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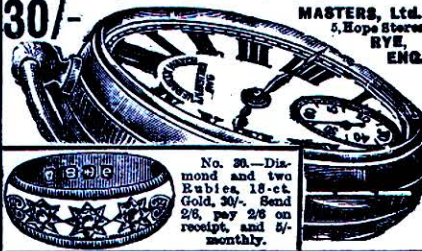
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# *The Schoolboy Traitor!*



A Splendid, Long,  
Complete School Tale  
of  
**HARRY WHARTON & CO.**  
at Greyfriars.

— BY —

**FRANK RICHARDS**

## THE FIRST CHAPTER.

### The Dropping of Hazeldene.

"HIGHCLIFFE cads!" said Frank Nugent.

Harry Wharton looked round.

The Remove were at footer practice on the junior ground at Greyfriars. Harry Wharton, Nugent, and Bob Cherry were potting in shots upon Hurree Jamsat Ram Singh in goal.

They had three balls in play, and they fairly kept up a

rain upon the Indian; but Hurree Singh saved with remarkable facility. The juniors who were watching the performance cheered him loudly. Hazeldene had usually kept goal for the Remove team; but Hazeldene had been so much off colour lately, that Wharton had been compelled to pass him over, and he was giving Hurree Singh a trial in goal. And the nabob was showing that he could keep goal better than Hazeldene ever could.

With three footballs pelting in upon him, Hurree Singh kicked and fisted, and hopped and jumped like a lively kangaroo, and as yet not one of the three had found the net.

While the practice went on, and all eyes were upon it, three fellows strolled in from the road, and came up to the ropes and stood looking on. They wore the well-known caps of Highcliffe School, and the supercilious smiles which belonged to the Highcliffe faces. Nugent had glanced round and observed them, and he recognised Ponsonby, Vavasour, and Gadsby, three Highcliffe fellows with whom the Greyfriars chums had had many a warm dispute.

If Harry Wharton & Co. had walked into the Highcliffe



ground, they would probably have been ragged by Ponsonby & Co.; but Ponsonby probably knew that he could depend upon fair play at Greyfriars. The three fellows stood looking on with their hands in their trousers pockets, exchanging lofty glances every now and then, and smiles, looking, indeed, as league footballers might look while watching a village game, which was pretty cool of the Highcliffe fellows, for their own football play was a byword, and Greyfriars had beaten them hollow many a time and oft.

"What the dickens do they want here, I wonder?" Wharton muttered.

Bob Cherry grinned.

"Looking for trouble, I expect."

"Well, they'll get it if they look for it here," said Harry.

"We've had too much of the Highcliffe swank."

"The too-muchfulness is terrific," murmured Hurrec Jamset Ram Singh, in goal.

"Play up!" shouted the juniors.

Taking no notice of the Highcliffe fellows and their patronising smiles, the Greyfriars juniors recommenced the goal practice.

One after another they sent in the leather, from short and long range, high and low, slow and fast; but Hurrec Jamset Ram Singh was there every time.

The nabob seemed to be an ideal goalkeeper.

The difficult feat of stopping three balls that whizzed in closely after one another seemed quite easy to him.

"My hat!" exclaimed Harry Wharton, as two balls shot in together, and Hurrec Singh fisted one out, and hurled the other back with his foot. "My only chapeau! Inky's the goalie for us, and no mistake!"

"You stuck to Hazel too long," said Tom Brown.

Wharton frowned a little.

"Well, I wanted to give him a good chance," he said.

"Go it, Inky!"

"Bravo!"

"I suppose they call this some sort of a game," Ponsonby remarked to his companions, as the leather-pelting went on.

"Kids' game, I call it."

"Oh, piffle, you know!" said Vavasour.

"Of course, they can't play for toffee," Gadsby observed.

And the three Highcliffe fellows grinned. A Greyfriars junior was standing near them, apart from the other fellows, his hands in his pockets, and a sullen expression upon his face. It was Hazeldene, late goalkeeper to the Remove eleven. He was watching the display of his successor in that post, with angry and bitter feelings he did not attempt to conceal.

The Highcliffe fellows observed him. He saw their looks, and favoured them with a scowl. Ponsonby remembered his face.

"Hallo!" he said. "You're Hazeldene, I think—you kept goal for Wharton when we played the Remove, didn't you?"

"Yes," said Hazeldene shortly.

"Are they trying a new goalie?"

"Looks like it, doesn't it?" snapped Hazeldene.

"Then you've got the boot?"

Hazeldene was silent. But the bitter look on his face showed Ponsonby that he had guessed correctly—that Hazeldene had, as he elegantly expressed it, "got the boot."

The three Highcliffe fellows exchanged glances again.

They edged a little nearer to Hazeldene, with more friendly looks. Their dislike for Harry Wharton & Co. was keen, and anybody who was against Wharton was a fellow they were prepared to be friendly with. And Hazeldene's look was sufficient to show that he had taken his dismissal from the team in the worst possible spirit.

"Why has Wharton dropped you from the eleven?" asked Ponsonby.

Hazeldene looked at him.

"Mind your own bizney," he said rudely. "What is that to do with you?"

"Nothing," said Ponsonby easily—he could take a rebuff smiling when it suited him, though his fingers were itching to knock Hazeldene down—"only I take a friendly interest in the matter, you see. I take it that you won't stand Wharton's swank, and that's the bottom of the trouble."

Hazeldene was silent. He would gladly have believed that himself; but he couldn't very well. He knew why he had been dropped—he knew quite well, for Wharton had put it into plain English. He had been a slacker, he had neglected practice, he had allowed himself to get out of condition, he went about with Vernon-Smith, the blackguard of Greyfriars, instead of attending footer practice, and he had taken no notice of repeated warnings. He knew, too, that regard for his sister, Marjorie, had made Wharton very lenient with him, and in his weak way he had supposed that that would last. Nobody could have been more surprised than Hazel when Wharton lost all patience at last and dropped him.

And nobody could have felt more bitter about it.

"I think I can understand," went on Ponsonby. "A

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fellow of your spirit naturally wouldn't stand Wharton's hectoring. That was it, I suppose?"

"Perhaps," said Hazeldene.

"And I suppose he wanted to stick you at the nets morning, noon, and night," said the Highcliffe fellow, "and jumped on you if you stuck out?"

"That's it," said Hazeldene. "A fellow's life isn't his own if he's in Wharton's team. I was sick of it."

"And they're trying the nigger-for goal?"

"Yes."

"More fools they!" said Ponsonby, who for some reason of his own was bent upon flattering Hazeldene into a good humour. "Greyfriars have beaten us, but they didn't beat us on their halves and forwards. It was the goals we didn't take, not the goals they did take, that beat us. If we could have got past the goalie, we should have licked them—we could always get as far as that."

Hazeldene flushed with pleasure. He knew that it wasn't true, but it was very pleasant to hear it all the same. It was gratifying to feel that he would be a great loss to the team that had discarded him.

Vavasour and Gadsby looked at Ponsonby in amazement they could not conceal. Why their leader should take the trouble to pile this obvious flattery upon a nobody like Hazeldene, was a mystery to him. But they knew that he must have some motive in it, and they were careful not to interfere. Ponsonby was their leader, and Ponsonby had a gift of cunning which he, and others, mistook for cleverness. Ponsonby was being very cunning now.

Ponsonby closed one eye—the eye that was away from Hazeldene. Vavasour and Gadsby understood the signal, and they joined in the game.

"Quite right, by Jove!" said Vavasour. "If the Greyfriars goalkeeper had been a little weaker, the matches would have ended very differently."

"Yes, rather," remarked Gadsby. "Look here, Pon, now that Hazeldene's not keeping goal for them, we might as well challenge them again, and lick them this time."

"I was thinking of that already, Gadsby, old man."

"All's fair in war," said Vavasour. "If they like to drop their best man, there's no law against our taking advantage of it and licking them hollow."

"Of course not!"

It was like so much new wine to Hazeldene. He began to think that, after all, footballing fellows who had played against him were much more likely to know his real form than carping and critical friends. His heart warmed towards the Highcliffe fellows, who, rivals as they were, were doing him the justice he was denied by his own schoolfellows.

Ponsonby would have continued on the same tack, but there came a sudden interruption to the talk.

Hurrec Jamset Ram Singh had just cleared with a tremendous kick.

The ball came whizzing from the goal straight towards the spot where the Highcliffe fellows were standing, and they were too busy in the game of flattering Hazeldene to be on the look-out.

"Mind your eye!" sang out Bulstrode.

But the warning came too late.

Right upon Ponsonby's face the football banged, and the Highcliffe captain gave a wild yell, staggered, and fell upon his back.

There was an irresistible roar of laughter from the Greyfriars fellows.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

## THE SECOND CHAPTER.

### Bitter Blood.

HARRY WHARTON ran to the edge of the field. He was trying not to laugh, but he tried in vain. He could not help it, as he saw Ponsonby rising from the ground, dazed, with his face smothered in mud. The footer-ground was not in the best of condition that morning, and the ball had been in play a long time. Ponsonby's face was smothered. He was mud from brow to chin, and his beautiful white collar was spotted and streaked, and his tie and waistcoat were not unstained.

"Sorry!" exclaimed Wharton.

Ponsonby glared at him through the mud.

"You rotter!"

"It was quite an accident——"

"Gr-r-r-r!"

"You should have been looking out, standing so close to the goal," said Harry. "Chuck that ball back, will you, Hazel?"

Hazel thrust his hands deep into his pockets, and made no reply. He was not disposed to be obliging to the Remove skipper. Wharton coloured. Mark Linley kicked the ball in, and Wharton punted it back into the field of play.

Ponsonby stood rubbing his face with his handkerchief.

**GRAND CHRISTMAS DOUBLE NUMBER NEXT WEEK!**





"I say, you fellows—Yow!" Billy Bunter broke off suddenly as a grasp of iron was laid upon his collar, and he was swung round. "Shut up, you fat boulder!" said Bulstrode, shaking him. (See below.)

The handkerchief was speedily reduced to a dirty rag, but his face was far from clean.

The Highcliffian was spluttering with fury.

"The beasts!" he grunted. "I suppose this is what you call a jape, you Greyfriars cads! Yow! I've got the filthy stuff in my mouth! Groo!"

"Too bad," said Vavasour, though he was grinning, too; "but it must have been an accident. The nigger couldn't have pulled off a kick like that if he had tried."

"Rats!"

"Well, you're jolly muddy," said Gadsby. "I suppose they'll let you have a wash here?"

"I say, you fellows!" A fat junior edged up to the Highcliff fellows, blinking at them through a big pair of spectacles. "I'll take you to our dorm., if you like, you know, and you can get a wash there."

"Thanks," said Ponsonby.

"But, I say, you don't mind my mentioning it," went on Billy Bunter. "I'm expecting a postal-order by the evening post. It is from a friend of mine—a titled friend—and should by rights have come yesterday, but there has been some delay. Would one of you fellows advance me ten bob, and have the postal-order when it comes? I'd send it over to Highcliffe by next post."

And Billy Bunter blinked earnestly at the Highcliffe fellows through his big glasses.

"You cadging rat!" said Ponsonby.

"Get out!"

"I say, you fellows—Yow!"

Billy Bunter broke off suddenly as a grasp of iron was laid upon his collar, and he was swung round. He blinked into the angry face of Bulstrode, of the Remove. Bulstrode shook him like a rat.

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"Shut up, you young rotter!" said Bulstrode, shaking him. "By Jove—"

"Ow! Leggo! You—you'll make my glasses fall off, and then you'll have to pay for them, Bulstrode, if they get broken."

"Sit down, you fat rotter!"

And Bulstrode gave the Owl of the Remove a twist that made him sit down suddenly with a bump that brought a gasp of pain from him.

"Ow!"

"If you speak to the Highcliffe cads again, I'll larrup you!" said Bulstrode, shaking his fist at the fat junior.

"Ow!"

The Highcliffe fellows grinned, and moved off with Hazeldene. Hazeldene had offered to take Ponsonby to a bath-room in the School House where he could wash the mud off his face. Ponsonby walked with Hazeldene, chatting, and Vavasour and Gadsby dropped a little behind. They looked at one another meaningly.

"What's the little game?" muttered Vavasour.

Gadsby shook his head.

"Blessed if I know."

"What is Pon buttering up that dummy Hazeldene for?"

"Can't make it out. But he's got some deep move up his sleeve—something up against Wharton. You can depend on that. You know Pon."

"I suppose so," said Vavasour thoughtfully, "but I'm blessed if I can make it out, all the same."

They followed Hazeldene into the School House. Hazeldene led the way to a bath-room used by the Removites, turned on the hot water tap, and sorted out a towel.

"There you are," he said.

"Thanks, awfully," said Ponsonby.

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Vavasour and Gadsby stood in the doorway, while Ponsonby scoured his face. Hazeldene waited with them idly. Ponsonby washed the mud off, and towelled his face to a bright crimson, and then borrowed a comb for his hair. Ponsonby was given to being very careful and select in his appearance.

"What did you chaps come over here for?" Hazeldene asked.

"To see Wharton."

Hazeldene grunted.

"I didn't know you were on chummy terms with Wharton."

"We're not. We want to challenge him to a footer match."

Hazeldene grinned sourly.

"What's the good? You can't stand up to Greyfriars, and you know it. We've always licked you hands down."

"Look here—" began Gadsby hotly. Ponsonby made him a sign to be silent.

"Hazeldene's quite right," he said. "We've been licked, and there's no getting out of it. But we think we've got a chance this time."

"Another dodge?" asked Hazeldene. "It's no good trying tricks a second time. That time you played three grown-up men in your team won't happen over again. If Wharton accepts your challenge, he'll fix an age-limit for players this time, and you won't be able to play any little game on him in that way."

"We're not thinking of a little game. We just want a fair and square game of footer, the best team to win," said Ponsonby, with an air of great frankness.

"Well, it will only mean another licking for you."

"I don't know about that. You won't be keeping goal for the Remove?"

"No," said Hazeldene.

"You won't be in the team at all?"

"I've told you I'm dropped."

"You don't like it?"

Hazeldene gritted his teeth.

"Am I expected to like it?" he snapped. "I've kept goal for the Remove all the season. I may not have attended regular practice, but a fellow has other things to do. I think I play up very well, and you fellows say you think so."

"Yes, rather."

"I shall have to explain to Mar—to someone, why I've been dropped, too," said Hazeldene, his brows wrinkling. "It's rotten. I'm feeling about as bad about it as I can, and I don't make a secret of it. If Wharton drops me finally from the eleven, I shan't remain on speaking terms with him."

"That's what I call proper pride," Ponsonby remarked.

"I suppose that nigger is a close chum of his?"

"Yes, they're very thick."

"And he's dropping you to put his chum in your place. I've known things like that happen often enough in footer teams," said Ponsonby, with a wise shake of the head. "Naturally, you don't like it. If I were in your place, I should be jolly well inclined to get my own back on Wharton."

Hazeldene clenched his hands.

"Show me a way, that's all," he said.

Ponsonby's eyes glistened.

"Do you mean that, old man?"

"Of course I do."

"Well, you couldn't score more than by seeing him lose his next match against us, with you not playing," Ponsonby remarked.

Hazeldene grunted. He knew very well that his not playing would not decrease the Remove's chances of winning.

Ponsonby watched his face keenly.

"Supposing," he said, in a low voice—"supposing there was a way you could make them lose the match through not playing you, what then?"

Hazeldene started.

"There isn't a way," he said.

"But if there was?"

"It's no good discussing impossibilities."

"It's not impossible."

"Look here," said Hazeldene abruptly, "what do you mean? Speak out."

"Well," said Ponsonby, still in a low tone, "I could show you a way, that's all, and you'd score over the rotters who've humiliated you."

Hazeldene drew a deep breath.

"You mean that?"

"Yes."

"I don't see how."

"I could explain if you chose to take it up?"

Hazeldene shook his head.

"No," he said.

But he said it in a weak and irresolute voice, and his eyes were gleaming with eagerness all the time. Ponsonby's eyes gleamed, too. He was sure of his man now.

"Better think over it," he said.

"No, no! It would be too rotten!"

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"I'll tell you what!" exclaimed Ponsonby. "Get leave to come over and see us to-morrow. We'll have tea in our study, and give you a good time. Then we can talk it over. Don't say any more now. Just think about it."

And the Highcliffe fellows went out, leaving Hazeldene with a deeply-wrinkled brow. Ponsonby & Co. strolled down to the football field again. The practice there had just concluded, and the fellows were coming off.

### THE THIRD CHAPTER. The Highcliffe Challenge.

HARRY WHARTON slapped his dusky chum on the back as they came off the footer field. Hurree Jamset Ram Singh had done well—wonderfully well, and Harry was more than pleased with him. The Nabob of Bhanipur was just the fellow to keep goal for the Remove, and that weak spot would become a tower of strength. There was no longer any chance of Hazeldene appearing between the sticks for the Remove.

"I suppose Hazel's dropped for good now," Nugent remarked, as they came off.

Wharton nodded.

"I've no choice in the matter," he said. "The fellows have been girding at me for a long time for playing him; and he's brought us as close as possible to a licking twice. I punched Bulstrode's head once for saying that I played Hazel on his sister's account; but, if I kept him in the team any longer, it would be true. I'm only afraid I've given the fellows reason to say that I've favoured him too much."

"Marjorie will be sorry about it."

Wharton looked glum for a moment.

"Well, it can't be helped," he said. "She will know that I couldn't do anything else, anyway. Hazel isn't in fit condition to keep goal against the Second Form now. Your young brother in the Second could beat him, as a matter of fact."

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "Here are the Highcliffe cads again. What do they want at Greyfriars?"

"Can I speak to you, Wharton?" asked Ponsonby, with unusual civility of manner.

"Go ahead!" said Harry tersely.

"We want to fix up a date with you for a footer match."

There was a general grin from the Removes who were gathering round. Highcliffe footer was a standing joke at Greyfriars.

"Oh, you're being funny, of course!" Tom Brown remarked.

"I'm serious."

"I don't know," said Harry Wharton, with a shake of the head. "You see, you're not what we call sportsmen, you know. Excuse my speaking plainly, won't you? The last match we had with you, you buzzed three grown-up men into the team. If it hadn't been for a professional chap playing for us, you'd have beaten us by that trick. You're always up to something of the sort. My idea is that we should do better not to fix up matches."

"Hear, hear!" said Bob Cherry.

Ponsonby sneered.

"Of course, if you're afraid of Highcliffe—" he began.

"Oh, rot!" said Wharton, breaking in crisply. "You know we're not. You know that a footer-match with you is simply a walk-over for us, though you're an older team. You can't play the game for toffee."

The three Highcliffe fellows were pink with anger. The grins of the fellows round them did not improve their tempers, either. But they were not in a position to show

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their anger with anything but looks. It required only a word from Harry Wharton to make the juniors collar them and give them a ducking, or the frog's-march out of the Close.

"That's all very well," said Ponsonby, still civil, "but I suppose it's 'the game' to give a team a chance of redeeming a defeat. You have to give a chap his revenge."

"There's something in that," said Wharton. "But, look here, what have you got up your sleeve? Is it another trick, like your Old Boys' dodge?"

"Nothing of the sort. We shall play the usual junior team, all picked from the Upper and Lower Fourth," said Ponsonby. "We simply want a fair match and no favour. We've been putting in some footer lately, if you want to know, and we're at the top of our form. We can beat you—if you're not afraid to meet us!"

"I suppose we'll meet you," said Harry. "I don't know about a date. We have a Form match on with the Upper Fourth next Saturday. We could scratch that or postpone it if Saturday would do for you."

Ponsonby's eyes lighted.

"First-rate!" he exclaimed.

"Very well; make it Saturday afternoon, then," said Harry reluctantly. "Mind, no tricks. If there's any rotten game on, and we find it out, we shall simply scratch the match, and refuse to meet you at all."

"Look here, Wharton—"

"I'm speaking in plain English," said Harry quietly. "I'm not going to pretend that you play the game when I know you don't. When I've seen you play fair, I'll believe it."

"Well, it's settled for Saturday, then?" said Ponsonby abruptly.

"Yes; on our ground."

"Just as you like."

"Kick-off two-thirty; that will give us time to get ready, and plenty of light to finish the game."

"All serene!"

And the Highcliffe fellows walked away. Harry Wharton & Co. went on their way to the School House, feeling and looking very puzzled.

"Blessed if I can make it out!" Nugent remarked. "They can't play footer, and the game will be only a procession for us, as usual."

Harry Wharton nodded.

"I can't make it out, either," he exclaimed. "I can't help suspecting that Ponsonby has something up his sleeve."

"The sleevefulness is terrific!" murmured Hurree Singh.

"But what?" said Bob Cherry. "He can't play the Old Boy dodge on us again. And if there are any tricks, we can scratch the match."

"That's so."

"If it were on their ground they might have some dodge of rushing us, but on our own ground there's no danger of that," Mark Linley observed.

"Well, they may intend to play the game this time," agreed Wharton. "We'll give them the benefit of the doubt, anyway."

And the chums of the Remove went in to tea. Billy Bunter was in Study No. 1 when Wharton, Nugent, and Hurree Singh came in. They stared at him. The fat junior had lighted the fire, and the kettle was singing on the hob. It certainly looked very cheerful, but the looks of the three chums were uncompromising. Billy Bunter did not belong to their study now, and they did not encourage him there. So long as he had been a regular occupant of the study they had put up with him with all the patience they could muster, but they were not called upon to put up with him now.

"What do you want?" asked Wharton abruptly.

Bunter blinked at him a little nervously.

"I—I thought I'd come and get you fellows some tea," he said. "It—it seems like old times, you know. I should like to treat you, if you don't mind."

Wharton's face relaxed.

"Well, perhaps you've got a spark of decency somewhere in your fat carcass," he remarked thoughtfully. "There's room for it, certainly."

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"Get on with the treat," said Nugent.

"The treatfulness will be terrific," murmured the Nabob of Bhanipur: "but the don't-think-fulness of my esteemed self is also great!"

"I say, you fellows, I'm glad to see you take it in this spirit," said Bunter. "You're just the fellows I like to stand a treat to. By the way, I forgot to mention that I've been disappointed about a postal-order. I was expecting it this morning, but there has been some delay in the post. I suppose you wouldn't mind advancing me the funds for the treat, and I'll hand you the postal-order as soon as it comes."

"Oh, dry up!" grunted Wharton. "I might have expected that."

"Oh, really—"

"Shut up!"

There was a shout from Nugent. He had opened the cupboard door, and was gazing at an empty dish with a wrathful face.

"Where's the veal-pie?" he shouted.

"Isn't it there?"

"The dish is."

Bunter edged towards the door.

"I—I say, you fellows," he murmured. "I—I got so hungry while I was waiting for you—waiting to get your tea, you know—that—that I felt that I ought to have a snack. It's all right, you know. I'm going to stand you a new pie out of my postal-order, and—Ow!"

He dodged out of the study with Harry Wharton's boot behind him. He landed on all fours in the passage with a loud yell.

"Yarrah!"

"Give him another!" shouted Nugent. "Here, take the poker!"

Billy Bunter did not wait for Wharton to take the poker. He leaped up and bounded away, and his heavy feet echoed away down the passage. Wharton turned back, laughing, into the study.

"He's gone!" he remarked.

