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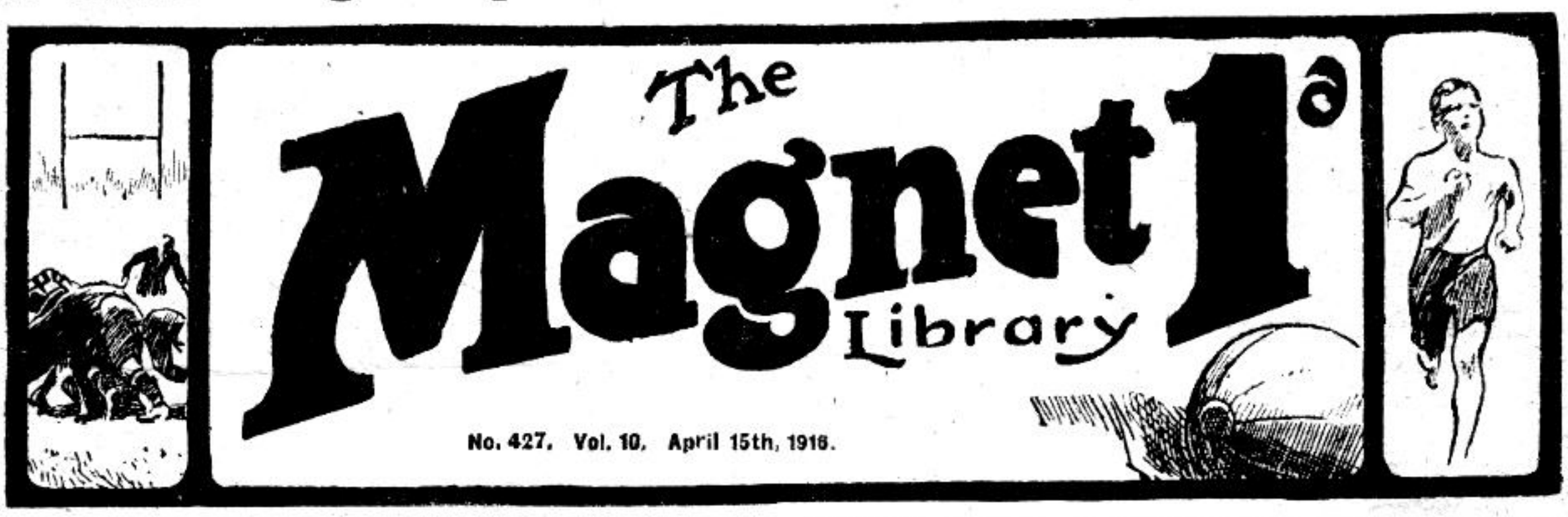
A Grand Long Complete School Tale of Harry Wharton & Co.



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FALSE EVIDENCE!

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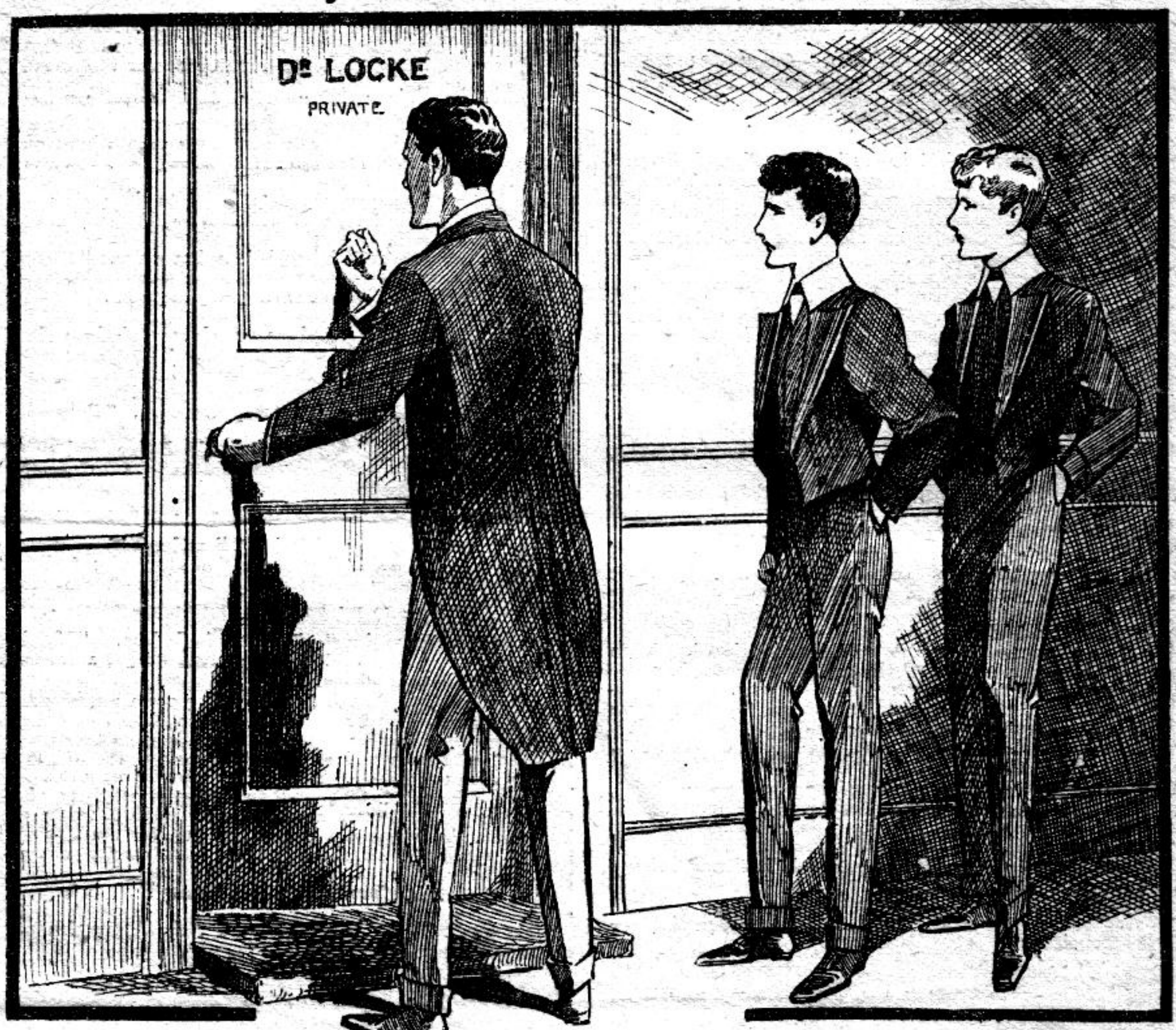
By FRANK RICHARDS.



Tap! Wingate struck his knuckles upon a panel of the Head's study door. "Come in!" called out Dr. Locke, in a low voice. *(See Chapter 10.)*

THE FIRST CHAPTER.
Very Important!

"TUESDAY!" said Bob Cherry, of the Remove Form at Greyfriars, with a thoughtful expression upon his sunny face. "To-day's Tuesday, by Jove!"

His four chums, Harry Wharton, Frank Nugent, Johnny Bull, and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, looked at him somewhat curiously. The Famous Five were gathered against the School House steps, enjoying the sunlight of the early summer evening.

"Yes," said Bob Cherry again; "to-day's Tuesday!"

"Queen Anne's dead!" exclaimed Nugent sarcastically. "In fact, three or four Queen Annes are dead! I believe that the moon is still up in the heavens, and it is quite possible that the sun is shining!"

Bob Cherry grinned.

"Oh, rats!" he said. "To-day's Tuesday, and something just struck me!"

"Did it hurt much?" asked Frank Nugent. "If you go on mooning like this, you ass, something will strike you—my fists, as a matter of fact!"

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"The strikefulness will be terrific!" remarked Hurree Singh. "Explain your ludicrous self, my esteemed and absurdful chum!"

"Well, the fact is," said Bob, "to-day's——"

"You ass!" roared Harry Wharton. "We don't want to hear that to-day's Tuesday any more! What's the something that struck you, and turned you into a burbling lunatic?"

"Nothing!"

"But you said——"

"I said that something struck me!" exclaimed Bob cheerfully. "But it hasn't turned me into a burbling lunatic. I just remembered something very important."

"Important?"

"Yes, rather! A parcel was sent off for me yesterday, and it's due to arrive at the station to-day. It's there now, I expect."

"A parcel?"

"At the station?"

"Then it must be important!"

"The importantfulness is——"

"Terrific!" grinned Bob Cherry. "Yes, Inky, my son, it is terrific! I vote we go and fetch that parcel now, before locking up."

"Exactly what I was going to suggest!" said Johnny Bull, with visions of a gorgeous feed at supper-time. "You're not so dotty, after all, old chap!"

"Is it a big parcel?" asked Harry Wharton.

"Not so very."

"Oh, well, I suppose it'll be well packed," said Nugent. "You can get a lot in a little space, you know. This'll be giddy corn in Egypt, you chaps! I was just wondering if we should have to go in Hall and eat doorsteps for supper. Bob, my son, you've come to our aid at a time of distress!"

Bob Cherry looked puzzled.

"I don't see——" he began.

"Of course you don't see," said Johnny Bull genially; "but that doesn't matter. We're hot on the trail of that parcel. I hope there'll be some tinned tongue in it."

"Tinned tongue!" repeated Bob Cherry blankly.

Bob Cherry leaned against the stonework and roared.

"Well, I'm blessed if I can see anything to grin at!" exclaimed Harry Wharton.

"Can't you?" chuckled Bob. "I can! It's jolly funny!"

"Now, you thundering ass," said Johnny Bull firmly, "what's the giddy joke?"

"You've—you've made a mistake!" gasped Bob, still grinning. "It's your own silly fault for jumping to conclusions."

"Explain yourself, ass!"

"Well, there's no tuck in the parcel at all, if you want to know the exact truth!" chuckled Bob. "I didn't say it was a parcel of tuck, you prize chumps!"

"Not tuck?"

"Of course not! It's a parcel of books!"

For a moment the Removites looked disappointed. Then their expressions changed, and they glared at Bob Cherry as though he had done them some personal injury. They certainly considered that he had deceived them in a most unwarrantable fashion. Therefore, as Hurree Singh remarked, the punishment—or, rather, the bumpfulness—would be terrific. It was.

The unfortunate Bob was grasped by eight strong hands and lifted gently but firmly into the air. His protestations met with no response.

"Look here, you asses——"

"It's a painful duty, but we've got to do it!" said Johnny Bull sternly. "Down with him!"

Bump!

"Yaroooooh!" roared Bob. "Ow! You blithering—— Yow! Stoppit!"

"Once more!"

Bump!

"Oh, you rotters!" groaned Bob Cherry, when at last he was upon his feet again. "I'm sore! What the dickens do you mean by bumping me?"

"Well, it's your own rotten fault!" growled Harry Wharton crossly. "Fancy telling us a rotten parcel of books was important! We thought it was tuck!"

"I didn't say it was!" howled Bob Cherry.

"No; but you didn't say it wasn't!" grunted Johnny Bull. "Now we shall have to have supper in Hall, after all!"

"Not necessarily," replied Bob ruefully, rubbing himself. "You won't give a chap a chance to finish. I've never known such asses for jumping to conclusions. There's a postal-order in that parcel, as well as the books—a postal-order for a quid. That's the reason it's important, fatheads!"

"That alters matters!" grinned Nugent. "You're not so bad, after all!"

"Yes; but it doesn't alter the fact that you bumped me, does it?" growled Bob Cherry.

"Oh, that's a mere detail!" chuckled Wharton. "If we'd known this before we shouldn't have acted so drastically. But it doesn't matter in the least. All that you've got to do is to consider that you haven't been bumped."

"Which is extremefully simple!" grinned the nabob.

"I don't know about being simple," replied Bob Cherry, who was really sore; "but I know that it's extremefully painful!"

Johnny Bull grinned.

"Well, we apologise, and that ends the matter," he said. "I vote we start right away. We've got heaps of time to get back before locking-up, and we can blow the giddy postal-order at Mrs. Mimble's when we get back."

"Hear, hear!"

Bob Cherry's sunny smile returned to his face.

"Right-ho!" he said. "But the next time don't be so beastly impatient!"

And the Famous Five crossed the Close and sallied out into the lane towards Friardale. When they arrived at the station they found that the parcel was at hand. It was not large—containing, as a matter of fact, one or two books which Bob Cherry had asked his people to send. The books themselves were welcome enough, but the remittance was considered the most valued item.

Having gathered the spoils, as it were, Harry Wharton & Co. turned their steps towards Greyfriars again. They didn't pass through the village, but went by a footpath which led across the Courtfield road, and then through the wood to the school.

But just as they were about to step into the main road to Courtfield, Johnny Bull, who was in front, dodged back with a grin on his face.

"Highcliffe rotters!" he said, in a low voice. "Ponsonby & Co—four of 'em—are just up the road, coming this way. I vote we amuse ourselves at their giddy expense!"

"How?"

"Why, Bob and I will show ourselves, and the cads will think that we're alone!" grinned Bull. "They'll pounce on their prey, and then you three chaps will appear upon the scene. They won't suspect a blessed ambush!"

"Good wheeze!" chuckled Harry Wharton. "Ponsonby & Co. will get a little surprise!"

Bob Cherry dropped his parcel in the hedge, and stepped into the road with Bull. As they did so they heard several exclamations up the road. They turned as though in surprise.

"Oh, crumbs!" ejaculated Johnny Bull, in a tone of alarm. "Highcliffe rotters!"

"We're copped!" gasped Bob. "Run for it!"

Their voices were plainly audible to Ponsonby & Co., as it was intended they should be. Ponsonby, Gadsby, Vavasour, and Merton, of the Fourth Form at Highcliffe, grinned to themselves.

"Two Greyfriars beasts!" shouted Gadsby. "My hat! We'll put 'em through it! It ain't often we get a chance of catching the rotters on the hop!"

Ponsonby & Co. darted forward. For some unaccountable reason Bull and Bob Cherry turned in opposite directions, so that when they ran for it they ran into one another's arms. And before they could extricate themselves the Highcliffe juniors were upon them. They were promptly captured.

Harry Wharton & Co., and, in fact, the majority of the Greyfriars fellows, were on the worst possible terms with Highcliffe. This was not very surprising, for the Highcliffe fellows, especially Ponsonby & Co., were pretty thorough young blackguards.

"Don't hurt us, please!" whined Johnny Bull, in a piteous voice.

"We won't do it again!" groaned Bob Cherry, his voice simply quivering with fright.

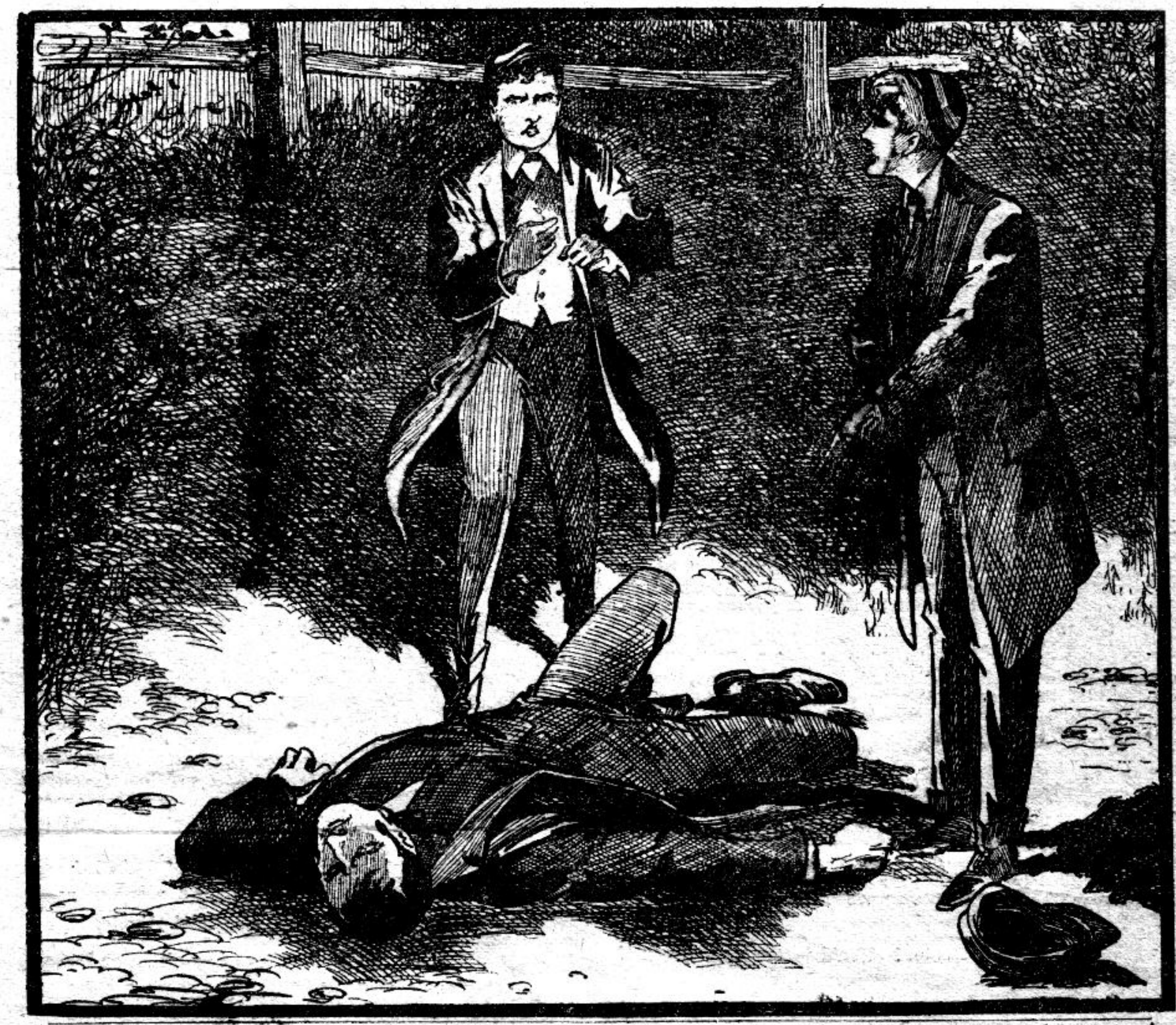
"Oh, look at 'em!" chuckled Merton gleefully. "Ain't they brave now they're fairly copped? There's not an ounce of pluck between the two of 'em!"

"Absolutely!" grinned Vavasour.

Ponsonby & Co. were smiling delightedly. It was something new for them to see Greyfriars juniors begging for mercy. And the experience had the effect of making the young scoundrels decide that the ragging should be all the more severe.

But they were counting their chickens before they were hatched, as it were. They had scarcely grasped their victims, when three cheerful youths suddenly appeared as though from

ANSWERS



Something dark was lying in the road just in front of the juniors. It was still and silent, and they felt their hearts beating wildly. "It's—it's Mr. Quelch!" Johnny Bull uttered the words haltingly. (*See Chapter* 6.)

nowhere. Gadsby was the first to notice them, and his gleeful expression faded from his face.

