CONDEMNED ... ON ... SUSPICION!

A Splendid Complete School Tale dealing with the Adventures of Harry Wharton & Co., of Greyfriars.

By FRANK RICHARDS.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.
The Accusation.

"Oh, my hat! Now for it!"

And Clara Trevlyn rubbed her hands with painful anticipation.

The door opened, and Miss Penelope Primrose, the principal of Cliff House School, came in with her stately tread.

Miss Clara, who had been seated upon the principal's desk, swinging her boots, jumped down in a great hurry, and stood meekly before the imposing lady. Miss Primrose looked at her kindly enough through her gold-rimmed spectacles.

"Well, what is it now, Clara?" she asked.

"If you please, I've come to be caned!" said Miss Clara demurely. "Miss Locke sent me."

"Dear me!" said Miss Primrose. "What have you done now?"

"Nothing, please—only put some fishhooks in Wilhelmina's hair!"

"Oh, my hat! Now for it!" shrieked a sudden voice in the corner of the study; and Miss Penelope Primrose uttered an ejaculation and looked round. A green parrot blinked at her from his cage in the corner. Miss Primrose looked quite shocked. Plato, the parrot, had many sayings—and some of them, which he had picked up on his voyage from India, were really not quite suitable for a seminary for young ladies. But "Oh, my hat!" was not on his list; and Miss Primrose, after a severe glance at Plato, turned a still more severe glance upon Miss Clara.

"Do be quiet, you naughty birdie!" said the old lady. "Clara, is it possible that you have made use of that—that extremely boyish expression? I am sure you did, because Plato always repeats the things he has just heard."

Miss Clara turned pink. Her friendship with the juniors of Greyfriars School had caused her to learn all sorts of expressions that would have surprised the prim, old-fashioned ears of Miss Penelope.

"Oh, my hat!" repeated Plato, in great delight. "Oh, my hat! Here she comes! Now for it! Oh, my hat!"

"Clara, I am really shocked! You know that you should not speak in that manner. When I was a girl, young ladies sometimes said: 'Goodness gracious me!' but even that very seldom,' said Miss Primrose.

"Oh, crumbs!" said Miss Clara. "I—I—I mean, goodness gracious me, Miss Primrose. One picks up all sorts of words from those bounders——"

"Those what?" shrieked Miss Primrose.

"I—I mean the Greyfriars boys, Miss Primrose," stammered Clara. "I—I——"

"You may hold out your hand, Clara," said Miss Primrose in her most stately manner, and she picked up a cane from the desk.

Corporal punishment at Cliff House School was reserved for the gentle hands of the principal, and as a rule it was not severe. But this time the cane came down rather hard. It was all Plato's fault, and the green parrot grinned and gobbled in the corner as if he were enjoying the scene.

Miss Clara did not enjoy it. She nearly said "My hat!" again when the cane descended upon her palm, but just managed to keep it back.

"Now go back to your class, Clara, and pray be a good girl," said Miss Primrose gently.

"Oh, rather!" said Clara.

"What!"

"I—I mean, yes, certainly," stammered Clara.

And she made haste to escape from the room before her unlucky tongue should give her away again.

Plato, on his perch in the corner, chuckled and gobbled.

"Oh, rather! Now for it! Oh, my hat! Oh, rather!"

Miss Primrose was looking over her desk. She seemed a little puzzled. She looked through the desk, and then looked through it again. Then she shook her head in a very dubious sort of way.

"I am sure I left it here," she murmured. "I had it here when Mary called me to speak to the butcher, and—and I left it on my desk here. Someone has removed it. Can that foolish girl have been playing some trick with it? It would be in keeping with placing fishhooks in Wilhelmina's hair. Dear me, I must send for her."

"Please excuse us, Miss Primrose!" said Harry. "We've heard about Clara, and we can't possibly believe——" "Oh, my hat!" interrupted the shrill voice of Plato, blinking from his perch. "This way to the canteen! Now for it! It does you credit! Hurrah!"

(See chapter 2.)

Miss Primrose rang the bell, and when it was answered sent the maid into the class-room to summon Miss Trevlyn. Clara made her appearance in a few minutes.

"Yes, Miss Primrose?"

"Have you removed my purse, Clara?" Miss Primrose asked quietly.

Clara started, and looked at her in astonishment.

"Your purse, Miss Primrose?"

"Yes."

"I have not seen it."

Miss Primrose's kind face hardened a little.

"Now, Clara, please be more careful," she said. "I left this room only a few minutes ago, and left my purse here upon the desk. No one could have entered the room while I was gone excepting yourself. You were sent here for punishment. I am certain that the purse was here. I know exactly where I laid it. There were six pounds in gold in it and some silver. It has been moved from where I left it when I was suddenly called away. What have you done with it? Tell me where it is at once, and I shall not punish you for a foolish joke."