"So's the veal-pie," said Nugent wrathfully. "What are we going to have for tea? There's nothing left but bread-and-cheese."

"The goodness of the esteemed bread-and-cheese is great," remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "Better a stalled ox and contentment therewith, than a dinner of herbs, my worthy chums."

Wharton laughed, and jammed the kettle upon the fire again.

"Bread-and-cheese and coffee," he remarked. "It's a feed fit for a prince, and I'm as hungry as a hunter. Never mind the pie."

And the chums of the Remove sat down to tea.

They had almost finished when the door of the study was thrown open without a knock. They looked up quickly, expecting to see Billy Bunter returning, but it was not Billy Bunter. It was Hazeldene, and he came into the study with a sullen, lowering brow.

#### THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

##### Wharton Refuses to Fight.

H AZELDENE frowned at the chums of Study No. 1, and did not return the nods they gave him. Wharton half rose in his chair, the expression of Hazeldene's face warning him that there was trouble to come. Behind Hazeldene, in the doorway, appeared the cool, cynical face of Vernon-Smith, the "Boulder" of Greyfriars. Whenever Vernon-Smith could bring about any trouble between Hazeldene and Wharton that trouble was certain to come to pass. Vernon-Smith very clearly recognised in Harry Wharton the chief obstacle to his complete dominion over the weak and vacillating Hazeldene. The Boulder did not enter the study, but remained in the doorway, looking in.

"Had your tea, Hazel?" asked Harry Wharton, in a perfectly friendly tone. If only for Marjorie's sake, he would not quarrel with Hazeldene if he could help it.

Very clearly before his mind was the memory of Marjorie's pretty and troubled face when she had told him that she feared that her brother was getting deeper into Vernon-Smith's hands, and she asked Harry to do all that he could to break that evil influence.

Harry had done all that he could. He had taken Hazeldene in hand—he had made a footballer of him, he had given him a place in the Form team. He had done his best to keep the reckless lad up to the mark, but Smith's evil influence had proved stronger. Harry could no longer keep Hazeldene in the team without open trouble with the rest, and without the consciousness that he was neglecting the interests of the eleven. To that extent he could not go, even for Marjorie's sake. But he hoped to remain on friendly terms with Hazeldene, and help him all the same. Hazeldene's look as he came into the study showed how elusive that hope was.

"No," said Hazeldene, "I haven't had my tea."

"Sit down, then."

Hazeldene made no motion to take the chair Wharton pushed towards him.

"We've not got a very ripping tea here," said Harry. "Bunter has been raiding us. But you're welcome to what we have."

"I don't want anything but some plain English from you, Harry Wharton."

Hazeldene's voice was hard and uncompromising.

Nugent and Hurree Singh rose. They could see now that there was going to be trouble. Harry Wharton realised it, but he did not allow his expression to change. One thing he was determined upon—he would never come to blows with Marjorie's brother if he could at any cost avoid it.

"Well," said Harry, "what do you want?"



"You asked me to stand out of the practice to-day, and let Inky take my place. You told me you were trying him for goal."

"Yes."

"Are you going to keep him for goal?"

"Yes."

"That's settled, then?"

"Yes, Hazeldene. Inky has played forward for the Remove before, but he's a splendid goal—much better than I thought he would be. I should be throwing the Form's matches away if I didn't play him in goal in the future."

"What place are you giving me?"

Hazeldene's tone was hard and sneering, and if any other fellow in the Remove had spoken to him like that Harry Wharton would have told him to get outside the study, and would not have made much of putting him out if he did not go.

But it was ever present to Harry's mind that this was Marjorie's brother, and he controlled his rising temper, and kept his hands down at his sides.

"Reserve goalkeeper," he said.

"Oh! You know I can play at half well."

"I know you can when you choose, but we have better halves than you ever were, Hazel. Your best place was in goal, and you could have kept it if you had liked. I warned you often enough how it would be. But—"

"Oh, you needn't give me all that over again!" said Hazeldene rudely. "Oh, drop it! I know all that. I don't want another lecture, thanks!"

Wharton's eyes gleamed.

"Then the matter is ended," he remarked.

"Not quite. You are dropping me definitely from the team?"

"Yes."

"And you offer me nothing but my name down in the reserves? Mere rot, as you won't want a reserve goalkeeper at all!"

"It's the best I can do, Hazel."

"It's not good enough for me."

Wharton was silent.

Hazeldene looked at him, with hard, clenched hands and burning eyes. Wharton faced him calmly and quietly.

"You've got nothing more to say?" asked Hazeldene.

"No," said Wharton, "excepting that if you've come here for a row you've come to the wrong place. I'm not going to quarrel with you. As for that fellow skulking behind you, I know he's at the bottom of most of the trouble."

Vernon-Smith shrugged his shoulders.

"I think you've treated Hazel badly," he said, "that's all, and I came here to hear him tell you so. You've interfered with his private friendships, and bossed him all along the line, and now that it suits your convenience, you drop him like a hot potato. It's not what I call playing the game."

Wharton's lip curled.

"A lot you know about playing the game," he said. "You—the blackguard of Greyfriars—you, who'd have been expelled long ago if it wasn't for your father's influence in some underhand way with the Head or the Governors! Hold your tongue, Vernon-Smith! I'll take cheek from Hazeldene, but I won't take it from you!"

The Bouncer shrugged his shoulders again, but did not reply.

"You can leave Vernon-Smith alone," said Hazeldene sullenly. "He came here as my friend—and he is my friend, though you've tried to separate us. It's as my friend that he doesn't like to see me treated in this way."

"He's trying to make you quarrel with me, Hazel, for his own game—you ought to be able to see that."

"That's enough," said Hazeldene. "I only wanted an explanation from you, and I've got it. You needn't put down my name in your blessed reserves; I don't want that distinguished honour. I'm going to chuck footer altogether."

"I'm sorry to hear it."

"As for you, Harry Wharton, I'll give you my opinion of you before I go, and never speak to you again," said Hazeldene, in a concentrated tone. "I think you've treated me badly, and I know you're my enemy, and an underhand one, and it may be all the worse for you, the way you've treated me."

Harry Wharton turned red, and then pale.

"You know how I'd reply to anybody else who said as much as that to me!" he exclaimed. "You know my reason for letting you talk like that. But that's enough; the sooner you get out of my study, the better I shall like it."

Hazeldene's lip curled.

"If anybody had said half as much as that to me, I'd have laid him on his back," he said.

Wharton drew a quick breath.

"Do you mean to say that you want to fight me, Hazeldene?"

"It's taken you a long time to guess that!" sneered Hazeldene.

Wharton put his hands behind him. He was very strongly tempted to use them upon the late goalkeeper of the Remove eleven, but he restrained the impulse. That he could easily have licked Hazeldene made him only the more determined to let the unreasonable, perverse fellow alone.

"I won't fight you, Hazeldene," he said quietly.

"You shall!"

"I will not!"

Hazeldene's eyes blazed.

"You think you are going to treat me like this, and not answer for it!" he cried, his voice thick with passion. "You shall fight me."

"I will not. Be sensible, Hazel. There is nothing to fight about. Even if you licked me—which you couldn't do—what difference would it make? You couldn't get back into the team that way. The only way you can get back into your old position is by slogging away at the game."

"I don't want to get back into my old position," said Hazeldene, between his teeth. "I've chucked up footer, and that's final."

"Then there's nothing more to row about."

"Only your treatment of me," said Hazeldene. "I've called you a cad—an underhand cad! Do you want more than that to make you fight me?"

Wharton changed colour.

"You can say what you like, Hazel," he said, in a low, determined voice. "I shall not fight you, whatever you say."

"Coward!" cried Hazeldene tauntingly.

The colour flushed into Wharton's face. But still he kept his hands behind him, though they were trembling now.

Hazeldene looked him full in the face, with sneering lips and gleaming eyes. Wharton made no movement.

The junior burst into a bitter, mocking laugh.

"Well, if you can take that quietly, you're welcome to!" he exclaimed. "Come on, Smithy, there's nothing to stay here for!"

And he swung out of the study with the Bouncer. Frank Nugent closed the door after them. Wharton sat down quietly.

There was silence in the study for a few minutes. Frank Nugent broke it.

"I should have smashed him, Harry!" he said.

Wharton laughed constrainedly.

"I'm not going to fight Marjorie's brother," he said.

"Of course, I knew it was that!"

"Besides, don't you see, it's all Vernon-Smith's doing. If he could bring about a fight between us, he would win all along the line. Hazeldene would have to stick to him then; I could never interfere between them again. Vernon-Smith brought him here to get up a fight between us."

"But suppose Hazeldene repeats that sort of thing in public, before the fellows?" asked Nugent doubtfully.

Wharton's lips set firmly.

"Let him!" he said.

"You will not fight him!"

"No!"

And the subject dropped.

## THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

### The Tempters.

**P**ONSONBY of the Fourth looked out of the window of his study in Highcliffe College. It was dusk in the Highcliffe quad, and he could only dimly see the big wooden gates in the distance. He was watching for a cycle-lamp to glimmer up at the gates, and announce the arrival of the expected guest from Greyfriars.

Vavasour was emptying a paper bag of pastries into plates on the table. Gadsby was buttering toast. A fag of the Second Form was making more toast, in great quantities. The chums of Highcliffe Fourth were preparing for the reception of Hazeldene of Greyfriars.

"By Jove!" said Vavasour. "We're taking a lot of trouble over that Greyfriars cad, Pon, my boy."

Ponsonby looked back from the window.

"It's worth it," he said laconically.

"Maybe," said Gadsby. "If it works out as you think —"

Ponsonby made a warning gesture towards the fag on the fender, and Gadsby left his remark unfinished.

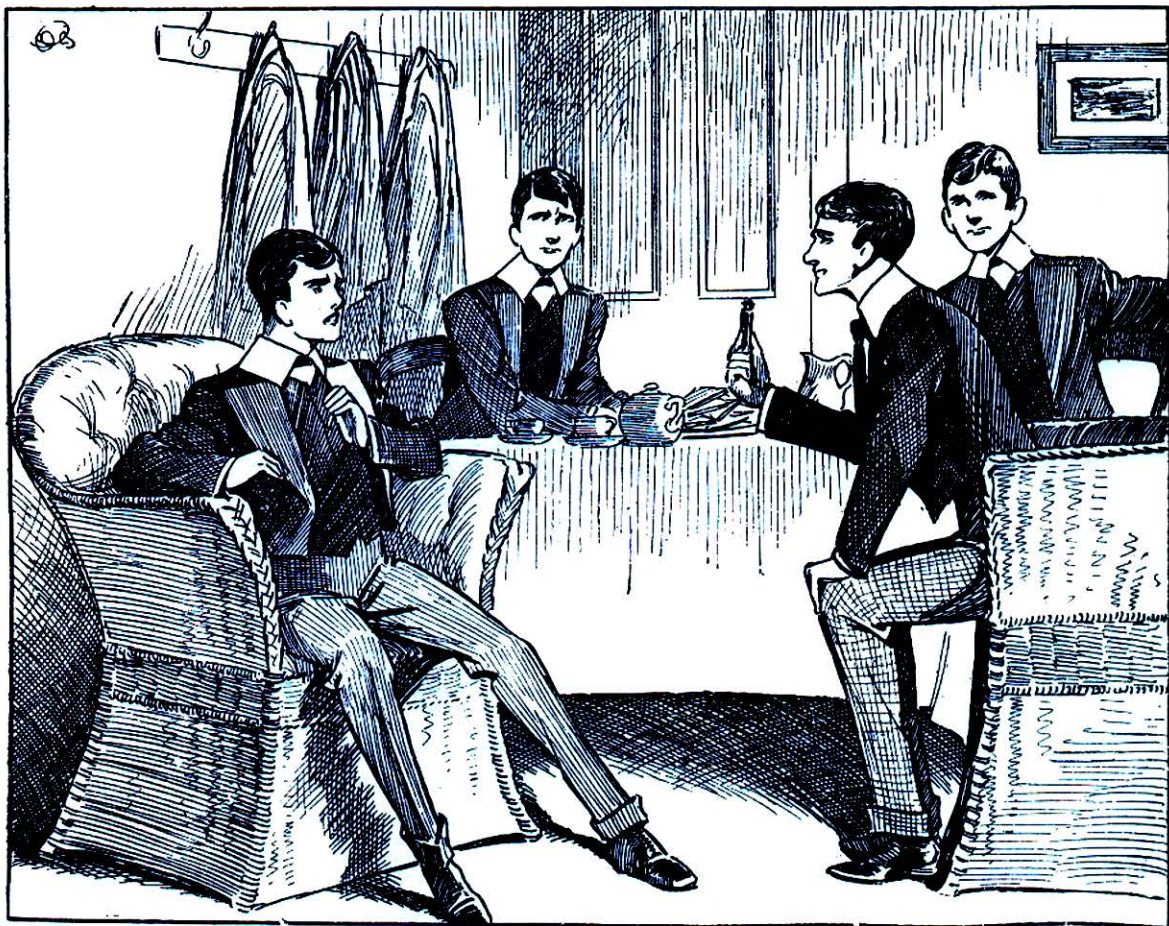
"That's enough, young Piper," said Vavasour. "You can cut."

The fag scuttled out of the study, glad enough to escape from his task, and Vavasour closed the door.

"I hope the chap's coming, that's all!" said Gadsby.

"Oh, he'll come; he accepted our invitation, didn't he?"





"How can I make Wharton unable to play?" gasped Hazeldene. "By giving him a dose of this!" said Ponsonby, unclosing his hand for a moment, and showing a small bottle. (See page 8.)

"Might be pulling our leg—he's a rotten, uncertain sort of rotter, anyway. I wouldn't take his word."

"Oh, he'll be here all right!"

"I suppose the game is to feed him to the chin, and butter him up," Vavasour observed thoughtfully.

Ponsonby grinned.

"That's it," he said. "And you mark my words, I'll twist him round my finger and make him do what we want."

"If he doesn't, we shall get a fearful licking next Saturday," said Gadsby. "As a matter of fact, the team's in rotten condition now than it was last time."

"If this wheeze doesn't come off, I shall find an excuse for scratching the match," said Ponsonby coolly. "I'm only playing if it's a cert."

"Oh, I see!"

"But I don't see how it can fail. It was your getting the stuff from your cousin that put it into my mind. We've tried it on the Head's dog, and the beast doesn't bother us now. I was thinking of making use of that chap Bunter—he'd sell his mean little soul, if he had one, for a bag of jam-tarts—but he might get frightened, and talk—or blackmail us afterwards. I've heard a lot of things about that fat chap. Hazeldene is more in our line—a chap who does things for spite is surer than a chap who does it for a bribe."

"My hat, Pon!" said Vavasour admiringly. "What a criminal you'd make!"

Ponsonby scowled, as if not quite pleased by this compliment, and turned to the window again. A light was gleaming through the dusk at the school gates. It was the lamp of a bicycle.

"Here he comes!" said Ponsonby.

The light moved towards the house. A few minutes later Ponsonby met the visitor at the School House door, the THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 147.

bicycle was put up, and Hazeldene was brought up to the Fourth-Form study.

He was looking a little tired and out of sorts; but the cordial greeting of the Highcliffe fellows put him at his ease. He was placed in the armchair with his toes on the fender. The weather was very cold, though fine, and Hazeldene was chilly.

"Ready for tea?" asked Ponsonby.

"Yes, rather. I'm sharp set enough."

"Good! We've got rather a spread," said Ponsonby. "Cold beef and ham, and poached eggs, and plenty of toast, and cake and jam. Make the tea, Vav, old man!"

"Right you are!"

Hot tea and a solid feed inspirited Hazeldene. He felt quite at his ease; and there was no doubt that the Highcliffe fellows were making themselves very pleasant. The talk ran on footer while they had tea, and the Highcliffians "battered up" their visitor to his heart's content. They related real or imaginary occasions upon which their attacks on the Greyfriars' goal had been defeated by Hazeldene's wonderful saves, and they soon put their visitor into a thoroughly good humour with himself, and a state of keen exasperation against Harry Wharton and every other member of the Remove eleven at Greyfriars.

But one thing they did not do; they did not make any allusion to the suggested scheme by which Hazeldene was to "get his own back" upon the team that had discarded him—the captain who had dropped him out.

Hazeldene was surprised and disappointed. He had come over chiefly from curiosity to know what that scheme was, not with any definite intention of entering into it. If it "wasn't very bad," as he put it to himself, he might take advantage of it to punish Harry Wharton. At all events, he

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would always have the option of refusing to have anything to do with it. But he was disappointed when it was not mentioned, and his curiosity grew keener and keener. He was not keen enough himself to see that the Highcliffe fellows were keeping the subject back on purpose, to force him to mention it and so have an appearance of being urged by him to suggest it.

He fell blindly into the trap, and as Ponsonby & Co. made no mention of the matter, he mentioned it himself at last.

"What about that scheme of yours?" he asked abruptly.

Ponsonby looked inquiring.

"What scheme?" he asked.

"You remember telling me about a scheme you had for knocking the Remove out of time in the match on Saturday."

"Oh, that!" said Ponsonby. "I understood that you had refused to have anything to do with it."

"Not exactly," said Hazeldene. "I said I'd hear what it was, at any rate, when I came over to see you."

"Well, if you want to do it, of course, we're willing."

"I don't say I want to do it," said Hazeldene hastily.

"But I'd like to know what the idea is. That won't do any harm."

"Tell him, Pon," said Gadsby.

"Oh, all right!"

Ponsonby had finished his tea, and he drew his chair closer to Hazeldene's. There was an air of mysterious secrecy about the Highcliffe fellows that impressed Hazeldene very much.

"Well, look here," said Ponsonby, "I'm going to trust you—we want to beat Greyfriars at footer. We've been clipped about our lickings till we're simply wild. The fags in the Second and Third Forms chip us in the quad, and the seniors make a standing joke of it. If we don't beat Greyfriars in a footer match, I can tell you that life won't be worth living for us at Highcliffe."

Hazeldene grinned.

"Then life won't be worth living," he said, "for you certainly can't beat the Remove eleven on your footer."

"I'm not thinking of beating them on our footer."

"As a matter of fact," remarked Gadsby, "our Fourth Form eleven has been going from bad to worse, and we should put up a poorer show than last time."

"Then it will be a walk-over for Greyfriars."

"No, it won't," said Ponsonby, "not if you do as we want, Hazeldene—not if you pay Wharton back in his own coin."

"What do you mean?"

"He won't let you play. Then don't you let him play!"

The Greyfriars junior started.

"How on earth am I to prevent him?"

"Easy as rolling off a form. Let him be unable to play on the day of the match."

"Unable to play!" gasped Hazeldene.

"Yes."

"But—but what have I to do with that? How can I make him unable to play?"

"By giving him a dose of—this!" And Ponsonby unclosed his hand for a moment, and showed a small bottle.

## THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Neither "Yes" nor "No."

H AZELDENE started to his feet with a cry.

"You—you villain!" he gasped. "Poison him!"

Ponsonby rose, too, his face flushing.

"Poison! No, you fool!" he said harshly.

"What is it then—a drug?"

"No, not even a drug. Only a little harmless medicine," said Ponsonby quietly. "Don't be alarmed. We're not asking you to do anything alarming. Wharton won't be any the worse for taking this stuff. Look here, I'll convince you by taking some of it myself."

"Let's see you do it."

"Very well."

Ponsonby poured a few drops of a pale yellow liquid into a teaspoon, and licked them up with his tongue. There was no doubt that he swallowed the dose, such as it was. Hazeldene's heart beat more evenly. He sat down again.

"Well," said Ponsonby contemptuously, "are you still frightened?"

"I wasn't frightened," stammered Hazeldene; "only you—you startled me."

Ponsonby returned the bottle to his pocket.

"Well, look here," he said. "This is how it is. We chaps here break bounds sometimes—after lights out—never mind what for; that's not in the story!"

"Oh, I can guess!" said Hazeldene. "I've been there myself!"

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**GRAND CHRISTMAS DOUBLE NUMBER NEXT WEEK!**

Ponsonby grinned, and slapped him on the shoulder.

"Good man!" he said. "Well, we've had a jolly lot of trouble with the doctor's dog. It's a wakeful beast, and the doctor may have a suspicion about fellows getting out at night. Anyway, he lets the dog loose in the grounds. It's caused us a lot of trouble; more than once making us stay in when we wanted to get out. Well, Gadsby's cousin is a chemist. He was Gadsby major when he was here, you know, and he used to break bounds with the best of them, and have a high old time; and sometimes now he meets us in Courtfield town and we have a bit of a razzle. Gadsby major was mauled by that beastly dog once, so he remembers him, and the other day, when we met him in Courtfield, he told us he'd show us how to settle the dog, and he gave me this bottle. Of course, it would be no good poisoning the brute; there would be an inquiry at once. They mightn't find us out, but it would be a risk; besides, all sorts of unexpected things come to light when an inquiry's started on foot. But this stuff isn't poison. It has an effect on the inside, and upsets the digestion, and so on, and makes the beast ill and low down, without doing anything that a veterinary surgeon can take hold of. See? We've tried it on the dog, and the beast crawls about with his tail between his legs now, and has quite given up barking of a night."

And the three young rascals chuckled. Hazeldene listened with great interest.

"And the dog's health isn't really affected?" he asked.

"Not at all. Gadsby major says that when we stop giving it to him, he'll recover from all effects in about a week, and be the same dog again. That jolly well won't be till the end of the term, I promise you."

"I suppose not," grinned Hazeldene.

"Well, if Wharton and some of the others—the best players, of course—get some of this stuff in their grub, they would be knocked up the same as that dog," said Ponsonby. "Their health wouldn't really be affected, but they would have dyspeptic pain, and heavy heads, and so on, and when the footer match came, they'd feel more like being carried off the ground than playing a hard match. See the wheeze? You give them just a taste of this once a day up to Saturday, and on Saturday they either stand out of the match, or they play so badly that we lick them easily."

Hazeldene drew a deep breath.

"There's no real harm in the stuff," Ponsonby went on. "You saw me taste it. It tastes like quinine and iron, and I'm sure there's some of both in it, but that's all I know. Look here, Wharton hasn't treated you well, has he?"

"No, he hasn't."

"You'd be glad to see him licked?"

"I shouldn't be sorry."

"Then here's your chance."

And the three Highcliffe fellows, throwing off the assumption of indifference now, fixed their eyes eagerly upon Hazeldene.

The Greyfriars junior was silent.

His revengeful feelings towards Wharton, and towards the whole footer team, were keen and sharp enough, and in his heart he would have been glad to see them defeated by Highcliffe on Saturday.

If Highcliffe had been able to defeat them, Hazeldene would have stood by and watched them do it, and exulted. If he had been able to help Highcliffe do it, by playing in their ranks, he would have done that.

But this!

This was so utterly base, so mean and low down, that, angry as he was, revengeful as he was, he could not bring himself to entertain the idea.

He shook his head.

There was a flash of fury in the eyes of Ponsonby for a moment; but his manner remained perfectly quiet and friendly.

"Think over it, old chap," he said. "You know the stuff's harmless; you saw me take some myself. You believe what I've told you about it?"

"Oh, yes; besides, I should try it first on an animal," said Hazeldene.

"Exactly; a good idea!"