"Oh, my hat!" he gasped. "It's an ambush!"

"Exactly!" grinned Johnny Bull. "This is where you get it in the necks, my tulips!"

"Run!" ejaculated Merton.

But there was no time to run, or even to think of flight. For Harry Wharton, Nugent, and Hurree Singh were upon the scene in a second.

"Let 'em have it!" roared Nugent excitedly. "We'll give the rotters socks!"

"The sockfulness will be terrific!"

And it was terrific! For a few minutes there was a terrible and gory conflict—from Ponsonby & Co.'s point of view, that is. They were literally wiped up, and bleeding noses and thick ears were as plentiful as leaves in Vallombrosa.

"Oh, by gum, this is too thick!" gasped Ponsonby. "Let's cut!"

The other valiant heroes needed no bidding. They were already cutting, as a matter of fact.

"Who said Britain was going to the dogs?" gasped Bob Cherry. "My hat! It was short and sweet while it lasted, but we've whacked the rotters!"

"By gum, it's nearly locking-up time!" exclaimed Nugent, glancing at his watch. "No time to hang about, you know. We'd better buzz!"

And the Famous Five hurried off to Greyfriars, congratulating themselves upon the result of the unexpected encounter.

Bob Cherry's parcel, which was the cause of their jaunt into Friardale, was completely forgotten in the excitement of the moment. It still reposed among the thick grass at the foot of the hedge, forgotten and neglected.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.
After the Parcel!

HARRY WHARTON laid his pen down with a sigh of relief.

"Thank goodness that's over!" he said, with a glance at the clock on the mantelpiece. "We've got heaps of time to prepare the feed. I vote we go along to No. 13 and get that postal-order from Bob. If he hasn't finished his prep, we can visit Mrs. Mimble's and do the buying."

"Good wheeze!" replied Nugent. "We didn't exactly have a banquet at tea, and I'm feeling rather peckish."

The pair had just finished their preparation in No. 1 Study. Harry Wharton went along the passage to No. 13, which Bob Cherry and Hurree Singh shared with Mark Linley and Wun Lung. But Bob wasn't at home, and Wharton put his head into the next room, which was occupied by Johnny Bull, Squiff, the Australian junior, and Fisher T. Fish. At the present moment the American was in sole possession.

"I guess Bull went out a minute ago," he replied, in answer to Harry Wharton's inquiry. "The jay said he was going to a feed, but I calculate he didn't ask me!"

"Well, you see," explained Wharton, "we're only having a select circle, and you're rather outside the mark, Fishy."

NEXT MONDAY— "THE UPPER HAND!" A Grand, Long, Complete Story of Harry Wharton & Co. By FRANK RICHARDS.

Fisher T. Fish glared.

"Say, you galoot——"

But Harry Wharton softly closed the door, and left Fisher T. Fish talking to the thin air. In the passage Johnny Bull and Bob Cherry were approaching. They both wore rather worried expressions.

"Been ordering the grub?" asked Harry Wharton cheerfully.

"No!" growled Bob. "What's become of that beastly parcel?"

"How the dickens should I know?" asked Harry. "It's your property, you ass!"

"I can't find the giddy thing!"

"Do you mean to say you left it under that rotten hedge?" Harry Wharton exclaimed wrathfully. "You chucked it down, you remember, when we met Ponsonby & Co. Didn't you pick it up again?"

Bob Cherry gave a sickly grin.

"Great Scott!" he ejaculated. "I remember now! I left it there!"

The looks of Harry Wharton and Bull were too deep for words.

"Left it there?" repeated Bull, in an ominous voice. "That means you've chucked a quid away, to say nothing of several mouldy old books, and diddled us out of a gorgeous feed! I can see you getting another bumping, you howling chump!"

"It wasn't my fault!" protested Bob indignantly. "You knew I chucked the parcel in the hedge. Why didn't you think of it?"

"It was your parcel," argued Harry Wharton, "therefore it was your place to remember it!"

"Naturally!" said Johnny Bull.

"Well, what's to be done?" asked Bob Cherry. "It's no good glaring at me as if you'd like to bore a hole through my napper! It was the fault of those Highcliffe rotters, I consider!"

Bull breathed hard.

"But that doesn't alter the thing, does it? We're dished out of that feed!" he said warmly. "You can take it for certain that the parcel won't be there to-morrow, and it's after locking-up time now. What's to be done?"

"Well, it wouldn't take me long to scoot down there—but it's after locking-up," Bob said thoughtfully. "I'm blessed if I want to lose those books, you know——"

"Blow the books!" growled Harry Wharton. "What about the feed?"

A fat form rolled up the passage, and Billy Bunter of the Remove thrust his spectacled face forward. Any mention of the word "feed" and Bunter was sure to be close at hand.

"I say, you fellows, what's that about a feed——"

"Nothing!" snapped Bull. "We weren't talking to you, Bunter! You can buzz off!"

"Oh, really, Johnny——"

"You're in danger, Bunter! You'd better make yourself scarce!"

Billy Bunter blinked.

"What do you mean?" he asked. "How am I in danger?"

"Well, my fist has got a habit of swinging round unawares!" replied Johnny Bull suggestively. "If your fat head happens to be in the way, you'll very probably get a thick ear! Our bizney is private, and we don't want any outsiders!"

"Oh, I say——"

"Murder him!" growled Bob Cherry impatiently.

"Oh, really, Cherry, if there's a feed, I want to be in it!" protested Bunter, who possessed the most colossal cheek. "I don't see why I should be barred from a feed! I've been disappointed about a postal-order——"

"Yes, and so have we!" said Harry Wharton. "But our disappointment happens to be a real one, not a rotten whopper!"

"Oh, don't be an ass, Wharton! I never tell lics—— Yow! Owww! Yooop!"

Bull's prophecy had come true, and his fist had swung round; but whether the action was accidental or not was open to question. Anyhow, Bunter sat down very suddenly on the floor. Before he could get up, a tall figure came striding along the passage. It was Loder of the Sixth.

"Bullying again!" he said harshly. "Have they been hitting you, Bunter?"

"Yes, rather!" gasped Bunter vindictively. "They all piled on to me, the rotters—all three of them! They knocked me over, and then kicked me!"

"You—you fibber!" gasped Johnny Bull.

Loder had his doubts as to the truthfulness of Bunter's accusation, but he never let an opportunity slip by for revenging himself upon his enemies of the Remove.

"You'll take fifty lines each!" he rapped out.

"Oh, I say, Loder, that's a bit thick——"

"Another word, Wharton, and I'll make it a hundred!"

Harry Wharton bit his lip, and remained silent. There was no sense in having his imposition doubled.

Loder was about to stride off, when Bob Cherry stepped forward.

"Just a minute, Loder!"

"Well?" said Loder sharply.

"I left a parcel down the lane by accident," said Bob meekly. "Will you please give me a pass out of gates so that I can go and fetch it? I sha'n't be gone more than twenty minutes."

Loder shook his head.

"To-morrow's a half-holiday," he said shortly. "You'll have to wait!"

"But it's rather important——"

"Can't help it; I'm not giving any passes to-night!"

And Loder went off with an unpleasant smile on his face. As soon as he had turned the corner, Bull and Harry Wharton grabbed Bob Cherry and shook him.

"You burbling chump!" said Wharton wrathfully. "What the dickens did you ask Loder for? You might have known that he'd refuse."

"How should I know?" protested Bob. "I didn't think the rotter would behave like that. It's early yet, and I only asked for a pass out for twenty minutes. I thought it was a good way out of the difficulty."

"Well; it's all up now!" growled Johnny Bull, when the Owl of the Remove had rolled round the corner. "The feed's off—very much off!"

"Rotten!" said Harry Wharton.

Bob Cherry set his teeth.

"I don't see why it should be off," he said grimly. "I haven't got a pass, but there are other ways of getting out besides the gates. What's the matter with breaking bounds? I don't see why we should be diddled out of a feed because of Loder!"

"I'm game!" said Bull promptly.

"No; I'd better go alone. No sense in doubling the risk."

"If you go, I go!" said Bull. "That's flat, my son!"

"Well, there's no arguing with you," replied Bob Cherry. "It's late enough now, so we'd better buzz off without any more delay. We shall still have time to have a good spread."

And the pair fetched their caps, hastened downstairs, and crossed the dusky Close. It was practically dark now, and not a soul seemed to be about; but just as the pair were slipping over the wall at their accustomed place, a fat form rolled out of the shadows and approached.

"I say, you rotters, I'll sneak——"

Bob Cherry breathed hard.

"Bunter again!" he muttered thickly. "I shall forget myself one day, and slaughter him—I know I shall! If he sneaks, we shall get into a fearful row!"

Bob was sitting astride the wall, and the fat junior looked up at him.

"Loder said you weren't to go, you know," he exclaimed. "But I sha'n't say a word. Goodness knows, I don't tell tales!"

"You fat rotter——"

"If you let me join in that feed, I won't say a word!" said Bunter eagerly.

"You can go and eat coke!" snapped Johnny Bull. "We're not going to have you at any feed, you—you blackmailer! And if you say a word, we'll bump you until you're blue all over!"

"Oh, really, Bull, if you'll let me join in the feed——"

"We won't, and there's an end of it!"

"I say," whispered Bob Cherry, "we can't go out with this beast in the know. He'll sneak, as sure as fate, and then Loder will be down on us like a ton of bricks."

"Shush! There's somebody coming!"

Two forms loomed up out of the dusk.

"Hallo! What's the idea?" inquired a cheerful voice. "Oh, it's you, Bunter, my pippin!"

"I—I was just helping Cherry and Bull to get over the wall," stammered Bunter. "They're breaking bounds, you know, Toddy!"

Peter Todd grinned. He and Tom Dutton—the other dim figure—were unfortunate enough to share the same study with Bunter, and Peter knew all Bunter's little ways. And, being head of the study, Peter Todd always took a fatherly interest in the fat junior's doings.

"It's Todd!" murmured Bull. "I say, Toddy, my son!"

"What's the trouble?" asked Peter. "Bunter, I suppose?"

"You've hit it!" replied Johnny Bull. "The rotter spotted us getting out, and he's threatened to sneak. We shall be awfully obliged if you'll take him away to some dark corner and quietly suffocate him. We're just popping down the road—explain later!"

"Good enough!" said Peter Todd grimly. "Leave Bunter to Dutton and I—we'll teach him the error of his ways!"

"Oh, really, Todd——"

MAGNIFICENT TUCK-HAMPERS FOR READERS OF THE "BOYS' FRIEND," 1D. OUT TO-DAY.

Bob Cherry and Bull slipped over the wall and disappeared.

"Now, Bunter, I'm going to give you a few words of advice," said Peter Todd. "If you say a single word about those two chaps breaking bounds, I'll lay you across the study table, and start on you with the poker—and finish you with a cricket-stump! That's the verdict. What do you say, Dutton?"

"Eh?" said Dutton, who was extremely deaf.

"What shall we do with this sneaking rotter?"

"Nonsense!" replied Dutton. "I don't think it is!"

"Don't think what is?" gasped Todd.

"Didn't you say it was hotter?" asked Dutton innocently. "I know it's pretty mild, but I thought the air was a little cooler myself."

Peter Todd sighed.

"What a life!" he murmured. "One study-mate as deaf as a door-post, and another a burbling rotter who wants looking after every minute! Well, it's no good grumbling. Thank goodness, I'm not an irritable chap, or I should be sprouting grey hairs by this time!"

THE THIRD CHAPTER.
Getting It Hot!

JOHNNY BULL chuckled.

"Toddy was the right chap in the right place, at the right minute," he said, as he and Bob Cherry trotted down the dark lane. "I don't think there's much fear of Bunter sneaking now."

"If he does, he'll have Todd to reckon with afterwards, to say nothing of us," replied Bob Cherry.

They cut off along the footpath, and in a very few minutes arrived at the spot where the parcel had been left. After a little groping among the grass, the parcel was found.

"My hat, I thought somebody had spotted it!" said Bob thankfully.

"Well, they haven't, so it's all serene," Bull answered. "Our mission is fulfilled, my son, so we'll wend our way homewards again."

"Wend away, then!"

And the two Removites cheerfully started on the return journey. They reckoned to be in within ten minutes now, but it happened that they were not the only juniors breaking bounds, and circumstances were to alter all their plans.

As they emerged into Friardale Lane once more, they paused for a moment to see if the coast was clear. It was very black under the trees, but as there was scarcely any wind, sounds travelled a long way.

"Somebody coming!" whispered Bull. "Better crouch down until he's passed."

"We don't want to be collared on the last lap," murmured Bob Cherry.

They flattened themselves against the hedge. The approaching steps grew nearer, and at last a tall figure strode briskly past.

"By gum!" breathed Bull. "What a giddy escape! It was Loder!"

"Yes, I saw that!" replied Bob. "We'd better not move from here until he's fairly out of earshot. He's simply a terror for spotting chaps out of bounds."

So they didn't move for several minutes. Then, just when they were about to emerge, Johnny Bull uttered an impatient exclamation.

"Oh, rats! Somebody else coming now!"

It was true. Other footsteps were approaching from Greyfriars, and Bob Cherry sighed.

"Looks to me as if the feed's off!" he said irritably.

The fresh footsteps proved to be those of two juniors, and as they passed, Bob Cherry and Bull nudged one another significantly.

"Snoop and Stott!" murmured Johnny Bull. "We ain't the only juniors breaking bounds, you see. I wonder what the cads are up to?"

"I don't know, and I'm jolly certain I don't care," replied Bob. "Some rotten game, you may be sure. Very likely they've run short of cigarettes. Well, I reckon the coast is clear now."

They waited a minute longer. But after they had stepped out into the roadway a sudden cry came from down the lane, followed by some unpleasant chuckles.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" said Bob Cherry. "What's the matter now?"

"Oh, hang! We can't wait any longer!"

But they waited, all the same, and listened intently.

"Oh, don't!" came a frightened voice from down the dark road. "They ain't mine, and you mustn't touch 'em! Please let me go!"

"Not likely!" came Snoop's sneering voice. "Hand over that basket, you young rotter!"

"I daren't! It ain't mine! Oh, you're hurtin' me!"

Johnny Bull gritted his teeth.

"I say, we can't stand this!" he said. "Those two rotters are bullying some poor village kid—pinching his basket, or something. We'd better go and investigate."

EVERY MONDAY, The "Magnet" LIBRARY. ONE PENNY.

"Right-ho, old scout!"

For the moment Bob Cherry and Bull forgot their own hurry. Here was a situation that demanded immediate investigation.

Bull led the way. They turned the bend and came suddenly upon Snoop and Stott. The cads of the Remove were somewhat startled at the sudden interruption.

Snoop had a basket in his hand.

"Run for it!" he gasped.

"No, you don't!"

And Bob Cherry made a grab at Stott and held him tight. At the same moment Snoop was captured by Bull.

The two cads shivered with fright.

"You rotten burglars!" panted Johnny Bull wrathfully.

"Mind your own bizney!" snarled Snoop. "What the dickens have you interfered for, anyhow? This basket of confectionery is mine——"

"It ain't!" exclaimed a small urchin shrilly. "Oh, what a lie! 'E forced me to give it to 'im!"

"I believe you, kid," said Bull sharply. "Hand it over, Snoop!"

"And be quick about it, too!" put in Bob Cherry sharply.

"I won't!"

Johnny Bull wasted no more breath. He grasped Snoop's arm and gave it a sudden twist.

"Ow!" howled Snoop. "You—you beast! Yarooooh!"

"Are you going to hand it over?" said Bull grimly.

"No! Yow! I—I mean, yes!" yelled Snoop.

And he threw the basket across to the frightened youngster.

"Now cut!" advised Bob Cherry. "We'll deal with these rotters, kid."

"Oh, I ain't half glad! Thanks!"

"Don't waste time! Cut!"

And the small boy hurried off with all speed. Bob Cherry and Johnny Bull looked angrily at their captives.

"You thieving rotters!" growled Bull.

"It was Stott's fault!" whined Snoop. "I didn't want any hand in it."

"Liar!" exclaimed Bob Cherry, with delightful frankness. "You're a pair—and a jolly rotten pair into the bargain! What shall we do with them, Johnny?"

Bull considered the matter.

"Well, we are in a bit of a hurry," he replied. "They deserve something really drastic. But, under the circs, what about making them fight us? You take Snoop, and I'll deal with this rotter. We can give them quite a lot of punishment in two minutes."

Bob Cherry chuckled.

"Good wheeze!" he agreed. "What do you say, Snoop?"

"I ain't going to fight!" howled Snoop desperately.

"This is a case where you have absolutely no say in the matter," said Bob calmly. "If you don't put up your hands you will only get more hurt. Are you ready?"

"No!" roared Snoop and Stott together.

"Then we are!" chuckled Bull. "Wire in, Bob!"

And they wired in with a vengeance.

The two cads had no chance. Still, although the fight only lasted two minutes, it was pretty warm while it raged.

Bob Cherry and his chum were not even touched, for they were both champion fighters; but their opponents went through the mill thoroughly, and their frantic efforts to ward off the blows were decidedly comic.

Stott suddenly grew desperate, and as Bull stepped back to deliver a blow, he turned, with the intention of running for his life. But Bob Cherry happened to be just behind, and Stott cannoned into him violently. He made a frantic grab at Bob's coat to save himself, and his fingers closed upon a button. Quite unconsciously he still grasped it when he tore himself free, and the button came away in his hand, accompanied by a small piece of cloth.

"Come back, you rotter!" roared Bull. "I haven't finished yet!"

But Stott did not accept the invitation. His ears felt like saucers, his eyes were puffy, and his nose was decidedly swollen.

Snoop was in no better condition. He had run for it at the same moment as Stott, for the cannoning incident had given him his chance. They ran side by side for twenty yards, and then paused and looked back.

"It's all right!" gasped Snoop painfully. "They ain't following!"

"All the same, we'd better run for it," said Stott nervously. "By gum, I'm aching all over! Oh, what rotten cads!"

Snoop was too much engaged in dabbing his nose to reply, and the precious pair trotted off towards Greyfriars.

And Stott still held the button off Bob Cherry's coat in his hand. It was a very insignificant thing, but it was to play an important part in the exciting events which were destined to follow.

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THE FOURTH CHAPTER.
The Button Clue!

"THE rotters!"

"Howling cads!"

Snoop and Stott gave vent to their feelings in no uncertain terms.

"My hat! We'll be revenged on them somehow!" growled Stott viciously. "Oh, crumbs! I shall have a rotten black eye to-morrow!"

"And I shall have two!" exclaimed Snoop pitifully. "I say, what idiots we were not to run for it first off!"

"How the dickens could we?" rapped out Stott. "The rotters wouldn't give us a chance. We can't sneak about their being out of bounds, because we're out of bounds ourselves. We shall have to think of some other way of getting even."

