

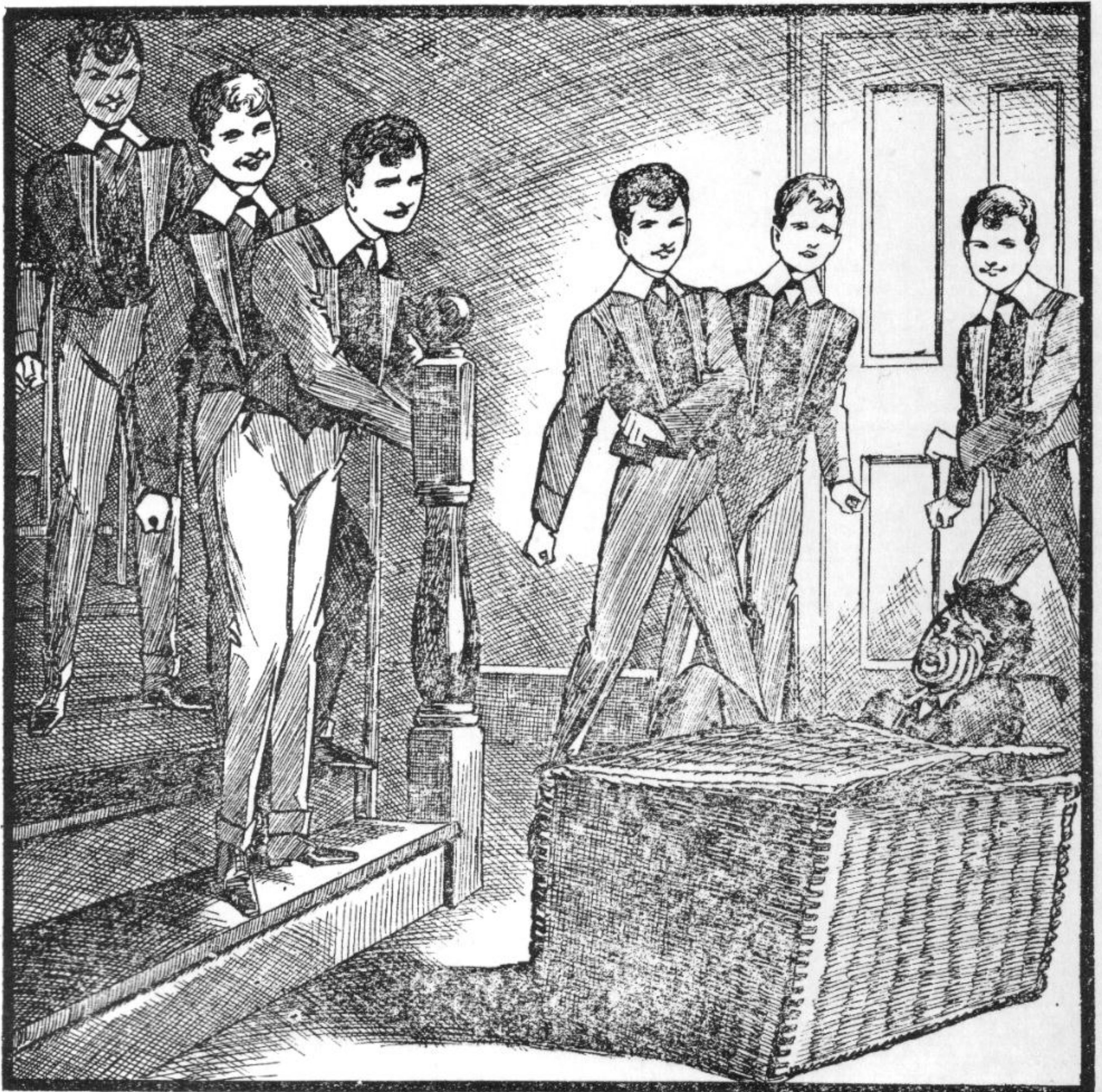


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No. 411. Vol. 9. December 25th, 1915.



Bob Cherry made a frantic effort to recover himself, but failed, and the trunk slipped. A wild howl proceeded from its interior, and the lid burst open. "Ow! Yow-ow!" roared Squiff. "You silly asses!" (A screamingly funny scene in the magnificent long complete school tale contained in this issue.)



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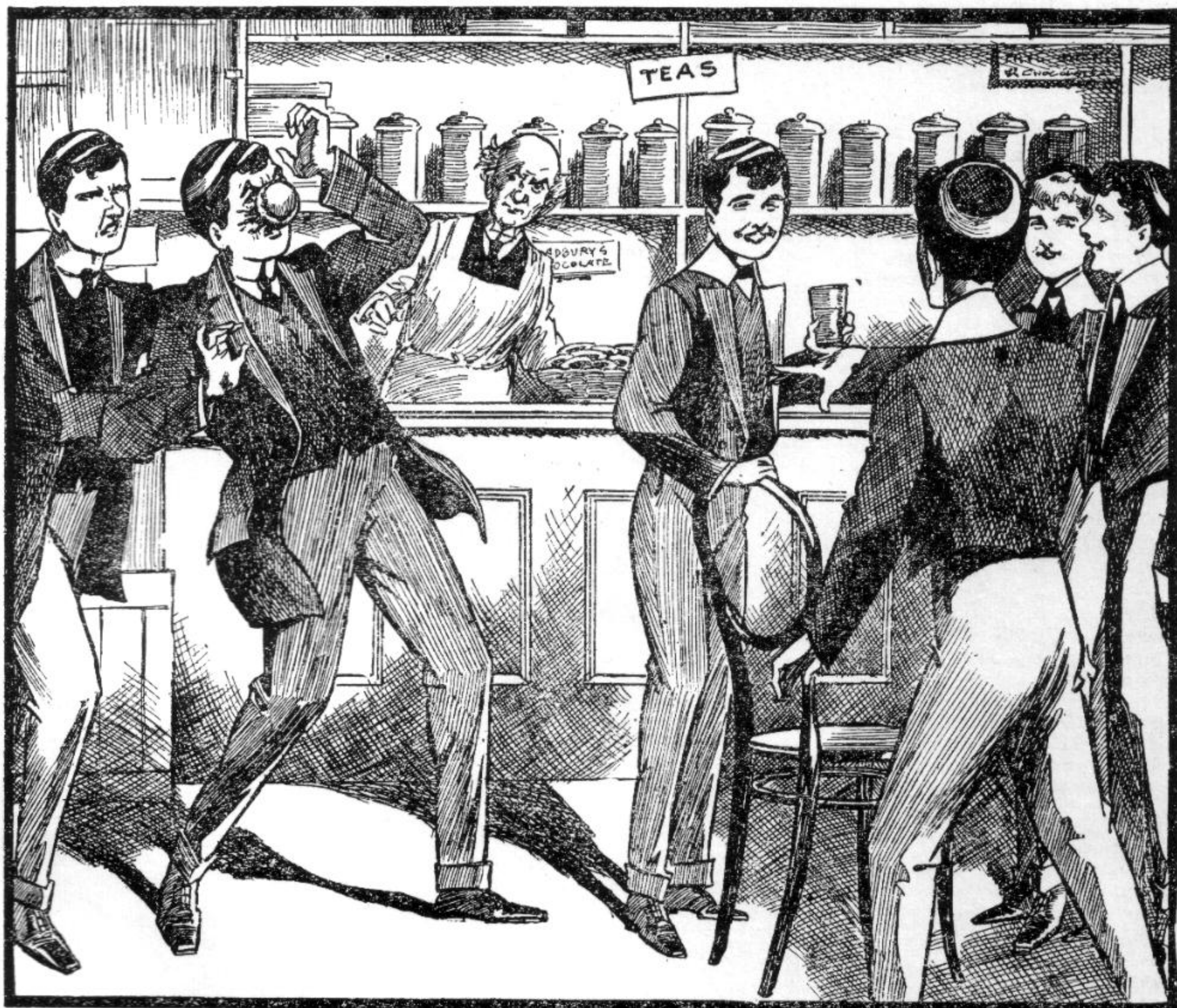


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# THE "BOUNDER'S" RELAPSE!

A New, Long, Complete Tale of Harry Wharton & Co.  
 at Greyfriars School.

By FRANK RICHARDS.



Squiff picked up a tart from the counter, and tossed it across to Coker. The Fifth Former was hardly prepared to receive it with such promptitude, and before he could put his hands up the jam-tart landed squarely between his eyes, and Coker gave a roar. "Ow! You young rotter!" "Ha, ha, ha!" (See Chapter 2.)

## THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Rather. Queer!

"MY uncle's a German——"  
 "Eh?"  
 "My uncle's a German——"  
 "What!"

"A German——"  
 "My only hat!"

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A little knot of juniors gazed at Bob Cherry of the Remove Form at Greyfriars in astonishment as he made that remarkable statement.

"Your uncle's a German?" gasped Johnny Bull.

"No, you fathead!" replied Bob. "I didn't say he was a German!"

"Yes, you did!"

"I said he was a German——"

"You said it that time, anyhow!" said Harry Wharton.

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December 25th, 1915.



"Explain yourself, you chump, or we'll hand you over to the military authorities as a giddy suspect!"

Bob Cherry snorted.

"You won't give a chap a chance to speak!" he ejaculated. "What I said was——"

"That your uncle was a beastly German!"

"He isn't!" roared Bob. "I was going to say that he's a German car-owner!"

"Well, if he's a German car-owner, he must be a German!" said Frank Nugent calmly. "I'm surprised at you, Bob, for not telling us this dreadful news before!"

"He's a German car-owner!" howled Bob Cherry. "That is to say, he's the owner of a rotten German motor-car!"

"Why couldn't you say so before?" asked Wharton, with a chuckle. "You gave us all a giddy fright!"

"The frightfulness was terrific!" remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "Well, my worthy Bob, what of your honourable uncle and his rottenful motor-car?"

"Oh, I was only going to say that he's going to sell it and buy a British-made car!" said Bob Cherry. "I was thinking of offering to take his old car off his hands. Driving down to Friardale or Courtfield in a German motor-car would be better than walking!"

Harry Wharton grinned.

"I'm afraid your respected uncle wouldn't cotton on to the idea," he said, "and I'm not exactly sure whether I should like to be seen driving about in a German motor-car. Everything German is barred!"

"Well, blow Germans and Germany!" said Johnny Bull impatiently. "We're going to walk down to Friardale, aren't we? What's the good of sticking here on the steps wasting all the giddy afternoon?"

The Famous Five were standing just outside the School House. It was a mild December afternoon, and, as there was no football on, Harry Wharton & Co. had decided to walk into Friardale, make some purchases, and end up by having a feed at Uncle Clegg's. But Vernon-Smith had arranged to accompany them, and for some unknown reason the Bounder hadn't turned up.

"We'll buzz off as soon as Smithy comes out," said Harry Wharton. "I wonder what the beggar's doing? Perhaps we'd better go and rout him out—— Oh, here he is!"

"Come on, Smithy!"

"We've been waiting hours!"

"Sorry!" said Vernon-Smith, grinning. "I didn't know I was keeping you fellows waiting. Look here, I'm in great funds just now, and I want you to let me do the honours to-day at Uncle Clegg's. You can all order what you like, you know, and I'll foot the bill."

"That's jolly good of you, Smithy!"

"Rather!"

"It's what I call a ripping suggestion!" remarked Bob Cherry. "I've got exactly fourpence-halfpenny, and I was wondering how I could rake up some more tin. We fall on your neck, Smithy, old man, and accept unconditionally!"

The Bounder grinned.

"Good enough!" he said briskly. "Come on!"