Clara's face was crimson now.

"But, really, really, Miss Primrose, I have not seen it!" she exclaimed, in great distress. "I assure you I did not see it when I came in."

Miss Primrose looked at her searchingly.

"That is very odd, Clara. Under ordinary circumstances, of course, I should take your word without hesitation. But no one else has been in the room——"

"I can't help that!" said Clara, a flash coming into her eyes. "I haven't seen the purse. If I had I shouldn't have touched it."

"It was here."

"Well, I haven't seen it, Miss Primrose."

There was a long and painful pause. Miss Penelope Primrose's face was growing harder and harder; all the kind and gentle lines seemed to have faded out of it. The crimson died out of Clara Trevlyn's face, leaving her very pale. She understood Miss Primrose's suspicion.

"You think I—I have taken your purse, Miss Primrose?" she exclaimed chokingly. "I haven't! I—I haven't!"

"I shall inquire whether anyone else could possibly have been in this room during the few minutes it was empty," said Miss Primrose coldly. "At what time did you come here precisely?"

"At eleven o'clock."

"And it wanted only a minute or two to eleven when I left. Now, Clara, go back to your class. I shall give you until this evening to return my purse to me. If you do not do so, you know what will happen. You may go!"

"But I—I didn't! I—I——"

"You may go, Clara!"

Clara looked almost wildly at the headmistress for a moment, and then turned and went unsteadily to the door. Miss Primrose sighed deeply as she sat down again. From the parrot in the corner came a sudden yell:

"Oh, my hat! Now for it! Oh, crumbs!"

"Silence, Plato!" exclaimed Miss Primrose, really angry with her favourite for the first time.

Plato was a present from her brother in India, and had only lately arrived at Cliff House. Colonel Primrose had explained in his letter that its name was Brandy-smash; but Miss Penelope had rechristened it Plato, a name much more classic and pleasing to her ears.

"Oh, my hat!" chuckled Plato. "Goodness gracious me! I don't care if you do cane me! Give me some rum hot! Drink up, boys—drink up!"

"Oh, dear!" said Miss Primrose.

THE SECOND CHAPTER
The Greyfriars Juniors to the Rescue.

"Hallo—hallo—hallo! What's the trouble?"

Bob Cherry, of the Remove Form at Greyfriars, uttered this startled exclamation.

Four juniors had jumped off their bicycles at the gate of Cliff House—Harry Wharton, Bob Cherry, Frank Nugent, and Johnny Bull. The four chums of Greyfriars had come over to Cliff House to tea, but a surprise awaited them.

Marjorie Hazeldene met them at the gate, as they expected; but she was not looking as they expected. Her usually sunny and cheery face was very pale, and there were traces of tears upon her fair cheeks.

The chums of Greyfriars gazed at her tear-stained face in consternation.

"What's happened?" exclaimed Harry Wharton, in great concern.

"Licked?" asked Johnny Bull sympathetically.

Marjorie shook her head.

"Worse than that!" she said, in a choking voice. "Clara—Clara is——"

Her voice choked, and she broke off.

"Clara licked?" asked Frank Nugent.

"She's going to be expelled!" broke out Marjorie, finding her voice at last. "And—and it's a shame! She's innocent, I—I know that. It's some horrible mistake!"

The juniors looked decidedly grave now. They leaned their bikes against the wall, and came in, and Marjorie was plied with questions. The girl explained, in broken and troubled tones, but clearly, what had happened.

"I—I hoped perhaps you could help us!" she said at last. "I—I know it's a mistake of some sort. Clara couldn't be a thief. But—but she's packing her box now. Unless she gives the purse back, she is to leave at five o'clock, and—and she hasn't it, you know. I know she doesn't know anything about it. Harry, can you help us? What are we to do?"

And Marjorie burst into tears.

Harry Wharton wrinkled his brows in thought.

"It's all rot! Clara isn't a thief!" he said decidedly. "What utter bosh! There's some silly mistake, of course!"

"Of course!" echoed the other fellows.

"Only—only nobody could have gone into the study excepting Clara!" sobbed Marjorie. "She went in only about a minute after Miss Primrose left, and Miss Primrose found her there when she came back. And—and Miss Primrose is certain she left the purse there, and it had a great deal of money in it, and—and it hasn't been found. Some of the girls say that if Clara hadn't taken it it would have been found somewhere. It's been looked for everywhere!"

"Phew!"

The juniors looked dismayed.

"Quite sure nobody went into the study?" asked Wharton, after a pause.

"Miss Primrose is quite sure, and—and there wasn't time. If anybody had been there, Clara must have seen them—at least, seen them coming out!"

"It looks pretty rotten!" Wharton confessed. "But I can't believe anything against Clara. We know her too jolly well for that!"