They were nearing Greyfriars now, and were still trotting. They turned a bend, and suddenly became aware of a tall figure striding towards them in the centre of the road. They were upon the new-comer almost before they knew it.

"Who is that?" asked a sharp voice.

They couldn't see who the owner of the voice was, because it was too gloomy, but they knew the tones well enough.

"Quelchy!" panted Snoop, shivering. "Oh, crumbs!"

"Let's dodge him!" muttered Stott desperately.

"Who is that?" repeated Mr. Quelch, for the figure was indeed that of the Remove Form-master. "Boys, I command you to stop!"

He could not see who they were, and the cads knew that if they succeeded in slipping past him they would be safe.

"Let's dash past!" whispered Stott.

"You go first, then."

Stott darted forward, but Mr. Quelch was not to be so easily frustrated. He stepped quickly to one side and made a grab at Stott as the latter shot past. He caught the Removite's shoulder and swung him round.

"How dare you disobey my command, boy! Tell me your name!"

"Rescue!" roared Stott, disguising his voice, "Rescue, Cherry!"

Stott had uttered the name in desperation, hoping that Mr. Quelch would be deceived. And Snoop, for once, backed his chum up. He was desperate, for he had visions of a flogging. So, instead of running and leaving Stott in the lurch, he simply flung himself upon Mr. Quelch, safe in the knowledge that the darkness concealed his identity.

Mr. Quelch was utterly taken by surprise. He had never dreamed for a moment that the juniors would resist. He went down upon the road with a dull thud, and remained perfectly still. As a matter of fact, he was slightly winded, but otherwise unhurt. The two startled juniors gazed down upon him for a moment, and Stott dropped the button which had been torn from Bob Cherry's coat close beside the prostrate master.

Then the pair of young villains, thoroughly terrorised by what they had done, fled towards Greyfriars as fast as their legs would carry them.

"Oh, what a fool you were!" panted Snoop, almost sobbing. "We ought to have told him who we were! He's hurt, Stott! He lay absolutely still!"

Stott gritted his teeth.

"You idiot!" he snarled. "He isn't really hurt, and we're safe. He hasn't the faintest idea who we are. We'd better be jolly careful how we get in, or we shall be landed."

Meanwhile, Mr. Quelch picked himself up rather painfully. He was simply furious, and he resolved that he would discover the culprits.

"The young rascals!" ejaculated Mr. Quelch, breathing hard. "I will punish them with the utmost severity! I heard Cherry's name mentioned, but I cannot think that Cherry would have committed such a dastardly attack upon me. I am inclined to think that some other boys are to blame, and the mentioning of the name was merely a ruse. Whatever it was, however, I mean to bring the culprits to book!"

He brushed himself down as well as he could, and then struck a match to see if anything had rolled from his pockets. Almost at his feet lay something quite interesting.

A button, with a small piece of cloth attached!

Mr. Quelch picked it up, and his eyes gleamed.

"This will most probably prove to be a clue," he murmured. "I will keep it and watch for a boy who has a button missing from his clothing."

The Remove-master was really not hurt in the least. He had certainly looked rather knocked out as he lay upon the road. But middle-aged gentlemen cannot stand being winded without showing the effects in a somewhat marked manner. For the moment Mr. Quelch had been quite doubled up, but the effects soon wore off.

After he had walked two hundred yards, he decided that a pipe would be rather consoling to his feelings, and he therefore charged it.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.
The Accident!

"OF all the luck!" groaned Bob Cherry. "I believe that everybody's buzzing about to-night just so that we shall be diddled out of that giddy feed. The other chaps'll be tearing their hair because we haven't turned up!"

Johnny Bull pressed his chum's arm warningly.

"Don't talk, you ass!" he whispered. "We don't want to be spotted, do we?"

"But I feel so blessed wild——"

"Shush!"

Bob Cherry and Johnny Bull were crouching in the hedge, when another dim figure came striding down the lane. They couldn't see who it was, but they knew the walk well enough. Mr. Quelch was abroad!

To make matters worse, Mr. Quelch was dawdling along as though he had at least twenty-four hours at his disposal. Bob Cherry and Bull didn't know it, but Mr. Quelch was filling his pipe.

"Lazy bounder!" murmured Bob warmly. "Why can't he buck up?"

"Dry up, you ass!" said Johnny softly.

Mr. Quelch was nearly opposite now, and the juniors' hearts almost stood still as he paused directly in front of them, in the centre of the road.

"By gum!" breathed Bob Cherry. "We're done for, Johnny!"

Bull gave Bob a gentle punch in the ribs, and the latter closed his lips. A match flared up suddenly.

"Might as well step out and show ourselves!" grunted Bob recklessly. "Is the silly old ass going to stick here all night?"

But Bull was not attending to his companion. He was not even looking at Mr. Quelch. His attention was directed up the road. A small light was coming swiftly along, and a very faint hum told Johnny Bull that it was affixed to a motor-cycle.

Mr. Quelch, apparently, did not hear anything unusual. He was busy with his pipe, which was particularly stubborn. It wouldn't draw properly, and Mr. Quelch was investigating the cause.

Meanwhile, the motor-cycle was charging onwards at undiminished speed. It was quite certain that the driver was unaware of any obstacle in the road, and his light was so poor that he would receive no warning until it was too late.

Mr. Quelch was standing absolutely in the centre of the road, and would certainly be knocked over unless he moved. Naturally, the motor-cyclist had no idea that anyone would stand in such a position, and his lamp was so unsatisfactory, and the lane so dark, that he would have no time to pull up, or even swerve, when he actually did see Mr. Quelch.

And if Bob Cherry and Johnny Bull shouted out a warning they would betray themselves!

"We must shout!" hissed Bull. "We can't possibly stick here and see old Quelchy bowled over!"

"But we shall give ourselves away, you ass!"

"That doesn't matter," whispered Bull. "Quelchy won't punish us when he knows we betrayed ourselves for his sake. He's a beast, I know, but he's a just beast!"

"Better wait a tick. Perhaps he'll move in time!" said Bob.

But Mr. Quelch made no sign of moving. He had unscrewed the stem of his pipe and was blowing through it.

Bob Cherry and Bull could see now that a side-car was attached to the machine, which was within twenty yards, approaching swiftly.

"Good heavens," muttered Bull, "old Quelchy must be deaf!"

But there was really nothing surprising in the fact that the Remove-master did not hear. The wind was making the leaves rustle in the trees, and there had been no warning blast from the motor-cyclist's horn. The machine, too, was an exceptionally silent one.

"Yell!" exclaimed Bull excitedly, and the two jumped out into the road.

"Stop!" they roared at the top of their voices.

Mr. Quelch jumped clean into the air.

"Upon my soul!" he ejaculated.

He looked round confusedly, for a second before he had thought himself absolutely alone. Now, in a second, the lane was simply full of life. Within five yards of him the dim outline of a motor-cycle and side-car was charging for him, and the shriek of brakes cut through the air.

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Ponsonby & Co. had scarcely grasped their victims, when three cheerful youths suddenly appeared as though from nowhere. "Oh, my hat!" Ponsonby gasped. "It's an ambush!" *(See Chapter 1.)*

"Look out!" roared Johnny Bull. "Hi, pull up!"

The warning was rather unnecessary, for the startled motor-cyclist was literally standing on his brake. He saw a dim figure in front, and swerved abruptly in an effort to steer clear. But there was not sufficient time.

Crash!

The body of the side-car struck the Form-master with considerable force, and he uttered a rasping cry, and was flung heavily to the surface of the road. Bob Cherry and Bull actually heard his head strike the ground with a fearful thud, and they turned white.

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "He's hurt, Johnny!"

"We must stop the driver!" gasped Bull.

For the collision had not upset the motor-cycle. It had been a glancing blow, and Mr. Quelch had been hardly hurt by the machine itself. After swaying giddily for a second, the combination ran on swiftly down the incline.

"Stop!" roared Bull. "You rotter! Stop!"

The two juniors forgot Mr. Quelch for the moment, and raced after the motor-cyclist.

"The howling cad!" panted Bob Cherry furiously. "He's not going to stop!"

"I believe you're right! What a fearful hound!"

But the juniors were wrong. They turned a bend in the road at full pelt, and could see the machine stationary a short distance ahead.

A dim figure was walking back towards them.

"What the dickens is the matter?" demanded an impatient voice. "Who, in the name of all that's idiotic, was that fool I bowled over?"

"It wasn't his fault!" exclaimed Johnny Bull indignantly.

"Whose fault was it, then, I should like to know?" asked the motor-cyclist, who was shaking considerably. He was apparently quite a young man.

"It was your fault, of course!"

"My fault!"

"Rather!" panted Bob Cherry. "What the dickens do you mean by flying about country lanes with only a pin's head of a light on your rotten jigger?"

The motor-cyclist was rather taken aback.

"I was in a hurry," he replied, "and I couldn't stop to fix up my big lamp. Besides, they won't allow us to have a decent light nowadays."

"All the more reason why you should be driving slowly!" snapped Johnny Bull.

The motor-cyclist gritted his teeth.

"How on earth was I to know that some fool would stand in the middle of the road?" he demanded. "Didn't you hear me coming? Who was he, anyhow?"

"Mr. Quelch, of course!"

"And who might Mr. Quelch be?"

"The Remove-master at our school—Greyfriars," replied Bob Cherry. "But we mustn't stand here jawing. I believe he's really hurt."

"I've got a passenger in the side-car——" began the motor-cyclist.

"Blow the passenger!" said Bob Cherry sharply. "Let's see what's happened to Mr. Quelch."

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And the trio walked hurriedly back up the incline.

"He went down with a frightful whack!" said Bull anxiously. "You never know how these things are going to turn out. Suppose he's got a broken leg——"

"Suppose nothing!" snapped the young man. "Personally, I don't believe he's hurt at all. My machine isn't even scratched!"

"It wasn't the collision that hurt him," said Bob Cherry. "I'm afraid he struck the ground with his head, and if he happened to whack on to a jagged stone——"

"Don't be a young ass!" said the motorist angrily. "I don't suppose he's hurt in the least, except for a bruise or two. Even if he is, I don't consider that I'm to blame."

They were nearing the spot now, and the two juniors hurried forward. They knew the place exactly, for they had been hiding close beside a great oak-tree.

"Here we are!" said Bull.

They looked round in the gloom.

"My hat!" murmured Bob Cherry.

Mr. Quelch was nowhere to be seen!

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

The Motor-Cyclist's Promise!

"HE'S gone!"

There was not the slightest doubt upon that point.

Bob Cherry and Bull looked round keenly, but the road was quite deserted.

"Well, I'm jolly glad!" said Bob thankfully. "It looks as if he wasn't so much hurt, after all. But why didn't he come down towards the village? Why didn't he come and make investigations?"

"Felt a bit dizzy, I expect," said the motor-cyclist. "It's more probable, though, that he tore his clothes, and wasn't exactly in a fit state to be seen. He's trotted off up to the school to be out of harm's way. I expect he realises, as a matter of fact, that it's his own silly fault."

Johnny Bull shook his head uneasily.

"I don't like it," he said candidly. "You don't know Quelch, sir. He's not the chap to slip off after such an occurrence. And his head hit the ground with such a whack that I thought he was stunned."

Bob Cherry was looking searchingly at the hedges.

"I suppose he hasn't crawled to the side of the road?" he suggested.

"Don't be a couple of silly infants!" snapped the motor-cyclist. "The man's no more hurt than I am!"

"We don't know that," said Johnny Bull. "I believe you're right, but it's only supposition. You ought to come along with us up to the school and make certain that everything's all serene before you clear off."

"Yes, I can see myself doing that! I've wasted enough time already! But I don't want to get out of anything if I'm really to blame. My name's Briner, if you particularly want to know—Charlie Briner."

"Well, there's no harm in knowing," said Bull. "But, really, Mr. Briner, I think you ought to satisfy yourself that everything is all right before you go on."

"I'm in a hurry——"

Johnny Bull stamped his foot.

"In a hurry be blowed!" he exclaimed impatiently. "Before you go you've got to make certain that everything's all right!"

"Are they my orders?" inquired Briner, laughing.

"Yes!"

"Then I'm afraid I'm going to disobey them," replied the motor-cyclist. "But look here, boys, seriously, I don't think there's any need for you to be anxious. To tell the truth, I'm in a dickens of a hurry myself—with thundering good reason."

"What do you mean?" asked Johnny Bull curiously.

"You didn't happen to see my passenger in the side-car, did you?"

"No."

"Well, the poor chap is ill, and I'm on my way to Wayland to the doctor's. There's Dr. Pillbury in Friardale, I know, but my friend particularly wants to be taken to Wayland," said Mr. Briner. "So, you see, the matter's rather urgent."

"That's not just a yarn, I suppose?" Bob Cherry asked bluntly.

"My dear kid, why should I fake up a yarn?" asked the motor-cyclist. "I don't consider that I'm to blame for what happened, and I'm jolly sure I'm not going to tell lies just to get away. Because, as a matter of fact, I can go when I like; there's nobody to stop me."

Bob Cherry and Bull were silent.

"I've stopped quite long enough," proceeded the stranger. "I thought it might have been serious; but as it isn't, I'm going to push off. My pal's in a pretty bad way; and, seriously, I can't afford to waste another minute."

"Well, if that's the case, we don't want to prevent your taking your friend to the doctor," said Bob Cherry slowly. "Old Quelchy is evidently all right, so there's no need for you to delay. But I think we'll go and have a squint at your friend, if you don't mind."

"That's what I was thinking," said Bull.

"Don't believe it—eh?" said Briner, with a laugh. "Well, I don't blame you; I'm a stranger to you. Come and satisfy yourselves, by all means."

"We will!"

The juniors could see that their companion was not exactly pleased, but the situation was rather serious. They walked down the road to the spot where the machine was standing.

The side-car was occupied by a middle-aged man, who was muffled up thickly, in spite of the mildness of the evening. He didn't speak, and seemed to take no interest in what was going on. There was no doubt that he was ill.

"Satisfied?" asked Briner.

"Yes, I think so," replied Johnny Bull.

"Perhaps you understand now why I was barging along at such a dickens of a rate?" went on the motor-cyclist. "It's important that I should get to Wayland quickly; but if there's any trouble I'm willing to take my share."

"That's fair enough, anyhow," said Bob Cherry. "But I don't think Mr. Quelch can be really hurt."

"What do you want me to do, then?"

"Will you be passing this way to-morrow?"

"I might," replied Mr. Briner.

"That's too uncertain," said Bob. "I was going to suggest your calling at the school some time to-morrow. If Mr. Quelch is all serene, then there'll be no trouble. But if he's wild, and demands all sorts of explanations, then it'll be a good thing for you to be on hand—just to point out that it was all his own fault."

"It's not a bad idea," said Briner. "I'll think of it."

"But, dash it all, that's not definite!" protested Johnny Bull. "Quelchy is a queer merchant at times, and he might get the police on the job. You don't want to be collared like that, do you?"

"Well, it wouldn't be exactly a birthday-party!"

"Then let's make a definite arrangement now," said Bull briskly. "If Mr. Quelch cuts up rusty we can tell him that you've promised to come along to-morrow and explain matters. We'll tell him, of course, that you are unable to come now owing to your friend's illness."

"Right!" agreed Briner. "I'll come during the morning."

"Honour bright?"

Mr. Briner sighed.

"I'll write it down in black and white if you like," he said. "Yes, kid, honour bright. Now I can push off, I suppose?"

"Of course."

"That's something to be thankful for, anyhow!"

And the stranger made preparations for going. The juniors could hardly help liking him. Under the circumstances, Bob Cherry and Bull were quite easy in their minds. As Briner had promised to call on the morrow, there was no need for any further delay.

He bade them good-night, started his engine—a powerful one with four cylinders, and therefore extremely silent—and "pushed off." The two Removites watched the little red tail-light as it disappeared into the distance.

"Well, we couldn't do any more, could we?" grunted Bob Cherry.

"Rather not!" replied Johnny Bull. "I consider that we've looked after Quelchy's interests jolly well! But I'm blessed if I can understand why he cleared off without interviewing the motorist!"

"We shall find out, I expect."

And they proceeded briskly towards Greyfriars. They were just passing the big oak-tree where the accident had happened, when Bob Cherry came to a stop.

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"That giddy parcel!" he growled. "I left it in the ditch again!"

"Better fetch it," said Bull. "That parcel seems to be landing us into a lot of giddy trouble. We've broken bounds before, but I don't think we've ever been through such a time as this. Looks as though we shall never get back to Greyfriars at all!"

Bob Cherry recovered his precious parcel, and they walked on.

"Harry Wharton and the others will be simply foaming at the mouth," said Bob. "Well, it ain't our fault, is it? We shall have to explain matters quickly before they fall upon us and lead us to the slaughter. They're apt to be rather hasty, you know."

"You blithering chump!" ejaculated Johnny Bull suddenly.

"Eh?"

"You frabjous idiot!"

"I'm blessed if I'm going to stand this!" roared Bob Cherry wrathfully. "I'm a good-tempered chap, Johnny, but this is a bit too thick!"

"Oh, don't get ratty!" growled Bull. "All those names apply to me just as much as they do to you. We're a pair of thundering asses!"

"Explain yourself!" roared Bob.

"We've forgotten a jolly important thing!"

"The parcel, you mean?" asked Bob. "But I've got it, ass!"

"Blow the parcel! I'm thinking of the number!"

"The number?" repeated Bob blankly.

"The registration number, of course!" replied Bull impatiently. "You've got sense, ain't you? We didn't take that motor-cyclist's giddy number!"

"Great Scott!"

"That name he gave us may be false," went on Bull. "How do we know? He certainly seemed sincere enough about turning up to-morrow, but we've only got his word. I say, what a pair of asses we were to forget an important thing like that!"

"I did think of it," said Bob Cherry slowly.

"Then why the dickens didn't you take the number?"

"Well, you see, I forgot it again," replied Bob lamely.

"Ass! I suppose you call that an excuse?" said Johnny Bull. "Still, as it happens, I don't think it matters much. But if Quelchy had been really hurt——"

Bob Cherry suddenly grasped Bull's arm.

"What's that lying there?" he asked, with a catch in his voice.

"What do you mean?" asked Johnny starting. "What's which?"

Bob Cherry pointed with a quivering finger.

Something dark was lying in the road just in front of them. It was still and silent, and the juniors felt their hearts beating wildly. Then, with one accord, they stepped forward to obtain a closer inspection.

"Good heavens!" gasped Bob Cherry faintly.

The object was the unconscious form of a man stretched full length in the road. And he lay so absolutely still that an awful fear gripped the juniors' hearts.

They knew, without looking at the face, that Mr. Quelch lay before them!

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.
Circumstantial Evidence!

"IT'S—it's Mr. Quelch!"

Johnny Bull uttered the words haltingly. He and Bob Cherry were bending over the still figure, and they were both thoroughly frightened.