"I say, you fellows——"

"Clear off, Bunter!"

"Oh, really, Cherry," protested Billy Bunter, who had just strolled out of the School House, blinking round through his big spectacles, "I heard what Smithy said just now about ordering what we like! It's jolly good of you, Smithy! Thanks awfully!"

"That's all right," said Vernon-Smith. "Don't mention it! Nothing to thank me for!"

"Look here, that fat porpoise isn't coming!" said Nugent warmly.

"Of course not!" said the Bounder. "I didn't say he was coming, did I? I told him he'd got nothing to thank me for!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, don't be an ass, Smithy, old chap!" said Billy Bunter. "You know very well I'm coming with you. You told me only this morning that you were going to treat me!"

"Why, you fat fibber——"

"I—I mean, you were going to tell me——"

"Buzz off, Bunter!" interrupted Bob Cherry. "I'll give

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you a gentle hint—you're not wanted, and we won't have you! Go and eat coke if you feel hungry!"

"But Smithy asked me——"

"Smithy didn't," said the Bounder, "and Smithy isn't going to! Come on, you fellows!"

And the Famous Five followed Vernon-Smith across the Close. Billy Bunter blinked after them wrathfully, and was half inclined to follow, but he had enough sense to realise that the Removites had meant what they said.

The little party strolled down the lane towards Friardale, talking animatedly. Harry Wharton and Bob Cherry linked their arms with Vernon-Smith. And it was not because he was standing treat that day; it was because they considered that Vernon-Smith was now one of their own particular chums.

The one-time Bounder of Greyfriars was a changed being to his former self. Then he had been everything that was base and deceitful. But a change had been wrought, and now he was highly esteemed by all the decent fellows at Greyfriars. He had dropped his vicious habits like a cloak, and the Famous Five were only too ready to name him amongst their friends. There were, of course, many little ways in which the old Bounder revealed himself; but, on the whole, Vernon-Smith was declared to be thoroughly decent right through. The juniors were quite certain in their own minds that the Bounder would never go back to his old habits.

"Hallo, Highcliffe rotters!" said Johnny Bull suddenly. "I vote we walk past them as though we didn't know 'em!"

"Yes, rather!"

"Don't look at the rotters!"

The juniors were nearing Friardale, and a turn in the road had suddenly revealed five or six juniors from Highcliffe School—Ponsonby, Gadsby, Vavasour, and two or three others of their kidney. The Greyfriars juniors were on the worst possible terms with Ponsonby & Co., who were, at best, a set of fast young blackguards. At one time Vernon-Smith had been "in" with them, but recently he had learned sense, and was now supposed to be as bitter against them as any Greyfriars fellow.

A sharp glint came into the Bounder's eyes as they drew nearer to Ponsonby & Co., but he said nothing. The two parties passed one another without a word being spoken, but Ponsonby & Co. wore supercilious sneers upon their faces, as though the Greyfriars juniors were beneath their contempt.

"My hat, I should like to biff the cads!" muttered Bob Cherry, in a suppressed voice. "No sense in us starting a row, though."

"They're not worth rowing with, old man," said Harry Wharton.

"All the same, there would be some satisfaction in wiping up the road with their beastly carcasses," said Vernon-Smith grimly. "I vote—— Oooocch!"

The Bounder suddenly stumbled forward, tripped on a loose stone, and went flying. A roar of laughter sounded from behind, and the Famous Five whirled round, with furious exclamations. For one of the Highcliffe fellows—Ponsonby probably—had hurled the stone which had struck Vernon-Smith. The Bounder scrambled to his feet, rubbing the back of his head, with an angry, hard look in his keen eyes.

"You rotten cads!" roared Bob Cherry hotly.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Ponsonby & Co.

"I say, this is too thick!" muttered Johnny Bull. "Let's collar the beasts and teach 'em a lesson!"

"Hear, hear!"

"On the ball!"

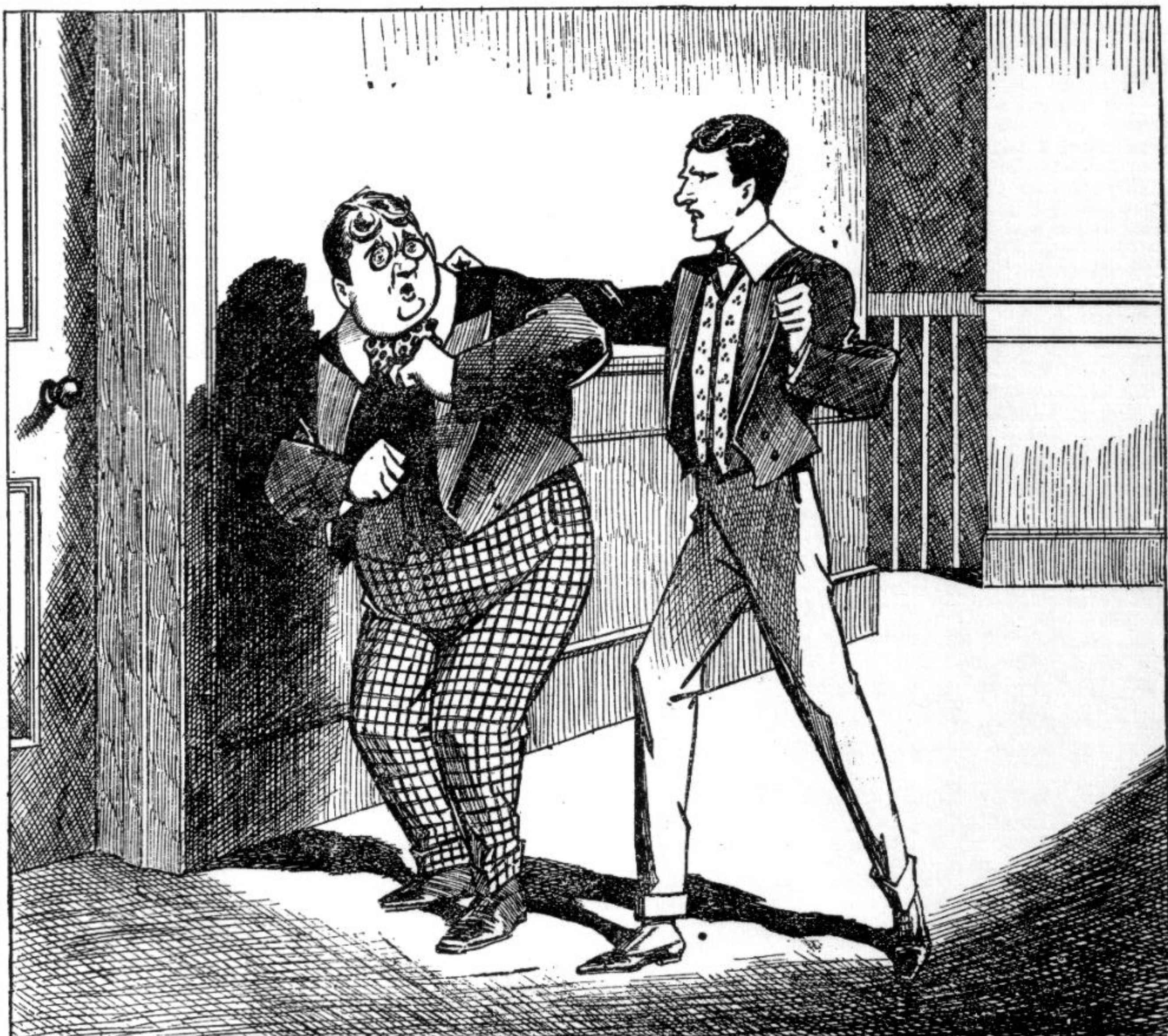
"Pile in!"

And the Famous Five and Vernon-Smith rushed forward to the attack. But Ponsonby & Co. had evidently no intention of coming to blows—stone-throwing was more in their line—and they took to their heels. But they were not destined to escape unpunished for their cowardly act. For at that moment a quartette of Greyfriars juniors appeared round the bend, and Ponsonby & Co. were rushing straight into their arms.

"Hi! Stop the cads!" roared Bob Cherry. "Collar 'em!"

The quartette were Removites—Bulstrode, Mark Linley,





Vernon-Smith gritted his teeth, and strode forward. Bunner made an effort to escape, but the Bouncer grasped his shoulder. "What have you been hanging about the passage for?" he demanded. "I saw you here a few minutes ago. Spying on somebody, as usual, I suppose?" (See Chapter 7.)

Tom Brown, and Sampson Quincy Ifley Field, more commonly known as Squiff.

Ponsonby & Co. checked, with alarmed exclamations, and gazed round for a loophole of escape. But at that point in the road the hedges were thick, and before the Highcliffians could decide what to do the Remove juniors were upon them on both sides.

In a moment Ponsonby & Co. were captives.

"What's the trouble?" panted Bulstrode.

"Why, these rotters started chucking stones, and one of 'em whacked Smithy on the napper!" said Wharton wrathfully. "So we're going to give them what for for being such cads!"

"Anything to oblige!" said Squiff coolly. "What shall we do first? Chuck them over the hedge, or murder them outright and bury their remains in the woods?"

"Look here, do you call this fair play?" snarled Ponsonby, in alarm. "It's just about your mark to pile on us in superior numbers!"

"You're a beauty to talk about fair play!" said Bob Cherry contemptuously. "This isn't a scrap, you rotter! We're going to give you a thundering good licking!"

"You'd better not touch us!" muttered Gadsby desperately. "There are ten or twelve Highcliffians down the road, and they'll be here in a tick, and will half kill you!"

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"Absolutely!" stuttered Vavasour.

Harry Wharton laughed grimly.

"You can't spoof us, you rotter!" he said. "There are six of you, and ten of us. Well, we're going to bump you for being such beastly cads! And if there do happen to be any more of your pals knocking about we're ready for them, too!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Let's get to bizney!" said Squiff impatiently. "I haven't been at Greyfriars long, but I know these chaps are regular outsiders!"

The six Highcliffians looked at one another sharply, and Ponsonby nodded his head. Then, with one accord, the half-dozen made a desperate attempt to escape. In a moment they were struggling fiercely with their enemies of Greyfriars.

Harry Wharton & Co. had no intention of letting Ponsonby and his companions escape unpunished, and very soon a free fight was raging in the lane. Excited shouts went up, and yells of pain rent the air. The Highcliffians were getting decidedly the worst of it, and after a short but gory struggle, they broke away and took to their heels.

"Let 'em go!" panted Wharton. "They're thoroughly whacked!"

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"Where's Ponsonby?" asked Bob Cherry. "He's not among them."

"He went off with Smithy, I think," said Mark Linley.

"Went off with Smithy?" repeated Bob.

"Yes."

"What do you mean?"

"Why, just after the row started I was helping Squiffy to knock a hole in the road with Vavasour's head when I happened to see the Bounder out of the corner of my eye," explained Mark Linley. "He wasn't taking part in the giddy battle, but stood talking to Ponsonby for a tick. Then they both went off, and dived through a gap in the hedge."

"Well I'm blowed!" ejaculated Bob Cherry.

"Jolly queer!" remarked Wharton thoughtfully.

"Smithy going off with that Highcliffe beast!" exclaimed Johnny Bull. "You must have been dreaming, Marky! The Bounder's finished with Ponsonby and that crowd! I'll give him a yell. Hi, Smith! Smithy! Smithy-y-y!"

But Vernon-Smith was not within call, or if he was he didn't choose to answer. Harry Wharton looked at his chums rather seriously. What could it mean? Why had the Bounder gone off with Ponsonby?