"But—but I can't take it on," said Hazeldene, slowly and hesitatingly. "I hate Wharton, and I pretty well hate the rest of them. They've treated me badly all round, and they have tried to separate me from Vernon-Smith, the only chap who really stands by me all through. But—but I can't do it!"

"You need only give it to Wharton and Inky," Ponsonby suggested. "Inky will keep goal, and with a duffer goal for Greyfriars we are bound to make the running. Then Wharton, as he's the skipper and the best forward. Nugent as well would make all safe. It needn't go any further. And it's as safe as houses. It's utterly impossible for them to suspect anything."



"I—I should have no chance."  
 "Have tea with them, and volunteer to make the tea," said Gadsby. "There's chance enough for you."  
 "I—I'm not on friendly terms with them now."  
 "Get on friendly terms, then."

Hazeldene shook his head.  
 "I—I couldn't do it, you chaps. I shouldn't have the nerve. Besides, it's—it's rotten. I can't take it on."

The Highcliffe fellows exchanged glances. Vavasour and Gadsby were perfectly prepared to seize Hazeldene, and to give him a record ragging, in complete disregard of all the laws of hospitality and honour. Hazeldene never knew how narrow his escape was at that moment. But Ponsonby made them a sign. Ponsonby had not given up hope of Hazeldene yet by any means.

"Well, look here, think about it," he said. "We'll see you again before Saturday."

Hazeldene hesitated.  
 "I can't come over here again," he said. "It—it would make the fellows suspicious. Some of them were talking about it this time."

"You needn't," said Ponsonby. "We'll meet you half way, at the old barn on the Courtfield Road. You know it?"

"Oh, yes. Bulstrode had a fight there the other day with Trumper, of the County Council School at Courtfield," said Hazeldene. "I was there. But—"

"Look here," said Ponsonby, "you think it over. Tomorrow I'll just stroll down to the barn after afternoon lessons, and if you feel inclined to join in the little game, you stroll down, too, and meet me. I'll have the stuff with me in case you want it."

Hazeldene looked relieved. Like most weak, vacillating natures, he hated to say either a direct "Yes" or a direct "No." To refuse the insidious temptation, and yet to have it always in his power to withdraw the refusal; that exactly suited his ways.

"Well, that's all right," he said.

"Done!" said Vavasour and Ponsonby together.

The matter so far settled, the Highcliffe fellows speedily tired of their distinguished visitor's company, and Gadsby remembered an extra prep, which had to be done in the Form-room with the Form-master, so Hazeldene took his leave. The three Highcliffians walked down to the gates with him, Gadsby wheeling his bike for him, and shook hands with him very heartily as they said good-bye.

"Don't forget," said Ponsonby, at parting. "I shall have a walk down to the old barn every day after lessons, and if you care to meet me there, you've only got to turn up there at half-past five or about."

"That's all right," said Hazeldene. "I'll remember."

And he pedalled away.

"Do you think he'll do it, Pon?" asked Gadsby, as the Highcliffians walked back to the school in the dusk. Ponsonby nodded.

"I believe so."

"If he doesn't—"

"We scratch the match, of course."

"But if he does," said Vavasour, with a grin, "then we've got those Greyfriars rotters in the hollow of our hand at last, and we'll make 'em sit up!"

And the Highcliffe fellows chuckled gleefully at the prospect. Meanwhile, Hazeldene rode away towards Greyfriars. He had no light on his machine, though it was long past lighting-up time; the lamp was in a bad state, and would not light easily, and he had let it alone. That was Hazeldene's way in everything. The long country road, almost bare of lamps, was very dark, and Hazeldene was thinking more of the rascally plot that had just been unfolded to him, than of where he was going. It was not surprising therefore that at a turning he ran into three pedestrians who were coming along the lane.

There was a sudden yell from the darkness.

"Hurroo! Look out!"

Then the machine heeled over, and Hazeldene crashed to the ground.

## THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

### Hazeldene's Ghost.

"YOU thilly ass!"  
 "You chump!"

"Faith, and ye're a howling omadhaun intirely!"  
 Hazeldene sat in the hard road, grunting. His machine had curled up beside him. In the dimness of the lane he was aware of three shadowy forms, one of which was rubbing its leg and uttering sundry excited ejaculations.

Their voices were enough to tell Hazeldene who they were. One of them, too, was so tall that he would have guessed him to be Trumper, the chief of the Courtfield County Council School lads.

"Oh!" groaned Hazeldene. "You idiots! What were you walking in the road for?"

"Faith, and I like that!" growled O'Neil. "There's no footpath here, you silly omadhaun!"

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"The thilly chump!" said Solly Lazarus, still rubbing his damaged leg. "I'll give him a licking for running into me in this thtupid way."

"You confounded Board-school rotters!" said Hazeldene angrily, scrambling to his feet. "I wish I'd knocked you into the ditch."

"Nithe polite young gentleman, ain't he?"

"Faith, and he's a blaggard intirely!"

"Get out of my way!" said Hazeldene, picking up his machine.

Trumper laid a heavy hand on the bicycle.

"Not quite so fast," he said coolly. "You called us some pretty names just now."

"Let me pass!"

"Collar the cad, chaps!"

Hazeldene made a sudden attempt to mount, but active hands dragged him off the machine. The bicycle went clanging to the ground again.

"Now, then," said Trumper quietly, "which one of us do you prefer to put up your hands to, you young cad?"

"Let me give the thilly ass a licking," said Solly Lazarus. "He theems to be about my thize."

"So he is, Solly. You're the man."

"Oh, rats!" said Hazeldene, who had no mind to fight a sturdy, thick-set fellow there in the dark lane, and who was moreover anxious to get in for calling-over at Greyfriars.

"I'm sorry I ran you down. That's all right."

"And sorry for calling us names, eh?"

"Oh, rats!"

"Stand up to him, Solly."

"Thertainly, dear boy; all therene," said Solly, leaving off rubbing his injured leg. "Put up your thilly fists, you thpaniel."

"Look here—"

"Rats! Put up your fists."

Hazeldene backed away in a savage temper. He made a clutch at his bike to get hold of it, and attempt flight. But the three Courtfielders had hold of him again in a twinkling.

"No, you don't!" said Trumper grimly.

"Oh, he won't fight!" said Barney O'Neil. "Look here, don't waste time on the spalpeen. Sure, and he's not worth it."

"All therene," said Solly Lazarus, "but we'll give him thomthing for himself to take back to Greyfriars, the thilly ass."

"What do you mean, Solly?"

"We'll chalk up his thilly chivvy," said Solly, producing a chunk of chalk from a pocket of his loud check waistcoat. "Keep thtill, you thilly ass!"

"Let me go!" roared Hazeldene.

"Rats, dear boy!"

Trumper chuckled.

"Well, buck up, Solly," he exclaimed; "it's beginning to rain."

"All therene, my boy."

Hazeldene struggled in the grasp of Trumper and O'Neil, but they held his arms firmly.

Solly Lazarus proceeded to chalk his face.

Hazeldene was quite in the wrong, and he was being punished very lightly, but he was furious all the same. He had ridden without a light, and run into the Courtfield fellows, and slanged them instead of apologising. It was not to be expected that they would allow him to escape unscathed. Hazeldene struggled and panted in the grasp of Trumper and O'Neil, as Solly chalked his face with a doft hand. Solly did not spare the chalk.

Over and over Hazeldene's face he went, simply grinding the chalk into the skin, till the junior's countenance glimmered a dead white in the dusk.

The rain was falling in heavy drops now, and Trumper and O'Neil both urged Solly to hurry; but the Semitic youth coolly took his time about it.

"All therene," he said. "I want to make it a real work of art, you know. Keep thtill, you thilly chump!"

"I'll pay you for this!" hissed Hazeldene.

Solly shook his head.

"Not at all, dear boy. I'm doing it free of charge. I shouldn't think of accepting anything for a thmall thing like thith."

"Great Scott, Solly, do finish!" exclaimed Trumper. "I shall let the boulder go. I've not got a coat, and it's raining."

"All therene."

# ANSWERS

FOUR SPLENDID COMPLETE STORIES NEXT WEEK!



"Faith, and ye don't want to be all night about it!"

"The chalk's all gone!" announced Solly. "The job's done, dear boys, and it's thimply ripping. Look at him."

The Courtfield fellows looked at Hazeldene, and grinned. Even in the deep dusk his face loomed up white and startling. It would take a great deal of soaping and scrubbing to get off that well-rubbed chalk.

"Now you can go," said Solly. "Perhaps you will be careful how you run into people in the dark in future, you thilly ass."

"Hang you!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Hazeldene gripped his bicycle and stood it up. He did not trouble to make another attempt to light the lamp, although riding without a light had got him into this unpleasant adventure. The grinning Courtfielders stood back to let him pass.

"I'll make you smart for this," he said thickly, "especially you, you Jew bouncer. Look out for yourself when I meet you alone, that's all."

"Thertainly!" said Solly. "Pleathed to meet you at any time, dear boy."

Hazeldene gritted his teeth, and, jumping on his bicycle, pedalled away into the darkness.

Trumper & Co. chuckled gleefully as they resumed their way in the dropping rain.

"I rather think that chap will make a sensation at Greyfriars when he gets in," said Trumper. "He won't get that chalk off in a hurry."

"All therene."

"Faith, and you'll want to look out, Solly, if he does meet you, with some friends with him," Barney O'Neil remarked. "I don't think he'd stop to think about fair play. You offered him a fair fight, but he wouldn't offer you one."

Hazeldene pedalled on swiftly towards Greyfriars. He thought of dismounting and attempting to wash the chalk off in a ditch, but he felt that he would not improve his appearance much by that. Besides, it was raining, and the rain was coming down more heavily every minute. He bent over the handle-bars, and scroched on to Greyfriars, mentally anathematising the Courtfield County Council School and all that dwelt therein.

It was fortunate that he met no traffic on the road, for he was riding very recklessly.

He came up to the gates of Greyfriars, and Gosling let him in, and he wheeled his bicycle in. He kept his face down, and his cap pulled over it, as he went in, to keep its curious state from Gosling's eyes, and looked away from the porter. He wheeled his machine through the rain to the bicycle shed.

Somewhat to his surprise, there was a glimmer of light in the bicycle shed. He concluded that one of the fellows was there repairing a machine, or cleaning it, though he could hear no sound from the building.

He glanced in at the little window as he passed it.

A candle was set upon a bench, and on a box beside it Billy Bunter was seated. He was not cleaning a bike. He had a paper parcel unwrapped on his knees, and was bolting tarts and cream-puffs at a record speed. Hazeldene grinned sourly. He knew that the fat junior had obtained a remittance from somewhere, or a loan from one of the fellows—as was more likely—and was indulging in this solitary feed in the bike-shed to escape the danger of having to share out with anybody else. That was very like Billy Bunter.

The candle was guttering down to its last flicker, and Bunter was bolting the remaining tarts rapidly. Perhaps he was timing himself to finish at the same time as the candle.

Billy Bunter was not a hero, and he had often provoked contemptuous amusement in Greyfriars by his terror of the dark.

Hazeldene went on to the door, and pushed it open.

Billy Bunter looked up guiltily.

For the first moment he thought he had been discovered by someone who had come to demand a share of his eatables, and he was prepared to bolt the tarts whole rather than share them out.

But what he saw startled him far more than a raider of tarts could have done.

Hazeldene had forgotten for the moment that his face was ghastly white in hue.

Bunter jumped up.

"Oh!" he gasped.

His fat leg caught against the bench and jolted it, and the candle sputtered out.

Billy Bunter gave a whimper of terror.

The apparition of that deathly face, followed by the sudden darkness, had quite overcome what little nerve he had.

He made a dash for the window. He dared not go near the door. That white, terrible face was still glimmering through the darkness there.

Bunter tore the window open and bundled through it. In a calmer moment he would never have ventured upon that.

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He dropped outside with a bump, and gave a gasp of pain. But in a second he was on his feet, and sprinting towards the School House for all he was worth.

Hazeldene stood transfixed with amazement for a moment. It dawned upon him that Bunter must have taken him for a ghost, and he grinned. He relighted the candle and put his machine up. Billy Bunter, without a backward glance, dashed on at full speed to the School House.

## THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

### Not a Phantom.

"HALLO, hallo, hallo!"  
 Bob Cherry caught Bunter by the shoulder as he came charging into the House. Bob was standing there, chatting with Nugent and Wharton, when the fat junior pounded in at top speed.

"Hold on, Tubby!"  
 "Leggo!" roared Bunter. "Yow! Leggo! He's after me!"

"What!"

"Leggo!"

"Who's after you, you young ass?" demanded Bob Cherry, tightening his grasp upon the Owl of the Remove, and forcing him to stop.

"Ow! Oh! Leggo!"

"Who is it? Ionides—Coker?"

"Ow! No."

"Who then, you chump?"

"The g-g-ghost."

"The what?"

"The ghost."

"Off his rocker," remarked Nugent. "It's a case of over-eating, and nightmare while he's awake. Leave the grub alone for a bit, Bunt."

"Oh, really Nugent—"  
 "You see, there's jam all over his chivvy," said Bob Cherry. "He's been eating himself into a fit."

"Ow! It was a ghost—Hazeldene's ghost!"

"Hazeldene!" exclaimed Harry Wharton, interested. "Hazeldene's gone over to Highcliff."

"Then he's got killed in some accident on the way," gasped Bunter. "His ghost walked into the bike-shed just now. He looked simply ghastly, with a face like—like chalk, and flames coming out of his mouth and eyes."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, really, you fellows—"

Bunter's wild imagination had supplied the flames, but Hazeldene's face certainly had been very like chalk. That was not really surprising, under the circumstances.

Bob Cherry released the fat junior.

"Oh, go and hide under a bed!" he exclaimed. "I advise you to keep off the grub. It's simply indigestion."

"G-g-go and see for yourselves," said Bunter. "I bet you don't dare to go down to the bike-shed, and see."

Harry Wharton laughed.

"Let's go down and see, you fellows," he exclaimed. "It's possible that some accident has happened to Hazeldene."

"Right-ho!"

"Y-you-you'd better look out!" gasped Billy Bunter. "I tell you it's a g-g-ghost! Of course, I wasn't frightened myself, but—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I say, you fellows—"

But the Famous Four were gone. Harry Wharton fumbled in his pocket for matches as they went through the shadowy Close. A light was glimmering from the bike shed.

"The ghost has a light, at all events," remarked Nugent, with a grin.

"Ha, ha! Yes."

"He's washing himself, too," said Bob Cherry, as his ears caught a sound of running water.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

They looked into the bike shed. The light was glimmering from the lavatory attached to it, where the water was running, and standing at the sink was Hazeldene, washing his face with lathered hands.

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

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "I should think you'd find it more comfy to wash in the dorm., in this weather, Hazel."

Hazeldene started and looked round.

His face was streaming with curiously whitened water, and his skin gleamed white and deathly still, in the light of a lantern perched on a shelf.

The chums of the Remove stared at him.

"What on earth have you been doing with your face?" asked Harry Wharton. "Have you had an accident, Hazeldene?"



"No," growled Hazeldene.  
 "Then what's the matter?"  
 "Nothing."  
 "Bunter came pelting in saying he'd seen a ghost," said Harry. "There's something wrong with your chivvy."  
 "Ha, ha, ha!" roared Bob Cherry. "It's chalk."  
 "Chalk!"  
 "Yes, look at the water—it's chalky. Hazeldene has been chalking his face—for a lark, I suppose."  
 "The chalkfulness is terrific."  
 "Blessed if I see the joke," said Wharton drily. "I wouldn't take all that trouble, and muck-up my face, to scare Bunter!"

Hazeldene turned on them savagely.  
 "If you want to know, it was done by the Courtfield rotters," he exclaimed. "I was collared in the lane by those Board-school cads, and that Jew kid did this to me. I'll make him sit up for it, some time!"

"What did you do to them first?"  
 "Mind your own business!"

Wharton turned out of the shed. Hazeldene was evidently not in a mood for talk. The chums of the Remove returned to the house, and Hazeldene sullenly finished his ablutions. The evening was very cold, and the cold water was not enjoyable, and wash as he would, some traces of the chalk would remain about his ears and the roots of his hair.

Hazeldene had intended to wash off the chalk in the bike shed, and say nothing about it in the house; but that was not possible now. Billy Bunter met the chums of the Remove as they came in, with an anxious stare.

"Well, did you see it?" he demanded.

"We saw Hazeldene," said Harry.

"Is he all right?"

"Right as rain, so far as I know."

Billy Bunter was puzzled. He waited for Hazeldene to come in, and when he came in, Bunter favoured him with a close stare. There was no doubt that he was alive and well, and that he was in a bad temper. His face was no longer pale, in fact, it was a great deal redder than usual owing to the rubbing and towelling it had received.

Bunter blinked at Hazeldene. The fat junior was very short-sighted, and he approached his spectacles within a few inches of Hazeldene's face to take a good survey of him.

Hazeldene stared at him angrily.

"What was the matter with your chivvy, then?" asked Bunter. "Had you been chalking it over, you ass? What did you do it for?"

"Oh, get out of the way!"

"Of course, I wasn't scared," said Bunter. "I knew you were only japing, and I pretended to rush off just to keep up the game. Ha, ha, ha! I knew you were only trying to pull my leg all the time."

Hazeldene gave the fat junior a violent push. Bunter staggered away, and fell with a heavy bump on the floor.

"Ow!" he gasped. "Ow—ow!"

Hazeldene walked on, and left him there. Bulstrode came and grasped the unfortunate Owl of the Remove by the shoulders, and jerked him to his feet. Billy Bunter blinked rather dazedly at his helper.

"Oh, really, Smith—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, is it you, Bulstrode! I'm rather short-sighted, you know. Look here, I've been treated rottenly by that cad Vaseline. I'm expecting a postal-order by the first delivery in the morning, Bulstrode. Look here, if you'll give Hazeldene a jolly good licking for me, Bulstrode, I'll stand you a—Ow!"

Bulstrode sat the fat junior down on the floor again with a harder bump than before. This time Billy Bunter was left to pick himself up.

## THE NINTH CHAPTER. Brought Up to the Scratch.

**V**ERNON-SMITH, the Bounder of Greyfriars, was in his study when Hazeldene came in. Hazel knew that before he entered, by a scent of cigarette smoke that came to his nostrils as he opened the door. The Bounder was reclining upon a sofa, with his feet upon a chair, and a cigarette was between his lips. He looked at Hazeldene, and nodded without otherwise moving. Hazeldene came in quickly and closed the door.

"Rather rotten for you if a prefect looked in just now," he remarked.

Vernon-Smith shrugged his shoulders.

"That's not likely to happen," he said. "Loder would take no notice, anyway. I get his smokes for him from Friardale. Besides, I don't care if I get lines. I get them done at a bob for fifty, and I can easily afford it."

"It's jolly nice to be rolling in money as you are," Hazeldene said enviously.

"Quite so," said the Bounder coolly. "I find it very agreeable. You've been over to Highcliffe?"

"Yes."

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"Had a good time?"

"Oh, yes!"

The Bounder blew out a little cloud of cigarette smoke, and looked at Hazeldene keenly through the blue wreaths.

"What did Ponsonby and the rest want with you?" he exclaimed.

"Oh, they just asked me to tea, you know!"

"For the sake of your beaux yeux, I suppose," said the Bounder, with a sneer. "Look here, you have come into my study to talk to me about it, and it's no good beginning by telling crammers."

Hazeldene coloured uncomfortably. He had had it borne in upon his mind on more than one previous occasion that it was useless to attempt to pull the wool over Vernon-Smith's eyes.

"Sit down," said the Bounder, with a grin. "Sit down, and make yourself comfy. Take a fag, and spout."

Hazeldene sat down, and took a cigarette, but he did not light it. As a matter of fact, he wanted to tell Vernon-Smith about his talk with the Highcliffe fellows, and to ask his advice. Vernon-Smith, lad as he was in years, was a man of the world in experience, and Hazeldene was keenly eager to get somebody's advice upon the subject; in fact to relieve his own mind by simply talking about it. And Vernon-Smith was about the only fellow at Greyfriars he could safely tell such a story to.

At the same time, the foolish fellow was not above the conceit of wishing Smith to believe that he had been asked over to Highcliffe for his own sake. Hazeldene, like many weak natures, had a great desire to be popular, and to be considered an influential and sought-after fellow. He had an uncomfortable consciousness that he was not, in reality, sought after on his own account. He had some degree of popularity on account of his sister Marjorie, who was respected and liked by all the Greyfriars fellows. He was sometimes aided in a friendly way by fellows who thought he was weak and easily led into mischief. The Highcliffe fellows had taken to him, but Hazeldene realised that it was simply because they wanted to make use of him. So it was all along the line. Vernon-Smith himself had interested motives in chumming with him. Hazeldene knew no one who would ever have taken the trouble to be friendly with him for his own sake and his own qualities. He would willingly have deceived Vernon-Smith on that point; but the Bounder was not to be deceived, and did not mind saying so.

Vernon-Smith was watching him through the smoke with a quiet grin. He knew his ascendancy over Hazeldene, and he knew that the whole story would come out soon. Hazeldene was a fellow who simply could not help having a confidant. He was always too weak to stand alone. And Vernon-Smith was very curious as to why Ponsonby & Co. had picked up with Hazeldene. At present he suspected that it was on account of Marjorie, and if that was so, that Bounder would have something to say about the matter.

"Light up!" he said.

Hazeldene lit his cigarette. In the Bounder's presence he always made a solemn pretence of being fond of smoking.

"Go ahead!" said the Bounder. "Of course, it's admitted to start with that they asked you because you're a nice, bright, entertaining chap. But what else did they want?"

"Oh, shut up!" said Hazeldene. "I don't mind telling you. They were very friendly to me, but they had an axe to grind as well."

"I thought so," said the Bounder coolly. "You were so jolly secretive about it before you went. Ponsonby told you something or other while he was here yesterday, that you haven't told me."

"They're up against Wharton."

"I know that." The Bounder's eyes gleamed. "Do you mean that they've got a dodge up against Wharton and his lot?"

"Yes."

"So that's it, is it?"

The Bounder sat upright on the sofa, and took his cigarette from his mouth. He was keenly interested now. It was not what he had expected. He had been prepared to oppose the Highcliffians' influence over Hazeldene. It occurred to him now that he might as well back Ponsonby up.

"What is it?" he asked.

Hazeldene stared gloomily into the fire. The Bounder's curiosity was very keen.

"Hang it all, Hazel! Go on!"

"Look here, it will be necessary to keep mum," said Hazeldene. "It's a jolly serious matter—not that I intend to have anything to do with it. If I did, and it came out, I might be expelled."

"Phew! You can trust me, of course! Go ahead!"

Hazeldene explained.

The Bounder listened in silence, allowing his cigarette



go out in his keen interest. His eyes were gleaming. He did not interrupt Hazeldene once.

"My hat!" he exclaimed, at last. "What a ripping scheme!"

Hazeldene started.

"Is that what you think, Smith?"

"Yes, rather! You've got the stuff?"

"No."

"No! You've refused it?"

"I've refused to have anything to do with it," said Hazeldene doggedly.

The Bounder's eyes glittered. But he held back his anger. He saw that he would have to be very careful with Hazeldene now.

"Look here, Hazel, it's a splendid chance to take down that swanking crew!" he exclaimed. "I'd give a tenner to see Harry Wharton play a rotten game at footer and get hissed by the Form. It's worth anything to us. Look here, Hazel, old man, it's too good a chance to be lost. You must do it."