"Is—is he hurt much?" whispered Bob Cherry. "Oh, Bull, do you think it's anything serious? He—he isn't——"

"Don't be an ass!" interrupted Johnny Bull sharply. "He's only unconscious. I can understand what happened clearly enough, can't you?"

"Not—not exactly."

"Why, he must have received a frightful crack on the head, but it didn't make him immediately unconscious," said Bull quietly. "I expect he staggered up, dazed, and walked away without knowing what he was doing. Then the full effect of the blow made itself felt and he simply collapsed. Such things often happen, you know."

"Then he's—he's only stunned?"

"That's all. He'll be all right to-morrow," replied Bull, with more confidence than he felt. "Of course, we know now why he disappeared when we went to look for him, and why he didn't come down the road and investigate. He was lying here all the time!"

"It's awful, Johnny!"

"I know. What can we do?"

"Hadn't we better rush up to the school?" suggested Bob Cherry. "We can't manage Mr. Quelch between us, and the longer he lays here the worse matters will be. Old Pills ought to be fetched, too——"

EVERY MONDAY. The "Magnet" LIBRARY. ONE PENNY.

"Suppose you stay here while I give the alarm?"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" said Bob. "Somebody coming. I hope it's some of our chaps."

Two figures had suddenly appeared in the gloom, and they approached rapidly. They were Courtney and Loder, of the Sixth, and they found Bob Cherry and Bull bending over Mr. Quelch's still form.

"What the dickens——" began Courtney.

"Quelchy's been hurt!" said Bull rapidly. "He was knocked down——"

"Mr. Quelch!" ejaculated Courtney. "Good heavens, what is the matter with him?"

"Stunned, I think," replied Bob Cherry briskly. "We'll explain later—no time now. He ought to be put to bed without delay."

"What have you kids been up to?" Loder asked sharply. "I expect you know more about this affair than you choose to say. Throwing stones, I expect——"

"Oh, don't be an ass, Loder!" protested Johnny Bull.

"Well, things look jolly queer," said Loder, who was bending close by Mr. Quelch. "He's got a bruise on his head that could only have been made by a stone. Seems to me that these kids have been up to something pretty rotten, Courtney."

"Dry up!" exclaimed Courtney. "Wait until you hear what's happened before you start making wild accusations, Loder. The first thing is to get Mr. Quelch up to the school. Look out, he's coming round, I believe!"

For a moment the master of the Remove opened his eyes and looked round confusedly.

"It's all right, sir!" said Courtney softly. "We're going to take you up to the school."

Mr. Quelch groaned a little.

"I—I was—was knocked down!" he muttered thickly. "Cherry—Bull——"

Mr. Quelch sank back again, and said no more.

"He's lost consciousness again," muttered Courtney. "My hat, this looks pretty serious!"

"But——"

"Silence, Cherry!" rapped out Loder. "The Head will hear what you have to say!"

"But we didn't do it!" protested Bull angrily. "You don't mean to say you think we've done this to Mr. Quelch?"

"You heard what he said!" exclaimed Courtney gruffly. "He said that he was knocked down by you and Cherry. Don't say anything now; but I should advise you to make a clean breast of it to the Head."

"But—but——"

"That's enough—we don't want to hear any lies!"

Bob Cherry and Johnny Bull gazed at one another with undisguised dismay. Those few words of Mr. Quelch's had been exceedingly unfortunate. Of course, it was obvious that he had endeavoured to say that he was knocked down by a motor-cycle, and that Cherry and Bull had made an attempt to save him.

But to Courtney and Loder Mr. Quelch's words had a vastly different significance.

"Look here, Courtney!" said Bob Cherry anxiously. "Mr. Quelch was bowled over by a motor——"

"I've warned you!" interrupted Courtney sharply. "Lying won't help you——"

"But it's the truth!" roared Bull.

"Hallo, what's this?" exclaimed Loder suddenly.

He held up a button with a piece of cloth attached. Courtney struck a match, and the two seniors gazed upon the little object.

"It was in Quelch's hand," said Loder. "It's pretty certain that he tore it from somebody's coat in a struggle. By Jove, I wonder if——"

Loder paused and stared at the two juniors.

"This is absurd!" said Bob Cherry heatedly. "You don't suppose we've had a struggle with Mr. Quelch, do you? He didn't tear that button off my coat, or off Bull's——"

Courtney struck another match.

"You young liar!" he said harshly. "What's this?"

Bob Cherry looked at his coat in amazement. He could see with only half a glance that the button had been torn from his own clothing. But how could it be? Bob felt staggered, and stared at Johnny Bull blankly.

"It's my button!" he ejaculated. "What on earth can it mean, Johnny?"

Bull shook his head.

"It's a mystery," he replied. "How could one of your buttons possibly get into Mr. Quelch's hand."

"That's enough!" snarled Loder. "This bluff won't help you, you young rotters!"

"It's nothing else," put in Courtney, who was quite convinced. "Why, I can't see how you've got the nerve to deny

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it! It's as plain as a pikestaff. Mr. Quelch said himself that you knocked him down, and we find a button in his hand which shows positively that it was wrenched away in a struggle. By lying you'll only make matters worse, so you'd better keep your mouths closed until we take you before the Head!"

Johnny Bull laughed strainedly.

"It's all piffle!" he exclaimed. "Mr. Quelch was bowled over by a motor-bike——"

"Silence!"

The two juniors realised that there was nothing to be gained by talking. Loder and Courtney had quite made up their minds, so explanations were useless.

"Lend a hand," said Courtney.

He and Loder lifted Mr. Quelch between them, and struggled up the lane towards Greyfriars. It was no light task carrying the limp form of the master, but the seniors were strong, and at last they arrived at the gates, Bob Cherry and Johnny Bull behind, their minds in a chaos of dismay.

"My heye!" exclaimed Gosling. "What's hall this?"

"Mr. Quelch has been hurt," said Courtney sharply. "Send somebody for the doctor at once, Gosling; or, better still, have him telephoned for. It's very urgent."

"Werry good, sir," said Gosling. "But what I says is this 'ere, 'oo's bin knockin' the pore gentleman about? I allus sed them tramps would set upon some pore——"

"That's enough, Gosling. Telephone at once," ordered Courtney.

The two prefects staggered across the Close with their burden. The entrance hall was crowded by the time Mr. Quelch was carried through, and an excited buzz of voices rose from all quarters.

Snoop and Stott appeared at the top of the stairs, and as they saw the unconscious form of the Remove-master they turned deathly pale, and fled along the passage to their own study.

Bob Cherry and Bull remained in the Hall. They were both rather pale, and the look of dismay was still apparent in their eyes. Harry Wharton, Hurree Singh, and Frank Nugent buttonholed them at once.

"What the dickens is the matter?" asked Wharton quickly. "What have you chaps been doing all this time?"

"It wasn't our fault," explained Johnny Bull. "Everything seemed to be against us. We met Loder, first of all, and then found Snoop and Stott up to some rotten game. But that was only a slight delay in comparison to what happened afterwards. We met old Quelchy, and only just saved him from being nearly killed."

"Great Scott!"

"You'd better explain," said Vernon-Smith, who was standing close by with a crowd of other fellows. "Loder says that you two chaps have got yourselves the sack. What does he mean?"

"Explain, you bounders!"

"There's not much to explain," said Bob Cherry. "What Loder says is all a mistake, of course. It's Mr. Quelch's fault, really, for recovering consciousness for a minute. He tried to say that we'd helped him, but the words he used sounded very different."

And the two Removites related exactly what had happened, and also explained their own peculiar position.

"Well, it seems jolly queer to me," said Skinner sneeringly. "I don't believe there was any motor-bike at all!"

"Neither do I," said Billy Bunter. "These two rotters have been telling whoppers! They half-killed old Quelchy, and are now trying to get out of it——"

"Shut up, Bunter!"

"Oh, really, Bulstrode——"

"If you say another word, you fat rotter, we'll bump you!"

"Oh, I say, Linley, I'm entitled to my opinion—— Yow! Yarooooh!"

Bunter subsided as two or three fists punched him in various portions of his anatomy. And, although Skinner and Bunter were pleased to disbelieve the story, the other juniors—the bulk of them, at least—were quite convinced of its truthfulness.

"You believe us, don't you?" asked Johnny Bull eagerly.

"Begad, my dear fellow," drawled Lord Mauleverer, "you're not a chap like Bunter. We know that you tell the truth. Yaas, I believe the story perfectly. But I must say that you were silly asses not to take that motor-cycle merchant's number."

"Yes, we must have been dotty," grunted Bob Cherry.

"The thing that's worrying me is that everything is black against us," said Johnny Bull. "Whatever we say won't make any difference. That button found in Quelch's hand is a regular puzzler."

"Well, the evidence is all circumstantial, anyhow," said Harry Wharton thoughtfully. "As soon as Mr. Quelch recovers he'll be able to tell exactly what happened, and you'll be cleared."

"But suppose he doesn't recover for a day or two?" asked Bob anxiously. "The facts seem so conclusive that the Head might sack us straight away. One thing's jolly certain, nobody can come forward and say that we were seen knocking Quelch down!"

Loder pushed his way through the crowd.

"Cherry, Bull," he snapped, "follow me!"

"Now for it!" groaned Bob Cherry dolefully.

"Don't worry, my dear fellow," said Lord Mauleverer. "As you're not guilty, you've nothing to fear, begad!"

And Bob Cherry and Johnny Bull were led off by Loder to the Head's study. Even now they didn't fully realise the appalling nature of the position into which they had been landed.

For, bad as matters were, they were yet to become far worse.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.
Disbelieved!

DR. LOCKE was looking terribly stern.

As Bob Cherry and Johnny Bull were led into the study they thought they had never seen the Head with such a black brow. Their hearts sank, for they realised that it would be extremely difficult to prove the truth of their story.

The door closed, and the Head looked at the two juniors searchingly. Courtney and Loder were in the room, and the latter did not look at all displeased. Courtney, however, wore a rather worried expression.

"Boys," said the Head, with terrible sternness, "I have heard some news which has astounded me more than I can possibly express. That any juniors could have performed such a dastardly act is entirely beyond my comprehension. But for the conclusive proof I should be inclined to cast doubts upon Loder's story——"

"But it's not true, sir!" burst out Bull.

"Silence!"

"We've done nothing, sir——"

"Will you hold your tongue, you wretched boy?" exclaimed Dr. Locke sternly. "I do not wish to hear a denial. The proof is too positive. It appears that you were breaking bounds, for Loder had already refused you a pass."

"That's right, sir," said Bob Cherry eagerly. "I left a parcel down the lane by accident, and we went to fetch it. There was no real harm, sir."

"The fact that you went to recover the parcel was, I admit, a mere breach of the rules," said the Head. "But you apparently met Mr. Quelch on your way back. I gather that he commanded you to stop. In desperation, you thought that you could take advantage of the darkness, and attack Mr. Quelch. You did so——"

"We didn't sir," said Johnny Bull frantically.

"Silence! I will hear what you have to say later," said Dr. Locke frowningly. "I do not for a moment suppose that you intended any real harm to Mr. Quelch. You probably tripped him, and he struck his head upon a stone. The evidence is clear, however, that you did attack him, for Mr. Quelch recovered sufficiently to accuse you. A button, too, off one of your coats was found in his grasp. Do you dare to deny the truth of what I say?"

"No, sir; it's true enough, but it's all a misunderstanding!" exclaimed Bob quickly. "Mr. Quelch didn't accuse us——"

"That's a lie!" cut in Loder. "Mr. Quelch distinctly said that he was knocked down by Cherry and Bull—didn't he, Courtney?"

Courtney nodded.

"I tell you it's a misunderstanding!" said Bull hotly. "We didn't touch Mr. Quelch, sir. As a matter of fact, I believe we saved his life, and he tried to say so."

The Head frowned angrily.

"I do not wish to be too hasty," he said, "but all this seems most untrue. If you have something to tell me, I give you permission to speak; but if it is not the truth, then your punishment will be all the greater."

"I've never told you a lie yet, sir," said Bob Cherry warmly.

"That is why I am so worried, Cherry," replied the Head. "But that does not prove that you are above such deception. I will weigh your story carefully; but, considering the facts which I have already learned, I must warn you to be very careful."

"It was like this, sir——"

"We met Mr. Quelch——"

"And hid in the hedge——"

The Head held up his hand.

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Bob Cherry and Bull crossed the dusky Close, and just as the pair were slipping over the wall at their accustomed place a fat form rolled out of the shadows and approached. "I say, you rotters, I'll sneak——" Bob Cherry breathed hard. "Bunter again!" he muttered thickly. *(See Chapter 2.)*

"There is no necessity for both of you to speak at once," he said sharply. "Bull, let Cherry tell the story."

"Very good, sir," said Johnny Bull.

Bob Cherry cleared his throat.

In simple language he told the Head exactly what had happened—how they had crouched in the hedge, and how Mr. Quelch had paused to light his pipe exactly opposite. He then described the approach of the motor-cycle and side-car, and how he and Bull had yelled out in the nick of time.

"We stopped the motor-cyclist, sir," he concluded, "and we all three walked back to the spot. But Mr. Quelch had gone."

"Gone!"

"Yes, sir. The effect of the blow evidently did not make itself felt at the moment."

"That is highly improbable," said the Head sharply. "But proceed."

"Mr. Quelch must have picked himself up and staggered up the road," went on Bob, realising as he was talking that the story was not convincing, even though it was the absolute truth. "As Mr. Quelch wasn't there, we naturally thought that he wasn't hurt much, and so we let the motor-cyclist go—especially as he had a sick passenger in the side-car, who was being taken to the doctor's. After the man had gone, we walked up the lane, and suddenly came upon Mr. Quelch's unconscious form upon the road. We realised then that matters were more serious than we had at first supposed."

"That's the absolute truth, sir," said Johnny Bull.

The Head was silent for a moment.

"I wish I could believe it," he said at length. "But in the face of all the facts, I can only look upon it as a trumped-up story. Can you give me any proofs to substantiate these improbable statements?"

"They're nothing but the truth, sir."

"You wish me to believe, then, that Mr. Quelch was knocked down by a motor-cycle and seriously injured—but, in spite of this, he got up and walked away, so that you felt no hesitation in letting the motorist proceed upon his way?"

"It was an exceptional case, sir," said Johnny Bull. "The passenger in the side-car was ill, and as we thought Mr. Quelch wasn't hurt, we didn't delay the chap."

"And what is his name?"

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"Briner, sir—he told us that," said Bob Cherry promptly.

The Head pursed his lips.

"Under the exceptional circumstances you naturally took his address?" he asked.

"No, sir; we forgot that."

"Dear me, that was very awkward!" said the Head cuttingly. "But all motor-cycles carry a number, I believe, and in the event of an accident that number is always made a note of. What was the number of this motor-cycle?"

Bob Cherry and Bull looked uncomfortable.

"We—we didn't look at it!"

"Then the only real fact that you know is, that the man's name is Briner?"

"That's all, sir," said Bob Cherry lamely.

"I suppose you would know him again?"

"I—I don't think so, sir," replied Johnny Bull. "You see, sir, it was very dark."

The Head rose to his feet.

"I have listened with as much patience as I could muster," he said angrily. "What you have told me is obviously a trumped-up story—there is absolutely no clue which we can follow up and inquire into. I am disgusted that two juniors can be so utterly lacking in the rudiments of truthfulness——"

"But—but we haven't lied, sir——"

"Silence!" thundered the Head. "I refuse to hear another word! Go from my study—your punishment will be meted out to-morrow, after I have ascertained the exact nature of Mr. Quelch's injury. I have heard quite enough to convince me that you attacked Mr. Quelch in a spirit of desperation, and that you have made matters a thousand times worse by attempting to clear yourselves by shameful and deliberate falsehood."

"Oh, sir, we haven't made a single misstatement!" gasped Bob Cherry, almost sobbing. "It's all true—every word of it! I know it sounds pretty thick, sir, but it all happened."

"And Mr. Briner is coming here to-morrow, sir, to make sure that everything is all right," added Johnny Bull eagerly. "He promised us that he'd come."

The Head elevated his eyebrows.

"That you should have the audacity to make such a statement amazes me," he said harshly. "Do not for one moment imagine that this fresh falsehood impresses me."

"But he's coming, sir—really!"

"In any case, your punishment will not be administered until to-morrow evening," said the Head sharply. "If this man comes, so much the better for you. But as he can be nothing but a figment of your imagination, I shall certainly be astounded when he arrives."

"He promised to come, sir, anyhow," said Johnny Bull.

"I have heard more than sufficient," exclaimed Dr. Locke sternly. "I am going now to Mr. Quelch's room. Loder, see that these wretched boys remain within gates until I have necessity to interview them again. On no account must they be allowed to leave the school precincts."

"Leave that to me, sir," said Loder pleasantly.

And he marched the two culprits away.

He took them straight to the junior common-room, where quite a crowd of fellows had collected, excitedly discussing the situation. The murmur of voices ceased as Loder appeared with Bob Cherry and Bull.

"These two young rascals are in disgrace," said Loder, in a tone of real pleasure. "Their guilt has been proved, and I should advise you kids to send them to Coventry."

"When we want advice from you, Loder, we'll ask for it."

"Begad, rather!"

"You cheeky young sweeps!" *roared Loder.* "*I'll*——"

"Clear off—we don't believe your rotten yarns!"

And Loder beat an undignified retreat, realising that the bulk of the juniors were in sympathy with the two culprits.

Bob Cherry and Johnny Bull explained what had occurred in the Head's study, and nearly all the Removites were convinced that there was some unfortunate mistake.

"It'll all come right to-morrow," said Harry Wharton confidently. "After that motor-cyclist chap promised to turn up he won't fail. But how's old Quelch? Is he badly hurt?"

"We don't know yet," replied Bull.

Five minutes later, however, Wingate looked in and reported that Mr. Quelch was unconscious, and that he was suffering from concussion. The doctor was confident, however, that he would recover within twenty-four hours—and that once recovered, he would be none the worse for his accident.

"That's something to be thankful for, anyhow," said Nugent. "It would have been thundering serious if Quelchy had been badly injured. Besides, if he'd pegged out, Bob and Johnny would have been arrested for murder."

But although the juniors tried to make light of the whole affair, they realised that their two Form-mates were in a decidedly awkward position.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.
False Evidence!

SNOOP and Stott were in a terrible state of blue funk. This was quite natural. They had seen Mr. Quelch's unconscious form brought in, and they had immediately rushed off to their study, pale-faced and nervous.

"We—we must have really hurt him!" gasped Snoop as the two young rascals faced one another in the study. "Oh, my hat! We shall be sacked if the truth comes out!"

"He—he was unconscious!" ejaculated Stott with a catch in his voice. "We must have given him a frightful whack on the head—he bumped it on the road, I expect. Don't you remember, Snoop, how still he lay——"

Snoop shivered.

"Don't be an ass!" he muttered. "We didn't mean anything. We only bowled him over so that we shouldn't be collared. Oh, by gum, this'll mean the sack if the truth comes out."