"But—but what are we to do?" said Marjorie, in a tone of almost piteous appeal. "Clara can't give the purse back when she doesn't know anything about it, and—and——"

"It may have dropped somewhere in the study!" suggested Nugent.

"The room has been searched!"

"Let's search it again! Can't make too sure!" said Harry Wharton. "I suppose we can go in, Marjorie?"

"Miss Primrose is there, but——"

Marjorie looked doubtful.

"We'll tell her we've come as Clara's pals!" said Wharton. "We've a right to satisfy ourselves as friends of the accused! Come on!"

Two minutes later Harry Wharton was knocking at Miss Primrose's study door. The kind voice of the principal of Cliff House School bade him enter.

Miss Primrose looked surprised as four juniors marched in with Marjorie Hazeldene. Her kind old face was very lined and worried. Miss Clara's misfortune had been a blow to her as well.

"Please excuse us, Miss Primrose!" said Harry. "We've heard about Clara, and we can't possibly believe that she did anything of the kind. It's impossible!"

"Simply the limit!" said Johnny Bull.

Miss Primrose gave a wan smile.

"I'm afraid there is no doubt, my dear boys; but your faith does you credit!" she said sadly.

"Oh, my hat!" came the voice of Plato, blinking from his perch. "Give me some rum hot! Now for it! It does you credit! Hurrah!"

"Great Scott! What's that?"

"Only the parrot," said Miss Primrose, smiling faintly. "A present from my brother in India. He always repeats things."

"This way to the canteen!" shrieked Plato. "Oh, my hat! Oh, crumbs! Goodness gracious me!"

"Silence, Plato! Please—please be quiet!"

Miss Primrose stepped towards the parrot's perch with a cloth to throw over him, the only means of keeping him quiet. Plato promptly flew off his perch, and settled on top of the high bookcase, out of reach, and there he chuckled at his exasperated mistress.

"He, he, he! Drink up, boys! Goodness gracious me!"

"Dear me, he is loose again!" said Miss Primrose. "Plato! Plato——"

Harry Wharton uttered a sudden exclamation.

"Oh, great pip!"

"Wharton!"

"I—I beg your pardon, Miss Primrose, but—but I've got an idea! Was that bird loose when your purse was taken?"

"Yes, I think so. But what——"

"Crikey!" shouted Wharton. "That's it!"

"Harry!" murmured Marjorie.

"What the dickens——" began Frank Nugent, in astonishment, staring at his chum's wildly excited face.

"Don't you see?" gasped Wharton.

"Blessed if I do! What——"

"The parrot! Parrots often steal things!" yelled Harry, in great excitement. "Haven't you heard of that? They're awful thieves, some of 'em! If the beast was loose he might——"

"Oh, great Julius Cæsar!"

"Good gracious me!" exclaimed Miss Primrose.

"If the beast—I mean, the parrot's taken it he's stuck it somewhere out of reach!" said Harry. "We'll jolly soon see!"

He dragged a chair to the bookcase, where the parrot was blinking down at them. Plato flew off with a screech as he mounted on the chair, and then upon a table, careless of the damage he did in his excitement.

Wharton peered over the top of the bookcase. He gave a sudden shout, and his hand disappeared behind the carved cornice. It came back with a net purse in it, through the meshes of which coins glistened.

"Is that your purse, Miss Primrose?" Wharton jumped down from the table with the purse in his hand, careless of books and a flower-jar that went flying. "Is that——"

"Yes, yes!" gasped Miss Primrose, sinking faintly into a chair. "Oh, dear! Goodness gracious me! It—it was that wicked, wicked parrot! Oh, Plato—Plato!"

"Shall I wring his neck, ma'am?" asked Johnny Bull kindly.

There was a tap at the door, and it opened. Miss Clara, with a very white face, came in.

"My box is packed, Miss Primrose——"

"My dear, dear child——"

Marjorie rushed at her friend and hugged her, and the juniors, in the enthusiasm of the moment, very nearly did the same.

"Clara—Clara, it's all right!"

"Right as rain!" chortled Bob Cherry. "It's found! It was the giddy parrot! Hurrah!"

"Dear child, forgive me!" said Miss Primrose. "I—I could not guess——"

Clara's face brightened up wonderfully.

"Oh, my hat!" she ejaculated. "What luck!"

And this time Miss Penelope Primrose never even thought of rebuking those boyish expressions as she drew Miss Clara into her kind arms and kissed her.

"Thanks to you, Harry!" said Marjorie softly.

"Well, it was jolly lucky we came over to tea!" said Harry Wharton.

"My hat!" said Miss Clara. "And you shall have a ripping tea too—a regular corker!"

And the chums left Miss Primrose's study in great spirits, and Plato yelled after them:

"Drink up, boys! Hurrah! A regular corker! My hat! Hurrah!"

THE END.

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