"I can't."

"Are you going to take everything lying down, then? Wharton's shoved you out of the team, and put a nigger in your place!"

"I've challenged him to fight me, and he won't."

Vernon-Smith laughed contemptuously.

"Bah! Did you call that a challenge? You should have given him the coward's blow. He wouldn't have refused you then. As it is, he thinks you dare not. And I'll tell you another thing—he thinks you're hiding behind your sister."

Hazeldene flushed scarlet.

"He can't think that, after what I've said to him!" he exclaimed.

"He knows you daren't touch him."

"I dare—and I will."

The Bounder shrugged his shoulders.

"I'll believe that when I see it!" he exclaimed. "Of course, it's nothing to me. You can do as you like. I'd rather get even by this Highcliffe dodge than by getting my head punched, myself. Besides, there's another thing—we can get some tin on it."

"I don't understand."

"Don't you see?" exclaimed Vernon-Smith eagerly. "There are a lot of the fellows who will put up money on the game, or any game, for the sake of a pen—fellows in the Sixth, too. They will be willing to back Wharton's team at long odds, you see, because Highcliffe have no chance against them at footer. We can lay money on Highcliffe, and then if Wharton and Nugent and Inky are put out of the match, we win all along the line, for Greyfriars can't win without them."

Hazeldene's eyes glistened for a moment. He was poor and extravagant—a combination which has led many a fellow of weak nature into trouble. The chance of making a big coup in cash over the affair appealed to him very strongly.

But he shook his head again.

"You won't do it?" said Vernon-Smith.

"I can't! It's too rotten."

The Bounder bit his lip.

"And you're going to put up with what they've done to you—Inky getting your place in goal, a new man being put into the team, and Wharton treating you like a dog?"

Hazeldene's lips moved convulsively.

"If he won't fight, what can I do?" he exclaimed sullenly.

"Make him!"

"But he won't!"

"Bah! I heard Snoop saying to-day that you knew Wharton wouldn't touch Marjorie's brother, and that's why you slanged him in his study—but that you dared not do anything that would make him really hit out."

Hazeldene clenched his hands.

"By George! I'll show Snoop—"

"Bah! Let Snoop alone. If you want to be warlike, there's Wharton!" said Vernon-Smith. "Not that I care about it, of course. It's no bizney of mine."

Hazeldene rose hurriedly, and threw his cigarette into the fire.

"Come with me," he said abruptly.

"Where are you going?"

"To see Wharton."

"What for?"

"You'll see."

And Hazeldene strode out of the study. Vernon-Smith followed him with a satirical grin upon his face. He had succeeded in exasperating his comrade to the proper pitch, and he had little doubt that the fight he desired would follow. And he knew that Harry Wharton would lick his adversary if that fight came to pass. And then—then sore, defeated, humiliated, would not Hazeldene turn to the Highcliffe scheme as the only means of revenging himself? Vernon-Smith thought that he would!

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## THE TENTH CHAPTER.

### The Coward's Blow.

HARRY WHARTON was in the common-room.

The Remove captain was far from expecting any trouble that evening—in fact, he was feeling very cheerful and very much at his ease. He was playing a three-handed game of chess with Nugent and Hurree Janiset Ram Singh. The Nabob of Bhanipur was a chess-player of great skill, and he usually beat both his chums, who played in consultation against him. Sometimes they pulled off a victory, but it was only after a long and hard tussle. The only fellow who could equal Hurree Singh at chess was Wun Lung, the little Chinese, and he could beat him. At the present moment the Nabob of Bhanipur had made a move, and was sitting back in his chair with a calm and placid smile upon his dusky face. Wharton and Nugent were considering, and five or six fellows were watching with interest. It was at this moment that Hazeldene came into the junior common-room, with Vernon-Smith at his heels.

Hazeldene walked straight up to the chess-table. Some of the fellows, who saw the look on his face and anticipated trouble, followed him.

Wharton did not even notice that he had come in. He was deeply considering his next move.

"What about the knight, Frank?" he asked.

Frank Nugent nodded. His brows were deeply corrugated in thought. Whatever move they made they felt that the Indian had another move up his sleeve ready for them. The king did not seem to be in danger, so far as they could see, but Inky had on what Bob Cherry called his checkmate look.

"I want to speak to you, Wharton," said Hazeldene, in a low, trembling voice.

The captain of the Remove did not look up.

"Another time," he said.

"Another time won't do," said Hazeldene.

"I'm busy."

"I don't care."

Wharton looked up then. Hazeldene's pale face and burning eyes could not fail to arrest his attention.

"Look here, Hazel, this is too bad!" he exclaimed. "What is it? You can see that I'm playing chess, and it's my move."

Hazeldene did not reply in words, but he threw out his hand and swept the chessmen from the table. In a moment the board was in confusion.

Frank Nugent gave a shout of wrath, and sprang to his feet.

"You cad!" he shouted. "What do you mean by that?"

Hazeldene gave him a bitter look. Frank was advancing upon him with clenched fists and blazing eyes. Hazeldene stepped back a pace.

"You can sit down," he said; "I'll settle it with Wharton."

Wharton pulled his excited chum back. Hurree Janiset Ram Singh had not risen. He was quite calm; but there was a blaze in his dark eyes, too. Hazeldene's inexcusable rudeness had provoked even the quiet and placid Indian.

"Hold on, Frank," said Harry quietly; "hands off him. You can leave him to me. He has come here to pick a quarrel with me."

"I've come here to tell you what I think of you," said Hazeldene, "and to show you up before all the fellows!"

Harry Wharton laughed contemptuously.

"I don't know that you can tell the fellows anything to alter their opinion of me," he said, "but I'm willing to hear you do it."

"I called you something last night," said Hazeldene—"it was something that would have made any other fellow fight."

Wharton bit his lip.

"I won't fight you," he said.

"Why won't you?"

"You know perfectly well."

Hazeldene gritted his teeth. He had worked himself up into a perfect passion of rage by this time—even a lurking sense in his heart of being in the wrong made him more savagely angry.

He turned furiously to the fellows round him.

"You hear that?" he exclaimed. "Wharton has treated me rottenly, and he refuses to fight me. He wants to make out that I'm hiding behind my sister."

Wharton's brow grew dark and stern.

"I didn't say anything of the sort!" he exclaimed. "And you have no right to drag your sister's name into a quarrel here!"

Hazeldene turned livid.

"You—are you going to dictate to me whether I shall mention my sister's name or not?" he cried hoarsely. "By George—"

"Faith, and ye'd better shut up, Hazel, darling," said Micky Desmond. "It's excited ye are."

"Mind your own business, Desmond!"

"Sure, and I—"

**GRAND CHRISTMAS DOUBLE NUMBER NEXT WEEK!**



"Wharton refuses to fight me, after treating me disgracefully!" said Hazeldene. "He says, or hints, that he thinks I'm sheltering myself behind my sister! Well, then, I've called him a coward, and it makes no difference to him! We'll see if that will make any difference!"

And stepping suddenly forward, he struck Wharton full in the face.

The sound of the blow rang through the junior common-room.

Wharton staggered back.

Everyone in the room expected him to spring forward and knock Hazeldene down. But he did not. He stood with his face going red and white. His hands were clenched till the nails dug deep into the palms, but he kept them down at his sides.

There was a deep, deep breath in the crowd.

And grim silence.

Hazeldene looked at Wharton with a sneering smile.

"Will you fight now?" he asked.

Only one word dropped from Wharton's lips in reply.

"No."

There was a murmur in the common-room. To some of the fellows who had laughed at the word of coward as applied to Wharton, there came a doubt now that perhaps it was true, after all.

Surely patience carried to such an extent had a very large tincture of poltroonery about it. At least, it seemed so to the Remove fellows.

"My hat!" said Bulstrode aloud. "If a fellow did that to me, I'd smash him!"

"Faith, and so would I!"

"The smashfulness should be terrific!" murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, with an anxious glance at his chum, wondering.

Hazeldene burst into a mocking laugh.

"You won't fight now?" he exclaimed.

"No."

"Coward—coward!"

Wharton did not speak. But Frank Nugent could stand no more. He sprang forward, his hands clenched.

"Put up your fists, you cad!" he cried. "You know Wharton is no coward, and you know why he won't fight you! You can stand up to me!"

Hazeldene did not lift his hands.

"Is Wharton going to shelter himself behind you?" he asked mockingly.

"You hound!"

Wharton drew Nugent back. More than one of Harry's chums were simply aching to knock Hazeldene down, but Wharton's look restrained them.

"Hold on, Frank," said Wharton quietly. "This is my bizney, you know."

Nugent snapped his teeth.

"And mine, too!" he exclaimed. "You're taking this altogether too far, Harry! Marjorie would never expect you to put up with an insult like that!"

"Hush!"

"I won't hush! That cad has gone too far! If you won't fight him, I will—and I'll give him such a licking that he won't be able to crawl about for a week!" shouted Nugent, who was almost beside himself with rage.

"He will fight me," said Hazeldene, with a hateful smile, "for if he doesn't I'll treat him like that every time we meet—in the Form-room, or in the Close, or in the dorm. I'll make him meet me!"

Wharton's face went hard and set.

"You hear that?" said Frank angrily. "Are you going to stand that, Harry? Can't you see the cad has been egged on to do this, and he will make you fight, whether you like it or not?"

"I will, certainly," said Hazeldene sneeringly. "I'll make him fight, or I'll give him the life of a dog!"

"Hold your tongue!" said Bob Cherry savagely.

Hazeldene shrugged his shoulders. He took a step towards Harry Wharton, with his hands clenched.

"Now what do you say, Wharton?"

Wharton met his eyes quietly.

"I say that I've done all I can to keep out of this," he said. "The fellows will all bear witness that I've put up with more than any chap ever was called upon to put up with, for the sake of peace. But if you mean what you say, I've no alternative but to fight you. And I will—and you'll be sorry for it," he added grimly.

"When—and where?"

"To-morrow afternoon, behind the pavilion."

"Good!"

And Hazeldene swung away. Harry Wharton sat down quietly. Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, who had a wonderful memory in chess, had already reset the board, in the same order as it was in when Hazeldene scattered the pieces and board. Wharton, with a manner of perfect calmness, resumed the game. But the calmness was only outward; and his moves after that were strange and unaccountable. On the morrow he was to fight Marjorie's brother—and how was he to face Marjorie afterwards?

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## THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

### Knocked Out.

**H**AZELDENE did not approach Wharton again that night. Whether he felt any regret for his action Wharton could not know; at all events, he did not show any.

When the Form went up to the dormitory Wharton did not speak to him. The coming contest was weighing heavily upon his mind. The matter was a worry to Nugent and Bob Cherry, too; but they were not sorry that Wharton was to fight Hazeldene. They were looking forward to seeing that youth get a thorough licking.

In the morning, when the Remove went down, Vernon-Smith came beside Wharton on the stairs. Harry did not look at him.

"I want to speak to you," said the Bounder.

"The want is all on your side, then."

"It's about Hazeldene."

Wharton's face lighted for a moment.

"I'm his second," said Vernon-Smith, a grim smile coming over his face as he noted Wharton's expression. "I've got to make the arrangements for him, that's all. What time are you meeting him? Will half-past two suit you, as it's a half-holiday to-day?"

"Yes," said Wharton shortly.

"Right!"

And the Bounder went to join Hazeldene. There was no more discussion of the subject, and no suggestion that the affair should either be postponed or patched up. After what Hazeldene had said and done, there was nothing for it but a meeting.

The whole Remove was intensely interested in the matter, and there was certain to be a big crowd to watch the combat. Even the late fight between Bulstrode and Trumper paled in interest beside it. Harry Wharton was the champion athlete of the Lower Forms.

Fellows in the Upper Fourth did not care to stand up to him; even the burly Bulstrode was no match for him. That Hazeldene should have any chance in such a combat was not to be thought of. Hazeldene was not supposed to be much of a hero. What did he mean by meeting Wharton, then?

The Removites were puzzled, and they all meant to turn up on the scene and see Hazeldene licked. There was little or no doubt but that would be the result.

But there was a glimmering of anxiety in the minds of Wharton's chums. Nugent tackled him on the subject when they came out after morning lessons.

"Look here, Harry," he said abruptly. "You're going to do your best in this affair, I suppose?"

"I suppose so," assented Harry.

"I mean, there's to be no rot about it. You can't help it that the cad is Marjorie's brother. You've got to lick him."

"Yes."

"You can't let him off lightly without risking getting licked yourself. You're not thinking of anything of that sort, Harry?"

Wharton made no reply.

"Mind, if you should happen to be licked, somebody else will take up the quarrel for you," said Nugent wrathfully. "The cad won't get off. So you may as well make up your mind to give him what he's asking for."

"Look here, Frank—"

"I mean what I say."

And Nugent would say no more. Wharton was very silent after that. In plain truth, he did not know what to do.

As the time drew near for the fight, the Lower Fourth proceeded in twos and threes towards the pavilion, and there was a considerable crowd on the ground when Wharton came up with Nugent and Bob Cherry and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. Hazeldene was there, and he had his jacket off already, and Vernon-Smith had a basin of water, a sponge, and a towel ready for action.

"We're waiting for you," said Vernon-Smith, with a curl to his lip.

Harry Wharton did not reply.

Nugent helped him off with his jacket.

He pushed up his sleeves, and Hazeldene came forward, ready for the contest. Tom Brown took out his watch.

"Look here, Hazel," said Harry Wharton, speaking with an effort. "This is mere rot—I don't want it to go any further."

Hazeldene looked at him with glittering eyes. Vernon-Smith had expected something of this sort, and he had primed Hazeldene ready for it.

"Are you willing to reinstate me in the team, and say you're sorry for acting as you've done?" said Hazeldene.

Wharton flushed with anger.



"You know that's impossible!" he exclaimed.

"Then you'll stand up to me."

Harry Wharton drew a deep breath.

"Very well."

"Time!" said Tom Brown.

"Go it, Wharton!" shouted a dozen voices.

There was no doubt which side had the general sympathy. For a footer captain to be challenged because he had dropped an incompetent player was, as the juniors put it, altogether too thick. And that Hazeldene should drive Wharton to fight him, after the reluctance Harry had shown, and in spite of the fact that Harry was on friendly terms with Marjorie Hazeldene, disgusted most of the fellows. It was pretty certain that no one on the ground wanted Hazeldene to win that fight—not even his own second. Vernon-Smith's plans would have been upset if Hazeldene had got the better of it, and all the rest were strongly in favour of Wharton.

But not one believed that Hazeldene had any chance. In fact, it was certain that he was booked for a most tremendous licking, if Wharton did anything like his best.

Nugent looked on anxiously. He was afraid that Wharton would make the mistake of sparing his adversary; and that was exactly what Wharton did do. In Hazeldene's face, weak and angry as it was, there was a strong resemblance to that of Marjorie, especially in the eyes and in the sensitive mouth. It was a weaker face than Marjorie's, but very like it. Wharton felt that he could not drive his blows at that face, in spite of all; and he contented himself with defence.

But this was not easy. The best way to defend is to attack; and Wharton was determined not to attack. He guarded well, but some of Hazeldene's blows came home, and once or twice Wharton reeled under them. In the first round he had a dozen openings for a knock-down drive at his foe, and he let every one of them pass him.

"Time!" growled Tom Brown.

Wharton stepped back. Nugent gave him an almost furious look.

"You're not touching the cad!" he exclaimed.

Wharton coloured.

"I can hold my own without hurting him," he said.

"You can't! He'll wear you down."

"Stuff! He can't stand up to me."

"He can if you don't touch him," said Frank angrily. "I tell you you are going the right way to get licked. I suppose you don't want that."

"Well, no," said Wharton slowly. "I don't think I could stand that, Frank. He would swank till I had to fight him again, and lick him."

"Then go for him now, and make an end of it."

"Time!"

Wharton went forward gloomily. The fight was absurd; he had only to put forward his strength to knock his adversary into a dazed and helpless state in the compass of a minute or less. But he could not do it.

Hazeldene's eyes were gleaming now. He was beginning to hope for victory. In his angry spite, he had been willing to take a licking, for the purpose of forcing Harry into that fight. But to win—His eyes danced at the thought. He did not see yet that Wharton was merely playing with him.

The second round was as uneventful as the first. All the fellows could see that Harry Wharton was holding his hand; but Hazeldene was not holding his. Wharton's face was beginning to show the signs of punishment. Hazeldene's had not been touched. Vernon-Smith was feeling increasing alarm. Gladly enough, at any other time, he would have seen Harry Wharton defeated. But not now! If Hazeldene got the better now, he would be satisfied with his revenge, and there was no chance of his adopting the Highcliffe scheme. And that would not suit Herbert Vernon-Smith at all. But he could not interfere now; he could only watch and hope that Wharton's patience would prove unequal to the strain that was being put upon it.

"Oh, go it, Harry!" growled Bob Cherry, in the

third round. "You're only playing with the rotter! Go it!"

Hazeldene flushed angrily. He was beginning to see what had been perfectly clear to everybody else from the beginning. But the thought that he was being spared only made his rage the more bitter.

He redoubled the force of his attack. Wharton, still only defending, retreated step by step, guarding well. But Hazeldene attacked savagely, relentlessly, and Wharton had no choice but to hit out or take a severe punishment. He hit out, and Hazeldene staggered back, and fell to the ground.

"Bravo!" shouted Bob.

Hazeldene scrambled up.

He threw himself upon Wharton furiously. There was no help for it; it was give or take, and Wharton had to give. And his blood was warming to the work now, and his own anger was rising.

He hit and hit hard. Hammer and tongs they went at it for the rest of the round, and Hazeldene was driven round the ring under a rain of blows. The Removites looked on, grinning. Hazeldene was losing any trace of swank now. He was realising that he was no match for Wharton, and he was driven to defence—and his defence was no more successful than Wharton chose that it should be.

Hazeldene came up to time for the fourth round burning with rage. He hurled himself at Wharton, determined to force the fighting. They exchanged heavy blows now, and Wharton hit out with all his force. His knuckles came grimly upon Hazeldene's jaw, and the junior was fairly lifted off his feet, and crashed down upon his back.

He lay there dazed and gasping.

Wharton dropped his hands at once, his face white and worried. Tom Brown counted, and had counted ten, and might have counted a hundred. Hazeldene made one feeble attempt to rise, but sank back, his head reeling.

"I'm done!" he gasped.

Wharton bent over him.

"Hazel," he said, "I'm sorry for this. I'm sorry, old man! Give me your fist, and let's say no more about it."

He held out his hand to the fallen junior.

Hazeldene's eyes blazed. He raised his hand, but not to take Wharton's. With his open palm he struck Harry in the face.

"That's what I think of you!" he gasped.

"Shame!"

## THE TWELFTH CHAPTER. The Cat's-Paw.

"SHAME!"

The word was shouted out by nearly every fellow on the ground.

"Shame, you cad!"

Hazeldene glared round at them. Wharton rose to his feet, his cheeks a deep crimson. He could not return the blow to one in Hazeldene's state; nor did the thought of doing so cross his mind.

He glanced down at Hazeldene with a look in which compassion and scorn were mingled, and turned away from him without another word.

Nugent helped him on with his jacket, and he left the spot with his friends. The juniors followed more slowly, most of them pausing to tell Hazeldene what they thought of him before they went. What they thought was not complimentary, and Hazeldene listened to it with a brow growing ever blacker.

He was left alone with his second at last. Vernon-Smith bathed his damaged face, his own wearing a look of friendly concern.

"Hard cheese, Hazel, old man!" he said.

Hazeldene groaned.

"Help me up!"

"There you are. Does your jaw hurt?"

The defeated junior groaned again. His jaw ached terribly, and he knew it would be a long time before that ache was gone.

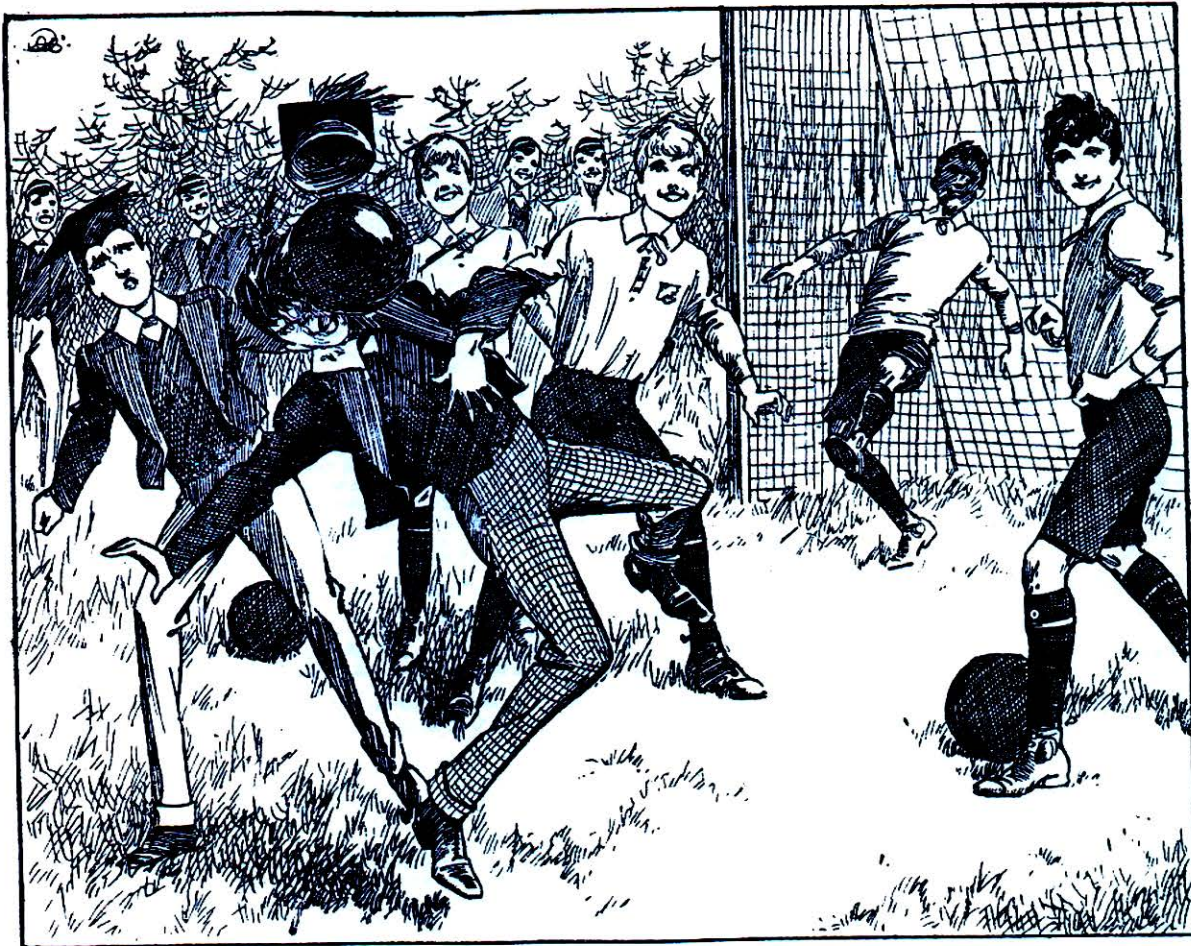
**NEXT WEEK!**

## GRAND CHRISTMAS DOUBLE NUMBER.

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"Mind your eye!" sang out Bulstrode. But the warning came too late. Right upon Ponsonby's face the football banged, and the Highcliffe captain gave a wild yell. (See page 2.)