The precious pair were labouring under the impression that they were the cause of Mr. Quelch's unfortunate state.

"I—I say," stammered Stott nervously, "do you — you think he's really bad?"

"Blessed if I know!" said Snoop shakily. "What shall we do? What the dickens shall we do, Stott?"

"Perhaps old Quelch will think that Bob Cherry and some other chap did it. We used Cherry's name, you remember."

"My hat, yes!" said Snoop. "And Bob Cherry and Bull were out of bounds, too! But very likely they'll be able to prove an alibi," he added nervously. "Suppose Quelchy really did see us—suppose he knew it was us!"

He shivered, and his teeth fairly chattered with fear.

"It's awful!" he muttered. "Oh, you were a fool, Stott!"

"Rot! You suggested it yourself!" declared Stott.

"Oh, you awful fibber! I didn't want to have anything to do with it!" said Snoop indignantly. "Don't you remember how I told you to own up and—and face it out? Don't you remember?"

"No, I jolly well don't!"

"I was against it all along!" said Snoop. "I guessed something like this would happen! Now we shall get the sack if we're found out. And all through you!"

"You rotten liar!" roared Stott. "It was your fault entirely!"

"Look here——"

"I'm blessed if I'm going to take any blame!" panted Snoop. "Suppose Quelch is really badly hurt? Suppose he—he pegs out——"

The two cads looked at one another fearfully.

"He might have got a frightful whack on the head," said Snoop, in a quivering voice. "I have heard of chaps going off like that. But it wasn't our fault, Stott!"

"We—we didn't mean to hurt him!" shivered Stott.

"Can't we do something? Suppose we—we clear out——"

"Clear out!"

"Why not?" asked Snoop eagerly. "Run away from Greyfriars!"

"My hat!"

The cads of the Remove were in a pitiable state of funk, and they were talking wildly.

"We can't run away," said Stott, with a glimmering of common-sense. "If we did we should be suspected at once. And we might not be suspected if we stay here and brazen it out. I—I think we'd better go down to the common-room and hear what the chaps are saying."

"You look like a blessed ghost!"

"*And you ain't much better*——"

A step sounded out in the passage. Snoop and Stott stared at one another with frightened faces.

"Somebody coming!" whispered Stott. "Oh, my hat! Suppose it's Wingate—come to take us before the Head?"

"Don't be an ass! Nobody's coming here——"

Tap!

The two cowards shook visibly.

"I told you so!" said Snoop faintly. "Oh, by gum, we're in for it now!"

Tap!

Still they hesitated, and the door opened at last. But the cads of the Remove need not have been so startled, for it was the face of Peter Todd which looked in upon them.

"Hallo!" he exclaimed. "Why the dickens didn't you answer?"

"Answer!" repeated Snoop confusedly.

"Yes; you heard me tap, I suppose?"

"No-o!"

"Then I shall have to speak to Tom Dutton," said Peter cheerfully. "His complaint is evidently infecting other fellows. But I hope I don't intrude—you seem rather startled at my appearance. I'm not a giddy ghost, you know!"

"What—what do you want?" asked Snoop, with an effort.

"Oh, nothing!" replied Peter Todd calmly. "Just looked

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in to see where you are. When there's any exciting news going about you're usually to the fore. As you were both conspicuous by your absence, I thought perhaps you were having a snooze. What's the matter? Have I copped you at something you don't want me to see?"

"Don't be an ass!" grunted Stott. "We were only talking. What's this startling news?"

"Haven't you heard?"

"No; we've been in the study a long time."

"Oh, then you've missed it!" said Todd. "Poor old Quelchy's been whacked on the napper, and he's insensible. But it's nothing serious. Old Pills said that he'll be all right within twenty-four hours."

"Thank goodness!" muttered Stott, with relief.

"Hallo, you seem pretty glad!" exclaimed Todd keenly. "I suppose you don't know anything about it?"

"No, nothing; how should we?"

"That's your bizney!" replied Todd. "But I thought you looked relieved, that's all. A couple of Remove chaps are suspected of doing the dirty deed——"

"Good heavens!" gasped Snoop, turning paler than ever.

Peter Todd stared.

"Well, hang it all, I'm blessed if I can understand you!" he exclaimed. "One might think you were suspected yourselves!"

"Who is suspected?" asked Stott eagerly.

"A couple of chaps who couldn't possibly have done it," replied Peter stoutly. "I admit that the evidence is pretty circumstantial, but I don't call it proof myself. I know for a fact, anyhow, that Bob Cherry and Bull couldn't have done such a thing."

"Bob Cherry and Bull!" ejaculated Snoop quickly.

"It's a bit of a knock-out, isn't it?" went on Peter Todd. "You see, a button is missing from Bob Cherry's coat, and it was found in Quelch's hand."

"My only topper!" gasped Stott.

"That's proof enough, anyhow!" exclaimed Snoop eagerly.

"Rats! It certainly is a bit surprising, but I don't call it proof myself," said Todd easily. "But it seems that Quelchy came to himself for a minute, and said that he'd been knocked down by Cherry and Bull. He was wandering in his mind, of course!"

"Well, I think it's jolly conclusive!" said Stott recklessly. "As a matter of fact, I know that Bob Cherry and Bull did it!"

"And how the dickens do you know?"

"Because I saw it happen!" replied Stott, throwing all caution to the winds in his terrible anxiety to lay the blame on other shoulders. Bob Cherry and Bull were suspected—therefore it would be a good plan to keep up the fiction. "We both saw it happen—didn't we, Snoopey?"

"Of course!" agreed Snoop, taking his cue. "We were crouching in the hedge when it happened, and saw the two rotters attack Mr. Quelch!"

"I'm not in the habit of using strong language," said Peter Todd angrily; "but my present thoughts regarding you two rotters are rather too murky for utterance. I'll simply say that you're a pair of thundering liars!"

"What!"

"I'll repeat it if you didn't hear properly," said Todd. "And, anyhow, didn't you tell me a minute ago that you knew nothing about it?"

Stott was taken aback for a moment.

"That—that was because we didn't want to give Cherry and Bull away," he replied. "But as Mr. Quelch knew who the rotters were, there's no harm in us saying anything."

"You make me feel sick!" grunted Peter Todd. "I don't believe a word. Come to think of it, you two rotters were looking pretty funky when I came in. I shouldn't be surprised if you know more about this than you care to say!"

"What rot!" exclaimed Stott, growing bolder, and letting his voice get higher. "I tell you, Todd, that we saw Bob Cherry and Bull spring upon Mr. Quelch and bowl him over. We saw it all—as plainly as we can see you!"

"Rather!" agreed Snoop.

The door, which had been ajar, was suddenly pushed open, and Wingate of the Sixth looked in.

"I heard you say something just now, Stott," he said quietly. "You were speaking rather loudly, and I couldn't help overhearing. Repeat it!"

"It—it was nothing, Wingate!" stammered Stott.

"It sounded considerably important to me," said Wingate sternly. "You were mentioning something about Cherry and Bull."

"I—I wasn't!" gasped Stott. "Really, Wingate, I think it's a bit thick. You must have mistaken my words——"

"That's enough, you lying rotter!" growled Peter Todd. "If he won't speak up, Wingate, I'll do it for him. He made a false accusation to me, and is rather funky of springing the same yarn on you. That's what's the matter!"

Wingate nodded.

"I heard quite sufficient!" he said sharply. "Snoop and Stott, you will follow me to the Head's study!"

"What—what for?" stuttered Snoop.

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"Because I tell you to!" rapped out Wingate. "You've apparently got some evidence to give which bears upon the attack on Mr. Quelch. Cherry and Bull are suspected, and you say that you saw them do it. Justice has got to be done, and your evidence seems to be highly important. What you said is the truth, I suppose?"

"Of—of course!"

"It's a lie!" exclaimed Peter Todd warmly. "Don't you believe it, Wingate!"

"That's enough, Todd!" said Wingate sharply. "Cherry and Bull are friends of yours, I know, so I don't blame you for being upset. This matter has got to be thrashed out to the bitter end, and the culprits brought to book."

"That's what we think exactly," said Stott, recovering himself somewhat.

"Then follow me, the pair of you!" ordered Wingate.

And the captain of Greyfriars walked out of the study. After a moment's hesitation, Snoop and Stott followed.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.
Convincing Proof!

TAP!

Wingate struck his knuckles upon a panel of the Head's study door.

"Come in!"

The prefect and his two charges entered the sacred apartment. Dr. Locke was alone, and he looked up from his desk somewhat in surprise.

"If these boys have been unruly, Wingate, please deal with them yourself," he said. "I am busy now, and——"

"But the matter is urgent, sir," interrupted Wingate. "I have brought them to you because they can throw some light on the attack upon Mr. Quelch. They declare that they saw it all happen."

The Head started.

"Indeed! That alters matters," he said. "How is it they did not come forward before?"

"They were breaking bounds, I suppose, sir, and were afraid."

"I understand. Well, we will deal with that question later," said the Head. "Boys, this is a very grave matter, and I hope you will confine yourselves to the absolute truth."

"It's not much we know, sir," replied Stott nervously. "We—we don't want to get the chaps into a row——"

"I understand your natural reluctance," put in Dr. Locke kindly. "But the affair is so outrageous that we must get to the bottom of it without delay. I may as well inform you that I already know the culprits, so anything you say will only substantiate the evidence already in my hands."

Stott cleared his throat.

"We were breaking bounds, sir," he began. "I hope you won't punish us, sir, under the circumstances. As we were coming back to Greyfriars we heard footsteps, and hid against the hedge, as we didn't want to be discovered. We could see that it was Mr. Quelch coming along."

"He was alone, I presume?"

"Yes, sir, quite alone," went on Stott. "In fact, we didn't see anybody else in the lane until we happened to look the other way. And then we saw Bob Cherry and Bull coming along."

"And how did you know they were Cherry and Bull?"

"We—we couldn't see very well, sir, but we heard them talking, and recognised their voices—didn't we, Snoop?"

"Heard them quite plainly, sir," agreed Snoop, ready to back his chum up in any lie.

"Quite so," said the Head. "Proceed."

"After a bit Cherry and Bull became aware that Mr. Quelch was coming along," pursued Snoop. "It all happened in a minute, and almost before we realised it. We couldn't possibly jump out and save Mr. Quelch, because we didn't know what was going to happen. But the two rotters sprang on him and bowled him over in a second."

"Dear me!" exclaimed the Head.

But he was not surprised. The evidence now being given to him supported that which he had already heard. Snoop and Stott had started lying by force, as it were, but Stott was now adding details out of sheer spite.

It was not surprising that the Head's face was very grave. He had already been convinced, but this story, told by two actual eye-witnesses—as he thought—put the finishing touch to it.

"As soon as they had knocked Mr. Quelch over, they ran for all they were worth," lied Stott. "Mr. Quelch was lying on the ground, quite still."

"And why did you not render him assistance?"

"We were too frightened, sir. We simply got up and ran."

NEXT MONDAY— "THE UPPER HAND!" A Grand, Long, Complete Story of Harry Wharton & Co. By FRANK RICHARDS.

"That's all we know, sir," added Snoop.

The Head frowned.

"One moment!" he said sharply. "You state that Cherry and Bull ran away as soon as they had committed the assault. That is in direct contradiction of the facts, for they were found bending over Mr. Quelch. How do you account for that?"

"We don't know, sir," replied Stott, breathing hard. "They—they must have come back. I expect they felt pretty rotten over what they'd done."

"Quite possibly, my boys," agreed the Head. "Indeed, there is nothing else to think. I am shocked and terribly disappointed. I always considered those two boys perfectly honourable and truthful. This is indeed a sad awakening."

"May I make a suggestion, sir?" put in Wingate. "You have not asked these boys if they saw anything of the motor-cycle and side-car."

The Head smiled grimly.

"I am firmly convinced that there was no such vehicle," he said. "However, I will put the question. While you were out, boys, did you see a motor conveyance of any kind—I mean in Friardale Lane?"

"No, sir—nothing at all."

"There wasn't one to see, sir."

"Thank you, my boys," said the Head. "You have proved that Cherry and Bull told me a fabricated story. Had these boys been well-known as untruthful, I should not be so angry as I am. But I always regarded them in quite an opposite light, and I shall therefore deal with them with the utmost severity. You may go."

"And—and what about our breaking bounds, sir?" asked Stott hesitatingly.

"Under the exceptional circumstances I shall overlook the matter," replied the Head.

"Oh, thank you sir!"

And the two young rascals retired, hardly able to believe their good fortune. But when they were alone, out in the passage, Stott was a little thoughtful.

"Well, we got out of it rippingly, didn't we?" said Snoop gleefully.

"Yes, we're safe enough," replied Stott. "But what was that about a motor-bike? I say, a motor-bike might easily have come along after we'd skipped in. It looks as if Bob Cherry and Bull have told the Head some yarn."

"Oh, rats!" exclaimed Snoop impatiently. "I don't care if they've told the Head fifty yarns! We're safe enough, anyhow!"

And the two contemptible cads went off in high good humour to the common-room. They had hardly arrived there when Wingate appeared and ordered Bob Cherry and Johnny Bull to follow him.

"We ain't going to the Head again, are we?" asked Bull warmly.

"Yes!" said Wingate sternly.

"Oh, I say, Wingate, it's bed-time!" protested Bob Cherry. "Besides, the Head said——"

"Never mind what the Head said!" rapped out Wingate. "Follow me!"

Very seldom had the Removites heard the good-natured Wingate speak in such sharp tones, and it was only too apparent that he, too, believed Bob Cherry and Bull guilty. Under all the circumstances, Wingate was not to be blamed. But as soon as he had gone, Peter Todd and a crowd of other juniors hurled themselves upon Snoop and Stott, and demanded to hear exactly what they had told the Head.

Meanwhile, Bob Cherry and Bull were again "on the carpet" before the Head. Dr. Locke's expression was graver than ever.

"I have just heard corroborative evidence that is absolutely conclusive," he said grimly. "I should advise you, my boys, for your own sakes, to make a clean breast of everything. I may as well warn you that you will not aid your cause by persisting in the manufactured lie which you previously——"

"But it wasn't a lie, sir!" said Bob Cherry quickly.

"You wretched boy! I have just heard the story of two boys who actually saw you perpetrate the assault upon Mr. Quelch. Snoop and Stott, of the Remove, witnessed the whole disgraceful scene!"

Bob Cherry and Johnny Bull were utterly taken aback.

"Snoop and Stott say that they saw us do it, sir?" gasped Bull.

"They saw everything!"

"It's a lie!" broke out Bob Cherry furiously. "I—I mean they've told you a lie, sir! They said it to have revenge on us because we ragged them for bullying earlier in the evening. What we told you about the motor-bike, sir, was the absolute truth!"

The Head's brow grew as black as thunder.

"Upon my soul!" he gasped. "You abandoned young reprobates! That you should have the audacity to persist in your story is utterly amazing!"

"But, sir——"

"Hold your tongue!" thundered Dr. Locke. "Have I not sufficient proof? Mr. Quelch said himself, before losing consciousness, that you two boys knocked him down. A button off one of your coats was found in his grasp—clear proof that there had been a struggle. And now two boys have come forward and stated that they witnessed everything. Can you expect me to credit your wild statements in face of all this?"

Bob Cherry looked round wildly.

"No, sir," he groaned. "We can't expect you to. But it's all a ghastly misunderstanding! We're not guilty. We saved Mr. Quelch's life—helped to, anyway. And to-morrow, when Mr. Briner comes, he'll prove our story to be true!"

The Head rapped his desk angrily.

"Upon my soul, your audacity takes my breath away!" he exclaimed. "Do you still dare to persist that this phantom motor-cyclist will appear to bear out your story?"

"He wasn't a phantom, sir. He was as real as any of us," said Bob Cherry quickly. "He promised to come——"

"Silence!" rapped out the Head. "I will listen to no more!"

Johnny Bull's eyes blazed.

"But it isn't fair, sir!" he shouted. "You ought to listen to us! It's only justice! All the evidence you have got is false, and you believe it! If you will only wait until Mr. Briner comes he'll clear up everything!"

"After what I have heard I can believe you base enough for any deception," said Dr. Locke harshly. "Do not imagine I am quite devoid of sense. There is nothing to prevent an accomplice of yours—for I still suspect certain boys sympathise with you—bribing a motor-cyclist to come here to-morrow to say just what he is ordered."

"Oh, sir!" gasped Bob Cherry.

"Were the man here now it would be a different matter. As it is he is merely a myth, a being nobody has seen except you two boys, who have a very good reason for saying you saw him!" went on the Head sternly. "I believe you invented the story on the spur of the moment, hoping to shield yourselves. But it has failed to impress me, and I cannot find words to express my disgust. I only hope that the morning will find you in a more chastened mood."

"It's no good!" groaned Bull dismally. "And we've told nothing but the truth, sir!"

"Were it not so terribly serious I could laugh at your preposterous persistence," said the Head. "I had you brought here because I was foolish enough to hope that you still had sufficient common-sense and honour to own your guilt. Since you have adopted this attitude, however——"

"It's the only attitude we can adopt!" interrupted Johnny Bull stoutly. "Mr. Quelch will bear us out when he recovers. Surely you'll wait until he can speak before you punish us?"

"I shall do nothing of the sort!" rapped out the Head. "I have too much evidence at my disposal already. I have a horror of acting hastily, but in this instance I fail to see any reason for delay. Wingate!"

"Yes, sir?" said Wingate, who had been standing by the door.

"Take these juniors to the punishment-room," said Dr. Locke. "And see that they do not get into conversation with their schoolfellows. I will deal with them to-morrow."

"Very good, sir."

And Bob Cherry and Johnny Bull were led away in disgrace, miserable and furious—furious with the two cads who had given lying evidence against them. Their position was desperate indeed. One ray of light only penetrated the darkness—if Mr. Briner kept his promise all would be well.

But would he keep it? The motor-cyclist didn't think matters were really serious. He didn't think Mr. Quelch had been really hurt. Would he keep his promise?

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.
The Verdict!

"IN the punishment-room!"

"And something's got to be done!"

"Matters have come to a giddy crisis!"

"Hear hear!"

A little meeting was being held in No. 1 Study. It was within a few minutes of bed-time, but the Removites didn't seem to remember that.

Harry Wharton and Nugent and Hurree Singh were there, of course, and some other juniors had joined the conclave. Squiff, Peter Todd, Vernon-Smith, Mark Linley, and Lord Mauleverer were all firmly convinced that something was considerably wrong.

MAGNIFICENT TUCK-HAMPERS FOR READERS OF THE "BOYS' FRIEND," 1D. OUT TO-DAY.

"One thing's jolly certain," said Squiff. "That yarn of Snoop's and Stott's is a whacking lie! They never meant to tell it to the Head, but as Wingate overheard them they were practically forced to."

"Yes; but they've convinced the Head, anyhow," growled Harry Wharton. "That's serious enough, ain't it?"

