that voice sounded.

Frank dodged the enemy. Mr. Pepper pursued him over the garden. It was not until he was twenty yards away that he realised that Frank was one of a small crowd.

Then he saw Ernest Levison on one window-ledge, Cardew on another, and Wally just clambering up on to the roof!

"Hi, Looker, you fool!" he roared. "Come out! These brats—"

Then he caught his foot in a tough root of the box edging of a path, and sprawled full-length on the gravel.

His next words did not complete the sentence he had begun, and were not fit for publication.

Mr. Looker came rushing out, saw Frank, failed to see the rest, and went hard in chase. Frank was small enough even for Mr. Looker, who was not an heroic soul.

There was more guile in Frank Levison than

his face showed. He saw a chance, and he took it.

He dodged Mr. Looker, ran his hardest for the kitchen door, gained it, darted inside, and turned the key in the lock.

Mr. Pepper got up. He and his dear friend stood and glared at one another.

"Look there! There's a nice sight for you!" howled Pepper.

And he pointed to the roof.

Wally, with one arm round a chimney-pot, grinned at them derisively.

"I'll get the hose!" yelled Looker. "I'll fetch them down!"

"Ernest, dear boy," said Cardew quietly, "I should rather like to get down before the hose arrives."

"Come along, then!" answered Levison major, bracing himself afresh.

Cardew carefully let himself down from the ledge, and felt with his feet for his chum's shoulders. It was not an operation easily to be conducted with a stream of water playing upon one.

He managed it somehow. He stood on the ledge by Levison's side again. Then he let himself down, gripping the ledge with his hands, loosed his hold, and dropped to the ground.

He staggered, but did not actually fall. Levison, following, was only saved from falling by Cardew's ready arms.

"Where's Frank?" panted Levison.

Cardew looked round.

"I perceive the dear Pepper an' his worthy friend. Both appear to be annoyed," he said calmly. "Frank I do not see. But you have the consolation of knowing that he must be somewhere, Ernest."

"He's inside the house, I do believe!" cried Fatty from the window.

"In that case, things are going to happen in a minute or two," Cardew said. "Ah! The charge of the Old Guard!"

Messrs. Pepper and Looker had abandoned the hose project, and were pushing for the house.

"The old blackguards!" snorted Levison.

"I've found a giddy skylight!" shouted Wally from the roof.

Now Messrs. Pepper and Looker had reached the kitchen door, but could not get in. They beat upon it with their fists. Mr. Pepper, who had no reason to be careful with what little paint there was upon it, kicked it savagely. Both howled.

"They seem surprised," said Cardew.

"Now, their surprise is surprisin', for really it was merely rudimentary tactics on the part of Franky to lock the door as soon as he was inside."

"I call it jolly smart of the kid!" growled Levison.

"It was certainly that, old top. Hallo! What is that I hear from without?"

It was the voice of Clive, and Clive called: "Frank's got the side door open! We're going in!"

"There you are!" said Levison major triumphantly.

"Praiseworthy indeed, but a trifle rough on cousin Walter," said Cardew. "Shall we get over the gate and—"

"No, let's stop here! We're a match for those two old rascals, and it's just as well to have someone this side."

But Wally had nothing to be dissatisfied about. He had got the skylight open, and had dropped through.

Clive, Durrance, Hobbs, Manners minor, and Jameson dashed in.

"Bravo, Franky!" yelled Reggie, ready with applause for once.

"I haven't found the keys yet," said Frank. "But I thought perhaps this door might only be bolted, and that's how I found it. We'll soon have those chaps out now!"

"Why, there's Wally!" cried Hobbs, as the leader of the Third side from the banisters, down which he had come as a quick way to the regions below.

"How did you get in?" asked Jameson.

"Through the roof, Jampot. My hat! Aren't those old bounders banging at the door?"

"How did you manage to lock them out, Frank?" asked Clive.

"They chased me about the garden, and I dodged them, and got in. It was easy enough," replied Frank modestly.