"Yes," he groaned, "it does! Ow! I—I've never had a drive like that before. I suppose I was a fool to stand up to Wharton. I knew I was not good enough for him."

"Well, you would do it," said Vernon-Smith.

Hazeldene turned on him savagely.

"Well, I like that from you, Smith," he exclaimed. "You were egging me on to tackle him all the time."

"I said you ought to go for him somehow; but, you'll remember, I recommended a safer thing than this," said the Bounder coolly.

"I know you did—that Highcliffe scheme."

"Still, you preferred this," said the Bounder, as he helped Hazeldene on with his coat. "It's not my bizney. If you choose to stand up to a fellow above your weight, you must expect to get it in the neck, you know. I suppose that you'll take the matter quietly now, and be civil to Wharton."

Hazeldene ground his teeth.

"You'll see," he muttered thickly.

The Bounder watched his face covertly.

"You won't challenge Wharton again?"

"What's the good?" groaned Hazeldene. "It's no good going through a milling like this again. I shall not get over this for a week. I'm not built to stand this sort of thing. I'm not as hard as nails, like Wharton. He never smokes, or touches a drop of liquor—and I've done both with you."

"Never mind that," said the Bounder. "You put up a good fight. Now you're licked—there's no denying the fact that you're licked—"

"Oh, shut up!"

"Well, now there's nothing for you to do but to lie low," said the Bounder. "You're kicked out of the Form team,

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licked because you objected to it, and generally put in your place and sat upon. The best thing you can do now is to join the circle of tame pups fawning round Wharton."

Hazeldene turned on him furiously.

"I can't stand up to Wharton, but I can stand up to you, Smith!" he exclaimed. "And if you say another thing like that, I'll knock you flying!"

The Bounder grinned.

"Oh, keep your wool on!" he said. "If you're up against Wharton—if you're going to make him smart for this, I'm with you all the time."

"Of course I am!"

"What are you going to do?"

"Can't you guess?"

"The Highcliffe dodge?"

"Yes!" said Hazeldene, between his teeth.

"Good!" said the Bounder.

"He had won, and he knew it. They walked slowly towards the house. In the Remove dormitory, Vernon-Smith helped Hazeldene to make himself as presentable as possible, and bathed his bruises, and did everything he could for him in the friendliest manner possible. Hazeldene was playing his game now, and it was worth while to make much of him, and keep him up to the point.

"You look better now," said the Bounder.

Hazeldene looked at his face in a glass, and muttered to himself.

"My face is black all over!" he said passionately. "I shall be a sight for days. Oh, I'll make him suffer for this!"

"How's your jaw now?"

"Aching like the dickens!"

"It's rotten!" said Vernon-Smith. "But you don't feel



worse than Wharton will when he's licked at footer by the Highcliffe fellows next Saturday. He may even be shifted out from the captaincy of the Form eleven."

Hazeldene's eyes gleamed.

"Good—good!" he exclaimed. "Anyway, he will be licked, and the whole team will have to climb down. They'll never get over a defeat from the Highcliffe fellows."

"That's so. Are you going to see Ponsonby to-day?"

"Yes; he said I could see him any afternoon about half-past five or six at the old barn on the Courtfield Road. I shall walk down there and wait for him."

"Good!"

Some little time later, Hazeldene left Greyfriars. Vernon-Smith did not go with him. He was using Hazeldene as a cat's-paw in this matter, and he did not mean to run the risk of taking a hand in it himself. If anything went wrong in the matter, Hazeldene could "face the music" alone.

The Bounder grinned as he watched Hazeldene go.

"And how to see to the financial part of the case," he murmured. "I can get Loder and Ionides to bet in sovs., and half a dozen fellows to put up bobs and half-crowns on the match. I rather fancy I shall make a nice little pile out of the Highcliffe match this Saturday."

And the Bounder chuckled. Bob Cherry heard his chuckle in passing, and turned round to look at him.

"What's the joke?" he asked.

The Bounder laughed.

"Not one I can tell you," he said; "but a very good one, all the same. Ha, ha, ha!"

And he strolled away, leaving Bob Cherry looking after him dubiously.

But as Solly looked, Hazeldene came swinging up to the stile, and he stopped there, evidently waiting for the Highcliffe fellows to come up to him. It was growing dusk in the lane, but Solly, whose eyesight was very keen—all Solly's faculties were very sharp indeed—could see the bruises on Hazeldene's face. He chuckled softly as he observed them.

"The thilly ass has been in the wars!" murmured Solly. "I wonder what he is meeting the Highcliffe rotterth for? They are generally rowing with one another. That fellow is a beathtly cad, anyway!"

Ponsonby and Gadsby came up to the stile, and, to Solly's alarm, the three juniors, after shaking hands, vaulted over the stile, and came directly towards the old barn.

Solly's face was a study for a moment.

"My only Uncle Tham!" he muttered. "They know I'm here, and they're coming to theize me and rag me, by Tholomon! Oh, dear!"

But another look at the juniors removed that idea from his mind. He could see by their expressions that they did not know there was an enemy in the old barn as they came towards it. But there was no doubt that, if they found Solly in the barn, they would rag him just as thoroughly as if they had come there for the special purpose of doing it.

Solly had no doubts on that point, and he immediately proceeded to make himself scarce. He could not leave the barn without being seen; but there was a short step-ladder leading into the loft over the barn, and Solly nipped up that ladder in a few seconds. He crept into the loft, and remained near the opening to watch. If the juniors discovered that he was there and attacked him, he felt that he could hold his own in a position like that; but he did not

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## THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

### A Secret for Solly.

"MY only Aunt Thelina!" murmured Solly Lazarus.

Solly Lazarus was alarmed.

And Solly had reason to be alarmed. He had been coming along the Courtfield Road, and had paused to rest upon a stile by the roadside, where a foot-path led to the old barn. The high bushes round Solly almost hid him from sight from the road, and, naturally, almost hid the road from him.

But he had become aware of approaching pedestrians from two directions; and, recognising a Greyfriars cap in one direction, and Highcliffe caps from the other, Solly Lazarus was on his guard at once.

There was rivalry and warfare between the County Council school at Courtfield and Greyfriars; but there was a more bitter enmity between Solly's friends and Highcliffe. The Greyfriars fellows were mostly sportsmen, and there was little ill-feeling mixed in their endless rows with the Courtfield fellows. But the Highcliffians were very far from being sportsmen, and Ponsonby & Co. often found fun in ragging members of the Courtfield party if they caught them by themselves, and had numbers on their side.

Solly, finding that a Greyfriars fellow was coming on one side, and two Highcliffe fellows on the other, naturally felt alarmed. They were coming towards the stile from up and down the lane; and when they found him there, it was more than probable that they would join forces for the purpose of ragging the County Council-school "bounder."

Solly slipped off the stile, and peered through the hedge from the field to observe the enemy.

His alarm was not in any degree lessened when he recognised the wearer of the Greyfriars cap as Hazeldene, the fellow he had chalked the previous night in the rainy lane.

The Highcliffians were Ponsonby and Gadsby, two of the least sportsmanlike of the Highcliffe juniors. And as Solly watched them, he saw Ponsonby suddenly wave his hand to Hazeldene in the distance.

"My Aunt Thelina and my only Uncle Tham!" murmured the alarmed Solly. "They're going to meet here, and I'm in a beathtly hole!"

Under such circumstances, discretion was evidently the better part of valour. Solly remembered the old barn lying back from the road, and, trusting to the high bushes to cover him, he made a dash for it.

In less than a minute, breathing quickly, he stood within the cover of the old barn, and peered cautiously out of the window to see if the enemy were visible. They were not in sight.

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# GRAND CHRISTMAS DOUBLE NUMBER NEXT WEEK!

anticipate it. He was sure by this time that the meeting at the barn had a reason utterly unconnected with himself.

He laid himself down on the hay in the loft, looking down from the opening into the dusky barn beneath. Three figures came in at the open doorway, and he heard the murmur of voices. He recognised all three of the fellows as they came in.

"Well, here we are!" said Ponsonby. "I rather expected that we should see you, after all, Hazeldene."

"You wouldn't have seen me," said Hazeldene, "only—"

"Only what?"

"Something has happened at Greyfriars," said Gadsby, who had been watching Hazeldene's face. "Have you fallen out with Wharton?"

Hazeldene flushed under his bruises.

"Yes," he said shortly.

Ponsonby and his chum exchanged glances.

"And there's been trouble?" said Ponsonby.

"Yes."

"Did you lick him?"

"No."

Ponsonby had known well what the answer to his question would be. He could see how sore Hazeldene was in both mind and body, and he knew that the Greyfriars junior had had a licking. He contrived to look sympathetic, but he could hardly keep a smile of satisfaction from his face. Events seemed to be shaping themselves exactly to suit the plans of the Highcliffe plotter.

"Well, I suppose you've come down for the stuff," said Ponsonby, dropping all further mention of the fight, as if that had nothing to do with the matter at all. "You've decided to take up the idea?"

"I think so."

"I don't know whether I've got it with me," said Ponsonby carelessly. "You see, you were so positive yesterday about not touching it, that I just strolled down here on the chance, really. Of course, I can get it."

Hazeldene's brows contracted.

"Look here, there's no need to beat about the bush," he exclaimed. "I am going to carry out the scheme you suggested, and I want the stuff to give Wharton. I know you've got it with you, too."

Ponsonby frowned. He did not quite like being talked to in this manner. In the loft, Solly's eyes widened, and he drew in a quick, silent breath. Less than ever was he inclined to show himself now. Not that the Courtfield boy wanted to play the eavesdropper. It was not that. But he knew what he might expect from these young rascals if they learned that he had discovered their secret. And Solly had a very clear idea by this time of what the meeting between Hazeldene and the Highcliffe fellows meant.



"Have you got it?" demanded Hazeldene.

"I'll see."

Hazeldene grunted as Ponsonby made an elaborate pretence of searching through his pockets.

"Oh, come off!" he exclaimed. "You know you've got it! You know jolly well that you're determined to make Wharton lose the match on Saturday, by fair means or foul, and you wouldn't lose a chance like this."

"Ah, here it is!" exclaimed Ponsonby.

Hazeldene's lip curled in a sneer.

"I thought you'd find it," he said.

"Yes, here it is," said Ponsonby, without taking any notice of Hazeldene's unpleasant tone, and he held up the little bottle containing the yellowish liquid. "I've found it! There you are!"

Hazeldene took the little bottle. He peered at it in the growing dimness of the barn, and then struck a match to look at it more closely.

In the light of the match the three excited faces, the bottle with its glassy glimmer, showed up to the watching eyes of the Courtfield boy above.

There was a moment's tense silence.

Then the match went out.

"So that's the stuff?" said Hazeldene.

"That's it."

"The same stuff that you showed me at Highcliffe yesterday?"

"The same."

"The same stuff that you tried on your head-master's dog?" persisted Hazeldene.

"Just the same," said Ponsonby impatiently. "I suppose you don't think that I'd pass any poison on you, do you?"

"Well, I suppose not," said Hazeldene. "But a chap can't be too careful in a matter of this kind. You say this was made up by a chemist?"

"Yes, Gadsby major—he made it up himself."

"And it won't really hurt?"

"Not at all. You saw me taste it myself yesterday."

"Yes, that's true."

"It simply has an effect on the inside," said Ponsonby. "Makes a chap feel dyspeptic, and low, and out of sorts—in fact, it throws him out of condition, and when he leaves off taking it, he's himself again in a couple of days."

"Well, I don't see that it can do any harm, then," said Hazeldene, as if arguing the matter out with himself.

"Of course it can't."

"How am I to give it to him?"

"In coffee would be best, as it is bitter to the taste. It tastes very like quinine, but in coffee Wharton won't notice the flavour."

"How many doses?"

"One would do, I think; but one every day until the match would be safer, then you could give smaller doses, and make quite sure of it."

"I suppose I could work it?" said Hazeldene thoughtfully.

"Of course you could," said Ponsonby. "It's as easy as falling off a form. Shove some into his tea or coffee, and there you are. But I think you had better let some of the others have it, too—Nugent and Inky, at least. If Inky is off colour on Saturday, we shall score."

"Good!"

"I think the three will be enough—more than three sick might make fellows suspicious. Though you might give that New Zealand chap some if you get a chance, and Mark Linley. They are dangerous players."

Hazeldene slipped the bottle into his pocket.

"That's about all," said Ponsonby. "If you should change your mind again—"

"I sha'n't change it."

"But if you should, drop me a postcard, that's all. You need only say 'All off' on the card, and I shall understand. Then I shall write to Wharton and tell him that we decline to play after all."

"Exactly," said Gadsby.

"We don't intend to come to Greyfriars for another licking," said Ponsonby. "It's either got to be a cert., or no match at all."

"I understand. But I sha'n't fail."

Hazeldene turned to the doorway.

"Right-ho," said Ponsonby, "and good luck!"

Hazeldene looked cautiously to and fro before he left the barn. Conscience makes cowards of us all, and Hazeldene was in fear of being observed in company with the Highcliffe fellows. But there was no one in sight in the thickening dusk, and Hazeldene strode away, and disappeared towards Greyfriars.

Ponsonby and Gadsby walked quickly away in the other direction. The Highcliffe fellows were in high feather now.

Neither they nor Hazeldene would have been so much at ease if they had known that, as soon as they were gone from the barn, a little lad slipped down the ladder from the loft, and stood in the place where they had been speaking.

"My only Aunt Thelina!" said Solly Lazarus, in a whisper to himself, and then he added: "My only Uncle Tham!"

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EVERY  
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ONE  
PENNY.

## THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.

### A Visitor for Wharton

"COURTFIELD cad!"

"What does he want here?"

"Outside!"

And then Snoop added:

"Board-school bouncer!"

The exclamations of the Greyfriars juniors were caused by the appearance of a Courtfield fellow in the Close. It was Solly Lazarus. He had walked in at the gates with as much coolness as if all Greyfriars belonged to him, and strolled easily to the School House. In the lighted doorway of the School House a group of juniors were standing. They sighted Solly, and greeted him far from politely.

Solly looked at them with his big black eyes.

"Good-evening, gents!" he said.

"Yah!"

"Courtfield cad!"

"My dear thilly atheth—"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! What do you want here, Moses?" demanded Bob Cherry, coming along.

"I want to thee Wharton."

"Rats!" said Snoop. "The Board-school bouncer wants to pick up anything that's left lying about, more likely. Yow!"

Snoop's remarks were cut short by Bob Cherry's grip on the back of his collar. With Bob's hard knuckles grinding into the back of his neck, Snoop gasped and snorted for breath.

"Ger-r-r-rooh!"

"You miserable cad," said Bob Cherry. "Is that the way to talk to Wharton's visitors?"

"Groo!"

"Oh, get away! You're not fit to touch!" said Bob.

And he gave the cad of the Remove a twist that sent him whirling across the hall, to fall down in a gasping heap on the other side. And Snoop, seeing that Bob Cherry was in an excited temper, deemed it best to remain there.

Solly looked at this little performance with a grin. His placid temper did not seem to have been ruffled by Snoop's remarks.

"All therene," he remarked. "I want to thee Wharton."

"Come in," said Bob Cherry. "I'll take you up to his study."

"All therene."

And Solly followed Bob Cherry into the house. The other fellows looked on curiously. What business Solly Lazarus, of Courtfield, could have with Harry Wharton, was a puzzle to them. Hazeldene met the two as they came towards the stairs. Hazeldene had been in only ten minutes before Solly's arrival. His face flamed into anger at the sight of the Jewish lad.

"My hat!" he exclaimed. "So you're here, are you, you cad?"

Bob Cherry frowned.

"Hold your tongue, Hazeldene!" he exclaimed angrily.

"I don't want to touch you after what you've had this afternoon, but you won't talk to a chap like that, I can tell you!"

Hazeldene turned on him fiercely.

"I tell you this is one of the cads who chalked me up in the lane the other night!"

Solly chuckled.

"You buzzed into me on your bike, and never thaid you were thorry," he remarked. "I think you were let off eathily."

"I'll settle with you now, you cad."

"I've come to thee Wharton."

"I tell you—"

"Stand aside, Hazel," said Bob Cherry. "I don't want to handle you, but if you lay a finger on Lazarus, over you go!"

Hazeldene gave him a bitter look, and strode away. He did not want a fistic encounter with Bob Cherry.

"I'm sorry for this, Lazarus," said Bob. "You ruffled his lordship a lot the other night, I think."

Solly grinned.

"It's all therene," he said.

"Here's Wharton's study."

Bob Cherry stopped outside Wharton's door in the Remove passage, and kicked at it.

"Come in, fathead!" sang out Nugent's voice.

The door flew open under Bob's heavy boot. Wharton, Nugent, and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh were there. They had just finished tea.

"Visitor for you, Wharton," said Bob Cherry. "Here you are, Lazarus, old man!"

And he pushed the Courtfield fellow into the study, and tramped on down the passage with his heavy tread.

Harry Wharton & Co. rose to their feet in surprise.



Solly grinned at them amiably.

"Hallo, Lazarus!" said Harry. "I didn't expect to see you here."

"Quite tho," said Solly, showing his white teeth in a grin. "Like my boathy check vithiting chaps like you in their own quarters."

Wharton coloured.

"I didn't mean that," he exclaimed. "You're welcome. Sit down."

"All therene!" said Solly, taking a chair, and putting his boots on the fender, where they immediately began to steam before the fire.

"Had your tea?" asked Nugent.

"Not yet, dear boy."

"Then have some with us. We're finished, but luckily the grub isn't. What do you say to sardines and bread-and-butter?"

"All therene!"

"And I can jolly soon make some more tea."

Solly looked curiously at the chums of Study No. 1 as they busied themselves looking after his creature comforts. The expression upon his face was very soft and cordial now. His reception in Study No. 1 pleased him. There was nothing like Snoop about these fellows. Swank and snobbishness found no place in Study No. 1—at least, now that Billy Bunter was no longer a tenant there.

"These are jolly good thardines," said Solly. "I'm hungry, you know. I was going home to tea, when I—when I thtopped, and came here instead. This tea is very nithe. Thank you very much, you know!"

"Rats!" said Wharton cheerfully. "Make yourself comfy. Try the cake."

"Yeth, rather!"

And Solly certainly did make himself comfortable. His eyes beamed, and his aquiline nose seemed to glow with comfort.

"You are a dethent lot of fellows," he remarked. "Of course, I came here on bithness, you know."

"Business?" said Harry, with a smile. "What business? Does Trumper want to meet us in a footer match?"

"Oh, no, it's not footer. It's your bithness, not mine."

"Ours?"

"Just tho."

Solly took another big bite of cake, and emptied his fourth cup of tea. Nugent silently filled it for him again, and then the three chums regarded Solly in silence. His words mystified them. What business of theirs could it possibly be that had brought Solly Lazarus to Greyfriars they could not imagine.

Solly rubbed the arched bridge of his nose thoughtfully.

"I've got news for you," he said.

"Yes."

"I understand that you are playing Highcliffe juniors on Thaturday?"

"That's right, though I don't see how you know," said Wharton, in surprise. "We've scratched a Form match to make room for them, but how do you know?"

"You are not playing a chap named Hazeldene?"

"No; he's been dropped."

"Oh, I thee!"

"Blessed if I understand you!" said Wharton. "What are you driving at, Lazarus? You're as mysterious as a villain on the stage or the hero of a newspaper serial. What have you got in your mind?"

"The Highcliffe chaps think they are going to win, you know," said Solly.

"I don't see how they can think that, after their experience of us. But I suppose they hope so, or they wouldn't challenge us. But—"

"Ponthonby is certain of it."

"How?"

"Because he has made arrangements for you to lothe the match."

"What?" shouted Wharton.

"And unless thomebody interfered," went on Solly calmly, "you would lose it, and that's why I've come over, dear boy."

And Solly laid back in his chair, and regarded the astounded faces of the Greyfriars fellows with a grin of enjoyment.

"What do you mean, Lazarus?" Harry asked. "You say Ponsonby has made arrangements for us to lose the match?"

"Yeth," said Solly, with a nod.

"And you've found out his little game?"

"Yeth."

"And came over to warn us?"

"Exactly, dear boy."

"It's jolly good of you," said Wharton gratefully. "Of course, we know the Highcliffe chaps. They're a set of utter cads; and they take to foul play like a duck takes to water. They've served us dirty tricks before now. I was in two minds about accepting their challenge, because I suspected they would have some card up their sleeve. But I'm blessed if I know what they can do this time! There's an age limit for the players, so they can't spring Old Boys on us as they did last time. And we're playing on our own ground, so they can't get up to any foul play with a crowd against us. If Ponsonby has a scheme on after all, he's as deep as a coal-mine."

"And he has a scheme, Lazarus?" asked Nugent.

"Yeth."

"You know all about it, Lazarus?" Wharton asked.

"Yeth."

"Then go ahead, and put us up to it."

"All therene! You are to have some thtuff given you before the match—a dothe on each day, if possible—so that you won't be in a fit thtate to play," Solly explained.

"My hat!"

"You, and Nugent, and Hurree Thingh, and perhaps Brown and Linley," said Solly. "That's the idea, dear boys."

"What kind of stuff?" asked Wharton, with a deep breath, looking at his chums. "Not a drug, surely?"

Solly shook his head.

"No; it's a thtuff mixed by a chemist, Gadsby's elder brother—thome thtuff that makes you off colour without injuring your health; but you'll be feeling bad all the time you're playing, and won't be able to play up."

"My word!" said Nugent.

Harry Wharton looked puzzled.

"I don't think Ponsonby is any too good for a trick like that," he said, "but—but— Look here, Lazarus, you're not pulling my leg, I suppose?"

"Thertainly not."

"How do you know about this scheme?"

"I heard them discuthing it."

"But—but I don't quite follow," said Wharton, wrinkling his brows. "Ponsonby is quite rotter enough to play such a trick, I feel sure, but—but how is the stuff to be given to us, Lazarus? The Highcliffe fellows never come here."

"It's to be given you by a chap here."

Wharton sprang up.

"What? A Greyfriars chap?"

"Yeth."

There was a heavy silence in the study. The three Greyfriars fellows were on their feet now, their eyes blazing. They looked at Solly, but Solly was still reclining in his chair in a perfectly easy attitude, apparently deeply interested in watching the steam rise from his damp boots.

"Look here," exclaimed Wharton, "if this is a jape, Solly Lazarus—"

"Not at all, dear boy."

"You say that a Greyfriars chap is in the plot with those Highcliffe rotters to spoil our game on Saturday?"

"Yeth."

"What is the chap's name?"

"Hazeldene."

"Good gracious!" exclaimed Harry Wharton.

He sank into his chair again, overcome.

He hardly needed any proof. It flashed into his mind that it was true. Marjorie's brother—Marjorie's brother was guilty of this base treachery.

"I can't believe it!" said Nugent.

The nabob was silent. He believed it.

"I'm thorry," said Solly, looking at them. "Ith the chap a friend of yours? I thought I had better come and tell you, you know."