"Yaas, begad!" said Lord Mauleverer. "I am afraid Bob Cherry and Bull are in a rather rotter position, my dear fellows. Not that I believe a word against them."

"The very idea of Quelchy being assaulted by them is absurd!" exclaimed Nugent warmly. "I gave the Head credit for more sense."

"He must be fair, you know," said Vernon-Smith thoughtfully. "Don't forget that Quelch himself said that he had been bowled over by Cherry and Bull. He apparently meant to say something quite different, but his actual words were absolutely accusing. And that button, too. How did that get into his hand?"

"Blessed if I can understand it!"

"We shall have to see the bounders, somehow," said Wharton. "We've got to do something to help them. But they're locked up in the punishment-room; they're going to be there all night. Beds have been made up, and——"

"The esteemed punishment-room is not a prison," said Hurree Singh softly.

"What do you mean, Inky?"

"The meanfulness is terrific," replied the dusky nabob. "The august room is merely a study likeful to this one. What is to prevent us trying keys in the ludicrous lock until we succeed in gaining the esteemed admitfulness?"

"Might work," said Nugent. "But a blessed prefect would be sure to butt in."

Hurree Jamset Ram Singh smiled.

"You mistakefully misunderstand me," he said gently. "It is bedtime within an honourable minute, and we have no timefulness."

"Then what's the use of suggesting anything, you ass?"

"Would it not be easy for two of us to creep out of the esteemed dormitory?" asked the Indian junior. "We could gain the admitfulness into the punishment-room, and nobody would be the wiser. Then the confabfulness with the august prisoners would be terrific!"

"My hat!" said Harry Wharton. "That's not a bad idea, Inky. If we could only have a jaw with Bob and Johnny we might arrange something."

"Begad, and so you might!"

"Worth trying, anyhow!" said the Bounder. "Cherry and Bull are in a rotten position, and we've simply got to lend them a hand."

"We've got to attend to Snoop and Stott yet," said Peter Todd grimly. "Their lies have made matters worse."

"Yes, but they can wait," interrupted Wharton. "The first thing is to help——"

Tap!

The door opened, and Courtney, of the Sixth, looked in.

"You kids too busy to notice the time?" he asked sarcastically. "You'd better look sharp!"

"Is it bed-time, Courtney?"

"Past!" answered Courtney shortly. "Buck up!"

And he retired. Further discussion was impossible, and the Removites trooped up to the dormitory.

After lights out a murmur of conversation still went on, and gradually got quieter, until ten o'clock struck. By that time nearly all the juniors were asleep. But after the booming had died away Harry Wharton sat up.

"Anybody awake?" he asked softly.

"Rather!" murmured Nugent promptly.

"The awakefulness is terrific!"

"Anybody else?" whispered Wharton.

Silence.

"Well, perhaps it's just as well," went on Harry. "Three of us will be quite enough. The other chaps have all gone to sleep. Slip a few things on, and we'll creep out like giddy burglars. Even if we don't succeed in having a confab with poor old Bob and Johnny, we'll have a jolly good shot at it!"

"The shotfulness will be——"

"'Shush! Some ass is moving!"

But it was a false alarm. The ass was only Billy Bunter turning over in bed, though he certainly made the bed groan when he performed that operation.

Harry Wharton, Frank Nugent, and Hurree Singh soon slipped a few clothes on. Then they sallied out on their mission. Fortunately the punishment-rooom was not far from the Remove passage, and by this time the junior quarters were deserted.

The trio had managed to rake up several old keys, and one after another they tried them in the lock. At the fourth attempt the door was unlocked.

"Come on!" breathed Wharton. "Skip in quickly!"

They skipped in, and found themselves in darkness. Wharton closed the door softly, and locked it again.

"Who's that?" demanded a voice.

EVERY MONDAY, The "Magnet" LIBRARY. ONE PENNY.

"Not a giddy word! We're visitors!"

"The visitfulness is terrific!"

"My hat!" whispered Johnny Bull. "What on earth are you chaps doing here? You'll be slaughtered if you're discovered. We're criminals in the condemned cell, you know!"

"Oh, case up, Johnny!"

Bull chuckled.

"Well, we feel like it, anyhow," he amended. "But, I say, this is a bit risky, you chaps. We're jolly glad to see you, and all the rest of it, but what's the wheeze?"

"We want to help you," replied Harry Wharton. "No, there's no need for a light; we don't want to take unnecessary chances. Now, what can we do?"

"Nothing!" said Bob Cherry promptly.

"Well, there's gratitude!" exclaimed Nugent. "What do you mean, you ass?"

"Exactly what I say," replied Bob. "How can you do anything for us? The Head had absolutely made up his mind that we assaulted old Quelch, and then lied to shield ourselves. Nothing you can say or do will alter him. Of course, Snoop and Stott made things fifty times as bad, the rotten liars!"

"Yes, we'll attend to them!" said Wharton grimly. "I expect they knew things were black against you, and made up their yarn to put the finishing-touch to it. Can't we threaten to boil them in oil if they don't own up?"

"No good," said Bull dolefully. "The Head would suspect that you'd bullied them into doing it. I don't blame him so much, you know, considering the evidence against us. It's all false—every bit of it—but it looks conclusive enough. That's the rotten part of it all!"

"It is a bit tall," admitted Nugent. "If we didn't know you chaps so well, I'm blessed if we shouldn't have doubts! Of course, we can understand that Quelchy tried to say something about the motor-bike, but what about that giddy button?"

Bob Cherry hugged his knees in bed.

"It's a mystery," he said, in a puzzled voice. "How it got into Quelch's hands is more than I can imagine—unless, by George—— Yes, that must be it!"

"Explain yourself, ass!" said Wharton impatiently.

"Don't you remember we told you we licked Snoop and Stott?" asked Bob. "Well, one of those rotters must have wrenched the button off in the struggle. They probably carried it with them for a bit, and then dropped it. Quelch must have picked it up!"

"It's the only explanation," said Bull slowly. "Still, it doesn't help us. The Head would laugh if we trotted out that theory!"

"What's to be done, then?" asked Nugent.

"Nothing, as I said before," answered Bob Cherry. "We can only wait until Briner turns up, according to his promise, and until Quelchy recovers. As soon as those two things happen we shall be cleared completely, and we shall leave the court without a stain on our giddy names! So there's nothing particularly to worry about!"

"Yes, but suppose——"

"Suppose nothing, my tulips!" said Bob cheerfully. "Time will wreak great changes, as the poet says. Johnny and I were tearing out hair not long ago—in fact, we were so wild we nearly went for one another! But we talked it over, and realised that everything will come right, if we're only patient. So I'm afraid you've wasted your valuable time in coming here!"

"The order of the bootfulness is terrific," murmured Hurree Singh. "We'll buzz back to the dormitory, my worthy chums!"

"We don't want you to get into trouble, anyhow," said Bull. "And you must admit it's a risky thing to come here!"

So the visitors soon took their departure, feeling somewhat easier.

On the whole, the Famous Five, separated for once, slept quite comfortably—at least, they didn't wake until the rising-bell clanged out the next morning.

And after breakfast Bob Cherry and Bull were released from the punishment-room.

One or two juniors shunned them, believing them guilty; but they were juniors who were of no consequence—such as Bunter and Skinner and Trevor, and others of their breed.

Just before lessons the Famous Five took a stroll in the Close.

"Glad the Head's shown some sense," remarked Johnny Bull. "Fancy being stuffed up in that beastly room on a sunshiny morning like this! Perhaps he realised that he's been a bit too hasty. He'll realise it, anyhow, when Briner appears on the scene."

NEXT MONDAY:— "THE UPPER HAND!" A Grand, Long, Complete Story of Harry Wharton & Co. By FRANK RICHARDS.

"When did he promise to come?" asked Wharton.

"This morning."

"Then there'll be ructions if he hasn't turned up by dinner-time!"

"Oh, he'll turn up right enough!" said Bob Cherry. "He promised on his honour!"

And Harry Wharton & Co. went in to lessons feeling quite comfortable. But the suspected juniors kept a sharp eye on the window, where they could peep into the Close. Mr. Capper, the master of the Upper Fourth was taking the Remove this morning, so things were a little lax.

But the morning dragged by, and there was no sign of the motor-cyclist.

Bob Cherry and Bull began to feel anxious.

At last lessons were over, and the Removites trooped out, most of them curious to know if the expected visit had been made. As it happened, the Famous Five ran into Wingate in the entrance-hall. Bob Cherry and Bull walked up to him eagerly.

"Has he been?" asked Bull breathlessly.

"What do you mean?" asked Wingate, with a cold look.

"Mr. Briner——"

"I suspected that yarn was a fake all the time!" cut in Wingate sharply. "No, Mr. Briner hasn't been, and I'm not surprised. The only thing I'm surprised at is that you should have the audacity to pitch such a yarn!"

And Wingate walked away, leaving Bob Cherry and Bull thunderstruck.

The motor-cyclist hadn't turned up, after all!

This was a blow indeed, and the Famous Five looked grave.

Dr. Locke was furious, and when Wingate came into his study a short time later, he handed the prefect a sheet of paper.

"I have decided that there shall be no more delay, Wingate," he said grimly. "As I suspected, that story of a motor-cycle was mere bluff. I am quite certain that there was never any such person. To-night those two wretched boys shall pay dearly for their duplicity Please pin this notice on the board at once!"

"Very good, sir," replied Wingate, glancing at the paper. "By Jove, sir, I see you're taking severe measures! Cherry and Bull are to go!"

The Head nodded.

"That is my verdict, Wingate," he replied. "Indeed, it is impossible for the boys to remain at Greyfriars after maliciously assaulting a master! I regret to tell you, Wingate, that Mr. Quelch is still unconscious. The doctor has great hopes of a rapid recovery, but personally I am doubtful—gravely doubtful!"

"We must hope for the best, sir."

And Wingate left, and pinned the notice on the school board in the entrance-hall.

"This evening, at six o'clock precisely, the whole school will assemble in Big Hall, when R. Cherry and J. Bull, of the Lower Fourth Form, will be publicly flogged for perpetrating an unwarrantable assault upon Mr. Quelch. To-morrow morning both boys will leave Greyfriars for good, as it is not desirable that they should remain in the school."

The Head's signature was beneath the notice, so there was no doubt as to its being in grim earnest.

Bob Cherry and Johnny Bull were to be sacked!

It was a terrible shock to most of the juniors, for they had never expected anything quite so drastic. There was still a crowd round the notice-board when the Famous Five hurried in from the Close, having been fetched by Tom Brown, the New Zealand junior.

"What's the giddy excitement?" asked Harry Wharton.

"I'm afraid to tell you," replied Tom Brown gravely. "Here we are! Have a squint at the board yourselves!"

They pushed through the crowd.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! A notice!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "Who's going to get the sack?"

"You are!" chuckled Billy Bunter. "He, he, he!"

The Famous Five read the notice.

There was a dead silence, and all eyes were turned upon Bob Cherry and Bull. The two juniors certainly changed colour a little, but otherwise they remained calm.

"Well?" grinned Skinner.

"That's just what it isn't?" said Bull. "It's far from well. It's jolly rotten!"

"You don't seem very upset, anyhow," said Bulstrode curiously.

"My dear chap, what's the good of being upset?" asked Bull calmly. "I freely admit the prospect of a licking isn't exactly alluring; but what must be, must be. Still, I'm not going to worry myself."

"But—but you're going to be sacked!"

"You're both going to get the giddy kick-out!"

"Rats!" said Bob Cherry promptly.

"But ain't—ain't you—— Oh, my hat, this is the limit!" gasped Tom Brown. "You don't seem upset in the least. You're going to be expelled!"

"That's just where you're mistaken," interrupted Bull. "Of course, we may leave Greyfriars, but we shall jolly soon show our faces again if we do! And if we are sacked, the Head will apologise to us humbly when we return."

"But you won't return!" roared Squiff.

"That only shows that you don't know what you're talking about," replied Bob Cherry. "If we're sacked, we shall be sacked before Mr. Quelch recovers. If he recovers to-day, we sha'n't be sacked at all."

"Begad, you seem jolly confident, my dear fellow!"

"We've good reason, Mauly, my pippin!" replied Bob. "You see, when Quelch comes to himself, he'll explain exactly what happened, and his yarn will coincide exactly with ours. Then the Head will realise that he's been too thundering hasty, and will politely request us to return. But if Quelchy's decent, he'll recover himself before the morning, and save a lot of trouble, to say nothing of expense."

Vernon-Smith chuckled.

"Well, I'm convinced, anyhow," he said. "If you chaps can take it so calmly, it shows that your consciences are clear. If you'd really been guilty, you'd have been in a purple funk at sight of that notice. Well, I hope Quelchy does the right thing, and shows his common-sense by having the decency to recover consciousness quickly!"

"That's the only really worrying point," said Johnny Bull thoughtfully. "We know we sha'n't be sacked, but we stand a ripping fine chance of being flogged! And it's all the fault of that rotten motor-cyclist!"

"Give the chap a chance," said Bob Cherry. "He may turn up yet; there's plenty of time before six. But if he doesn't come to our rescue, we'll simply slaughter him the next time we come across him!"

The attitude of the two suspected juniors practically convinced the Removites of their innocence.

It was a half-holiday that day, being Wednesday, but there was no footer match on. Indeed, footer was not very alluring to the Famous Five under the conditions which prevailed at the moment. They were more interested in watching and waiting for Mr. Briner The latter arrival or non-arrival would make a lot of difference to the evening's proceedings.

As Harry Wharton & Co. stood round the School House steps, Horace Coker of the Fifth came out in all his glory. He was attired somewhat weirdly in a pair of baggy flannel trousers, an oily dust-coat, and a pair of gauntlet gloves.

"What's the idea?" asked Harry Wharton. "Going to shove yourself in a field, Coker?"

"What do you mean, you cheeky rotter?" asked Coker.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.
Trouble for Coker!

"GREAT Scott!"

"My only Aunt Mary!"

"Begad! What's the matter, my dear fellows?"

Lord Mauleverer, the dandy of the Remove, strolled leisurely up to the group of juniors who were collected round the notice-board. Billy Bunter was amongst them, and the fat junior was grining expansively behind his big spectacles.

"He, he, he!" he chuckled. "The bounders have got it in the neck this time! Well, I'm jolly glad—— Yarooh! What the dickens did you thump me for, Todd, you beast?"

"If you're glad, you'd better go and be glad by yourself!" growled Peter Todd. "I don't allow you to display gladness in front of me!"

"Oh, really, you rotter——"

"Shut up, Bunter!" said Squiff. "There's nothing to be happy about that I can see! This is a rotten piece of news! I never expected the Head would be so beastly drastic!"

"I don't call it exactly fair," said the Bounder, frowning. "The Head might at least have waited a bit longer. He might have waited until Quelchy came to himself, and told his own story. But I expect the fact that that motor-cyclist hasn't turned up has made him jolly ratty!"

"I don't wonder at it!" exclaimed Skinner sneeringly.

"You don't wonder at what?"

"The chap not turning up," replied Skinner. "As he doesn't exist, he couldn't very well turn up, could he?"

"Bow-wow!"

But many juniors were now beginning to feel a little bit doubtful.

The notice was short and plain, and was in the Head's own handwriting:

MAGNIFICENT TUCK-HAMPERS FOR READERS OF THE "BOYS' FRIEND," 1D. OUT TO-DAY.

"I thought you were got up as a scarecrow," replied Wharton calmly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I don't want any sauce——"

"This is a sad world, Coker," said Bull sorrowfully. "We don't always get what we want, and we sometimes get what we don't want! It's quite possible that Bob Cherry and I will be licked to-night, but we don't want to be."

"It's what you deserve, anyhow!" growled Coker. "Not that I believe you really bashed old Quelch about. You're a set of cheeky young rotters, I know, but I think you'd draw the line at that."

And the great man of the Fifth stalked away.

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.
The Truth at Last!

BIG Hall was crowded.

It was not only crowded, but packed to suffocation. It was a warm evening, and juniors and seniors alike were not at all pleased by having their recreation interrupted by being forced to attend a public flogging. Still, there it was.

The bulk of the fellows, moreover, were entirely in sympathy with the unfortunate victims. Even Temple, Dabney, & Co., of the Upper Fourth, were quite convinced in their own minds that there was some ghastly mistake somewhere.

"All this messing about!" growled Peter Todd. "What's the good of keeping us stuck in here on a fine evening like this? It ain't fair. Why can't the Head get it over, and done with it?"

"It's a jolly serious matter," said Bulstrode. "Not that I believe Cherry and Bull guilty, you know. But the Head thinks they are, and he's going to make a giddy example of them."

"Poor chaps!" said Russell sympathetically. "I'll bet they'll ache all over!"

Harry Wharton groaned inwardly.

"And if old Quelch would only recover himself, like a decent chap, instead of lying in bed, everything would be all right. Fancy seeing Bob and Johnny flogged for nothing! It's galling!"

"And they'll be sacked afterwards, begad!" said Lord Mauleverer.

Harry Wharton gritted his teeth.

There was a murmur from the end of the Hall, and a louder buzz from the juniors.

"Silence!" rapped out Wingate.

The buzz died down, and all eyes were turned upon the raised platform at the bottom of the Hall. The Head strode majestically forward and faced the assembled throng. It was apparent that he was about to speak, and there was absolute silence.

"Boys," began the Head gravely, "I am about to perform a task which is extremely distasteful to me. You know why you are here, and there is no necessity for me to waste many words. Two boys, belonging to the Lower Fourth Form, will now be publicly flogged, and will leave Greyfriars by the first train in the morning. They have, as you know, committed a disgraceful assault upon Mr. Quelch, which has happily turned out less serious than I first supposed. Nevertheless, Cherry and Bull are not fit companions for the boys of this school, and it is impossible for me to allow them to remain. The enormity of their offence is greatly aggravated by their persistent and useless denials. Had I even a single shred of evidence to support their own story, I would postpone drastic action until a thorough investigation had been made. But I am convinced that such a course would be a waste of time."

The Head paused impressively.

Bob Cherry and Johnny Bull were led up on to the platform. They were both rather pale—"white about the gills," as Peter Todd described it—but there was no sign of nervousness in their demeanour. They had done everything possible—they had told the truth, and it was useless to protest further. To make a scene in Hall now would not improve matters.

The Head looked at them sternly.

"My boys, the step I am about to take is a very serious one, and I am willing to give you one more chance of acknowledging your fault," he said quietly. "I am not going to bribe you to speak the truth by saying that your punishment will be lessened. I leave it to your consciences to take the right course."

"We've done that already, sir," said Johnny Bull stoutly.

"We've nothing more to say, sir," added Bob Cherry. "What we've told you has been the absolute truth, and if you punish us you will do so unjustly."

There was a murmur from the body of the Hall.

"Hear, hear!"

Wingate glared round angrily.

"Silence!" he roared.

"You have evidently decided to brazen matters out to the bitter end," exclaimed the Head to Bob Cherry and Bull. "In the circumstances it will be a waste of time for me to plead with you further."