"Let's have a hunt for the keys," said Clive.

It was really only one key that was wanted—the key of the green-baize door. Three or four of them made for the kitchen, but Frank and Wally ran upstairs.

And there was the key in the lock.

THE PENNY POPULAR.—No. 37.

"Don't make a noise, Franky!" said Wally, as he turned it. "This must be where they are."

Very quietly he pushed open the door. The five were in the bed-room. He could see them at the window.

"Hallo, you fellows!" he said cheerily. "Like to get out—what!"

"My hat!"

"It's Wally!"

"And Frank! Oh, good egg!"

Down below the furious thumping of Pepper and Looker continued.

Kerr took command at once.

"You locked them out, Frank?" he said.

"Yes; and opened the side door, and let the other chaps in!" Wally answered. "I needn't have got up on the roof at all. Frank did it all. There are no flies on Franky, Kerr!"

"I should say not," agreed Kerr.

"But I didn't take any risk—you took a lot, Wally," said Frank.

"We'll let the old geese in and collar them!" said Kerr. "Come along!"

They met Clive, Durrance, Jameson, Hobbs, and Reggie on their way to the kitchen, and the five turned back with them.

Kerr disposed of his forces with speed. All except Frank and Wally waited in the passage just outside the kitchen. To those two was allotted the task of letting the two angry reward-seekers in, and seeing that they did not get out when the rush was made upon them.

Frank turned the key, and opened the door suddenly.

"You can come in!" he said.

The invitation was hardly needed. Messrs. Pepper and Looker fell over one another in their hurry, and came down with a combined thwack upon the stone flooring.

"Yooop!" howled Looker.

"You clumsy fool!" snarled Pepper.

And then the avalanche descended upon them.

From outside rushed in Cardew and Levison major. From the passage came Kerr, Figgins, Fatty Wynn, Julian, Kerruish, Clive, Durrance, Manners minor, Hobbs, and Jameson.

Fatty dumped himself upon the chest of Pepper. Kerruish and Clive sat on Looker.

"Find some rope!" ordered Kerr.

"What are we goin' to do with the dear gentlemen?" asked Cardew. "I do not think we can hang them, y'know, Kerr. They deserve it, but the consequences to us—"

"Ass! We're only going to tie them up till we've made up our minds what to do."

"Oh, is that all? It sounded rather like a lynching party."

"Police!" yelled Mr. Pepper.

"You'll be gagged if you sing out again!" snapped Figgins.

"Besides, you'll get no change out of fetching in the police," said Kerr. "They can't touch us."

"You're runaways!" gasped Looker.

"Who says so?" demanded Julian.

"There's the bills," puffed Pepper.

"The fifty quid reward—what! Don't you wish you may get it, my man, eh?" gibed Cardew.

It was quite obvious to Mr. Pepper now that he was not going to get that fifty pounds, or any part of it. It was not quite so obvious what he was going to get, but he felt sure it would be nothing he could enjoy.

"You've made yourselves liable to penalties for illegal detention," said Kerr. "If anyone calls in the police it won't be you, I fancy. We shall give you in charge if you try it on, anyway. Otherwise, we shall deal with you on your own account."

Both of the prostrate schemers vented heartrending groans at that. But they made no further attempt to bring the police upon the scene.

"Let's look round and see what we can find, you fellows," said Levison major.

They found a pail of whitewash. They discovered a bucket of tar. They slit open a pillow and collected the feathers. Cardew wanted to have a feather-bed instead of a pillow, but Kerr said that would be wasteful, and Wally, after a search, announced that Mr. Looker had no feather-bed, which made it impossible.

They brought together vinegar and treacle, and spray for the trees in the garden, and quite a lot of other things of the liquid kind.

With these they made a nice mixture. Then they tied the precious pair back to back, and tarred and feathered them. Over the tar and feathers they poured the whitewash, and over the whitewash they poured the mixture.