"Quite right," said Harry. "He's not exactly a friend himself, but he's the brother of a girl friend of ours."

Solly grinned slightly. He had met Marjorie Hazeldene, and he understood. Up to a few days ago the Courtfield fellows had been attending a class at Cliff House which was also attended by the Greyfriars chums.

"But are you sure?" asked Harry, in great distress. "I can hardly believe in such wickedness. How do you know?"

"Let's have the whole yarn, anyway," said Nugent.

"Thertainly, dear boys."

And Solly explained at full length. His explanation carried conviction with it. There was no weak point in the story. Even if the chums could have believed the Courtfield fellow wicked enough to come to them with a slander on his lips, he could never have invented a tale so circumstantial as this,

## THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER.

### Solly's Advice.

HARRY WHARTON broke the silence that followed. He was surprised and vaguely uneasy. He understood at once that the Courtfield fellow had got on the scent of some plot on the part of Ponsonby & Co., and had come to Greyfriars to put the fellows there on their guard. But Harry was far from suspecting the miserable truth as yet. That a Greyfriars fellow could be in league with the enemy never even crossed his imagination.

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GRAND CHRISTMAS DOUBLE NUMBER NEXT WEEK!





"Do you mean to say that you want to fight me, Hazeldene?" said Wharton.  
(See page 6.)

Wharton's face went very pale as he listened.  
"My word!" said Nugent. "It looks like it, Harry."  
Wharton made a passionate gesture.  
"And he's Marjorie's brother?" he muttered.  
"It seems impossible!"  
"It's true, you know," said Solly.  
"Look here," said Harry, whose face seemed to have become years older while he listened—"look here, Lazarus, is it possible that they knew you were there all the time, and were piling on the agony just to pull your leg, you know?"  
"By Jove, I shouldn't wonder!" said Nugent. "Ponsonby is just the fellow to think of a trick like that. He might have guessed that Lazarus would come here and warn us, and that we should rag him for saying such things about a Greyfriars chap."

Solly shook his head.  
"It was all there!" he said.  
Wharton rose, and began to move about the study. It seemed as if he could not keep still. There was a painful silence in the room. Solly filled in the interval by eating the rest of the cake and emptying his teacup for the fifth time. Then he rose to his feet.

"I shall have to be getting along," he remarked. "I'm sorry for this, you know, but I thought I'd better tell you. I think I mentioned that Ponsonby meant to thrash the match if the thing doesn't come off. But if it had come off, they would have licked you hollow. I'm sorry for it."

"You've done us a jolly good turn," said Wharton, and he grasped the hand of the Courtfield fellow. "I don't know how to thank you."

"That's all there!" said Solly. "You're detestable chaps, and I like to do you a good turn. If you would like some advice, too—"

"Go ahead!" said Wharton.  
"If you speak to Hazeldene about this, he'll deny the whole thing, and say it was a lie got up by a Board-school bouncer," said Solly cheerfully. "You'll get to think the thame thing yourself in the long run, for the whole thing will drop through then, and so there will never be any proof."

Harry was silent. There was a great deal of probability in what Solly stated. Once the matter was mentioned to Hazeldene, the possibility of proof would certainly be gone. And it was very likely to come to pass that the Greyfriars fellows would take their own schoolfellow's version of the matter.

"You thee, that would be beathtly," said Solly. "I came over here to do you a good turn, and I should not like you to come to conthider me a beathtly thlanderer. It would be a little bit hard on me, don't you think tho?"  
"We should never think that, I hope," said Nugent.

"All therene! Bethides," went on Solly, "you ought to bowl the bouncer out, or he may try the thame trickth again another time. Bethideth that, you want to make the Highcliffe rotterth thmart for it, don't you?"

"Yes, rather," said Wharton, between his teeth.  
"But they'll thrash the match if the thing fallth through, and you'll have no chance at them. I've thought out a thcheme for you, if you care to follow my advice," said Solly. "You can take it or leave it, ath you like, of courthe."

"Go ahead!"  
"I should thay nothing to Hazeldene, but keep an eye on him. You'll thoon find him out in trying to give you the thuff. Then you can pretend to be knocked up, and unfit for the footer match, and the Highcliffe rotterth will come over expecting to lick you hollow; and you can thuddenly recover on the morning of the match, and wipe up the ground with them."

Nugent burst into an involuntary chuckle at the thought of the surprise the Highcliffe fellows would experience if that should happen. A grin came over the dusky features of

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**FOUR SPLENDID COMPLETE STORIES NEXT WEEK!**



Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. But Wharton remained very grave.

"Thanks, awfully, Lazarus!" he said. "We'll think it out. And once more, thank you for coming over and telling us."

"Not at all, dear boy."

Wharton went down to the school gates with Solly, in case he should be troubled by any "lark" of the Greyfriars fellows. Then he returned to his study, his face dark and thoughtful, to consult with his chums upon what was to be done.

## THE SIXTEENTH CHAPTER.

### Mum's the Word.

"WELL, you chaps?"

"Well, Harry?"

"What do you think?"

"Blessed if I know what to think!"

"The blessedness is terrific."

The chums of the Remove looked at one another grimly. What was to be done?

"I feel inclined to call on Hazeldene, and have it out with him," said Harry Wharton, slowly. "That's what I'd like. Only—"

"Only if you do, he'll have the bottle in a safe place, and he'll deny everything."

"And if he's innocent, he'll deny everything."

"Exactly."

"So that will leave us just where we are, with no proof either way," said Harry. "And we owe it to Lazarus to make sure. It was decent of him to come here and warn us. He knew that he might be disbelieved and ragged; but he came all the same. He's a sportsman. I know he wouldn't lie. But he may have been taken in. It might be a spoof business altogether, because they knew he was in the loft."

"Or he may have gone to sleep there and dreamed it all."

"It's not likely; but I'd rather believe that than that Hazeldene could be such a villain. The worst of it is, that we've no way of punishing those Highcliffe scoundrels except by having them over here on Saturday."

"And they won't come if Hazel takes the alarm."

"That's it."

"Lazarus suggested a jolly good idea. It would be ripping to see their faces, when they came over expecting to beat us, and found us in first-class form."

"You're right there, I'd like that," said Harry, clenching his hands. "I'd like that, and no mistake! It's the only way we can punish them."

"If it's true!"

"Yes, if it's true, of course."

"We must prove whether it's true," said Nugent resolutely, "and the only way is by giving Hazeldene his head. I don't like keeping the thing secret any more than you do, but we must have proof one way or another."

Wharton nodded.

"That's right. If Hazeldene tries to doctor coffee for us, he must come into our study to do it. That will give him away."

"Exactly."

"The exactfulness is terrific."

"We must tell Brown and Linley, too," said Harry Wharton, with a worried look. "They will have to be put on their guard."

"Yes, rather."

And it was left at that. Harry Wharton went downstairs to look for Mark Linley and the New Zealand junior. He met Hazeldene on the stairs, and Hazel stood aside to let him pass, without speaking or meeting his eyes.

Wharton passed him, in wonder. Could the fellow be so base—had he allowed envy, and hatred, and evil feelings to carry him so far as Solly had stated? Or was there some trick, some mistake in the matter?

Well, he would soon know. He found Mark Linley and Tom Brown in the common-room, and with a few words he put them in possession of what Solly had told him.

Both of them looked very grim.

"Do you believe it?" Harry asked.

"I hardly know," said Mark. "But I agree with Lazarus, that we owe it to him to make sure one way or the other."

"Same here," said the junior from Taranaki.

"Well, that's settled, then. You'll be on your guard, and not give the game away either. Not a word to Hazeldene or to anybody else."

"Right you are."

Hazeldene had nothing to say to the chums of the Remove that evening. It was part of the scheme concocted with the Highcliffe fellows that he should make up an appearance of friendship with them, and so gain an entrance into their

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study once more. But Hazeldene hesitated at that. He felt that he must do it, but he could not do it all at once. For that evening, at all events, Harry Wharton's blows rankled too keenly for him to be able to approach the chums in a friendly manner, however insincere.

But hatred was feeding upon his heart, and if there was at any moment a glimpse of repentance there, it was only momentary. And if he had faltered in his evil purpose, there was his bad angel at his elbow always ready, like Mephistopheles, to whisper evil counsel in his ear. Vernon-Smith, at all events, was not likely to repent.

Vernon-Smith had found fellows of his own tastes, who were willing to lay bets with him on the match. To Hazeldene's hint that Sixth-Formers would not pay a junior even if they lost, the Bounder replied with a mocking grin.

"They will pay me," he said.

"They jolly well won't," said Hazeldene. "I remember a sweepstake some of the seniors got up, and they wouldn't pay when a junior won."

"I'm not quite like the rest of the juniors," said Vernon-Smith scornfully. "I shall make them pay. I've made them put up the stakes beforehand, you duffer! When they saw the gold in my hand, they couldn't resist it, and they were so certain of the Remove beating Highcliffe, that they were willing to put up ready money."

"Who's holding the stakes—one of themselves?"

"No, ass—Banks, the bookmaker."

"Banks! He's hand in glove with that crowd."

"I know he is—and with me, too. Banks has more to gain from me than from Loder & Co., I can tell you," said Vernon-Smith, with a grin. "Banks will see fair play, and hand the stakes to the winner. Oh, I've got my eye-teeth cut, I can tell you."

"You might put something on for me," said Hazeldene.

"I have done so. I've put up a sovereign for you, and if the Remove are beaten, you get three pounds, and I get the sovereign back. Carne laid three to one."

Hazeldene's eyes glistened.

"I can do with the money," he said. "I owe a good deal in various ways."

"Well, I know that, and, of course, I want you to score as well as myself," said Vernon-Smith. "I'm relying on you. I've put up all my available cash, as a matter of fact, and if we lose, I'm stony till I get another remittance. But we can't lose if you do your part of the business."

Hazeldene grated his teeth.

"I shall do that," he said. "Hang the money! But I'll make Wharton & Co. smart for dropping me out of the team, or I'll know the reason why!"

"That's the tune!" said the Bounder heartily.

Hazeldene did not look in Wharton's direction when the Remove went up to bed that night. Vernon-Smith gave him a significant look, evidently thinking that the sooner he began the better; but Hazeldene affected not to understand. He went to bed in silence, and in the morning, when he rose, he left the dormitory without the exchange of a word with the chums of the Remove.

Vernon-Smith followed him down with an unpleasant look on his face.

"You're leaving it pretty late, Hazel," he said.

Hazeldene made an impatient movement of the shoulders.

"Hang it! I can't make up to the fellows!" he exclaimed.

"To-day's Thursday, the match is the day after to-morrow, and there isn't much time," said the Bounder, with lowering brows.

"Oh, I'll think about it presently!"

"I'll break the ice for you," said Vernon-Smith.

"How do you mean?"

"I'll speak to Wharton for you."

Hazeldene made a gesture of annoyance, but he did not reply. When Harry Wharton came out after breakfast, Vernon-Smith spoke to him, with an appearance of great frankness.

"I say, Wharton, if you don't mind my speaking about it—"

Wharton looked at him.

"What do you want?" he asked directly.

"It's about Hazeldene."

"What about him?"

"I fancy he's sorry for the way he's been acting towards you," said Vernon-Smith. "I think that if you gave him a chance he'd make it up, that's all. Of course, it's no business of mine, but you've accused me of making trouble between you, that's why I spoke."

And he walked away with his hands in his pockets, whistling. Harry Wharton looked after him with a curious expression, and then met Nugent's eyes. Nugent nodded in reply to Harry's unspoken thought.

"Then it's true," said Wharton, "and—and Vernon-Smith's in it?"

And Nugent nodded again.

**GRAND CHRISTMAS DOUBLE NUMBER NEXT WEEK!**



**V**ERNON-SMITH had supposed that his few words would be enough for Harry Wharton. He knew how anxious Harry was to be on good terms with Hazeldene, for Marjorie's sake. He had expected the Remove captain to snatch eagerly at the olive-branch.

Under other circumstances, Wharton would certainly have done so.

He would have embraced any opportunity of getting on the old terms with Hazeldene. But in the light of what Solly Lazarus had told him, he knew the inner meaning of the Bouncer's intervention, and he did not stir. He did not approach Hazeldene that day, and Hazel, who knew that Smith had spoken, waited in vain for some overture from Wharton.

Vernon-Smith was puzzled and annoyed. But as he had failed, that was all the more reason why Hazeldene should attend to the matter himself, and on Thursday evening he urged Hazeldene to make a move.

Hazeldene hesitated long.

Wharton avoided him so carefully, and so carefully refrained from giving him any opening, that it was difficult to find an opportunity; and Thursday evening passed away without Hazeldene making the attempt. At bedtime that night, Vernon-Smith was in a savage temper, which he tried hard to keep within control. It was useless to quarrel with Hazeldene, for the weak, passionate junior was quite capable, in an angry and remorseful moment, of throwing up the whole matter, and having no more to do with it. Vernon-Smith did not want to risk that.

"Better say good-night to Wharton," he whispered, as he sat on Hazeldene's bed to take his boots off. "That'll break the ice."

Hazeldene shook his head. "Hang it!" he muttered. "I can't do it. Look here, Smithy, some other way can be found."

Vernon-Smith compressed his lips. "There is no other way," he said. "You can't doctor his tea at the breakfast-table I suppose, with the whole school looking on, or pour it over the joint at dinner. You can't ask him to take a ginger-beer without making friends."

"It's—it's so rotten!" muttered Hazeldene desperately. "I don't mind doing it—he deserves that for the way he's treated me—but to make friends with him—bah!"

"Well, he was keeping friendly with you, all the time he was making up his mind to kick you out of the eleven."

"Yes, that's true." "It's only a Roland for an Oliver. And you can't do it without, Hazel. And you can only manage it in the study. There's no other way. And to-morrow's the last day before the match."

"Oh, all right!" muttered Hazeldene. "Speak to him now for a start."

Hazeldene's lips twitched. "Good-night, Wharton!" he called out. His voice sounded husky and strange. Harry Wharton looked across at him.

"Good-night!" he said. The other fellows stared at Hazeldene, too. He went red and pale. But the Remove were not surprised that he had come out of the "sulks" at last. He had kept it up long enough, and the fellows imagined he had come to look upon a better side of things. Only five juniors in the dormitory knew the cause of his change of front. They were the chums of No. 1 Study, and Mark Linsley and the New Zealand junior. They knew only too well!

The Remove turned in. Hazeldene slept badly. He was awake when the rising-bell went in the morning, and he was the first up. His eyes were heavy, and he had a feverish headache. He was feeling out of sorts altogether, and in a vile temper. A bad temper and a headache on a cold and misty morning are not conducive to an amiable frame of mind, or a state of repentance.

Hazeldene was more determined upon the rascally deed than he had been the night before.

After morning school that Friday he made the plunge at last. Harry Wharton was still careful to give him no opening: if Hazeldene chose to betray himself, he should do so without any encouragement. As the chums of the Remove went out into the Close, sniffing the air tinged with frost, before dinner, Hazeldene came up to them.

There was a flush in his cheeks, and a curious brightness in his eyes, which would not somehow meet those of the junior whom he addressed.

"I say, Wharton," he exclaimed abruptly, "I think this has gone far enough, don't you?"

"How do you mean?" "Well, it's no good keeping up black looks at one another, as far as I can see. It's beginning to look silly."

"I quite agree with you there," said Harry; "and goodness knows I've never had any ill-feeling towards you, Hazel, and should be glad to be friends again."

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Hazeldene's lip curled for a moment with the old look. "With me out of the team, though?" he sneered. "Naturally—unless you get into form to play with some credit for the side."

"If I did, would you shift Inky out for me?"

Wharton paused and reflected.

"No," he said. "Inky is too good a goalkeeper for that. He's the best goalkeeper the Remove have ever had. I couldn't move him out. But if you get into good form, I'll give you a chance in the team somewhere else. You have played half sometimes."

"Well, never mind that," said Hazeldene. "In the team or out of the team, it's no good going about like a bear with a sore head. It's all over, as far as I'm concerned."

Wharton looked him straight in the face, but he could not meet Hazeldene's eyes. They were too elusive.

"Very well," he said. "I hope you mean that, Hazel."

Hazeldene started.

"What do you mean, Wharton?"

"I mean what I say. I hope you mean it, and if you're sincere, there's my hand on it," said Harry, holding out his hand.

Hazeldene hesitated, and then took the hand, giving a hasty and ineffectual handshake. Then, with a nod, he turned and walked away.

"My word!" said Nugent softly. "Harry, he can't be such an awful rotter as to shake your hand if he meant to play you such a trick!"

Wharton looked troubled.

"I hope not," he said.

"What do you think about it, Harry?"

"Blessed if I know. But we shall see."

Hazeldene made another remark to Wharton after dinner. It was only a remark on the weather, but Harry replied civilly enough; and matters between them seemed to be assuming something like their old footing.

The matter was weighing upon Harry's mind during afternoon lessons, and he was very quiet and thoughtful; he made Mr. Quelch some absent-minded answers that surprised that gentleman. He left the Remove Form-room the richer by fifty lines in consequence when the class was dismissed.

Billy Bunter tackled him in the passage.

"I say, you fellows, I've got a splendid idea about a big bust-up for the end of the term, before we break up for Christmas!" he exclaimed. "You see—"

But the chums of the Remove were in no humour to listen to Billy Bunter's great ideas just then. They pushed him against the wall, and left him gasping for breath as they walked on.

"Dear me!" said Alonzo Todd, stopping and looking at Bunter. "You seem to be quite out of breath, Bunter. I trust that you have no organic weakness in the region of the lungs. My Uncle Benjamin says—"

"Ow! It's that—ow—gerrooh!"

"Dear me! Have you got something on your chest, Bunter?"

"Yoooh! Yooop! Ow! It's that beast Wharton!"

Alonzo looked astounded.

"My dear Bunter, impossible. How could you possibly have Wharton on your chest?" he exclaimed.

Bunter snorted.

"Ass! It was Wharton shoved me here, and took my breath away. I'm rather short of breath, owing to—not having enough to eat. I was going to have tea with those rotters, and now I won't!"

"Dear me!"

"I'll have tea with you instead, Todd."

"That is really very kind of you, Bunter, and a great honour to me. I should be very pleased—"

"That's all right—let's get to the tuckshop, then."

"But—"

"We can talk as we go along," said Bunter hungrily.

"Oh, certainly!" said Todd, falling into step with the fat junior. "Very well, certainly. The only difficulty is, that I have no money—"

"What?"

"But if you would care to lend me five shillings—"

"Eh?"

"Or return me part of that ten shillings of mine which you used by mistake—"

"You ass!"

"In that case I should be very pleased to stand a really nice tea, Bunter," said Todd, beaming. "I could not very well ask Mrs. Mumble for credit. You see, my Uncle Benjamin always impressed upon me very carefully never to get into debt, and—"

But Billy Bunter was already rolling away, leaving Alonzo to waste his sweetness upon the desert air.



## THE EIGHTEENTH CHAPTER.

## The Traitor.

**N**UGENT jammed the kettle on the fire, and piled up the coal round it. The weather was very cold: ripping weather for footer, as Nugent remarked, but not quite ripping for sitting around in studies. Keen winds came off the sea, and blew cold into the old Close of Greyfriars, and fellows were already talking about snow. The fire blazed up and cast a ruddy glow over No. 1 Study, and Hurree Singh's dusky face glowed with contentment as he came in with a packet of comestibles from the tuckshop. Harry Wharton followed him in, and threw his cap upon the bookshelf, and his scarf into the armchair, and blew out a steaming breath.

"Cold!" he remarked.

"Jolly cold," said Nugent.

"The coldfulness is terrific," Hurree Singh remarked. "The coldfulness of the esteemed English winter is felt bone-folly by my honourable self."

"I suppose it must be," grinned Nugent. "I believe you can cook eggs in the sun at Bhanipur, can't you, Inky? Still, you'll never turn blue with cold, that's one comfort. Shove the eggs on."

"The shovelfulness is terrific."

The fire crackled and blazed, and the kettle began to sing. Wharton laid the table while Hurree Singh boiled the eggs. Nugent made the coffee, sending a fragrant odour through the study. The room was not large, but it was cosy, and the tea-table of the three chums looked very cheery and comfortable.

Harry Wharton's face had recovered its wonted cheerfulness.

"Looks as if Hazeldene had given up that idea, if he ever had it," Frank remarked, reading Harry's thought in his look.

Harry Wharton nodded.

"That's what I was thinking, Frank. The fellows must have known that Solly Lazarus was there, and must have been pulling his leg."

"It doesn't seem exactly likely, but—"

"But it's more likely than the other now."

"Well, yes."

"Unless Hazel comes in now, I shall— Sh"! Wharton broke off as a tap came at the door. It was Hazeldene.

He looked into the study and nodded to the chums.

"Can I come in?" he asked.

"Yes," said Wharton heavily.

His tone was abrupt: he could not make it cordial. The black doubts and suspicions that had been thronging in his mind had been almost dismissed; but now they crowded back again with redoubled force. His tone as he replied was so discouraging that, unless Hazeldene had had a special purpose to serve, he would hardly have persisted in coming in. But he affected to take no note of it, and he came into the study.

"The fact is," he said, with apparent frankness, "I've had a bit of a row with Bulstrode, and I don't want to go to the study. Do you fellows mind if I have tea with you?"

"You're welcome!" said Nugent, as Wharton did not speak; he could not, for the moment.

"Thanks awfully!" said Hazeldene. "You're very kind. It's some time since I've had tea with you fellows."

"Well, I can't say that's our fault!" said Frank.

Hazeldene laughed, in a somewhat hollow way.

"Well, let's leave that out," he said. "It's all right—let bygones be bygones. That coffee smells ripping."

"Yes, it's all right."

"The all-rightfulness is terrific," murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Let me pour it out. As I've come to tea, I may as well make myself useful, as Alonzo would say," remarked Hazeldene.

"Certainly, go it."

Hazeldene took up the coffee-pot.

"We shall want some more water in it, for four of us," he said. "All right; I'll shove some in from the kettle."

He lifted the coffee-pot down to the fender, and took hold of the kettle, and opened the lid of the pot.

The chums of the Remove made no movement, said no word.

But for Solly's warning, they would have thought nothing at all of the matter, for Hazeldene's action was natural enough.

But in the light of that warning, it had a terrible significance.

As Hazeldene bent down before the grate, with his back to the chums, the coffee-pot was hidden from their view, and it was quite in his power to empty the little bottle into it, if he chose, without being seen—if unsuspected.

But, as a matter of fact, Nugent, who was nearest to Hazeldene, half rose silently from his chair, and looked over

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Hazeldene's shoulder from behind without stirring from his place.

Hazeldene did not hear him move, and never suspected.

His action concealed, as he believed, from observation, he dropped the contents of the bottle into the coffee-pot.

Nugent caught the gleam of the glass bottle in the first light, and saw it inverted over the coffee.

Then, still without a sound, he sank into his chair again.

Hazeldene did not even know that he had moved. He closed the lid of the coffee-pot with a bang, at the same time slipping the bottle into a pocket.

He rose from the fender. His face was very red, but that might have been caused by the glow of the fire.

Nugent had said nothing, but the look upon his face was enough for his chums. They knew what he had seen, as well as if he had told them.

Hazeldene set the coffee-pot on the table again.

"Better let it stand a minute," he remarked.