## THE SECOND CHAPTER.

### No Explanation!

**H**ARRY WHARTON wore a rather worried look.

"I'm blessed if I can understand it!" he said. "Smithy's finished with Ponsonby. He's as dead against the Highcliffe rotters as we are. I expect he'll be here in a minute or two, and explain things."

"Bound to be!" said Bob Cherry. "All the same, it's jolly peculiar, his buzzing off with Ponsonby like this!"

"The peculiarfulness is terrific!" said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"What's the giddy argument about?" asked Squiff.

"Why, Vernon-Smith, instead of joining in the dust-up, like the rest of us, went off with Ponsonby into the woods," explained Johnny Bull. "I don't like the look of it, I tell you. The Bounder has been on his best behaviour for weeks now, but he's such a giddy uncertain chap that you never know what he's up to."

"Oh, Smithy's all right," said Squiff calmly. "One of the best in Greyfriars. I've heard that he used to be a bit of a wild ass, but he's chucked all that now."

"That's what we think," said Wharton, "but——"

"Oh, rats!" said Sampson Quincy Iffley Field. "Wait until Smithy comes back and explains. No sense in supposing a lot of things, is there? He'll tell you everything when you get back to the school."

"Yes, but he was coming down to Friardale with us, ass!" said Bob.

"You'll have to go without him."

"But he was going to have a feed with us at Uncle Clegg's!"

"Can't you feed without Smithy's august presence?" asked Squiff.

"And Smithy was going to foot the bill!" added Bob warmly. "Now he's buzzed off with that howling rotter Ponsonby, and left us in the lurch! I've only got a few rotten coppers!"

Squiff grinned, in his cool way.

"That alters matters, doesn't it?" he chuckled. "You'd better wait here for a few minutes until the Bounder comes back. He surely won't break his word, after promising to stand treat!"

But, although the Removites waited a full ten minutes, there was no sign of Vernon-Smith returning. Harry Wharton & Co. looked rather grim. To say the least, it was extremely bad form on the Bounder's part to clear off in this way, after promising to pay for the feed at Uncle Clegg's. He would have to offer a good explanation to satisfy the Famous Five.

"Well, I've had enough of this!" said Bob Cherry impatiently. "I'm fed up with hanging about! Let's go on and have our feed without Smithy. I suppose we've got enough tin between us for a decent tuck-in?"

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"Heaps!" said Wharton. "I'm in funds."

"We'll come, too, and if there's any shortage of tin I'll make it up," said Squiff.

"You're the very chap we're looking for, Squiffy!" said Nugent.

"Any old thing," said Bob Cherry. "The more the merrier."

And the nine juniors proceeded on their way to Friardale, dismissing Vernon-Smith from their minds for the time being. But they meant to get a good explanation from the Bounder later on. His strange conduct would have to be accounted for.

When they arrived at Uncle Clegg's they found Coker & Co. of the Fifth already regaling themselves on solid and liquid refreshment. The great man of the Fifth frowned as he saw the Removites pile in.

"You kids had better not kick up a row," he said gruffly. "I came here to be quiet."

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" said Bob Cherry. "The mighty Coker is in our midst! Going to stand us a feed, Coker, old man?"

"I'll stand you a thick ear!" growled Coker generously. "If you think—— Hi! Leave those tarts alone, you young rotter!"

Coker jumped up as Squiff helped himself to a jam-tart, and proceeded to devour it. Squiff seemed quite oblivious of the fact that the tarts were Coker's property. A detail like that didn't concern Squiff in the least.

"Put it down, you young sweep!" roared Coker.

The sunburnt junior from New South Wales grinned.

"That's what I am doing!" he mumbled, with his mouth full.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"If you think you can come in here and nick my pastry you're jolly well mistaken!" shouted Coker wrathfully. "You Remove kids are altogether too cheeky, as I've said many a time. You want taking down a peg or two!"

"We're perfectly willing to be taken down—if you can do it!" said Nugent coolly.

"Look here——"

"Don't ask us to!" exclaimed Squiff. "We're not strong enough to stand the shock!"

Coker glared.

"If you say another word, Biff, or Niff, or whatever your fatheaded name is, I'll pick you up and sling you out into the street!" shouted the Fifth Former.

"Young gentlemen, please!" remonstrated Uncle Clegg gently.

"Oh, you shut up, Cleggy!" growled Coker. "I'm not going to be cheeked by this funny merchant from Borneo!"

The junior with the many names smiled sweetly.

"Nice, sunny temper he's got, hasn't he?" he remarked. "Do you know, I've often wondered how it is that Coker is still alive! I don't think he's a bad sort, really, but he's too high and mighty! I believe he thinks he's as good as two giddy prefects rolled into one!"

"I'm blessed if I'd stand that, Coker, old man!" murmured Potter.

"I'm not going to!" said Coker wrathfully. "If you don't give me that tart back immediately, you young bounder, I'll wipe the floor with you!"

"Sorry!" said Squiff calmly. "I've eaten it!"

"You can give me another one, can't you?" growled Coker, feeling that he was bound to demand satisfaction in some way, although he knew, inwardly, that it would be rather unwise to go for Squiff, with so many of his companions near at hand.

"Certainly!" said the Australian junior. "Catch!"

Squiff picked up a tart from the counter, and tossed it across to Coker. The Fifth Former was hardly prepared to receive it with such promptitude, and before he could put his hands up the jam-tart landed squarely between his eyes, and Coker gave a roar.

"Ow! You—you young rotter!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Sorry!" gasped Squiff.

"You look sorry!" grinned Bob Cherry.

"You did that on purpose!" howled Coker hotly.

"Of course I did!" said Squiff coolly. "I told you



to catch it, but you were too giddy slow! If you let it flop on your nose, that's your look-out! I'm blessed if I'd waste a good tart like that!"

Coker glared round helplessly at the grinning juniors. For a moment he had a wild idea of rushing at Squiff, and exacting summary vengeance. But he checked himself in time, remembering that on previous occasions of a similar nature the juniors, strange to relate, had respected his seniority in no way whatever, and had piled on him unmercifully. So Coker thought it wisest to swallow his wrath.

"All right, you cheeky young sweep!" he growled. "I'll make you sit up before long! You seem to forget that I'm a senior, and entitled to respect!"

Harry Wharton & Co. grinned. The very idea of respecting Coker struck them as being funny.

"That's all right, my son!" said Squiff condescendingly. "Don't trouble to apologise! We know you can't help it!"

Coker nearly exploded again, but, with a sign to his chums, he stalked out of the shop, followed by a general chuckle.

"Poor old Coker!" grinned Harry Wharton. "He's always getting the worst of it, somehow. Still, I must say it was your fault this time, Squiffy."

"Oh, rats!" said Squiff calmly. "A little thing like that will do Coker good."

And the Removites went on with their feed, discussing other matters. When they arrived back at Greyfriars Vernon-Smith had not returned, and Harry Wharton was rather concerned.

With Bob Cherry and Johnny Bull he strolled down to the gates, meaning to question the Bounder as soon as ever he came in. As luck would have it, Vernon-Smith was even then approaching the gates. He looked as cool as usual, and he grinned cheerfully at the trio as he came up.

They did not notice several dark smudges on his waistcoat, and that he had buttoned his jacket to make them less obvious.

"Well?" said Wharton grimly.

"What's the idea?" asked Johnny Bull.

"Explain yourself, Smithy," added Bob Cherry.

Vernon-Smith smiled cynically.

"I'm sorry I couldn't join you in the feed," he said shortly. "I was detained, but I'll pay the bill, if you'll let me know the amount."

"Don't be an ass," said Harry Wharton warmly. "If you've got a good reason for what you did there's nothing more to be said. Where have you been all the afternoon?"

"I'd rather keep that to myself."

The Removites gazed at the Bounder curiously.

"Why?" asked Bob Cherry. "Any special reason for secrecy?"

"Yes."

"Oh, well, that's none of our bizney," said Harry Wharton. "But I think you owe us an explanation."

"Why do I?"

"For one thing," said Wharton, "why did you go off with Ponsonby?"

Vernon-Smith started.

"So you saw me?" he said in a hard voice. "Oh, well, it doesn't matter. I—I wanted to get Pon alone for a few minutes, that's all!"

"Look here, Smithy! Have you made it up with that Highcliffe rotter?" asked Wharton sharply. "We thought you were as dead against him as the rest of us; then in the middle of a scrap you walk calmly off with Ponsonby, as though you were old friends."

The Bounder smiled coolly.

"Oh, don't make a fuss!" he said. "You know me well enough, I should think."

"No, I'm blessed if we do!" ejaculated Bob Cherry. "You take a giddy lot of knowing, Smithy. Where have you been all the afternoon?"

"That's my bizney."

"Oh, I say, don't let's quarrel," said Wharton quickly. "If you won't tell us where you've been, Smithy, perhaps you'll say whether you've been with Ponsonby all the afternoon or not. Have you?"

The Bounder hesitated for a moment.

"No," he said quietly; "I was only with him for about ten minutes."

"And you won't tell us why?"

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ONE  
PENNY.

"I'd rather not, thanks!" said Vernon-Smith calmly. "But you can take my word for it, you chaps, that your suspicions are groundless. Oh, I can see what's in your minds—you needn't tell me! You think I'm getting thick with Ponsonby & Co. again. Well, I'm not! And that's all I'll say. Sorry I can't explain my movements of this afternoon!"

And Vernon-Smith pushed past and crossed the Close. Harry Wharton and the others looked at one another in silence for a moment.

"Well, I'm blessed if I know what to say!" exclaimed Harry Wharton thoughtfully. "Smithy's a queer chap, and there's no telling what he's up to. I think we'd better let the matter drop and give the Bounder the benefit of the doubt."

"It's about the only thing to do," said Bob. "After all, Smithy hasn't done anything very serious, although it was pretty thick of him to buzz off after promising to pay for our feed. No sense in keeping things up, though. We'll just tell the other chaps what Smithy has said, and then say no more about it."

And so it was agreed.

### THE THIRD CHAPTER.

#### Coker's Jape!

**H**ORACE COKER, of the Fifth, held one person at Greyfriars in the very highest esteem—and that person, needless to relate, was Horace Coker! He considered that his dignity had been greatly lowered by the episode in the tuck-shop. Squiff was the guilty party, for Squiff had shown unwarranted nerve. Nerve appeared to be a peculiar characteristic of the cool Australian junior. And Coker looked upon cheek, from a junior, with a heavy frown. Therefore, Master Squiff would have to be brought to book.

The question was, how could that object be attained? Coker had heard of Squiff's various exploits, and if they were true—as they undoubtedly were—Squiff was a decidedly ticklish customer to tackle. Nevertheless, Coker felt that he was bound to tackle Squiff promptly, and with firmness.

"I haven't got a word to say against the young ass except that he's a blessed lot too cheeky!" said Coker to Potter and Greene, in the privacy of his own study. "He's a jolly decent chap in the main, but I'm not going to allow him to assault the honour of the Fifth!"

"Hear, hear!" said Potter.

"That's all very well," said Greene; "but he's only one out of a score. All these Remove kids are a lot too cheeky, and it's impossible to go for the whole bunch."

"Good enough!" replied Coker. "If we deal summarily with Squiff it'll teach the others a lesson, and perhaps they'll realise that it's best for them to keep their places. But it'll be no good unless we do the thing properly. Now, then, suggest a wheeze!"

Potter and Greene looked solemn, and for a minute all was silent in the study. Then Coker grinned audibly.

"Well?" he said. "Have you thought of anything?"

"Yes, I've got a wheeze!" said Potter brilliantly.

"Choke it up, then!" said Coker.