Pepper and Looker groaned and swore and threatened, but they did not succeed in making anyone outside hear; and even had they done so no aid could have reached them, for every door was locked during the operations.

When it was all over Cardew addressed to them a few parting words.

"If I were you, Pepper, I should take up permanent residence with the dear friend to whom you are so strongly attached, for I should not be at all surprised if you found Rylcombe a bit sultry after this. Ta-ta!"

"Ta-ta!" echoed the rest, and they cleared out.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Paying the Piper.

"OH crumbs! Fancy being out of all that!" moaned Curly Gibson, when he heard what had happened. And the look on Joe Frayne's face was more eloquent than words.

But, like the rest, they were cheerful enough as they rode back.

It was a long ride, and they only halted once for lunch—rather a late lunch, but none the less welcome.

But they reached St. Jim's before time for prep.

There was a crowd at the gates, and that crowd thickened every moment as word was passed along that the runaways and the remnant of their pursuers had returned.

"My hat! You chaps will get it in the neck!" said D'Arcy major.

"Oh, chuck it, Gus! You wouldn't have come back if you hadn't been forced to."

"Enjoyed your little outing, Kerruish?" asked Tom Merry.

"Very much, thanks," replied Kerruish, gripping the hand Tom held out to him.

Most of them wanted to shake hands with Kerruish, it seemed. There was a pretty general feeling that he had been badly treated, and that something was owing to him. But the Manx Junior himself, though glad enough to find his old popularity

restored, had no feeling of resentment left against anybody.

"Sorry, Reddy!" he said, as Dick Redfern pressed forward.

"I'm sorry, too, Kerruish!" replied the New House junior, who knew quite well what he meant. "But it's over now, old chap, and we won't think any more about it!"

"Kerr, you boulder, they'd never have stuck it without you!" said Blake.

"Wathah not!" chimed in Gussy.

"That's quite right, isn't it, Kerruish?" said Julian.

"Well, don't tell Railton so, and especially don't tell Ratty!" Kerr said, grinning. "There are some kinds of credit that don't do a fellow a heap of good, you know!"

"I suppose we'd better go an' see Railton at once—hang the man!" Cardew said.

"Perhaps we'd better go first!" Kerr suggested. "After all, we're deeper in the mire than you are."

"No; let's all go together," said Levison major.

"An' then we can take to ourselves credit for bringin' these boulders back, by gad!" drawled Cardew.

But they knew he did not mean it.

The Head had not returned yet, and Mr. Railton was for the time being in his place.

He made that clear to them at once.

"Oh! So you have all come back at last?" he said, as they filed into his study.

"Yes, sir," replied Kerr.

"I am going to deal with you myself. I need hardly say that Mr. Ratcliff and Mr. Selby are very angry with those of you over whom their respective authorities extend. But I have persuaded them to leave everything to me."

"Kerr, Figgins, and Wynn, nothing more will be said as to your defiance of Mr. Ratcliff; though, of course, I shall punish you for that as for the rest. You Third Form boys know quite well that Mr. Selby had no intention of giving you leave to go at all; but where so many of your seniors transgressed I do not think it would be fair to bear with especial severity upon you. Kerruish, you are at the bottom of all this trouble, yet I recognise the fact that you were not fairly treated. You must be punished with the rest, but I shall not inflict upon you any extra punishment."

"Thank you, sir," said Kerruish gratefully.

One after another they had to hold out their hands, and there was nothing half-hearted about the manner in which Mr. Railton laid on. Yet not one of them all felt that it was done with the least spice of malice; not one of them all but went out, burdened with impositions though they were, feeling that they liked and respected Victor Railton more than ever.

Kerruish was the last to go. Mr. Railton kept him for a few special words in season.

When he got out Kerr was showing a crowd of fellows a copy of the reward bill, taken from the side of a barn they had passed.

"Sooner or later," Kerr said, "I'm jolly well going to find out who did this, and why they did it!"

And Racke and Crooke, as they slung away, did not feel too easy in their minds.

THE END.

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