His voice was shaking a little. Again, it would have passed unnoticed if there had been no suspicion. But now—

"Good!" said Nugent, speaking with perfect calmness.

"Better let it stand. By the way, I don't know about the milk. I wonder whether you'd mind getting some, Hazel?"

"Certainly!" said Hazeldene, with great readiness. "Don't wait for me for your coffee. I'll have mine when I get in."

He took the milk-jug and left the study, glad enough to get away while the chums drank their coffee. He had been puzzled in his mind for an excuse not to drink any himself.

Nugent closed the door after him.

Wharton and Hurree Singh sat quite still. All action seemed to have devolved upon Frank Nugent.

Nugent acted promptly, without stopping to think. He took the coffee-pot, poured the contents into a basin in the cupboard, and covered it with a plate. Then he rinsed the pot with hot water, and threw it away. Then, hastily putting in fresh coffee, he made a fresh pot of coffee, and placed it on the tray where Hazeldene had put it. He had not waited to boil up the water again, and the coffee was not likely to be very successful as a beverage, but that mattered little.

Wharton and Nugent watched him in silence.

Frank sat down again.

"Good gracious!" said Harry at last, in a low and broken voice. "It's all true, then? It's all true, Frank?"

"Yes, all true."

"You saw him?"

"I saw him empty a bottle into the coffee."

"By Jove!"

"It won't hurt us now," said Frank grimly. "We can drink this coffee quite safely. But not a word, mind."

"But—but when he comes back—"

"Mum's the word! We don't want him to warn the Highcliffe cads that the thing's fallen through, and have them scratch the match at the last moment. We want them to come over here, to-morrow, and give them a dressing," said Frank savagely. "They've led this rotten fool into this bizney, and they've got to be punished."

Wharton drew a deep breath.

"Right!" he said.

Frank poured out three cups of coffee. He heard footsteps in the passage. He was stirring his coffee sedately when Hazeldene came in with the fresh milk.

Hazeldene's eyes snapped as he saw the three coffee-cups, and saw Harry Wharton sipping his. Harry felt that he must do something to avoid speaking to the traitor or looking at him, and he sipped his coffee. That the drugged coffee was in a basin in the cupboard, and that the present liquid was quite harmless, of course, Hazeldene was not likely to suspect.

"Here's the milk!" he exclaimed.

"Thank you!" said Nugent coolly. "I'll pour out your coffee now."

Hazeldene faltered:

"I—I don't think I'll have coffee," he said. "It's not good for me. If you don't mind, I'll make myself some hot milk-and-water."

"Oh, better have some coffee!" said Nugent mercilessly. "It's ripping coffee, too; and you've taken the trouble to put more water in it, you know, for yourself."

"Yes; but—but I'll have milk-and-water if you don't mind."

"It's not cheap coffee," Nugent explained. "It's the best that Mrs. Mimble keeps, you know. You needn't be afraid of it."

Hazeldene changed colour.

"I'd rather not have any."

"Oh, all right!" said Nugent. "I'll have another cup myself."

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He drank his coffee and refilled the cup. Wharton and Hurree Singh had emptied their cups. Nugent filled them again. Hazeldene watched him, as he poured out the coffee, with a kind of fascinated stare. He seemed unable to take his eyes off the steaming brown liquid.

Nugent moved his lips a little.  
"Do you notice that the coffee has a taste, Wharton?" he asked.

"It doesn't seem so nice as usual," said Harry, quite truly, for the coffee had been made with unboiling water.

"The tastefulness is terrific!"  
Nugent opened the coffee-pot and sniffed into it.

"It smells much the same," he said. "I'm! I don't think I'll have my second cup, after all. It's not nice. You were right to let it alone, after all, Hazel."

Hazeldene's face was almost ghastly.

"I—I—I'm feeling rather faint," he muttered. "If—if you don't mind, I'll go. The study's very hot, and I—I think I'd better get out of doors."

"But you haven't had your tea," said Nugent.

"I won't have any, thanks."

"Well, I must say, you're a queer fish, Hazel. Perhaps, if you had a cup of coffee, it would set you up," suggested Nugent.

"N-n-no, thanks!"

Hazeldene staggered rather than walked from the study.

## THE NINETEENTH CHAPTER.

### Tom Brown Feels Very Bad.

THE chums of the Remove looked at one another.

For some minutes there was grim silence.

Wharton was very pale. He could not eat and he pushed his plate away and rose. He stood before the fire, his hands in his pockets, his brow darkly wrinkled. His face seemed to be older.

"Well?" said Nugent at last.

"The villain!" said Wharton. "The young scoundrel! But—but he's not alone in this, Frank. The fool is a cat's-paw! I am sure that Vernon-Smith has been egging him on, as well as those rascals at Highcliffe."

"Very likely."

"But it's Ponsonby & Co. who are at the bottom of it," said Harry, his eyes gleaming. "We'll make them sit up for it."

"What-ho!" said Nugent emphatically.

And the Nabob of Bhanipur added that the esteemed sit-upfulness should be terrific.

"The worst of it is, that we can't have it out with Hazel," said Harry Wharton, biting his lip. "I feel rotten at the idea of keeping it dark, even for one day. But there's no other way of getting at the Highcliffe rotters! And we can't make the tale public, either. It would be too fearful a disgrace for the school. If we told the Highcliffe rotters we knew, they'd crow over us for having such a rotten traitor in the school. As it is, they'll say nothing, for their own sakes."

"That's so."

"But we'll make them simply crawl to-morrow!" said Harry, with flashing eyes. "I don't like rough play as a rule, but to-morrow we'll smash them! We'll play within the rules, of course; but we'll do everything that the rules allow, and we'll make them feel that life isn't worth living!"

"Good egg!"

"The goodness is terrific!"

"And now there's a chance for us to show what we've learned in the Amateur Dramatic Society," said Frank, with a grin.

"How do you mean?"

"I mean that we've got to be invalids," said Nugent.

"That stuff—which we haven't swallowed—has got to knock us up, or Hazel will get suspicious, and let his friends at Highcliffe know in time to beat the match off. We've got to be done in."

Wharton nodded slowly.

"I suppose you're right, Frank."

"Of course I am! Mum!" said Frank suddenly, as the door handle moved.

But it was not Hazeldene returning. Tom Brown and Mark Linley came into the study. Mark closed the door behind him.

"Well?" said Tom, looking inquiringly at the chums.

"We saw that Hazeldene had been to tea with you, and we thought we'd see how it had turned out."

"I hope it is all right?" said Mark.

"It's all wrong."

"What has happened?"

Harry Wharton explained.

"Then it's all true?" said Tom Brown. "My hat! We owe a lot to that Courtfield chap. We should have been caught in the trap like rats!"

"The catchfulness would have been terrific!"

"As it is," said Tom coolly, "the Highcliffe rotters will

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be caught. Hazeldene is standing at the window at the end of the passage. He saw us come in here. I fancy he'll look in soon, to see if we're having tea with you, and drinking his precious coffee. He'd better find us doing it."

Nugent grinned.

"Good! This coffee won't hurt you. Squattez vous!"

As if to prove what Brown had said, footsteps were heard coming along the passage.

Tom Brown and Mark took the cups of coffee Nugent handed to them, and began to drink.

Hazeldene looked into the study.

His eyes glinted for a moment.

"Hallo!" said Nugent. "Come back for some coffee?"

I'm afraid it's all gone now."

"Oh, no!" said Hazeldene hastily. "I—I just looked in to tell you that I'm feeling better now, but—but I don't want to have tea, thank you. That's all. So-long!"

And he went away.

Tom Brown grinned over his coffee.

"The cad's quite satisfied now," he remarked, as Nugent closed the door. "We're all in the same boat, as he's seen us drinking the coffee. Nice chap."

"The utter cad!" said Mark, putting down his coffee-cup.

"I could never have believed it of him. It seems incredible!"

"But it's true," said Nugent.

"What's the programme now?" asked the New Zealand junior.

"There's only one thing to be done, if we're to get at the Highcliffe cads, we must seem to be knocked up by the stuff," said Nugent. "We may as well go to bed early; that's the easiest way of keeping up appearances."

"Good!"

Tom Brown and Mark left the study. Mark went to his own study to work, but Tom went down to the common-room.

Hazeldene was there, sitting by the fire alone, and looking decidedly gloomy. Tom Brown dropped heavily into a chair by his side, and gave a deep and hair-raising groan.

Hazeldene gave him a sudden guilty look.

"What's the matter?" he asked breathlessly.

Tom groaned again.

Two or three juniors gathered round him. The New Zealand fellow was very popular, and he had plenty of friends to feel concerned if he were ill.

"What's the matter, Browney?" asked Ogilvy.

"Faith, and he sounds as if he had the hump!" remarked Micky Desmond.

"Shall I pat ye on the back, Tommy darling?"

"Ow!" groaned Tom.

"But what's the matter?"

"I—I wasn't like this till I had that blessed coffee with Wharton," said Tom Brown, quite truthfully. "I say, Hazel, you had coffee in Wharton's study. Did you notice anything wrong with it?"

Hazeldene's face was livid.

"I didn't have it," he said. "I'm feeling seedy, and I didn't stay there to tea."

"Ow! I wonder what it is like to be poisoned?" groaned Tom Brown.

"I—I wonder whether it would be possible for a careless ass to use poison in a coffee-pot by mistake?"

Hazeldene muttered something.

"Oh, rats!" said Bulstrode. "You're not poisoned.

Perhaps you've been eating some New Zealand mutton by mistake."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, rats!" said Tom Brown. "I tell you I was all right till I had the coffee. I heard of a chap once who put some stuff in somebody's coffee for a lark, and it turned out that he had used real poison, and he was a murderer. Ow!"

Hazeldene rose unsteadily to his feet.

"Hallo!" said Tom, looking at him. "You're not queer, are you? You said you didn't have any of the coffee."

"I—I'm feeling seedy," said Hazeldene. "I think I—I'll go and lie down for a bit."

And he almost staggered out of the common-room, followed by another hair-raising groan from Tom Brown.

Vernon-Smith followed him into the passage. There was a vague alarm in the Bounder's face.

"I say, you haven't made any bungle with the stuff, have you?" he muttered. "You wouldn't be such a fool as that."

Hazeldene's face was ghastly.

"I gave them the stuff Ponsonby gave me," he muttered thickly. "I—I saw Ponsonby taste it when I was at Highcliffe—at least, he said it was the same stuff. Of course, I had to take his word for it."

"I suppose it must be all right," said the Bounder; "but—but Gadsby major mayn't be a skilful chemist, and they all make mistakes at times."

"Oh!" muttered Hazeldene, clenching his hands.

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wish I were well out of it. What a fool I was to get mixed up in the matter at all."

He had unconsciously raised his voice. Vernon-Smith grasped him by the arm almost fiercely.

"Quiet, you fool!"

"Oh, I don't care!" But Hazeldene lowered his voice, all the same. "I'm sick of it. I don't care if it comes out."

"You mad idiot! Do you want to be expelled from the school, and sent to a reformatory for ten years?" Vernon-Smith whispered fiercely.

Hazeldene shuddered.

"You'd better go and lie down," said Vernon-Smith contemptuously. "If you've used the wrong stuff, you'd better keep mum more than ever, unless you want to grow up in prison instead of at school. That's what it would mean. I suppose you're too young to be hanged?"

"Oh, shut up—shut up!"

"Go to bed, then, and keep your nerve."

Hazeldene went to bed. It was the only place where he was safe. He felt that if he had to meet the eyes of his schoolfellows, he would start up and shriek out the whole story, and face everything to get that terrible strain off his mind.

## THE TWENTIETH CHAPTER.

### The Invalids.

**H**AZELDENE went to bed, but not to sleep. A light burned in the long, lofty dormitory, and he had a book by his bedside, but he could not read. The solitude of the great room terrified him. Vernon-Smith might have kept him company, but the Bounder of Greyfriars was not likely to think of putting himself out for the sake of the troubled, conscience-stricken traitor. Hazeldene lay with wide-staring eyes, thinking, tortured by fear and remorse. He had sinned, and sinned deeply, but there could be no doubt that he was paying for it now.

The silence of the dormitory was broken at last. Tom Brown came in, groaning heavily at every step. Ogilvy and Morgan and Russell came with him, to help him to bed. They were full of sympathy, and, indeed, Tom's groans seemed to demand sympathy.

Hazeldene looked at him wildly, but dared not speak. He closed his eyes, and affected to be asleep.

Tom Brown turned in, and the other fellows left the dormitory. Tom looked over towards Hazeldene's bed.

"Hazel!"

"Yes," said Hazeldene, forgetting for the moment that he was supposed to be asleep.

"Would you be very much scared if I were to die here?"

"Oh!"

"I'm sorry if my groans keep you awake," said Tom; "but if you were feeling as I do now, I'm sure you'd do just the same as I'm doing."

"It's—it's all right," muttered Hazeldene.

Groan!

Hazeldene closed his eyes again. He tried to sleep. He would have given worlds to sleep, but worlds and solar systems could not have bought that boon for him. Even, without his tortured conscience to keep him awake, there were Tom Brown's deep groans echoing through the silent dormitory at intervals.

Tom was one of the shining lights of the Amateur Dramatic Society, and he entered into the spirit of the thing with great zest. He had sometimes played ghost to groan behind curtains on the junior stage, and he was working off his most dramatic groans on Hazeldene now. In fact, so well was he doing his work, that he almost began to believe that he was really ill, and he groaned without stopping to think.

Tom was in the middle of a very long groan when the door opened again, and Frank Nugent came in, leaning heavily upon the arms of Micky Desmond and Lacy. They helped him to his bed, and he sat there and groaned in unison with the New Zealand junior.

"Feel very bad?" asked Tom Brown.

Nugent only groaned in response.

His friends helped him to bed, and then went downstairs. Ten minutes later, Hurree Jamset Ram Singh was helped in by Trevor and Smith mince.

"Hallo! You got it, too, Inky?"

Groan!

"Feeling very bad?"

Groan!

"Poor old Inky!"

Groan!

And Hurree Singh turned in. Hazeldene, with three juniors groaning away in three different parts of the dormitory, was not likely to go to sleep, even if he had been otherwise able to do so. He felt distracted, and thought of

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getting up and dressing and going down. But he reflected that he would see Wharton or Linley doubled up with pain in the common-room if he did.

It was getting near bedtime now. Wharton and Linley did not come to bed early, but three desperate groaners were sufficient to keep Hazeldene in an unenviable state of mind. When the Remove came up to bed, Hazeldene looked anxiously at Wharton and Linley. Both of them were very quiet, but they were not groaning. No doubt they were standing the effects of Ponsonby's medicine better.

Hazeldene was relieved to some extent. He had feared that Ponsonby had deceived him, or made a mistake in the stuff. But it was pretty clear now that he could not have used poison, at all events. Probably the real trouble was that he had, in his haste, and through leaving the attempt so late, given an overdose. But he remembered Ponsonby's assurance that the ill effects would not be permanent, and he was relieved.

The juniors' groans, too, ceased when the Form came to bed. Perhaps they felt that they had groaned enough, and were too considerate to keep the whole Remove awake. As a matter of fact, they were fast asleep as soon as any.

But they did not forget their part when the rising-bell clanged in the morning. Tom Brown crawled out of bed with the manner of a fellow upon whom old age had descended suddenly. He went through his washing in a dispirited way, and dragged on his clothes, and left the dormitory without speaking to anybody.

Nugent emitted a series of suppressed groans during his toilet. Hurree Jamset Ram Singh twisted his dusky face into alarming expressions of agony whenever he noticed that Hazeldene's eyes were upon him.

Wharton, on getting out of bed, stumbled, and fell upon the floor. This was so unlike Wharton that it could not fail to attract attention. Hazeldene felt that he alone understood it. Wharton was feeling as bad as anybody else who had drunk the coffee, but he was keeping it under with iron self-control. But that sudden weakness had betrayed him.

Hazeldene's worst fears were relieved now, and the success of his dastardly scheme seemed assured, but he hardly knew himself whether he was glad or not. But he told himself that it was too late now to be either glad or sorry; it would not make any difference. All he could do was to sit tight and watch events. And to that Vernon-Smith counselled him, too.

At the breakfast-table it was noticeable that five juniors ate very little. Bob Cherry observed it with anxiety.

"You're off your feed, Harry!" he exclaimed.

Wharton smiled.

"Oh, I'm all right!" he said.

"Look here, we can't beat Highcliffe, if you chaps are sick," said Bob, in alarm. "Aren't you feeling any better this morning?"

"I'm all right, old chap."

"The all-rightfulness is terrific!"

"We'll beat Highcliffe all right," said Nugent.

"I say, you fellows," said Billy Bunter, blinking at them; "if you feel off colour to-day, I don't mind playing for Greyfriars, you know."

"Go on, Billy! You're too good."

But Bob Cherry was so uneasy that immediately after breakfast Harry Wharton took him aside, and confided the whole matter to him. Bob listened in astonishment, and his desire to look for Hazeldene at once, and smash him, was only kept in check by the still more attractive prospect of smashing Ponsonby & Co. in the afternoon.

After dinner five juniors went to the dormitory to lie down, instead of turning up to practice. Hazeldene and Vernon-Smith exchanged glances as they dragged themselves slowly up the stairs.

"It's all serene!" whispered Vernon-Smith. "The Highcliffe chaps will simply walk over them this afternoon. And if a team is played without those five in it, it will be just as easy for Ponsonby."

Hazeldene nodded without replying. Now that he had succeeded, now that his revenge was within his grasp, was he glad? He could not have told himself.

But there was great alarm in the Remove. The fellows had been looking forward to the Highcliffe match as to a comedy. To see the Highcliffians chased over the field, and nine or ten goals scored against nil, would be amusing, almost as amusing as a really good and well-fought match—for a change, anyway. But to see Greyfriars licked by a team they rightly despised, that would not be so amusing. And if five of the top players in the team were "rocky," what chance on earth would the eleven have? The Highcliffe fellows, however rotten they were, could not fail to score. And if the five best men were left out, and five reserves played instead, it would be like giving the game away to Highcliffe.

**GRAND CHRISTMAS DOUBLE NUMBER NEXT WEEK!**



The Removites had very long faces.

Micky Desmond went up to see the sufferers in the dormitory. A chorus of groans greeted him, as he looked in.

"Faith, and it's like a hospital intirely!" he said. "What sort of a game are you gossoons going to put up, anyway?" "Oh, we'll be all right, Micky, when the time comes!" said Harry. "All this will pass off as soon as the Highcliffe fellows arrive."

"Faith, and it's a mighty quare illness ye've got, then!" said Micky, puzzled.

"Quite right; it is queer," agreed Wharton. "We've never had anything of the sort before. Look here, Micky, go and watch the road, and tell us when the brake comes in sight. There's a good fellow."

"Sure, and I will, but I don't understand at all, at all!" said Micky.

"That's all right, Micky."

And Micky went away very much perplexed.

Nugent gave a soft chuckle.

"I'll bet there never was such a recovery in the history of doctoring, as we shall have when it's too late for Hazeldene to send Ponsonby a wire," he remarked.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The chums waited. A quarter of an hour later Micky Desmond burst into the dormitory.

"Sure, they're coming!"

"You've seen the brake?"

"It's coming down the road intirely!"

"Good!" exclaimed Nugent. "Hurrah!"

And he bounded off the bed. Micky Desmond stared at him blankly, and his eyes almost started from his head as the other juniors also jumped up quite briskly.

"Faith!" gasped Micky Desmond. "And ain't ye ill intirely?"

"Ha, ha! We've recovered!"

"Sure, it's mighty quare!"

And Micky went down, leaving the chums changing into their football things, and he was still muttering, as he went downstairs, that it was mighty quare.

## THE TWENTY-FIRST CHAPTER.

### In For It.

**P**ONSONBY & CO. alighted from their brake, and were greeted by Bob Cherry. Harry Wharton had not yet appeared. Ponsonby looked round for Hazeldene. As the Highcliffe fellows were taken into their dressing-room, Hazeldene joined them.

Ponsonby gave him an eager look.

"I haven't heard from you," he remarked, "so I suppose it's all right?"

"Yes, it's all right."

"They had the stuff?"

"Yes. I was only able to give one dose," muttered Hazeldene. "I gave them nearly all the stuff at once!"

"My hat! It must have given them a twisting!"

"It did," said Hazeldene thickly. "It—it was horrible. Four of them went to bed early last night, and were groaning out loud for an hour or more. Wharton fell down when he got up this morning."

Ponsonby's eyes glimmered with satisfaction.

"By Jove, you've done splendidly!" he exclaimed. "It will be a walk-over for us!"

"Good!" said Gadsby. "I had my doubts."

"Oh, it's all right!" muttered Hazeldene. "But—but I wish I hadn't done it! I've felt inclined to tell Wharton, more than once."

Ponsonby laughed mockingly.

"I shouldn't recommend you to do that," he said. "You would get ragged out of the school. It wouldn't make any difference now; we shall lick them."

"And, of course, we should deny anything about the matter," said Gadsby. "So you'd better hold your tongue, my fine fellow."

"In fact, we don't know anything about it," said Vavasour. "I don't for one, and I don't mean to. You've been telling us a fairy-tale, Hazeldene, and you'd better ring off. I don't want to hear about it."

Hazeldene gave the Highcliffe fellows an evil look, and quitted the dressing-room.

He had little to expect from them, either in politeness or anything else, now that he had done their rascally work. He was a used tool.

"I'm rather anxious to see Wharton," said Ponsonby, with a grin. "My hat! How long their faces will all go when we score goals!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Highcliffe fellows turned out in high spirits. Six of the Remove team were on the ground now; Treluce and Morgan and Ogilvy and Desmond and Bob Cherry and Smith minor. Harry Wharton & Co. had not yet appeared. The Highcliffians punted a ball about to keep themselves

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warm. Five fellows issued from the School House, with long coats on over their football garb, and came down to the ground. They were Wharton, Nugent, Hurree Singh, Tom Brown, and Mark Linley. They walked slowly, as if with effort, and their faces were very serious. Vernon-Smith chuckled as he saw them.

"I don't think they look like a winning team," he remarked to Hazeldene.

Hazeldene did not speak.

No one else thought so, either. The Highcliffians ceased punting the ball about, to stare at the new-comers. The faces of the Greyfriars fellows were serious enough. Was this the team that was to beat Highcliffe? Judging by their looks, a Second Form eleven could have walked over them.

"Hallo, Wharton!" said Ponsonby quite jovially. "You're not looking so chippy as we expected. Not seedy, I hope?"

Harry Wharton looked him straight in the face.

"Not in the least!" he said.

"Well, you don't seem very fit, anyway."

"Oh, I'm all right!"

"Well, we're ready," said Vavasour.

The two teams turned into the field. As if by magic, the sickness that seemed to have fallen upon Harry Wharton & Co. vanished. They ran on the field as lightly as the rest; with their overcoats they seemed to have cast aside all slackness and sickness. Vernon-Smith and Hazeldene watched them with starting eyes.

"I don't understand this," muttered the Bounder. "They seem all right now. Has the effect of the stuff passed off, do you think?"

"I—I don't know."

"They can't have been gammoning all the time," muttered Vernon-Smith. "They can't have suspected, and gammoned you, can they, Hazel?"

"Goodness knows. I don't care!" muttered Hazeldene savagely.