The Head prepared for the distasteful work, and there was an absolute silence in the great hall. All eyes were fixed upon Dr. Locke's right arm—some in keen anticipation, but most in helpless impotence.

Crash!

The door burst open unceremoniously. In fact, it opened so suddenly that Potter, of the Fifth, who was standing near, was sent flying. For a moment there was quite a noisy commotion. Hundreds of eyes turned round instantly to ascertain the cause.

The Head himself glared round with a black frown.

"What is the meaning of this noise?" he thundered.

"By Jove, am I in time?" gasped a breathless voice.

A man in a light dust-coat and leggings strode up the Hall towards the platform. And Johnny Bull, with a sheer whoop of joy, recognised the newcomer. For a second he completely forgot himself.

"Hurray!" he roared excitedly. "It's Mr. Briner—turned up at the giddy eleventh hour!"

"How dare you!" rapped out the Head. "Silence, you wretched boy! Wingate—Courtney, who—who is this intruder?"

"I reckon I'll answer that question myself," said Mr. Briner breathlessly. "I hope you'll pardon my abrupt entrance, sir, but the matter was rather urgent. Has the flogging started?"

"No, sir; it has not!"

"Then I'm in time!" said the motor-cyclist in relief. "I should have felt an awful cad if I'd let those two youngsters go through the mill because of my forgetfulness! It seems as though there's some little mistake, and I'm the chap who can clear the air. My name's Briner."

The Head started.

"Briner!" the Head repeated quickly. "Good gracious! Can it be possible that I have been in error?"

"We told you he'd come, sir!" said Bob Cherry gleefully, for Bob was now standing on his feet again. "Everything will be explained now."

"Upon my soul!" gasped the Head.

He was utterly amazed. So certain had he been that the juniors had been lying, that he had looked upon the existence of Mr. Briner as a mere myth. But he pulled himself together, and decided that he would hear the stranger's story before he came to any conclusion.

The excitement among the assembled boys was considerable. Harry Wharton & Co. were hugging themselves with sheer joy, while those who had openly expressed doubts were looking rather sheepish. Snoop and Stott, close to the door, had turned decidedly pale, and were whispering together in extreme alarm.

It was some minutes before the prefects could regain order.

"What the boys told you, sir, was the perfect truth," said Mr. Briner, in reply to a lengthy question of the Head's. "Mr. Welsh—Quelch, I should say—was standing in the middle of the road lighting his pipe. It was a thundering silly thing to do—ahem! At least, it was rather unwise. My jigger's rather quiet on top gear, and I couldn't see him, owing to my poor light, and he couldn't hear me. If it hadn't been for these two boys there would have been a frightful bust-up."

"Dear me!" exclaimed the Head.

"They sprang out and yelled, and I jammed the brakes on and swerved," went on Mr. Briner. "Even as it was, I knocked the master flying, but when we went back to the spot he'd gone. Of course, it's obvious that he picked himself up, walked a little way, and then collapsed. I learned all these facts just now. But at the time I thought Mr. Quelch was unhurt, and so didn't worry myself. But what the boys told you was true in every detail. The whole thing was an unfortunate accident; nobody was really to blame except, perhaps, Mr. Quelch himself."

"But the boys say you promised to come this morning," said the Head.

Mr. Briner looked penitent.

"That's where I'm to blame," he admitted. "Of course, I didn't know the affair was at all serious, and I was rather worried about my friend, who's been taken ill. He'll corroborate all I've said. As a matter of fact, I completely forgot about my promise, and I'm really awfully sorry."

The Head opened his mouth to speak, but another interruption occurred. A side-door opened close to the platform, and Dr. Pillbury flustered in.

"Dr. Locke," he exclaimed urgently, "I have startling news!"

EVERY MONDAY, The "Magnet" LIBRARY. ONE PENNY.

NEXT MONDAY— "THE UPPER HAND!" A Grand, Long, Complete Story of Harry Wharton & Co. By FRANK RICHARDS.

The Head changed colour.

"Good heavens! You don't mean——"

"No, no! Gracious, no!" replied Dr. Pillbury quickly. "Mr. Quelch is certainly no worse—indeed, I am more than satisfied at his quick recovery. I am convinced that at the end of two days he will be able to resume his customary duties in the school. Ten minutes ago he recovered consciousness, and actually insisted upon getting up!"

Johnny Bull grinned with delight.

"Now we shall hear all about it!" he murmured.

"What Mr. Quelch says is amazing!" went on the doctor. "He declares that he was knocked down by a motor-cycle, and that Cherry and Bull saved him from a far worse accident. It appears that the boys' strange story was true, after all."

"Well, that ought to convince you, sir!" said Mr. Briner calmly. "It seems that everything is coming right at the last minute."

The Head looked relieved.

"My boys," he said to Bob Cherry and Johnny Bull. "I am deeply grieved that I should have so misjudged you; but, really, I cannot hold myself to blame. As you so persistently repeated, it has all been a terrible misunderstanding. The evidence that was placed in my hands was absolutely convincing, and——"

The Head paused, and his eyes gleamed angrily.

"There will be a flogging, after all!" he said grimly. "Snoop and Stott evidently lied to me in the most barefaced fashion, for it is quite obvious that their story had no foundation of truth. Wingate," he added sternly, "bring Snoop and Stott to me at once!"

The captain of Greyfriars walked briskly down the Hall, and then uttered a surprised ejaculation. There were two vacant places where Snoop and Stott had been. The two young rascals had vanished.

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.

A Flogging, After All!

WINGATE returned to the platform with a grim expression upon his face.

"They've slipped out in the excitement, sir!" he reported. "That fact in itself shows that they are guilty!"

"Their punishment will be none the less severe!" replied the Head frowningly. "Boys, you may dismiss!" he added, addressing the school. "I will deal with Snoop and Stott later on this evening. I am only too thankful to say that Cherry and Bull have been saved from a punishment which they certainly did not deserve. Indeed, when I have heard the full story—the true story—I may have occasion to compliment them."

And the crowd dispersed noisily. There was great rejoicing, and Bob Cherry and Johnny Bull were grasped by their enthusiastic chums and mounted shoulder-high. Harry Wharton & Co. were extremely jubilant. The situation had been saved in the nick of time, and everything in the garden was lovely, so to speak.

In the Hall the Head gave Wingate his instructions.

"Bring Snoop and Stott to me immediately you have discovered their whereabouts," he said, and then turned to the visitor. "Mr. Briner," he added, "I shall be happy if you will accompany me to my study, so that we may have a short conversation."

"In three minutes, sir, if you will excuse me," said the motor-cyclist, with an anxious look towards the door. "My jigger's out in the Close, and I happen to know what boys are. If you will allow me to put it in a safe place I shall be delighted."

And he and Wingate went off together. The motor-cycle was close against the gates, and matters were as Mr. Briner had suspected. Quite a crowd of juniors were clustered round it, some of the more morbid spirits searching for the place where the machine was "coshed" into Mr. Quelch. Gosling was heroically endeavouring to keep the juniors off, visions of a substantial tip flitting through his mercenary mind.

"Now, then, you kids, stand clear!' ordered Wingate sharply. "Gosling, have you seen anything of Snoop and Stott?"

"Which I've been lookin' after this 'ere bike!" answered Gosling, wiping his brow. "Wot I says is this 'ere—them two young rips went out o' the gates not five minutes ago, and 'urried down towards Friardale."

"Snoop and Stott did?" asked Wingate quickly.

"Which is wot I jest says," replied Gosling.

"Hang it all!" exclaimed Wingate. "The young rascals are going to give us some trouble!"

"Surely they haven't been mad enough to run away?" asked Mr. Briner. "By Jove, I know what I'll do! You leave this to me, young 'un!"

"What's the idea?" asked Wingate.

"I'm going to whizz down the road on my jigger and fetch those two young rascals back," replied Mr. Briner briskly. "I suppose they're wearing the school caps?"

"Of course!"

"Then I can't mistake them, as they're the only two juniors outside the grounds. It won't take me long to collar them."

He started the engine of his machine, jumped on, and whizzed out of the gates. Amid a cloud of dust he disappeared towards Friardale.

Snoop and Stott were frightened almost out of their wits. Now that the real truth had come out they realised that severe punishment awaited them for volunteering false evidence to the Head. They also realised that they had properly put their foot into it. For it had now been brought home to them that Mr. Quelch's condition was not the result of their own action at all. In jumping to a hasty conclusion they had slipped their heads into the noose, as it were.

Fearful of the consequences, they had slipped out of Big Hall and had hastened down towards Friardale, hardly knowing what they did. They were too alarmed to think clearly, and were utterly panic-stricken.

But they were soon to be brought to book. Mr. Briner was on their track, and before they reached the village the powerful motor-cycle bore down upon them. It stopped, and Mr. Briner got off.

"Are your names Snoop and Stott?" he asked pleasantly.

"Ye-es!"

"Then you're the fellows I want," said the motor-cyclist calmly. "Jump in!"

"Look here, what the dickens——"

"Jump in!" roared Mr. Briner.

He looked quite fierce for a moment, and Snoop and Stott, utterly cowed, got into the side-car with pale faces. For a moment they had thought of running, but they realised that such a course would have been futile. So they resigned themselves to the inevitable, and gave themselves up. There was no sense in prolonging the agony.

Mr. Briner smiled a little as he restarted and returned to Greyfriars. But he felt no pity for his two prisoners. They were evidently a precious pair of young blackguards.

"Here they come!"

"Hurrah!"

"See the conquering heroes!" chuckled Squiff.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Mr. Briner met with an overwhelming reception, and, as had been predicted, so did Snoop and Stott. They were yanked out of the side-car, and would probably have ended up by being ducked in the fountain if Wingate and one or two other prefects hadn't been on hand.

The Removites never knew exactly what occurred in the Head's study during the interview that followed, but Snoop and Stott were not exactly pictures of happiness when they emerged. There was to be no public flogging, but there had most certainly been a private one. Snoop and Stott had given false evidence, but their punishment was real enough.

For the rest of that evening they displayed the most extraordinary reluctance to seat themselves, although they were politely offered chairs on many occasions. They were chipped unmercifully, in fact, and at last they went up to bed hours before time, in sheer desperation. There, at least, they found some measure of comfort. And their agony was by no means mitigated by the knowledge that they were gated for a week.

Meanwhile a terrific feed was being consumed in the Rag. The guests were legion, for the general whip-round had been responded to to the last penny. And the guest of honour was Mr. Charlie Briner, who evidently enjoyed himself very much indeed. Billy Bunter, as usual, distinguished himself wonderfully, in spite of the fact that he had contributed nothing to the fund; but a little detail like that didn't worry Bunter in the least.

And so, as Bob Cherry cheerfully declared, everything had turned out all serene, without any real harm being done—for it was now certain that Mr. Quelch would be well within a couple of days—and that knowledge made the juniors' appetites all the keener.

THE END.

(Another Magnificent Long Complete School Story of the chums of Greyfriars next Monday, entitled "THE UPPER HAND!" Order your copy of the the "Magnet" Library in advance. It is the only way of making certain of your copy.)

MAGNIFICENT TUCK-HAMPERS FOR READERS OF THE "BOYS' FRIEND," 1D. OUT TO-DAY.

THE GOLDEN KEY!

A Long Instalment of our Magnificent, New Adventure Story.

By T. C. BRIDGES.

The First Instalments Told How:

DICK DAUNT and DUDLEY DREW, two chums, discover a letter in a bottle which they have extracted from the body of a shark.

They are informed by its contents that a certain MATTHEW SNELL is marooned on an unnamed island in the Keys, and he offers a substantial reward to any persons effecting his rescue.

On going to the island, however, they are unable to find Mr. Snell.

EZRA CRAY, a moonshiner, and his scoundrelly colleagues then visit the island, and, finding that it contains gold, attempt to kill the two chums.

Having previously hidden their boat, Dick and Dudley seek refuge in a cave.

Leaving the cave to replenish their food supplies, they are captured by the gang and made to work at gold-washing.

They endeavour to escape one night by digging under the palisades of the camp during a storm. Suddenly one of their guards is heard passing, and at any moment a flash of lightning threatens to reveal them to him.

(Now go on with the story.)

Back to the Salt Water.

Suddenly Dick found that he could not bear the suspense.

"I'm going to follow," he whispered swiftly in Dudley's ear. "You wait." Then, before Dudley could answer, he was on his feet and outside.

Rufe's figure loomed huge in the light of his swaying lamp. It was raining as hard as ever. The drops shone like silver lines as they crossed the illuminated space. Dick noticed these things subconsciously. All his attention was concentrated on the man himself, and, clutching his piece of hoop-iron, he crept, shadow-like, in the big negro's track.

Suddenly the familiar glare of a fresh flash shone blue through the thick rain-mist. For a fraction of a second everything was clear as day. And, as ill-luck would have it, Rufe was exactly opposite the tunnel.

Dick saw him start, heard the thick exclamation he uttered, and saw him turn and stride towards the heap of fresh earth.

Every pulse in his body tingled. Would Rufe cry out, or would he not? He did not. He strode across to the spot, and, holding his lantern over the opening, bent down to investigate.

Like a flash Dick sprang. He lit fair and square on the man's back, and his weight sent the big nigger sprawling forward. He had not time to fling out his hands to guard himself, and his bullet-head rapped against the stockade with a force that made the solid fence quiver.

Almost before his bulky body reached the ground, Dick's fingers met in his throat. There was no need. The blow had done the business. Rufe lay like a dead man, stunned and utterly insensible.

The lantern had fallen, and gone out in the fall. All was dark as ever.

Next instant Dick heard Dudley's voice.

"You've got him?" he exclaimed incredulously.

"You bet!" said Dick briefly. "He's knocked out. Gag him before he comes to!"

Dudley felt in the negro's pockets, found a handkerchief of sorts, as well as rope, and also a pair of handcuffs. Within half a minute Rufe was not only gagged, but handcuffed into the bargain.

"I guess he won't trouble us much more!" chuckled Dudley.

"Come on, then! Let's finish our tunnel before the other chap misses him!"

Dudley laughed—actually laughed.

"Tunnel! Well, I guess not. I've got the key. What's the matter with the gate?"

"But Seth'll be there."

"Not likely. Not in this weather. He's inside the guard-house. And even if he is waiting, what's the harm? We've got Rufe's rifle. Pity if the two of us can't hold up one nigger between us!"

"Yes, I suppose we can do that much. Come on, then! But, I say, oughtn't we to tell Dan?"

"Dan's right here, boss," was the answer; and the shadowy form of the negro appeared alongside. "But doan't yo' worry about me. Yo' leab dem bars loose, and ef I kin file these here irons off me befoah mawnin', I'll get out all right!"

"We'll stop and help you if you like," declared Dick. "Suppose we collect the whole bunch of you, and rush Cray's camp?"

Dan shook his head.

"Not a bit o' use, boss. One file won't cut all dem irons—not in one night. And, anyway, dose oder niggahs, dey ain't got no rifles. No, de bes' ting is for yo' white men to go on out, and fix up some ways ob gettin' back to Floridy. Den yo' bring help, an' fix up dat Ezra an' all his crowd proper!"

There was no doubt about it. Dan was right. Besides, the rain was beginning to slacken. The cloud would probably break soon, and what was to be done was best done in the dark. Dan slipped back again to the shed and, after taking Rufe's rifle and lantern, Dick and Dudley went softly over to the entrance.

They stopped and listened. They could hear no one. They waited until a faint flicker of lightning from the fast-receding storm showed up the surroundings.

"The coast's clear," said Dick softly. "All we've got to do is just to walk out."

As he spoke he unlocked the padlock on the chain holding the big bars in their places with the key which he had taken from the helpless Rufe, and pulled the lower bar out of its socket. Then very quietly the two walked straight out of their prison.

"Easy as pie," said Dudley, who seemed a new man since the escape had been broached.

"Easy, once we had the file," corrected Dick. "We'd never have done a thing without that!"

"That's so," allowed Dudley. "I'd like mighty well to know how it got there!"

"Same way as the quinine got into the cave, I expect," replied Dick. "But there's no time for making guesses now. What are we going to do?"

"Finish what we started on this morning," Dudley answered promptly. "Collar the schooner and get away!"

"That's my notion, too," agreed Dick. "But it won't be any soft snap in this darkness and gale!"

"I guess not," said Dudley. "But it's the only way we shall ever get quit of Cray and his little lot. Myself, I'm real sick of messing about like we have been doing, hiding up in all kinds of dog holes, and getting nothing out of it!"

Dick gave a grim laugh.

"We'll get our own back all right this journey," he declared confidently. "If we can skip with the schooner, Cray's crowd are marooned. Our little cat-boat won't take the half of them, even if she's afloat. And after this storm, I rather fancy she's bust up!"

While they talked they kept going briskly in the direction of the Big Bay. It was shocking bad travelling, for in the dark they stumbled over the palmetto roots, and got caught up in the thorny bamboo vines. But it was gradually growing lighter, and by the time that they were in sight of the sea some stars were visible, and they could see the bulk of Look-out Mountain looming dark against the night sky.

They went straight to the spot where they had been brought ashore in the morning.

"There's the schooner," said Dudley, pointing.

Sure enough, she was plainly visible, rising and falling in the heavy swell which was sweeping in from the sea. She was about two hundred yards from shore.

"Yes; but where's the boat?" questioned Dick uneasily.

Dudley looked round. There was no sign of her.

"Gee, but I believe she's gone adrift!" he said quickly. "Yes, by thunder, so she has! Here's her mooring rope, and it's broken right in the middle. It's chafed through in the storm, and she's gone!"

For a moment or two neither spoke. This was a terrible and quite unforeseen blow.

"There's our own," said Dick suddenly.

"But she's ashore at the inner end of the bay."

"All the more likely to be safe. Come on! We must try and get hold of her. If we can, we can use her to reach the schooner."

He started off at once around the edge of the bay. It was fearful going, and the gale, that still blew in from the sea, whipped the spray in their faces, while at times the gusts were so strong they could hardly stand against them.

Presently he found that Dudley was no longer beside him. He turned quickly. Dudley was staggering as he walked.

"I had a tumble," he explained. "Knocked most all the breath out of me, I guess!"

His voice was so weak and hoarse that Dick was scared.

"You take my arm!" he ordered.

Even so, they could only go very slowly. By the time they reached the lower end of the bay the sky was clear, and the stars gave light enough to see a long way, but it still blew as viciously as ever. Dick looked all round.

"No sign of the boat," he muttered. "Wait here, Dudley, and I'll get up on the higher ground!"

"I'm afraid she's gone up," said Dudley sadly.

Dick left him, and climbed a bluff a little way inland from the beach. From this point he could see for a good distance; but although he searched with his eyes every yard of water that was visible, he could see nothing whatever of the cat-boat.

It was at this moment that the sound of a rifle-shot came down wind. He started, and turned his eyes towards the camp.

From the height at which he stood he could see right over the low brush as far as the site of the camp.