"Well, look here," proceeded Potter, waxing eloquent, "my wheeze is as simple as anything. All you've got to do, Coker, is to disguise yourself as Squiff's uncle, and then go to Courtfield and hire a motor-car——"

"Half a tick!" interrupted Coker curiously. "Is this the wheeze?"

"Of course!"

"Oh! Get ahead then!" said Coker ominously. "I only wanted to make sure! I've got to disguise myself as Squiff's uncle, then, and hire a motor-car from Courtfield?"

"Exactly!" said Potter. "Then you'll drive up to Greyfriars, and take Squiff away with you. We'll be hiding by the roadside, and we'll join you later. Then we'll give the young rotter a fearful hiding and make him walk back—about ten miles. That's what I call a dashed good wheeze!"

Coker smiled pityingly.

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"Oh, that's what you call a dashed good wheeze, is it?" he sneered.

"Rather! What's up with it?"

"What's up with it?" roared Coker. "You ass! You fatheaded chump! First of all, I'm to disguise myself as Squiff's uncle?"

"That's it!"

"Then perhaps you'll tell me what Squiff's uncle looks like!" said Coker. "He's never been here, so far as I know, and I've never seen a photograph of him. If you'll be good enough to tell me how to disguise myself as a chap I've never seen I'll get ahead right away!"

"I—I forgot that," stammered Potter.

"I should think you did!" growled Coker. "And who's going to pay for the hire of the car from Court-field?"

"You—you could do that, old man!"

"Oh, could I?" remarked Coker pleasantly. "About ten quid, just to jape a fatheaded Remove kid! I always thought you were a bit potty, Potter, but now I know that you're absolutely hopeless! Great Scott! You ought to be in an asylum for suggesting a wheeze like that!"

"Look here——"

"Oh, rats!" growled Coker. "I've got an idea—and it's a good one! Listen to this!"

And Potter and Greene obediently listened, the former rather sheepish at the exposure of his "dashed good wheeze." He was quite ready to pick Coker's idea to pieces in retaliation, but when the idea was expounded Potter had forgotten all about his own wheeze and lay back in his chair and roared.

"By gum!" he exclaimed. "That's top-hole, Coker. The cheeky young beggar will be the laughing-stock of all Greyfriars, and Harry Wharton & Co. will be afraid to go for us again for fear of being treated in the same way!"

"Rather!" grinned Coker. "Don't forget, we've got to be out in the quad as soon as it's dark!"

And as soon as it was dark Coker & Co. were on the move. Several juniors noticed that the Fifth Form trio were unusually active, but exactly what they were up to nobody seemed to know. Not that the Removites particularly cared what Coker & Co. were doing. Billy Bunter, perhaps, would have nosed around if he had known that something was on, but he happened to be writing an impo., so he lost a golden opportunity for displaying his spying proclivities.

The Fambus Five and Squiff had no idea that the great Coker was bent on revenge for the tuck-shop affair. It had been very slight, anyhow, and they had forgotten all about it. It was only Coker who remembered it!

After prep. Sampson Quincy Iffley Field happened to stroll out into the Close. He was making for the gym, as a matter of fact, in order to go through a little course of exercises. But he was not destined to reach the door of the gym.

As he walked across the dim Close three forms suddenly loomed up.

"Hallo! What's the——"

"Yes, it's Squiff right enough!" murmured a determined voice.

"Good! Collar him!"

Squiff stood stock-still.

"What's the game?" he demanded. "What——"

Three pairs of strong hands grasped him, and he was yanked forward. He struggled desperately, but in spite of his considerable strength—for Squiff was an exceedingly muscular youth—he was unable to make his escape. The three unknown forms held him firmly, and yanked him along.

"Look here, you rotters!" gasped the prisoner. "What's the game?"

"Silence!"

"Rats! I'm not——"

"Gag him!" said a stern voice.

But Squiff was not gagged. He was whirled along until he found himself in the wood-shed. The door closed, and was locked. Then, as he stood panting in the darkness, a match scraped, and a candle was lighted. Squiff blinked round, and saw three grinning faces. "Coker & Co.!" he ejaculated. Then he grinned, too.

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"Well?" he asked coolly. "What's the little game? You've got me properly, you bounders!"

"Yes, we've got you," said Coker grimly, "and we're going to make you sit up! You Remove kids are altogether too cheeky, and you've got to be shoved into your place!"

"Well, this isn't my place," said Squiff coolly; "yours either, for that matter. It belongs to the school! I can't see any sense in bringing me here, if you want to shove me in my place!"

"None of your beastly nerve!" growled Coker. "You seem to forget that I'm a senior——"

"Well, I do forget it now and again," replied Squiff. "You see, you act more like fags than Fifth Form chaps! For instance, you can't say it's dignified to jump on me in the Close and drag me here—it's absolutely a kid's game!"

Coker frowned.

"You young ass!" he said darkly. "I've brought you here to make an example of you. When we've finished with you, my son, you won't know yourself, and your cheeky friends will realise that it's a bit too much of a task to tackle Coker & Co."

Squiff grinned calmly.

"Proceed, Brutus!" he said. "I am ready!"

Potter and Greene chuckled, but Coker only frowned more deeply. Squiff's coolness was certainly irritating, when he had expected the Australian junior to be filled with alarm. "We'll soon alter your tone, my pippin!" he grunted. "Come on, you chaps; let's get the business over!"

"Have you dug it yet?" inquired Squiff.

"Dug what, you young ass?"

"My grave!" said Squiff calmly.

"Your—your grave?" gasped Coker.

"Yes. Ain't you going to kill me?"

"You young fathead, it's only a jape!"

"My mistake," said Squiff. "I thought it was murder!"

Coker grunted, and signed to his chums. Squiff's equanimity seemed to be impervious, and he stood before Coker & Co. with no sign of alarm. Inwardly, however, Squiff knew that he was "in for it," and he wondered what form the jape would take.

He was not left long in doubt.

The Fifth Form trio proceeded to business. They produced ropes, and the prisoner was bound securely, although in such a manner that he was in no way hurt. Then Coker & Co., with many chuckles, fished out some grease-paint, and decorated Squiff's face in a most original manner. By the time they had done Squiff looked more like a bloodthirsty redskin brave than a peaceable British schoolboy. As a matter of fact, Squiff's face was absolutely startling, and when Coker placed a small pocket mirror before him, the Cornstalk started and uttered a gasp.

"My hat!" he ejaculated faintly. "Is—is that me?"

"It is!" grinned Coker. "But we haven't done yet, my son!"

"Don't mind me!" said Squiff. "I like this sort of thing, you know! Here, I say, chuck it!"

But Coker & Co. took no notice of Squiff's expostulation. They tied a handkerchief securely over his mouth, so that he was unable to speak. Then a big, wicker trunk was produced from the back of the woodshed, and Squiff was lifted bodily into it. Then the lid was closed down on him. There was no fear of his being in want of fresh air, for the trunk was of open basket-work. Coker chuckled as he secured the lid.

"Now for the label," he said. "That's it! By George, the young bounder's a weight! Lend a hand, and we'll soon have him across the Close!"

To Coker & Co.'s satisfaction the Close was deserted, and they struggled across it with their heavy burden, which they set down at the bottom of the School House steps. A form appeared out of the gloom, and revealed itself as Trotter, the page-boy, grinning all over his face. "I'm here, as you told me, Master Coker!" he said.

"Good!" said Coker breathlessly. "Here's a bob for you! Buzz indoors and tell Harry Wharton that there's a hamper outside, addressed to him and his pals!"

Trotter pocketed the shilling, and proceeded to No. 1



Study in the Remove passage. Trotter tapped on the door.

"Come in, ass!"

Trotter stepped in, and found that Harry Wharton and Nugent had visitors—the other members of the Famous Five.

"Oh, it's you, Trotter!" said Harry Wharton. "Have you seen Squiff?"

"Squiff, sir! You mean Master Field, sir?"

"Master Field is Squiff at Greyfriars, Trotty, and Squiff he'll always be!" said Bob Cherry.

"I haven't seen 'im, sir—not since tea. But I come up to say there's a hamper—a big 'un—on the School 'Ouse steps, addressed to Master Wharton!"

"Oh, good!" exclaimed Harry cheerfully. "I wonder who the kind donor is?"

"Never mind the kind donor," said Johnny Bull. "If it's a hamper, it probably means tuck, and I feel peckish, now I come to think of it!"

"The peckishfulness is terrific!" murmured Hurree Singh.

And the Famous Five hurried out of their study, and went downstairs at the double.

"My hat!" ejaculated Nugent, as he surveyed the trunk. "That's a whacking hamper! I'll bet there's something in it!"

Nugent was right—there was!

"I say, that can't be tuck!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "Why, if that was full of grub, there'd be enough to provide a feed for the whole Remove!"

He lifted one end of the trunk.

"My only hat!" he gasped. "It weighs a ton!"

Squiff, inside the hamper, heard everything, and made an attempt to make himself known. He certainly made a noise, but through the handkerchief it was utterly unintelligible, and he wriggled at the same time.

"I—I say, did you hear anything?" asked Nugent, startled.

The Famous Five gazed at one another uncertainly. And in the momentary silence Squiff again mumbled out a cry, and the trunk rocked.

"Good heavens!" gasped Harry Wharton. "There's something in it alive! What on earth can it mean, you chaps?"

"Perhaps it's a dog," suggested Bob Cherry. "Some present from somebody."

"You ass!" said Nugent. "Do you think a dog weighs half a ton? More like a giddy elephant! There must be some mistake. Perhaps it's a wild animal for the Zoo, got out of it's proper course, and sent to Greyfriars by mistake."

The Famous Five stared at the trunk uncertainly.

"Well, I suppose we'd better take it in," said Harry Wharton at last. "But I'll be jolly careful in opening it. Come on, lend a hand!"

The Famous Five grasped the trunk, and staggered into the School House with it. But Squiff was no light weight, and the trunk was bulky. Nearly half-way up the stairs Bob Cherry, who was behind, suddenly slipped.

"Look out!" roared Nugent.

Bob made a frantic effort to recover himself, but failed, and the trunk slipped. The next second it hit the stairs with a crash, turned completely over, and landed with a thud in the entrance-hall. A wild howl proceeded from its interior, and the lid burst open.

"Ow! Yow-ow!" roared Squiff. "You silly asses! You burbling chumps! I'm bruised from head to foot! Grooooooh!"

The handkerchief had become dislodged from Squiff's mouth, but he was still securely bound, and he lay half in and half out of the trunk, his face turned towards the startled juniors.

And the Famous Five uttered a simultaneous gasp of astonishment.

"What is it?" gasped Bob Cherry.

"It's me!" howled Squiff. "Don't you know me, you fatheads?"

It was not exactly probable that the juniors would recognise such a weird spectacle as Squiff pre-

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sented, but the Australian junior had forgotten the startling state of his countenance; but the Famous Five knew the voice well enough.

"Squiff!" ejaculated Harry Wharton faintly.

## THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

### After Lights Out!

"SQUIFF!"

"It can't be," gasped Bob Cherry—"it can't be Squiff!"

"You—you asses!" shouted Squiff. "Can't you see it's me?"

Considering that Squiff's face was smothered with varied varieties of gaudy grease-paint, and utterly unrecognisable, it was rather a mistake on Squiff's part to expect his chums to distinguish his features. And it struck Harry Wharton & Co. as being irresistibly funny. Their faces broke into grins, and they roared.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Can't you see it's Squiffy, chaps?" gurgled Bob Cherry. "Oh, my hat! What a question to ask!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Squiffy, old man, is it really you?"