The Bounder bit his lips hard as he watched. Coker of the Fifth, a big fellow in norfolds, was refereeing the match. Ponsonby won the toss, and as there was a stiff wind blowing, he gave it to the Greyfriars fellows to kick off against. Not that it made much difference to Harry Wharton & Co. If it had been blowing a gale, they could have beaten the Highcliffians hands down.

Wharton kicked off, and the play started. Ponsonby had told his comrades to rush the Removites, and to keep them going all the time, and force the play without cessation. The invalids would soon be helpless at that rate, and the Highcliffians would be playing practically a team of six men—without a goalkeeper. And if they could not win under those circumstances it would be odd.

Only—

Only Harry Wharton & Co. did not crumple up as their adversaries confidently anticipated. The medicine should have done it. But it didn't. Instead of tottering about the field, falling over each other, miskicking, and generally mucking up the game, the chums of the Remove played up in their finest style.

Harry Wharton led a forward rush, and the ball was taken away from Highcliffe quite easily, and slammed into goal within three minutes of the start.

Ponsonby looked bewildered.

"W-w-what does this mean?" he muttered to Vavasour, as they went back to the centre. "Has that cad Hazeldene been tricking us?"

"He's given the game away to Wharton, and they've fooled us between them," said Gadsby, gritting his teeth.

"He didn't look like it," Ponsonby said slowly.

"But Wharton looks like it."

There was no doubt about that. Certainly Harry Wharton & Co. could not have been dosed as per programme, or they could never have played up in this way. The fellows who had filled the Remove dormitory with their groans the night before were playing up like Internationals now.

What did it all mean? Had there been a mysterious and miraculous recovery, or had Hazeldene played the Highcliffians false? It really mattered very little, for in either case, the Highcliffe eleven was committed to the match now. Ponsonby & Co. had started, and they had to play it out.

They were in for it—with a vengeance.

Ponsonby cherished a desperate hope that the medicine was, perhaps, lying low, and had not yet taken its full effect. He hoped every moment to see some sign of slackness on the part of the Remove players. But he hoped in vain. Instead of slackening, they warmed up to the work.

Three goals were put in in the course of a quarter of an hour, and by that time the Highcliffians were gruelled almost to a standstill.



And the game went on, fast and furious.

Wharton was only playing at all to punish the rascals who had plotted against him, and who had led a weak and foolish fellow into their own rascality. He did not regard the match as normal football. The Removites played up as they had never played before. They did not exceed the rules in any way. Never once had the referee any cause to whistle on their account. But they took full advantage of all that the rules allowed them, in the way of charging, and the slack, unfit Highcliffians were in no state to brace up against it. They were crumpled up, knocked right and left, and they were soon almost on their beam ends.

And still the terrible game went on—terrible to Ponsonby & Co. It seemed to them that half-time would never come. Yells of laughter were rising round the field, and every goal taken by the Remove was greeted with a gust of merriment from the crowd, instead of a cheer. The goals were not worth cheers; the Remove had no difficulty in scoring. In the first half of the match, seven goals were put up for Greyfriars, and the Highcliffe fellows had not scored once, and were never near scoring at any time.

When the whistle went for the interval, Ponsonby & Co. were hardly able to stagger off the ground to rest.

Greyfriars yelled itself hoarse. Seniors and juniors were crowding from all sides to see the match. The fame of it had spread abroad, as it were, and fellows didn't want to miss such a comedy. Even some of the masters were seen at their study windows, looking out, with countenances decked with joyous smiles.

There were only two faces, apparently, in all Greyfriars, that were not smiling. They were Hazeldene's and Vernon-Smith's. The latter was clenching his hands madly. He saw now that, whatever the reason might be, Highcliffe had no chance of winning. As for Hazeldene, he had ceased to care whether Highcliffe won or not. The thought that was beating in his brain was that Harry Wharton must know all—that his treachery was no secret. The chums of the Remove could not have drunk the coffee—they had discovered the plot somehow, and avoided it. The groans and affected sickness had been to blind him, so that he could not warn Highcliffe of the failure—as if illumined by a lightning-flash, he saw it all now. And his heart was sick in his breast. He could not have been fooled in that thoroughgoing manner unless the chums knew all. He was known to be a traitor, and when the match was over, and there was nothing further to serve by keeping the secret, he would be denounced.

He grasped Vernon-Smith by the arm as the players came on again.

"They—they must know!" he muttered, in a choking voice.

"Fool!" said Vernon-Smith, bitterly and savagely. "Fool! You have bungled somehow! I have lost fifteen pounds—do you hear that? I'm stony-broke! Fool!"

And, shaking Hazeldene's hand roughly from his sleeve, the Bounder of Greyfriars strode away. He did not care to see the finish of the match. He knew how it must end.

Hazeldene remained. He was rooted to the spot. While the rest of Greyfriars roared with laughter, he stood still and silent and pale—silent with fear. What was to happen to him after the match? Could he hope for mercy? He was conscious how little he deserved it.

The whistle had gone for the second half, and the teams were playing again. The brief rest just enabled Highcliffe to go on. But whatever nerve there had been in their play was gone now. Their goalkeeper was in a state of bodily fear. If he left his goal, he was charged into it again with the greatest promptness, and he was aching all over from concussion with Removites and the hard ground. When the halves and the backs were attacked, they began to let the ball go easily, fearful of being charged. The game was becoming farcical.

The Remove players were now laughing loudly as they played. They expended as much breath in running as in playing. But it made no difference. The Highcliffe slackers were so hopelessly outclassed, that half the Remove team might have sat down, and the other half would have won the match now. The Highcliffians were so confused and dazed by the rough and rapid play, that they hardly knew what they were doing.

Goals were piling up till the Removites were tired of scoring. With a total of twelve goals to nil, it ceased to be worth the trouble of kicking them.

The Removites contented themselves now with keeping the Highcliffians on the go, charging them off the ball, and generally grueling them.

Ponsonby & Co., hardly knowing whether they were awake or in the grip of some terrible nightmare, were rushed and run about the field, five or six of them always gasping on the ground at a time. Two or three fellows had crawled off, and Ponsonby found himself playing only seven men presently. Then Ponsonby felt that he had had enough of it.

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Bob Cherry was charging at him, and Ponsonby knew what it would mean if Cherry reached him. With a gasp, he turned and fled.

There was a roar of laughter from the crowd as the Highcliffe captain made a wild break for the pavilion, with Bob Cherry on his track. The Remove players left off playing, and stood and yelled.

"Ha, ha, ha!" "Oh, my hat!" gasped Nugent. "Hold me, somebody! Ha, ha, ha!"

The rest of the Highcliffians followed their leader's example. They made a break to escape, and dashed off the field, with a quarter of an hour yet to play. Coker stared after them, and put his whistle into his pocket.

"Well, my only Uncle Sam!" said Coker. "I've never refereed a match like this before! Ha, ha, ha!"

Yells of laughter followed the unhappy Highcliffians into the dressing-room. They lay about the room gasping for a long time before they found strength enough to change into their ordinary clothes. When they reappeared, they were staggering and gasping and snorting painfully, and their legs seemed to have a great tendency to give way under their weight.

A crowd of grinning Removites escorted them to their brake. They refused to take any refreshments; they did not even say good-bye. They simply piled into their brake, and went off, and as soon as they were out of hearing of the Removites, they groaned in chorus on the way home to Highcliffe.

"My hat!" said Bob Cherry. "Those fellows will have some first-class aches in their bones to-morrow, I rather think."

"The achefulness will be terrific, my worthy chum."

And the Removites roared again.

But Harry Wharton's face grew hard and grave as he left the pavilion, and Hazeldene stepped into his path. The junior's face was white as death—his eyes burned from it with an unnatural glitter.

"I want to speak to you, Wharton," said Hazeldene, in a hoarse, dry voice.

Wharton made a sign to his chums to go on, and stopped. They remained alone. Hazeldene fixed his eyes upon Harry's face.

"You—you know?" he said.

"Yes, of course."

"Everything?"

"Everything."

There was a moment's silence. A queer, rattling sound came from Hazeldene's throat.

"What are you going to do, Wharton?"

"Nothing."

Hazeldene looked at him wildly.

"You—you don't mean that! You can't mean it!"

Wharton looked him straight in the eyes.

"The Highcliffe cads were worse than you," he said.

"They put you up to it. We have given them some punishment they won't get over in a hurry. You—you are a rotten traitor, Hazeldene. You've turned against your own school, and against fellows who have always treated you decently. You've acted as I never believed a Greyfriars chap could act. If I gave you what you deserve, I should lick you till you couldn't stand, and then show you up before the whole school, and have you sent to Coventry by every decent fellow. You can't say you don't deserve it."

"I—I was mad—mad!" muttered Hazeldene. "I was sorry afterwards."

"I hope that's the truth."

"But—but you are not going to—to give me away now?" muttered Hazeldene, licking his dry lips. "Is that what you mean?"

"Yes. I can't disgrace Marjorie's brother," said Wharton abruptly. "You've got me there. She would feel it more than you ever would, and she's the noblest girl in the world. I wouldn't make her suffer your disgrace for anything. That's why you'll get off. But don't expect me to speak to you again, or any of the fellows who know about this, either. They couldn't, and I couldn't. You make me sick, Hazeldene!"

And Harry Wharton strode on, leaving the schoolboy traitor alone. Hazeldene stood staring after him dully. He had escaped far more easily than he deserved, and than he expected; but—

But the bitter scorn in Wharton's eyes was as hard a punishment as any that could have fallen upon him. He turned away at last with a groan. What could he do—what could he ever do to wipe out that stain? Was there any chance for him?

THE END

(Next week's Splendid Christmas Double Number will contain four long complete stories. Order your copy of THE MAGNET in advance.)

**GRAND CHRISTMAS DOUBLE NUMBER NEXT WEEK!**





# STANLEY DARE

## The Boy Detective

### INTRODUCTION.

Stanley Dare, the Boy Detective, is engaged by a big firm of South African merchants to recover the sum of £200,000, which has been stolen from them. Dare traces the money to Vera Cruz, where he finds that it has been stolen from the original thief by a secret criminal society, one of whose members, an Englishman named Mark Sefton, has absconded with the whole of it. The young detective is on the track of Sefton when he comes face to face with Leon Scala, the chief of the criminal society, who is staying at a hotel in Panama under the name of Murillo. Scala bolts from the hotel, and shortly afterwards a boy comes in with a note for Senor Murillo.

(Now go on with the Story.)

#### A Dynamite Explosion—News of Mark Sefton's Death and Burial—A Startling Surprise.

"Here!" Stanley Dare said.

The boy, supposing he was the person to whom the letter was addressed, handed it to him. Dare flung him a peseta, and the urchin, picking up the coin with many "Gracias!" ran off.

"If Scala and company don't employ rather more intelligent messengers to deliver their correspondence than that one, they are likely to come to grief," muttered Dare, with a laugh.

In dealing with such miscreants, he was perfectly justified in the action which he had taken. Opening the letter, he read the contents. They were as follows:

"Mark Sefton sailed two days ago in the Pacific Mail steamer, Cotopaxi. His passage was booked for San Salvador."

There was no signature.

Dare tore the note into fragments, and tossed them to the wind.

"San Salvador must be my next destination then," he murmured. "I think I have got ahead of Senor Leon Scala and his friends this time."

The small republic of San Salvador lies on the western side of Central America, and south of Honduras and Guatemala, and the capital city of the republic, one of the most unhealthy and unpleasant of the larger cities of what was once the Spanish Main, is a short distance inland from the Port of La Libertad.

It is a part of Central America so little heard of in Europe, and practically so out of the world, that Stanley Dare, when he arrived there, was not at all surprised that Mark Sefton should have chosen it for a temporary hiding-place. Moreover, earthquakes are of such frequent occurrence, that the average European gives the country a wide berth.

At Libertad the young detective learnt that an Englishman answering to Sefton's appearance had landed there from the Cotopaxi four days previously, and had gone up to the capital, San Salvador. But in that city the young detective lost all trace of him again.

It did not follow, however, that he had quitted San Salvador because he happened to have vanished for the time being. It might easily be that he was lurking in the town disguised, and, possibly, passing himself off as a Spaniard, for, having spent a considerable portion of his life in the South American Republics, he could speak the old-fashioned Spanish of these places like a native.

Dare left the hotels of these places severely alone, and rented some furnished rooms in a house on the outskirts of the city. From these quarters he could make excursions at all hours of the day or night, without exciting any remarks from the irregularity of his movements, as would have been the case at a hotel.

On the third night of his stay in his new quarters, he went out about ten o'clock to follow up a clue which he had obtained that evening. No sooner had he gone than two cloaked figures, who had been in hiding on the opposite side of the road, crossed quickly, and, by the aid of a duplicate key, opened the door, and entered Dare's apartments. One of them carried a dark lantern, the other one a small oblong case, which he deposited with infinite care on the floor.

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The two men were Leon Scala and Pedro Valdez.

"This is his bed-room," said Valdez, leading the way into an inner room. "He will be back here soon after midnight. Quintana will take care of that, for he is leading him in this fandango. We may reckon, therefore, that he will be here in two hours' time, and that he will be in bed, say, in three hours' time."

"It is of little consequence whether he is in bed or not," observed Scala, "so long as he is in the house."

"It matters nothing at all," replied Valdez. "There is enough dynamite in that case to wreck the house. Luckily, the other part of the house is at present unoccupied, or there would be others making a sudden leap into the next world at the same time as our young detective. The time fuse that will explode the dynamite will burn for three hours."

"Then we will not set it until eleven o'clock," said Leon Scala. "That will make matters more sure. We will make ourselves comfortable here until that hour."

So, with perfect sangfroid, the two villains, who were deliberately planning a dastardly murder, sat down in the most comfortable chairs they could find, and, lighting cigarettes, helped themselves to a winebottle which they found in a cupboard. Eleven o'clock struck.

Valdez stretched himself lazily, and, producing some tools, lifted one of the floorboards under Dare's bed. The dynamite was placed in the space beneath, and the fuse was lighted. Then the board was fastened down again, so neatly and skilfully that not the slightest trace was visible that it had ever been interfered with.

"Caramba! There is a surprise in store for the residents of this part of the town to-night," said Leon Scala, with a fiendish chuckle. "When they hear the explosion they will think that an insurrection has started."

"The particular surprise will be for the youth Dare," replied Valdez.

"He will scarcely have time to realise it in this world," said Leon Scala, with terrible significance.

They quitted the house as stealthily as they had entered, and disappeared into the darkness. An hour and a half passed, and then Stanley Dare came briskly down the street. He entered the house, and lit the lamp in his sitting-room.

"Hallo!" he muttered. "Somebody has been here. Cigarette-ash on the floor, and a strong smell of smoke in the room. H'm! My visitors have been helping themselves to my wine, too. Very careless of them to leave such traces of their presence. Nothing missing, so they are not ordinary thieves. Evidently someone who takes some interest in my movements. Ah, what is this?"

He picked up a broken sleeve-link, which must have fallen from the shirt-cuff of one of the men. A grim smile curled his lips as he put it carefully away in his pocket.

"It belongs to Leon Scala," he said to himself. "I remember noticing the peculiar design at the hotel in Panama. I may have an opportunity of returning it to him before long."

He made a careful inspection of the rooms, but could discover nothing, for Valdez had taken care to remove even the trace of a finger-mark on the boards. That they had left signs of their recent presence in the way of cigarette-ash and the half-empty wine-bottle showed the peculiarity of their methods—extra cautious in vital points, but careless in minor details.

FOUR SPLENDID COMPLETE STORIES NEXT WEEK!



At one o'clock Stanley Dare retired to rest. At two o'clock the burning fuse would reach the dynamite, and the explosion would take place.

The hands of Dare's watch pointed to five minutes to two, when he was suddenly aroused from his sleep by the sounds of wild cries and shouts, and an occasional pistol-shot.

Slipping on some clothes, Stanley Dare hurried to the street. A crowd of men were in hot pursuit of an unfortunate wretch, who was flying for his life down the centre of the road.

"Murderer! Thief! Stop him! Stop him!"

It was such a scene as is not infrequently enacted in the turbulent centre of South American Republics. The face of the man who was being pursued was livid with terror, and his breath was coming from him in short, spasmodic jerks. His clothes were in rags, and covered with filth; his hat was gone, and there was blood trickling down the back of his neck.

The crowd surged past, carrying Stanley Dare with them. To interfere to save the life of the hunted wretch was out of his power, for he was whirled along like a straw on a flood by the mob. A church clock struck two, and on the very stroke of the hour a terrible explosion drowned all other sounds.

The house which Dare had quitted only two minutes before was completely wrecked, and shortly afterwards all that remained of it was blazing furiously.

On the following afternoon Stanley Dare obtained a reliable clue, which enabled him to trace Mark Sefton to the sea-coast town of La Union, in the south of Salvador. Here he found the keeper of the postada at which the fugitive had lodged. When questioned, the man shrugged his shoulders with an expressive gesture.

"The mad-brained Englishman!" he exclaimed. "We thought at first he was a Spaniard, for he spoke the language well. Carai! I am at the loss of a week's board and lodging through him."

"How so?" asked Dare. "Has he gone away without paying?"

"One may say so," was the reply, "since he is dead."

"Dead?"

"Dead as a saint," declared the innkeeper. "He quarrelled with a man, and struck him. That same night the man he had struck stabbed him to the heart. The Englishman whom you name Sefton was buried two days ago."

"Where?"

"Beyond the clump of palms." He led Dare to a window, and pointed out the trees in question. "There is an outcrop of rock, and the grave is by the side of the one which is marked with a cross."

This was startling news indeed, and left the young detective in a dilemma. He had reason to believe that the broken link was carried in a small washleather bag, which Sefton wore suspended by a strong piece of ribbon from his neck. There was nothing for it but to ask the man point-blank whether he had seen it.

"What the Senor Ingles had on him," the innkeeper declared, "we regarded as his own special property, and left there. So the washleather bag you refer to is buried under six feet of earth beyond the palm-grove yonder. It is a strange thing, senor, but not more than three hours ago I was asked the same question by a half-caste. I am not fond of these coloured men, but I gave him the information he required as I have given it to you."

Half-caste! Leon Scala, then, had stolen a march on him again. Knowing the character of the man, he knew (all well that he would not have the slightest hesitation in desecrating the grave to see if the broken link—which was of such immense value—had really been buried with him or not.

But although the dead Englishman was a stranger in the land, it was not likely that any such act as the interference with his burial-place would be tolerated by the people. It was work that would have to

be carried out in the dead of night, when nobody was about.

Stanley Dare resolved to keep watch in the vicinity of the rock outcrop that night, and with that object in view he made his way into the palm-grove as soon as darkness fell, and took up a favourable position, where he could command a good view of the spot without being himself seen.

For five hours he waited there, with the patience of a Red Indian stalking an enemy, until he began to think that his vigil was going to be a useless one after all.

Presently a sound broke on his ears—the low murmur of men's voices, and stealthy, cautious footsteps among the dead leaves. Three minutes later Pedro Valdez, Leon Scala, and Quintana emerged from the grove of trees, and came to a halt in front of the rock on which a cross had been carved to mark the site of the grave. Quintana was the third man who had been with the others since they had left Vera Cruz.

"Don't waste any time," exclaimed Valdez. "Carajo! This digging up of dead bodies is not the sort of work that I care about."

They had brought a couple of spades and a crowbar, and they started to dig at once.

Suddenly one of the shovels struck something with a hollow sound, and Valdez uttered an exclamation of satisfaction.

"Here is the coffin!" he cried.

They cleared away some more earth, and then Leon Scala got to work with the crowbar, prising one end of the coffin up. Then, exerting all their strength, they lifted it out on to the level ground. Quintana produced a couple of screw-drivers, and the screws were soon removed from the lid. That work accomplished, Scala and Valdez lifted the lid off. They bent forward to look into the coffin, and then a singular outcry arose from the trio of scoundrels. Fierce oaths and exclamations broke from their lips.

The coffin was empty, save for some pieces of lead wrapped in canvas. No man had ever been buried in it.

Anything so uncanny as the half-caste's appearance at this discovery cannot be imagined. His dirty yellow complexion turned now to a greyish green, his eyes gleamed maliciously, and he bared his teeth like a snarling dog.

At length he mastered himself, and shook his clenched hands above his head.

"He has baffled us again!" he cried. "But he shall not escape my vengeance in the end, even though I have to follow him for half a lifetime. If I could but once get sight of him, it would be—"

The words that he was about to utter froze suddenly on his lips. He stood rigid, his eyes staring straight in front of him. The others followed the direction of his gaze, and a choking cry of fear broke from the lips of Pedro Valdez.

For, standing by the open grave, they saw the young detective. They made sure that on the second occasion they had done their work properly, for they had watched him enter the house in San Salvador, which was blown to atoms by the dynamite so soon afterwards.

And now here he was alive and confronting them just as they had concluded their nefarious work.

The hour and the place of his reappearance had such an effect on the superstitious fears of Pedro Valdez that he took to his heels, and ran as hard as he could back to the town. Leon Scala and Quintana stood their ground.

"You were searching for a broken link," said Dare quietly. "Well, here is one that belongs to you, Leon Scala." He tossed the sleeve-link at the half-caste's feet. "You left it behind you in my room at the house in San Salvador—the house which you and your accomplices destroyed, in the hope that I should be destroyed at the same time."

"Caramba—"

"Silence!" commanded the young detective. "I give you two hours in which to get out of La Union. Go! And make no attempt to draw your revolver, for I have mine handy and loaded, and I shall not hesitate to use it."

(To be continued.)

# For Next Week



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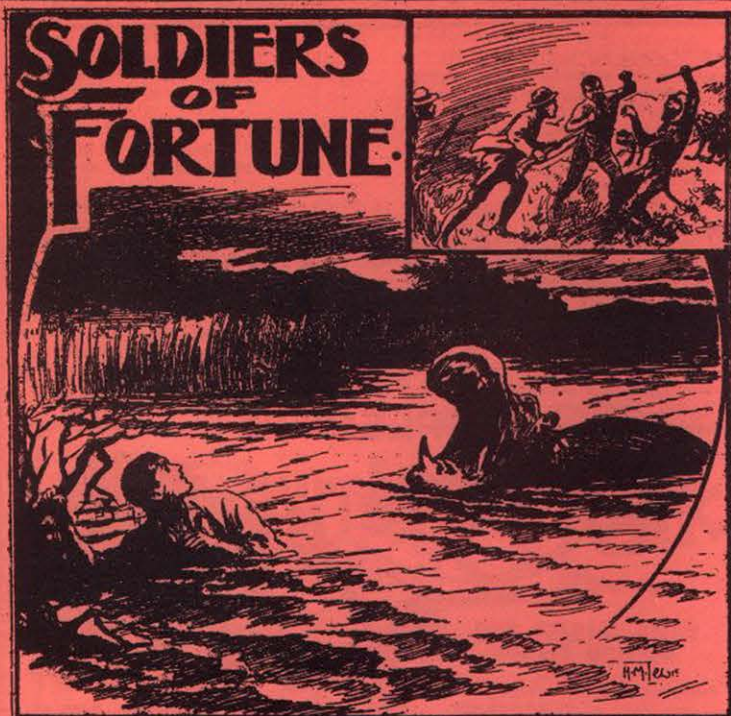
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