Lights were flashing. He could see one moving rapidly from the direction of the cabin towards the stockade.

He gave a low whistle of dismay.

"The beggars are on to our escape," he muttered; and ran back to Dudley with the news.

"Yes, I heard the shot all right," said Dudley. "Dick, I guess we'll have to take to the bush again!"

"No; I'll swim out to the schooner."

"That I swear you won't," retorted Dudley. "The bay's full of sharks. And even if you could do it, I can't. No, old chap, we're up against it all right. We've got to take to the scrub again, and chance that our luck will turn!"

Dick gulped down his bitter disappointment. The two turned back from the water, and, climbing up to the higher ground, dived into the thick palmetto. Hardly had the harsh fronds closed behind them before they heard the sound of heavy boots crashing through the undergrowth less than a hundred yards away.

The Gopher.

Both crouched low in the thick palmetto while Cray's men swept by.

There came a shout.

"The boat's gone. The cubs hev got aboard the schooner!"

"I guess not," was the answer, in Bent's harsh voice. "Thet there boat's broke loose in the storm, and gone adrift. Ef they wuz in the schooner, they'd hev got her under way by this."

"Thet's so. They'd hev been off before now," agreed the first speaker.

"Then, where be they?" asked someone else.

"Somewheres up in the scrub," answered Bent "Fur enough away from this, anyways. Thet I'll lay!"

"I only wish we'd got them dogs!" came Cray's snarling tone. "We'd hunt 'em down mighty quick!" He burst into a perfect torrent of evil language.

Bent laughed.

"Save your breath, Cray," he advised. "Cussing ain't going to hurt 'em any. Guess we'll find 'em all right in the morning. They ain't got no grub, and the island ain't big enough to hide 'em. Anyways, I'm not a-going to fool round here in the wind and the dark any longer!"

"Some o' you better set a guard on the schooner," was his last advice.

Then the boys heard him turn and tramp heavily away.

Cray gave some angry directions to two of his men to wait and keep an eye on the schooner; then he, too, made off, leaving his followers cursing their ill-luck in having to spend such a night on the open beach.

"A nod's as good as a wink," remarked Dick Daunt to Dudley. "We're all right till morning. The next thing is to find some place out of the wind, where we can lie up for the rest of the night."

"Are you cold, old chap?" he added anxiously, as he caught the sound of Dudley's teeth chattering.

"I reckon I am," allowed Dudley. "But that don't signify. Once we get moving again, I'll soon warm up!"

They started off again in search of shelter. But it was far too dark to tell where they were going, and the scrub made any sort of travelling desperately difficult. More than that, they were both tired out, aching in every bone, and so wet that their very skins were bleached like a washerwoman's hands.

Dick still had his corked bottle of matches, but it was out of the question to make a fire. Even if they could have found any dry stuff, the light would at once have attracted the attention of their enemies.

At last Dick gave it up.

"It's no use, Dudley. Let's make a wind-break, and wait till morning. We're only finishing ourselves with this sort of thing."

"I reckon you're right, Dick," Dudley answered, and his voice was so hoarse and so weak that it frightened Dick. Dick was in terror of Dudley getting another attack of fever, and this time there would be no quinine.

They were in the thickest of the thick palmetto, and this in itself did a good deal to break the wind. Dick began wrenching off the fronds. They were so tough that it took all his strength to tear them from the stems. Some he plaited together to make a sort of shelter, others he piled as a bed. He went on until his hands were too sore to pull any more. Then the two huddled close together, and prepared to wait for dawn.

It was not really cold. Anyone wearing ordinary British clothes could have stayed out that night, without much discomfort. But the boys were wearing only breeches, boots, and flannel shirts. All their garments were ragged and wet through. Their teeth chattered as the strong gusts came off the sea, sweeping across the scrub, and making the stiff leaves rattle as they passed.

Never had either of them known time to drag so terribly. It was not as though they had anything to look forward to. Morning would not bring breakfast, a bath, a change of clothes, or any sort of comfort. On the contrary, it would bring a renewal of pursuit, flight, hunger, the chances of being recaptured.

To think of falling again into the hands of Cray made Dick's flesh creep. He knew now, by actual experience, of what brutalities the man was capable.

Yet, in spite of all the troubles that the day must bring, he had never in all his life been more thankful to see at last the pale gleam in the eastern sky, which heralded the dawn. Down in latitude 25, sunrise is not the slow and tedious process it is in our far northern latitudes. Rapidly the yellow gleam changed to rose, and that to bright gold, and then the great, flaming orb seemed to rush up over the horizon.

The two crept to an open space where the rays struck full upon the bare sand. There they stretched themselves at full length, and soon the genial warmth began to draw the chill of night from their cramped and numbed bodies. Their soaked clothes steamed and dried, and the sand became hot to the touch.

"Gee! But it's almost worth freezing to get warm again," said Dudley presently, as he turned over on his face and stretched his thin, brown arms wide on either side. "I feel as if I could stay here all day, Dick, couldn't you?"

"Not without breakfast," returned Dick, rather grimly. "See here, Dudley, as soon as you're thawed out, we've got to start and hustle for grub of some sort."

"And it'll be some hustling, too!" remarked Dudley. "Unless we raid the camp, I don't reckon we're going to see anything fat in the way of breakfast."

"Porridge," said Dick meditatively. "Porridge and cream, bacon and eggs, nice crisp toast, and fresh butter. Coffee—big cups, with hot milk and lots of sugar——"

"Quit that!" broke in Dudley, almost savagely. "Quit it, I tell you!"

"I'm sorry, old man. I——"

He stopped again, making a motion for silence. Just ahead, under the edge of the palmettoes, the sand was heaving as though something were pushing it up from below.

(There will be another magnificent instalment of this grand adventure story in next Monday's issue of "THE MAGNET." Order your copy in advance. It is the only way of making certain of your copy.)

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MY READERS' PAGE

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The Editor is always pleased to hear from his chums, at home or abroad, and is only too willing to give his best advice to them if they are in difficulty or in trouble. . . . Whom to write to: Editor, The "Magnet" Library, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.

For Next Monday:

"THE UPPER HAND!"

By Frank Richards.

In the splendid long, complete story which appears next week George Wingate, the popular captain of Greyfriars, plays the leading part. A convict escapes from Blackmoor Prison. Wingate, while exploring the sea-caves, is narrowly saved from death by this man. The escaped prisoner succeeds in convincing the fellow he has rescued that he was wrongfully sentenced, and Wingate agrees to do all that he can to help him. But the task is surrounded with difficulties, for there is a man at the school who is anxious that the convict shall be recaptured. This is Mr. Black, who has taken for a time the place of Mr. Lawrence Lascelles, the mathematical master. Carne of the Sixth also finds out what Wingate is doing, and uses his knowledge to force the skipper to resign. Carne's hope is that he himself may get the place thus rendered vacant. The story tells, in its famous author's own thrilling style, how the discovery is made that the fortunes of both the master and the scheming prefect are bound up with those of the erstwhile prisoner, and it is only for a brief space that the intriguing Carne is allowed to hold

"THE UPPER HAND!"

CRITICAL TIMES.

During the next few months those who have to do with the supply of reading matter of every kind will have critical times to face. The limitations imposed by the Government upon the use of paper have created difficulties which people outside the trade cannot easily understand. One of these—and a very big one—is due to the fact that publishers, in the interests of economy, can no longer afford to let newsagents have such large supplies on sale or return, and naturally the newsagents will not risk losing money by ordering copies which they may have left on their hands. The remedy for this difficulty is for all who really want their papers to order them in advance. I know that I have said this before. I don't want to keep rubbing it in, but I have good reason to know that it is still necessary. Unfortunately, the very people I particularly want to get at may never see this, because, through their omission to take my warning, they may already be going without. This is where you who do read it can help me. Speak to your friends about it. Find out whether they are still getting their papers, and if not, why not? Never mind if you make a mistake and approach fellows who never have bought the papers. That is no reason why they never should, and I can do very well with a few hundred thousand new readers—more or less. Lots of papers will go down in the stormy weather which is upon us. I want you to help me to ensure that none of mine shall be among them.

THE "GREYFRIARS HERALD."

It is true that one of the six has already gone down—the smart little "Herald." Something had to be sacrificed, and the "Herald" was the youngest of them all. I trust that in the better days which we are all hoping will come after the war I may be able to bring it out again. Already, though these lines are written only a few days after the announcement of its suspension was made, I have had many hundreds of mournful letters. One reader used a black-edged envelope and sent it by express delivery. Another admitted that she shed tears. To them all I want to say that, though I shed no tears, I regretted the suspension of the little paper to the full as much as any of them possibly could do. Help me to keep the flag flying, and you will be helping to make sure of the restarting of the "Herald" in the days to come.

THE HOWARTH LETTER.

A whole pile of correspondence concerning the letter from a fellow signing himself "T. Howarth," which appeared a few weeks ago, has come along. Numerous indignant readers express the desire to meet Howarth in deadly combat and wipe the floor with him. One offers to form a monster "Magnet" League, with the object of opposing Howarth's endeavours to kill the paper. Don't trouble, my loyal friend. Not Howarth nor five hundred Howarths can kill the "Magnet," or even do it serious injury. The presidents of Anti-Magnet Leagues, of whom he writes, only exist in his own disturbed and childish imagination. In one of Shakespeare's plays a character asks to be written down an ass; someone had called him one, and he wanted documentary evidence of the slander. People like Howarth supply their own documentary evidence, and in their cases there is no question of slander.

A LETTER FROM HOSPITAL.

Private James Wilson, of the Lancashire Fusiliers, writes from St. George's Hospital, Malta: "I feel I must say something about the good old 'Magnet,' which whiled away many a happy hour in Gallipoli. I am a signaller in our company, and while sitting in a dug-out one was apt to get rather down in the mouth. But when the 'Magnet' came along you can just imagine my joy! At home I've got quite a store of back numbers, and the people there send on several of them with every new issue. I passed these on when I had read them again, and they were not half appreciated, I can tell you. I understand some of those miserable Anti-Magnetites make out your replies are faked. I should just like to let them have a yarn with some of ours, and then they might learn what fellows worth a thousand of them think of your papers and of you."

This is the sort of letter it does one good to receive, and I am sure that all my readers will join with me in wishing our friend, Private Wilson, a very speedy recovery and the best of luck in the future.

NOTICES.

Private S. Brewer, Headquarters, Machine-gun Company, 14th Infantry Brigade, would like to correspond with a girl reader of the "Magnet."

T. E. Beecroft, 115, High Street, Peckham, S.E., asks whether any old reader can supply him with the "Magnet" story entitled "The Race to the Tuckshop."

Will the correspondent who wrote on a very grave matter, signing himself "Bradford," send the Editor, in confidence, his name and full address?

Gunner Fred Taylor, 34528, C Battery, 181st Brigade, R.F.A., Minden Barracks, Deepcut Camp, Hants, would be glad to have letters from "Magnet" readers, especially those in the Camberley or Frimley district.

Private A. E. Jump, 1900, Dispatch Rider, attached 164th Infantry Brigade, Headquarters, B.E.F., France, would be grateful for back numbers of the "Boys' Friend" 3d. Library.

Bombardier Anthony Gibbon, 78121, C/46th Brigade, 14th Light Division, B.E.F., France, would be glad to have back numbers of either the "Magnet" or "Gem."

J. N. Laidlaw, R.N.D., B2, Naval Camp, Blandford, Dorset, would be glad to correspond with a girl reader, age 17-18, and would also be grateful for back numbers of the Companion Papers.

Avondale Cricket Club (juniors) would be glad to arrange fixtures with other clubs in their neighbourhood. Hon. Sec., R. Quarendon, 15, Tantallon Road, Balham, S.W.

C. Turner, 4, England's Lane, Hampstead, N.W., wants to buy the halfpenny issues of the "Magnet," and is willing to pay full price for them.

A. W. Harper, 25, Wennington Road, Bethnal Green, N.E., would be glad to hear from any readers, boys or girls, interested in forming a "Magnet" and "Gem" League, with the main object of sending copies of the papers to soldiers in the trenches.

Yours Editor

THE PRIDE OF THE RING!

A Magnificent Serial Story dealing with the Noble Art of Self-defence.

By MARK LINLEY.

Held to Ransom.

"You've run away from school—wot?" said Mike, as Binks moved over to the fire to dry his wet garments.

"To tell the truth, yes. I can't stand Earlingham, at any price. The boys are so rough and uncultured that one would imagine oneself to be in Germany. I am glad, indeed, to have shaken the dust of Earlingham from my feet."

"An' you're goin' to Lunnon?" queried the Bruiser.

Binks nodded.

"Werry well. We'll come an' see yer part o' the way, if you like. It's a goodish step from 'ere."

"Bless you, I'm not going to walk all the way to town!" gasped Binks. "I shall take train from Lingfield."

"Right-ho! Then Mike an' me'll come along with yer, to sorter kep yer company, like."

"That is very kind of you, I am sure!"

"Don't mench! It'll give us greater pleasure!" said the Bruiser.

And he meant what he said.

Binks handed the ruffians the money for his light snack, and accompanied them into the storm.

"You will get horribly wet!" he said.

"That don't matter. Us is used to it," said Mike cheerfully

Their faces buffeted by the fierce wind, Binks and his unsavoury companions tramped on.

"I 'opo as 'ow you gits to Lunnon safely!" said Mike, with a grin.

"I hope so, too, my dear fellow. Here, I say! Where are you going?"

The ruffians had wheeled round suddenly, and taken to the road which led to the quarry. The cap Binks was wearing blew off, and floundered in the roadway, but Mike and the Bruiser, each grasping one of his arms, whirled him onwards.

"Rain's comin' down rather 'eavy!" exclaimed the Bruiser. "It's adwisable to get a bit o' shelter afore we goes on."

Binks nodded rather doubtfully. He began to feel strangely startled. Was it possible that these two men had some ulterior motive with regard to him—that they intended to do him a mischief?

The more Binks thought about it, the greater grew his alarm. The wind and rain abated suddenly, and, glancing up, he could see a leering, menacing gleam in the eyes of Mike.

"I—I say——" he exclaimed. "Now that the storm has ceased, we can go back to the main road."

"We can," chuckled the Bruiser, "but we don't want to. Kim on!"

And the precious pair of scoundrels forcibly dragged the expostulating Binks into the stone quarry.

Laid by the Heels.

Benjamin Bartholomew Baraduff Binks was in one of the worst predicaments that he had ever experienced in the course of his career, which was not very extensive.

Only that night he had taken a step which in nine cases out of ten proves disastrous. He had run away from school, and a fellow who does that is invariably courting trouble.

Misfortune had dogged the wretched youth's footsteps. He had been compelled, owing to the fierce storm which was raging at the time, to take shelter in a country inn, and here he had fallen foul of two of the most desperate scoundrels in the locality, Mike and the Bruiser.

These two amiable gentlemen at once assured themselves that they had discovered a gold-mine. Binks' pater was a man who had accumulated quite a hoard of this world's wealth, and he would be prepared to pay a good round sum for the ransom of his son and heir, in the event of the latter being kidnapped.

And Binks was quite an easy prey for any would-be kidnappers. He fairly asked for it, as it were. Mike and the Bruiser had cornered him in the bar-parlour, and by means of cross-examination had discovered his circumstances, together with the fact that he had run away from Earlingham. With well-feigned sympathy they had offered to assist him to London, and had assisted him instead to the old stone quarry in the locality, where he had been promptly made prisoner.

How long he would have been fated to remain there was uncertain, had not a party of searchers been on the track. Neddy Welsh & Co., in company with Hobbs of the Sixth, Hanks the porter, and a couple of armed policemen, had been scouring the countryside far and near; and two members of the expedition—Dolly Gray and Kenrick—favoured the theory that Binks had gone into the old stone quarry for shelter.

"It's worth our while to go and have a look, anyway," said Gray. "We ought not to leave a stone unturned."

"That's so," said Hobbs. "Full steam ahead!"

As they drew near to the quarry the searchers were astonished to hear the sound of gruff voices intermingled with Binks' shrill treble.

"Lemme go!" Binks was wailing. "You're a pair of horrid hooligans, and I believe you intend to keep me here for days!"

"That's it," said the Bruiser cheerfully. "Sort of 'ollerday, like. Which you orter be werry grateful to me an' Mike for takin' you away from your larnin'."

"What do you hope to gain by keeping me here?" asked Binks.

"A little matter of about five 'undred quid," said Mike pleasantly. "Your pater will dub up quick enough when 'e knows his darlin' Benjamin's in danger."

"Dear me!" gasped Binks. "The outlook is not at all satisfactory. I shall feel constrained to make a big attempt to escape. Take that!"

The speaker's puny fist shot out, catching Mike on the cheek, and glancing off like water from a duck's back. It would have taken a blow of six times that power to disable Mike.

But at that precise moment Hobbs, who had witnessed the whole scene from the entrance to the quarry, gave the order to charge, and with one accord the members of the search-party dashed in, hurling themselves upon Mike and the Bruiser with such vigour that they were borne swiftly to the ground.

But, although it was a surprise attack of the most forceful nature, the two kidnappers did not yield easily. They bit and kicked and snarled, thinking for the moment that they merely had to deal with a parcel of schoolboys. As soon as they caught sight of the constables, however, their manner changed at once. Terrified beyond measure, the precious plotters grovelled on the ground, clasping their big, awkward hands in a desperate appeal for mercy.

"I'll mercy yer!" growled one of the constables. "Lemme get these 'ere blinkers hon yer, yer huncoof rebrobates!"

"'Ave pity!" muttered the Bruiser in broken accents. "'Ave pity on a poor cove what's down!"

Click!

The handcuffs snapped upon the fellow's wrists, and Mike shared the same fate.

"How did you get into the grip of these rogues?" inquired Hobbs, turning to Binks.

"They offered to assist me to London, and brought me here instead, with the detestable object of holding me to ransom, and obtaining five hundred pounds from my father, who, as I may have told you, is rolling in riches."

"You mad young idiot! It would serve you right if you'd been kept down here for days without grub! What on earth was the matter with Earlingham that you should wish to run away from it? Come back and make a fresh start, and learn how to fight your own battles. You can't always remain a milksop, you know."

This was one of the best bits of counsel Binks had received in his career. He laid the words of the captain of Earlingham to heart, and resolved to give Earlingham another trial. In later years Benjamin Bartholomew Baraduff Binks greatly benefited by this step, and became—— But that is another story.

As for Mike and the Bruiser, they received but scant sympathy. The two constables, assisted by Hanks the porter, conveyed them to the local gaol, where they were convicted next morning, and ordered to take their trial at the next assizes.

Neddy Welsh & Co., hugely delighted at the success of their enterprise, tramped back to the school in splendid spirits, and, after partaking of an unlimited supply of cake and cocoa in the domestic regions, trooped up to bed, where, fatigued by the exertions of the past few hours, they were soon slumbering soundly in the arms of Morpheus.

(To be continued next Monday.)