"You—you fatheaded fatheads!" howled Squiff. "Can't you come and cut these rotten ropes? I'm bruised all over, and I believe both my giddy legs are broken! It's just like you to go and chuck a chap downstairs!"

"Sorry!" grinned Harry Wharton. "But we didn't know you were inside the trunk, old man. Why didn't you let us know before?"

"I was gagged!"

"Oh, that accounts for those uncanny noises," said Johnny Bull. "We thought you were some quaint zoological specimen, by the sounds you made!"

"By the look of him, I should say he's the giddy missing link!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "You ought to see your face, Squiffy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The unfortunate Squiff was released from his bonds, and he staggered to his feet.

"Ow! I'm sore!" he groaned, stamping up and down. "I don't think my legs are broken, after all! Well, what the dickens are you cackling at?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Many other juniors had been brought to the spot by the uproar, and they roared with merriment. The only fellow who couldn't see anything funny in the thing was Squiff himself. He glared round at the grinning juniors.

"Well, you're a nice lot of bounders!" he exclaimed. "You chuck me downstairs, and half kill me, and then cackle like a lot of fatheaded old hens!"

"Well, it's your own fault, Squiffy, for packing yourself in that old trunk and painting your face!" chuckled Bob Cherry. "What did you do it for?"

"Ass! Do you suppose I did this for fun?" growled Squiff. "It was that rotter Coker and his study-mates! They piled on me in the Close!"

"Oh, it was Coker & Co.!"

"My hat!"

"Well, they did the job pretty thoroughly, I must say!" grinned Peter Todd. "This is one for Coker, you chaps! The insult will have to be avenged! After all, Squiff's a Remove chap, and, although he's as funny as a giddy pantomime, it doesn't alter the fact that Coker's dared to lay hands upon the sacred person of a Remove fellow!"

"It was all right until those giddy asses hurled me downstairs!" growled Squiff. "I feel as if I've been through a blessed mangle! Ow! I'm aching all over!"

"Cave!" hissed Hazeldene suddenly. "Loder's just crossing the Close, and if he sees you like that, Squiff, he'll skin you!"

And Squiff made himself scarce. When Loder entered the Hall he found the juniors still grinning, but there was no apparent reason for their hilarity, and the unpopular prefect went on his way, with a frown.

Later on, in No. 1 Study, Squiff related his adventures. Now that he had cleaned the grease-paint off, he felt himself again, and grinned with the rest. After all, Coker & Co. had scored a complete success.

# ANSWERS

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"Well, the only thing is to avenge it immediately!" said Squiff determinedly. "The bounders have got to be japed thoroughly! I've thought of a ripping wheeze, if we can only work it, but it'll mean risking a caning each."

"Oh, that's all right!" said Bob Cherry. "We take those risks every day."

"Yes; but this'll land us into a serious scrape if we're bowled out," went on Squiff. "Not that I expect we shall be bowled out, because we shall do the thing jolly carefully. It'll mean staying awake to-night until after ten, and then creeping out of the dorm—"

"It's a dormitory rag, then?"

"Not exactly. Listen!" said Squiff.

And he outlined his scheme. The Famous Five chuckled as they heard it, and promised Coker & Co. a warm time of it that night.

But the great men of the Fifth were destined to remain undisturbed, for circumstances altered the plans of the Removites—circumstances which drove the jape from their minds, and caused them to alter their plans altogether.

It came thus:

Harry Wharton & Co. went to bed with the full intention of keeping awake until the school clock struck 10.15; then they were to quietly arise, slip into their clothes, and sally out on their expedition. Nobody else in the Remove had been told of the arrangement, for the wheeze would have been impracticable had it been made common knowledge. It would be risky enough for the Famous Five and Squiff, and if the scheme had been generally known many other juniors would have wanted to have a hand in it.

Wingate came in and saw lights out, and the Remove dormitory soon settled down to sleep. But there were six juniors, at least, who had no intention of settling down for the night yet awhile. But, in spite of their good intentions, it was a difficult matter to keep awake when the dormitory was so quiet and still. Four of the Remove heroes, at least, dozed off, knowing well enough that Harry Wharton would keep awake and arouse them at the appointed time. It was Squiff and Wharton who did not allow themselves to doze, and their beds were next to one another.

Ten o'clock chimed out from the old tower, and the dormitory remained silent and peaceful, except for Billy Bunter's unmusical snores.

Two minutes past, and then a creak sounded as someone moved in bed. A moment later, from one end of the dormitory, a dim figure slipped out of bed.

Harry Wharton and Squiff saw him, and they raised their heads curiously. For they knew that the form was not that of one of their chums, and they could hardly guess who it was at first. Wharton made a sign to Squiff to keep still, and the pair watched curiously.

"By gum, it's Smithy!" murmured Wharton to himself. "Of course, nobody else would be out of bed up that corner of the dorm. But what on earth is Smithy doing? He doesn't know anything about our plans, and he's evidently on some little game of his own. My only hat! What can it mean?"

Harry Wharton was rather startled, and not a little perturbed. He hardly thought it possible that Vernon-Smith was returning to his old habits, and that he was again bent on one of his old nocturnal expeditions to the village public-house, there to play billiards or cards. The Bounder had finished with all that sort of thing, and had turned over a new leaf. It would be an unsavoury surprise to find that he had gone back to his former disgraceful ways.

"I can't think that," murmured Harry Wharton, with a frown. "And yet it was jolly queer of Smithy going off with Ponsonby like that to-day. It almost looks as though they arranged to meet somewhere to-night. By jingo, we shall have to let old Coker off to-night, and devote our attentions to the Bounder!"

Vernon-Smith made no noise, and in a very short while he had finished dressing.

Then he stole very quietly to the door and vanished. He closed the door so quietly that it was some moments before Harry Wharton realised that the Bounder had gone. Then he sat up quickly, and Squiff followed his example.

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"By George!" said Squiff.

"Did you see him?" breathed Harry.

"Yes, rather!"

"See who it was?"

"Yes! Smithy!"

"I'm going to follow him!" said Wharton grimly. "Come on! Let's slip into our togs and see where the Bounder's off to! That jape on Coker can wait!"

Squiff slipped out of bed.

"How about the others?" he breathed.

"They're asleep, the lazy bounders!" muttered Wharton. "I say, Nugent, Inky, Bob! Oh, rats! They're all asleep. Better let 'em alone."

"That's what I was thinking," said Squiff. "Two of us will be quite enough to follow Smithy. I say, do you think he made arrangements with Ponsonby to go somewhere to-night?"

Harry Wharton set his lips.

"That's what I was thinking," he said. "My hat, I don't like to think that the Bounder's turned rotter again, but it's jolly suspicious!"

Squiff nodded.

"Rather!" he murmured, as he slipped rapidly into his clothes. "It can't be some jape, because nobody would work off a jape single-handed. Smithy's got something else on—something he doesn't want the fellows to know about."

"Well, it's up to us to bowl him out!" said Wharton. "If we cop him in the very act, we might be able to shove the brake on him before he goes too far. Buck up, or we shall be too late!"

"I'm ready!"

"Come on, then!"

And the two juniors stole out of the dormitory, leaving Bob Cherry, Nugent, and the others peacefully slumbering. Out in the passage Harry Wharton laid his hand on Squiff's arm, and pinched it warningly.

"We shall have to go jolly easy," he muttered. "It's only just after ten, and none of the masters have gone to bed. I expect there are some prefects about, too. Smithy's bound to have made for the little window at the end of the Remove passage, if he's broken bounds."

They arrived at the window without mishap, and Wharton's surmise proved to be correct. The catch was unfastened, proving that the Bounder had made his exit from the School House. From a distant part of the House voices could be heard, but the juniors didn't hesitate. They slipped out of the window without a sound, and closed it after them.

It was a risky business, for severe punishment would have resulted had the Removites been discovered. And they weren't out of the wood yet, for the Close had to be crossed, and it was quite on the cards that they should run full-tilt into a master.

But Harry Wharton and Squiff were game; they knew that they were bound on an honourable errand. For if they succeeded in bringing the Bounder to a full stop before he plunged into disgrace, they would have done something worth all the trouble and risk.

They started to cross the Close; then Wharton grabbed his companion's arm.

"Down," he hissed—"flat on the ground!"

They dropped, and only just in time, for a figure appeared, and a bright glow gleamed in the darkness. One of the masters was having a last breath of fresh air and a cigar before retiring.

"Old Quelchy, I expect!" breathed Wharton.

"Looks like Prout, by what I can see."

"Blow him!" murmured Harry impatiently. "Why can't he buzz in?"

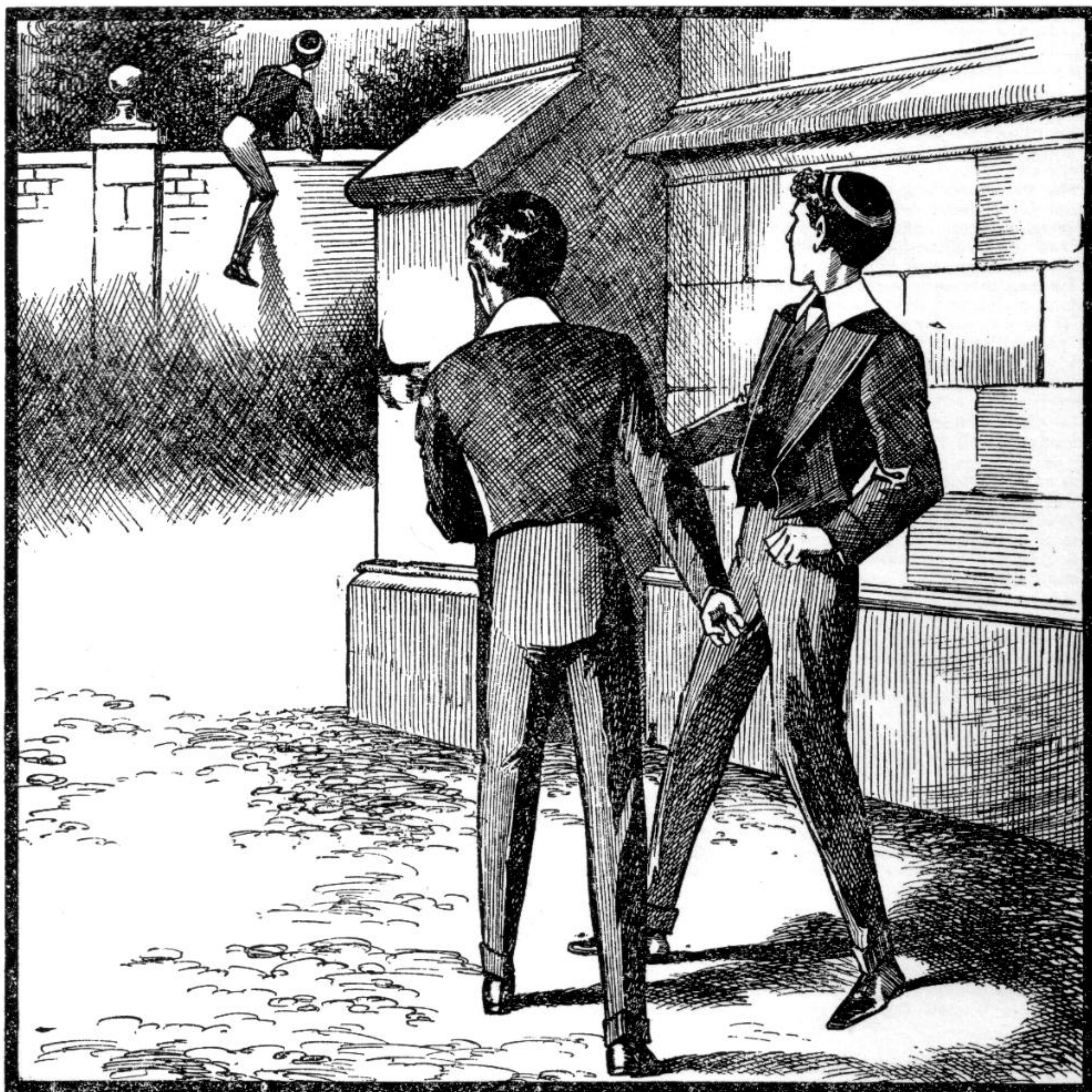
"Why not ask him to?" grinned Squiff.

But Mr. Prout, the master of the Fifth, remained in the Close for several minutes longer; then, to the juniors' relief, threw his cigar away, and turned in. The door shut to, and Wharton and Squiff rose cautiously to their feet.

"Might as well go back to the dorm," growled Harry Wharton. "I expect the Bounder's down at Friardale by now; he's had time. Just like old Prouty to mess things up!"

"Well, we'll go— My hat, look there!"





Squiff pointed excitedly at a dim form which was clambering over the school wall. "The Bounder!" ejaculated Harry Wharton, under his breath. (See Chapter 4.)

Squiff pointed excitedly.  
A dim form was clambering swiftly over the school wall.

"The Bounder!" ejaculated Harry Wharton, under his breath.

#### THE FIFTH CHAPTER. Out of Bounds!

**S**QUIFF gave a chuckle.  
"Of course it's the Bounder!" he said softly.  
"You can see what's happened. I expect he just got to the wall when Prout came out. Of course, he couldn't climb over the giddy wall while Prout was there, so he waited, like us, for the coast to clear."

"Well, we've got him now!" said Wharton grimly.  
They nimbly scaled the wall. Once in the lane, they could see Vernon-Smith's figure hurrying swiftly towards

the village in the gloom of the night. Apparently, he had no suspicion that he was being followed, for he did not once look behind him.

"We've got to catch him before he gets to Friardale," said Wharton. "If he once gets into the habit of gambling and card-playing again he'll be finished! It's up to us to save him from ruin. He's been going straight for a long time now, and he's got to keep going straight, whether he likes it or not! I thought the ass had done with this sort of thing!"

"It's Ponsonby, I expect," said Squiff. "Ponsonby's been jawing him, and persuaded him to have a flutter to-night."

"Ponsonby ought to be boiled in oil!" growled Harry.  
They were getting nearer to the Bounder now, and the Captain of the Remove considered the advisability of making a rush. If they did, Vernon-Smith would probably be collared before he had time to know what had happened. But, on the other hand, he could easily

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bolt into the thick woods bordering the road, and give his pursuers the slip altogether.

He seemed quite unaware of the juniors behind him.

"Better get within twenty yards, then jump on him!" whispered Squiff.

Harry Wharton nodded.

But the Bounder upset that arrangement by turning into the footpath that led through the woods. He was over the stile in a moment, and had disappeared without even a glance round him.

"Hang it all, we shall lose him," muttered Wharton. "Come on!"

They ran now, but when they reached the stile and paused for a moment, all was still. Only the breeze in the trees sounded. The Bounder had vanished like some genie of the Arabian Nights.

"Blow it!" growled Wharton crossly. "He's gone!"

"He can't have gone far, that's certain," said the Australian junior briskly. "He was here two ticks ago, and if he was walking through the wood we should hear him plainly."

They listened intently.

"Not a giddy sound!" said Squiff. "The beast's hiding!"

"Yes, he's as deep as ever," said Harry Wharton. "He knows jolly well that we sha'n't be able to find him so long as he keeps still. It's as dark as pitch under the trees, and we should never spot him."

"But he didn't know we were following."

Harry Wharton gritted his teeth.

"Didn't know!" he exclaimed. "This looks like it, doesn't it?"

"Well, it's rather queer," admitted Squiff.

"He knew we were on his track from the first, I expect," said Wharton grimly. "And we allowed him to slip right away under our very eyes! What an ass I was not to rush him before he got to this footpath! But I thought that he was in the dark with regard to us."

"He's in the dark now!" grunted Squiff.

"Very likely he's only ten yards away, and can hear all we're saying," went on Harry Wharton. "Well, it's no good, old man. We're diddled!"

"Fairly dished."

"And the Bounder's escaped."

"Well, I vote we have a squint round before we toddle off," suggested Squiff. "Never say die, you know. We might dig the silly ass up any moment. If he is somewhere close by, he daren't move while we're so near, and we might fall on him."

But a lengthy search proved fruitless. The Bounder had evidently been hiding in an adjacent thicket, and had slipped away while the juniors were searching in other directions. They emerged on the road at last, and gazed at one another crossly.

"All this blessed fag for nothing!" growled Harry Wharton.

"Rotten!"

"And even now we don't know what the Bounder's game is," went on Wharton. "Of course, there's not much doubt about it. He's relapsed into his old ways, and has gone to the beastly pub with Ponsonby; there's no other possible explanation for it. The Bounder wouldn't break bounds after lights out for any honest object."

"Well, we'd better buzz back," suggested Squiff. "No sense in hanging about here when we ought to be getting our beauty sleep. We'll interview Smithy in the morning."

And they returned to Greyfriars in an irritable frame of mind. They succeeded in reaching the Remove dormitory without mishap, and stole towards their beds. Their chums were fast asleep, and Squiff and Harry Wharton weren't long in slipping between the sheets. Squiff was asleep in two minutes, but the captain of the Remove lay awake for some time, for he was worried and anxious.

When the rising-bell rang out on the following morning, Wharton was the first to sit up in bed. His gaze was directed towards the Bounder's bed, and Vernon-Smith raised himself on his elbows. He looked heavy and tired, and there were rings round his eyes.

Wharton looked at him grimly.

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"Mornin'!" murmured Vernon-Smith languidly.

"I want a word with you, Smithy, when we get down," said Harry Wharton shortly.

"Anything to oblige, old chap," said the Bounder.

The Famous Five were the first down, and Squiff joined them a moment later on the School House steps. Wharton was telling his chums why the jape against Coker had been allowed to slide. He related what had occurred overnight.

"Looks jolly rotten," said Bob Cherry, knitting his brows. "Smithy's a silly ass if he's allowed Ponsonby to talk him over."

"Well, it looks as though he had," exclaimed Nugent. "Did you notice him this morning?"

"Rather!" replied Johnny Bull. "He looked awfully groggy."

"The grogfulness was terrific!"

"And chaps don't look like that unless they've been drinking and smoking," said Nugent.

"Unless they've been working hard half the night," remarked Wharton. "But the Bounder hasn't been doing that, that's certain. I'm going to question him when he comes down."

"Might as well save your breath," said Bob Cherry. "Smithy won't admit anything. I don't want to be too jolly hasty, but things look black against him. Where did he go to last night?"

"The Cross Keys, of course," grunted Johnny Bull.

"We don't know," said Bob slowly. "We've got no proof."

"All the proof I want," said Nugent. "I think——"

"Look out, he's coming!"

Vernon-Smith strolled out of the School House.

"Hallo, wherefore those serious looks?" he inquired cheerfully.

The Famous Five and Squiff eyed the Bounder in silence.

"Lost your tongues?" asked Vernon-Smith.

"No!" replied Wharton. "Look here, Smithy, we want to talk to you."

"All serene. Fire ahead!" said the Bounder coolly. "Let's go over in a quiet corner if it's anything private. Banter's just coming out."

The seven juniors found a quiet spot, and Vernon-Smith looked at the others with a hard, cynical smile. He guessed what was coming, and was not in the least perturbed.

"Well?" he said.

"It isn't well, it's just the opposite!" growled Squiff. "Look here, Smithy. I've always looked upon you as a decent chap."

"Thanks awfully!"

"But now I'm not so certain," went on Squiff. "Last night——"

"Wait a minute," interrupted Harry Wharton. "It was yesterday afternoon that the thing started. You went off with Ponsonby, Smithy, and wouldn't explain why. We took your word that everything was all right; and yet, after lights-out, you got up and stole out of the house."

"Come to that, you did the same!" said the Bounder calmly.

"Yes, but we were only following you," said Squiff.

"We wanted to see what your game was," pursued Wharton. "You've been a thoroughly decent chap lately, Smithy, and we don't want to see you go to the dogs again. We want to pull you up before you go too far."

"Very kind of you, I'm sure."

"Don't be flippant over it," said Harry Wharton sharply. "It's a serious matter, and you know it. You were out last night—goodness knows for how long—but you look jolly rotten this morning. I suppose you admit that you were out?"

"Considering that you and Squiff followed me to the stile, there's no sense in denying it," said the Bounder coolly. "Yes, I was out. Any more questions, or does the lecture continue?"

"I wish you'd be serious," said Wharton, biting his lip.

"There's nothing to be serious about," said Vernon-Smith calmly.



"You gave us the slip," went on Harry, "and went off somewhere."

"Quite right."

"Where did you go to?"

"The Cross Keys, of course," growled Johnny Bull. Vernon-Smith laughed.

"Did you see me there?" he asked.

"No," said Bull grimly, "but I can guess!"

"Then your guesser must have gone out of order, old chap!" he chuckled. "I didn't go near the Cross Keys!"

"Is that the truth, Smithy?" asked Harry Wharton.

"Yes."

"Honour bright?"

The Bounder hesitated.

"It's the truth," he repeated, setting his lips.

The Removites regarded him grimly.

"Well, we won't press the matter," said Wharton. "Now, did you meet Ponsonby again?"

"That's my bizney!"

"Look here, Smithy, we don't want to quarrel," said Bob Cherry. "Why don't you answer our questions—why can't you be straightforward?"

"I don't choose to be. I suppose I can please myself?"

"Yes, but—"

"The best thing you chaps can do is to shut up," went on the Bounder, suddenly looking grim. "If you question me until Doomsday, I sha'n't answer any. If I like to go out at night, I don't see what the dickens it's got to do with anybody else. You know I was out last night, and that's all you're likely to know. You won't get any information from me!"

"Then you admit—"

"I don't admit anything."

"Oh, what's the good of all this?" growled Squiff. "Smithy won't tell us anything, that's clear. Better let him alone, and see that he doesn't get into further mischief in future."

Vernon-Smith grinned cynically.

"I can look after myself, thanks," he said, with just the trace of a sneer in his voice.

He walked away, leaving six wrathful juniors glaring after him. The Famous Five and Squiff were properly wild with the Bounder. His refusal to explain his mysterious escapade made them all the more certain that he had recommenced the habits which they had thought he had dropped for good.

Many juniors noticed the Bounder's tired looks, and there was much wondering. In the Form-room that morning Mr. Quelch was forced to call Vernon-Smith sharply to attention several times.

"What is the matter with you, Vernon-Smith?" he said at last.

"Nothing, sir!"

"If there is nothing the matter with you, then you have no excuse for inattention," said Mr. Quelch tartly. "The next time I have to speak to you I shall punish you!"

"Very good, sir!"

And Vernon-Smith bucked up. The other Removites regarded him curiously, and wondered why he was looking so sleepy. They did not know of the episode of the previous night, and thought that the Bounder was not exactly well.

Harry Wharton & Co. had no proof that their suspicions were correct, and so they said nothing to enlighten the others. If Vernon-Smith had really taken the downward path again the fellows would soon find it out for themselves.

## THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

### The Bounder's Letter!

**W**HERE'S Smithy?"

Harry Wharton asked that question, and he asked it in a decidedly irritable tone of voice. Peter Todd, whom the Remove skipper had addressed, turned from the window in his study and looked at his visitor's grim face.

"What's the trouble?" he asked.

"Where's Smithy?" repeated Harry Wharton. "Have you seen him?"

"Lots of times, my son!"

"Oh, don't be funny! I'm in a hurry!"

"Well, it's no good coming to my study in your nasty temper!" said Peter genially. "How the dickens should

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I know where Smithy is? I'm not his keeper—I don't carry him in my waistcoat-pocket!"

"I can't find him anywhere!" growled Wharton, who was attired for football, and had a ball under his arm. "Where can the silly ass be?"

"Ask me another," said Todd. "You seem terribly anxious to find the Bounder."

"You chump! Isn't it a half-holiday?"

"I believe so."

"And isn't the Remove playing Trumper & Co. of Courtfield this afternoon?" growled the captain of the Remove. "The team's been weakened by Nugent whacking his knee. It's nothing much, but he can't play this afternoon. There's Tom Brown, too—he's not playing. I reckoned we should just stand a chance of pulling the match off with the Bounder playing. He's a ripping footballer!"

"Well, why can't he play?" asked Peter Todd.

"You ass! He can play, but I can't find him!" exclaimed Wharton warmly.

"Oh, he must be somewhere about."

"Well, it's nearly time to kick off, and nobody seems to know where he is," said Wharton. "I'll go and have another search."

"Right-ho! I'm just ready—I'll come with you!" exclaimed Todd.

They hastened down to the entrance-hall, where several juniors were collected.

"Seen Smithy, you chaps?" asked Harry Wharton.

"No—not since dinner, at least," replied Mark Linley. None of the others had seen Vernon-Smith.

Squiff came in from the Close, looking puffed.

"No luck!" he panted. "I've been scooting round for ten minutes, but I can't find him. I reckon we shall have to kick off without him. It's jolly rotten, but he's greased off somewhere! Who shall we shove in as a substitute?"

"I don't know!" grunted Wharton irritably. "My hat! I'll give Smithy a talking-to when he does show up! It's a rotten trick to leave us in the lurch like this! He didn't say a word, and I thought he'd turn up in time for the match."

"We'll bump him till he's blue!" said Squiff cheerfully. "But that doesn't alter matters, does it? Trumper's waiting for us, and we can't keep him hanging about all the afternoon. Shove a reserve in Smithy's place, and let's start."

"It's the only thing to do," said Todd. "Still, it's queer about Vernon-Smith."

"Hallo! What's that?" asked Fisher T. Fish, the American junior, coming in. "Did I hear you talking about Smithy?"

"Yes. Have you seen him?"

"I guess so!"

"Oh, good!" exclaimed Wharton, in relief. "You're the very chap we're looking for, Fishy!"

"I guess—"

"Don't guess so much—tell us where the Bounder is!"

"I don't know where the galoot is," said Fish. "I guess—"

"Don't know where he is? You said—"

"I said I'd seen him!" exclaimed Fisher T. Fish. "That's dead true! I saw the jay half an hour ago, as he was going out of the gates. He asked me to hand you word that he wouldn't be playing this afternoon."

"Oh!"

Harry Wharton frowned angrily.

"Did he say why?" he asked.

"Yep—or, rather, he didn't exactly give details," replied Fish. "He just said he'd got an important engagement. I guess the mugwump has gone off on the ran-dan. Say, I'll take his place in the team."

"No you won't!" interrupted Wharton promptly. "We want a footballer!"

"Wal, ain't I a footballer?" demanded Fish.

"My dear chap, I believe you've got some delusion to that effect," said Squiff gently. "But it's only your little way. You're like the Germans, you know—you're over-confident—you've got too much swank! The Germans think they're better soldiers than the British or French:



but they're not! You think you're a better footballer than us; but you're not!"

Fisher T. Fish glared.

"If you call me a German——" he exclaimed.

"I didn't—you're only a Yankee!" said Squiff sweetly.

Harry Wharton chuckled.

"Oh, come on!" he said. "Trumper and his men will be tearing their hair!"

"Look here!" shouted Fisher T. Fish.

"Sorry! Can't stop!"

"I guess——"

"Guess away, old man!"

"You all-fired jays!" roared Fish. "You ramping galoots!"

But Squiff and Harry Wharton had gone, and Fish turned an indignant face towards the other juniors, who were grinning broadly.

"I guess I'll make those insulting mugwumps sit up after the match—just a few!" he said warmly. "I guess a real live American is a heap better than a member of this benighted, effete, smouldering old country! Yep, sir, you bet your sweet life!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Fisher T. Fish snorted, and walked away. Meanwhile, Harry Wharton had placed a reserve in the team, and the match with Courtfield Council School had commenced. Wharton was feeling extremely sore, for this match was rather an important one, as far as the Remove was concerned. For Vernon-Smith to calmly walk off and leave the team in the lurch was altogether too thick. He was a first-class player, and he knew that the team was already weakened.

Wharton told himself that he would give the Bounder a good talking-to when he did show up. The Remove captain was practically certain, now, that Vernon-Smith had recommenced his old habits. The previous night he had again broken bounds after lights out. Wharton had said nothing to him; but it was noticed that the Famous Five were very reserved in their attitude towards the Bounder. And now, when an important match was on, he had again taken himself off—probably to play cards and gamble with Ponsonby & Co. of Highcliffe.

There was adequate reason for Harry Wharton to be angry, especially as the match went badly for the Remove. At half-time Trumper & Co. had scored two goals, whilst the Remove had none to their credit. Two—nil! It was galling!

The game went on, but the Removites did not work together as usual. Vernon-Smith's absence was felt keenly, and there was no doubt that he was the cause of the Remove's bad luck. For Wharton was not in the best of tempers, and he admitted making some mistakes. This, too, was the result of the Bounder's absence. Squiff scored a goal soon after the whistle went for the second half, and this put some heart into the Removites. They played up with more dash, and Trumper and his men had all their work cut out to hold their own. Five minutes later Wharton headed the ball into the net, and there was a roar.

"Goal!"

"That's two to us!" panted Bob Cherry. "My hat! I thought we were going to be whopped hands down! We're equal now!"

"Won't be so bad if we end up in a draw," said Wharton hopefully.

But when the teams lined up again Trumper & Co. were looking grim. Things were all in their favour, and they meant to win the match. Things had been so easy in the first half that they had got a little careless. Now they set their teeth, and played the game with great vigour.

Much as the Removites hoped for a win—or, at least, a draw—they were doomed to disappointment. When the whistle blew at last the score stood three—two. Greyfriars had lost the match! And it was all the Bounder's fault!

There was no doubt about that. Even Trumper admitted that his team would have lost if Vernon-Smith had been playing.

Harry Wharton waited about in the Close after the visitors had gone, but there was no sign of the Bounder.

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So he went in to No. 1 Study, where his chums were having tea.

"He hasn't turned up yet," he said grimly.

"Never mind!" said Squiff cheerfully. "Sit down and have some tea, my son! No sense in crying over spilt milk! We'll attend to the Bounder later on!"

"Yes, but——"

"But rats!" interrupted Squiff. "The match is lost, and growling won't alter it! Next time, though, we'll whack Trumper & Co. hollow—on their own ground, too!"

There was no damping the spirits of Sampson Quincy Ifley Field, and the Famous Five were soon chatting cheerfully over their tea. After all, there was no disgrace in the defeat; their team had been hopelessly weakened, and they had acquitted themselves well, all things considered.

But Vernon-Smith would have to give a good account of himself.

After tea, Harry Wharton, Squiff, and one or two others went down into the Hall, and made inquiries. The Bounder was still out. It was dusk now, and the Close was dim and cold. What could Smithy be doing all this time?

The Famous Five did their prep, and again appeared in the entrance-hall. Squiff was there, and he shook his head.

"Not back yet?" he said. "It's locking-up in five minutes——"

"Here he is!" ejaculated Johnny Bull, who was peering out into the pitchy Close.

An overcoated figure mounted the steps, and regarded the juniors calmly.

It was the Bounder.

For a moment there was silence, and the late arrival laughed.

"You're all looking mighty solemn," he said. "What's the trouble?"

Harry Wharton stepped forward.

"I want an explanation, Smithy!" he said grimly.

"An explanation?" repeated Vernon-Smith. "An explanation of what?"

"You know well enough!" growled Bob Cherry. "What about the match with Courtfield?"

"Oh, the match!"

"Yes, the match!" repeated Wharton. "You know well enough that you had no right to sneak off, and leave me to find out at the last moment that you were absent! You could, at least, have warned me that you had an engagement!"

"I'm sorry!" said the Bounder. "As a matter of fact, I forgot all about the match!"

"Forgot it?" ejaculated Squiff.

"Yes. You may not believe me——"

"We don't!" said Johnny Bull bluntly.

"But it's the truth!" said Vernon-Smith coolly. "I completely forgot that I was booked to play against Courtfield this afternoon. I'm awfully sorry, Wharton! I hope you won!"

"We lost!" growled Bob Cherry. "Three—two!"

"And it's all your fault, Smithy!"

"The faultfulness is terrific!"

The Bounder looked concerned.

"I'm really sorry——" he began.

"And so you ought to be!" interrupted Harry Wharton.

"Look here, Smithy! I don't want to pry into your private affairs, but I think it's up to you to explain why you left us in the lurch this afternoon. Where did you go? I think we have a right to know, under the circumstances!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Where did you go, Smithy?"

"Cross Keys——"

"Dry up!" muttered Wharton sharply, giving Johnny Bull a dig. "Let's hear what he says."

"Oh, he'll tell fibs!" grunted Bull, who was very suspicious of the Bounder.

Vernon-Smith set his lips.

"I had an engagement," he said shortly. "That's all!"

"An engagement? Who with?"

"That's my affair!"



"Look here, Smithy!" said Wharton concernedly. "We've been getting on jolly well lately, and I don't want to begin hostilities, as of old. Why can't you answer our questions?"

"I can, but I don't choose to!" said the Bounder, who looked tired and heavy.

"I suppose it's Ponsonby?" asked Bob Cherry.

Vernon-Smith gritted his teeth.

"Go and eat coke!" he said roughly.

"Have you been out with Ponsonby & Co.?" asked Wharton sharply.

"Mind your own bizney!"

And the Bounder jerked his handkerchief out of his pocket. Billy Bunter came out of the common-room, and suddenly made a dive towards the floor as Vernon-Smith moved away.

"Smithy's dropped something!" he exclaimed. "I say, let's see——"

"Give it to me!" said Squiff, taking a letter from Bunter's fat hand.

"Oh, really, Squiffy——"

"I say, Smithy, you've dropped something," said Squiff quietly.

The Bounder turned round, then he snapped his teeth together as he saw what Squiff had in his hand. In three strides Vernon-Smith was on the spot, and he snatched the letter away from Squiff.

"That's mine!" he panted.

"I know it is!" said Squiff, in surprise. "No need to snatch, though!"

The Bounder breathed hard, and thrust the letter into his pocket. Then he turned his back on the juniors, and walked quickly upstairs.

"Well, my only hat!"

"What's the matter with him?"

"That must have been a jolly private letter!"

"Love letter, perhaps," suggested Nugent.

Harry Wharton looked thoughtful.

"I don't like the look of it," he murmured to his chums. "Of course it's none of our bizney, but Smithy was jolly upset about that letter. He was afraid we should see the wording of it."

"Rats! I'm fed up with Smithy!" said Bob Cherry crossly. "All this fatheaded secrecy is getting on my nerves. If he likes to have rotten letters, let him have 'em! I'm blessed if I want to pry!"

And the others nodded in agreement. All the same, their curiosity had been aroused, and their suspicions, too.

What did that letter contain?

## THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

### Bunter Means to Know!

**B**ILLY BUNTER was uneasy.

There was no particular reason why Bunter should be uneasy, but he rolled up the Remove passage in a decidedly disturbed frame of mind. The fact was, he was very anxious to see the contents of the Bounder's letter, which he had picked up, and which Squiff had snatched away from him. The Owl of the Remove dearly liked prying into other people's affairs, and once he set his mind on a certain thing he generally managed to accomplish his desire, no matter how dishonourable the method.

Bunter's curiosity was such that he saw no wrong in opening other people's letters, and reading the contents. In fact, he considered it a perfectly legitimate means of gaining information. He badly wanted to see the inside of the letter which the Bounder had dropped, and he was very uneasy.

"Squiff's a rotter!" he muttered, as he lounged up the Remove passage. "If he hadn't called the Bounder back we should have seen that giddy letter. Smithy was regular startled when he spotted it in Squiff's paw. I'll bet it's something jolly private."

Bunter stood in the passage, thinking. He was wondering how he could get that letter out of Vernon-Smith's pocket, and read the contents. The only way seemed to be to wait until bed-time, and take the letter while Vernon-Smith was asleep. The only drawback was that Bunter himself would have to keep awake until the whole Remove was slumbering.

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A study door opened down the passage, and Vernon-Smith appeared.

As soon as he spotted Bunter, however, he backed into his study again.

"Hallo! What's he up to now?" muttered the fat junior suspiciously. "I don't believe in the Bounder! He's been pretending he's turned goody-goody, and he's just as much a rotter as he ever was! That's my opinion!"

After which, of course, nothing was to be said.

Bunter glanced up and down the corridor, and then crept silently forward. Considering his bulk he progressed wonderfully softly, and paused outside Vernon-Smith's door. Then he bent down quickly, and applied his eye to the keyhole.

At first he saw nothing but the Bounder's back; then Vernon-Smith moved, and the spying junior had a clear view of the table. He saw Vernon-Smith take the mysterious letter from his pocket, and place it carefully between the leaves of a book.

Then, without any warning, he turned out the gas.

"My hat! He's coming out!" gasped Bunter.

He jerked himself upright, and hastened along the passage. But Vernon-Smith, coming out of his study, saw him just before he turned the corner. The Bounder frowned.

"Bunter!" he shouted.

"Eh? Did you call me, Smithy?" exclaimed Bunter nervously.

"Yes, I did! Come here!"

"I—I'm in a hurry——"

"Don't tell lies!" said the Bounder grimly. "Come here!"

"Oh, really, I don't see——"

Vernon-Smith gritted his teeth, and strode forward. Bunter made an effort to escape, but the Bounder grasped his shoulder.

"What have you been hanging about the passage for?" he demanded. "I saw you here a few minutes ago. Spying on somebody, as usual, I suppose?"

Bunter wriggled.

"Oh, really, Smithy——"

"Were you sticking your nose into somebody else's business, you fat rotter?"

"No-o! I—I was only strolling along to my study!" gasped Bunter.

"Sure?"

"Ye-e-s, of course, Smithy!"

"Well, buzz off!" growled Vernon-Smith. "I'm not sure, but I believe you're up to some rotten game or other. You'd better clear off while you're safe! If I catch you spying I'll lick you till you can't see!"

He released his hold, and Billy Bunter scurried off with a gasp. He paused when he reached the entrance-hall.

"My only topper! I thought Smithy had copped me!" he murmured. "But he doesn't know that I saw him shove that letter in the book! It's because of that letter that he's so anxious!"

The Bounder had certainly displayed some anxiety lest Bunter should spy, and it was obvious that he was anxious on his own account. He followed Bunter down the stairs, and entered the common-room. He evidently did not suspect that Bunter knew the whereabouts of the letter.

Bunter's little eyes gleamed behind his big spectacles.

"Now's my chance!" he muttered. "It's my duty! Smithy's up to something rotten, and it's my duty to show him up!"

And Billy Bunter proceeded to do his duty. He undoubtedly had warped ideas on the subject of duty—for that which he now did other fellows would have called by a very different name. He hastened up to the Bounder's study, slipped in, and took the letter from between the leaves of the book. It was not necessary to light the gas to perform this operation, for enough light entered the study from the passage.

"Got it!" muttered Bunter triumphantly.

He closed Vernon-Smith's door hurriedly, and rolled along to No. 7 Study. It was empty, much to Bunter's satisfaction—Peter Todd and Tom Dutton were elsewhere.



# THE GREYFRIARS HERALD, 1<sup>d</sup>. 2

Edited by the Chums of the Remove Form.



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He lit the gas, and then gazed curiously at the object in his hand.

It was an ordinary envelope, unstamped, and without any writing upon it. It had already been torn open, and Bunter inserted two fat fingers into it, and withdrew the contents. This was a half-sheet of quarto paper, roughly torn, with a few lines of typewriting upon it. There was no name or signature in ink, and there was nothing to show whom the letter was addressed to. Since it belonged to the Bounder, however, there was no denying that it was his.

The wording on the paper ran thus:

"I must see you to-night. You'd better come to the usual place at eleven o'clock. No sense in letting these things hang on. You lost two quid over the last game of nap, and you owe me five besides. I want four to-night at least. You've got it by now, according to what you told me, so don't fail. We can have another little flutter, too. I've got hold of a regular green 'un, with heaps of cash, and we'll relieve him of it inside two hours. Don't miss the fun. Haste—P."

Billy Bunter's eyes nearly bulged from his head.

"My—my only sainted grandmother!" he ejaculated.

The letter fluttered in his hand.

"This proves that the Bounder's still at his old games with a vengeance!" exclaimed Bunter breathlessly. "He's going to meet somebody to-night, too! 'P'! Why, that must stand for Ponsonby, of course! My hat, won't the fellows be surprised when they see this—won't they realise how the Bounder's deceived 'em!"

Bunter was so excited that he could hardly stand still. With such information in his

possession it was utterly impossible for him to keep it to himself. Even if he had been calm he would have let out hints to everybody he met. Now that he was excited he simply rushed out of the study, and made a bee-line for the common-room. It never entered his head that Harry Wharton & Co. might pile on him heavily for being so dishonourable as to annex the letter from Vernon-Smith's study, or that Vernon-Smith himself might exact summary vengeance for the betrayal.

Bunter's head was too full of his discovery to think of such details.

He burst into the common-room.

"I—I say, you fellows——"

"Shut up, Bunter!"

"Clear off!"

"Oh, really!" shouted Bunter excitedly. "I say, where's Smithy?"

"Gone out somewhere."

"Well, it doesn't matter—he'll find out soon enough!"

exclaimed Bunter. "He'll find out that we all know about his rotten gambling tricks! I've found something out——"

Peter Todd strode forward.

"Been spying, I suppose?" he grunted darkly. "Look here, Bunter——"

"I haven't been spying?" roared Billy Bunter. "I—I found this letter in the Remove passage—Smithy dropped it!"

"How do you know Smithy dropped it?"

"I—I saw him!"

"Then why didn't you give it to him?" asked Squiff.

"He—he went off before I could call him!" exclaimed Bunter, a little confused with the rather hostile reception he was receiving. "I've read it——"

## NEXT MONDAY. "HAZELDENE'S HONOUR!"

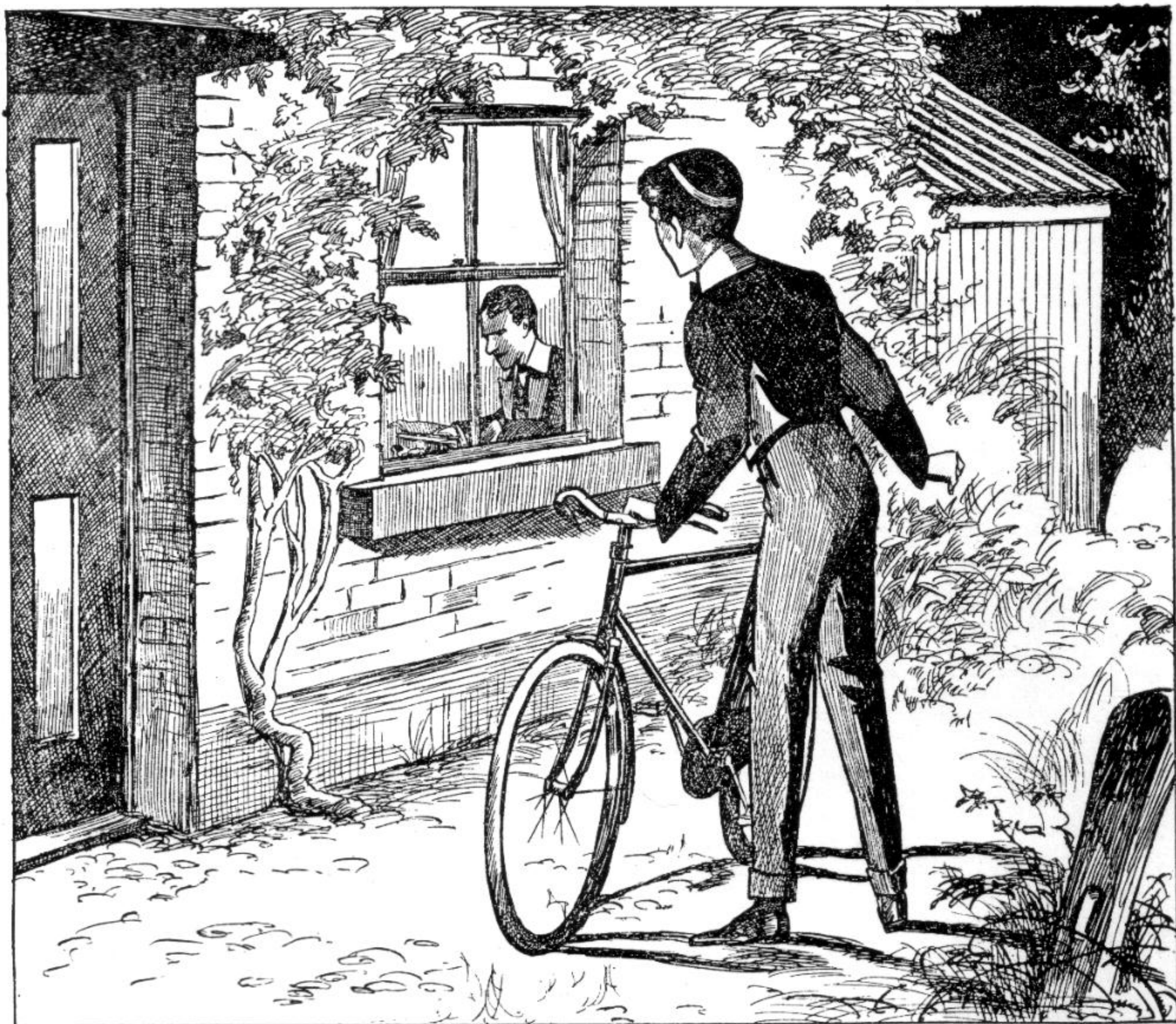
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Squiff limped down the path, and came alongside a lighted window. The blind was not drawn, and he paused for a moment and looked into the room. Then he uttered a startled gasp, and looked again, with staring eyes, for alone in the room was Vernon-Smith, and he was seated at a little table, operating a typewriter as fast as he could manipulate the keys. (See Chapter II.)

"Trust you for that!" said Harry Wharton scornfully. "It's from Ponsonby," went on Bunter quickly. "He wants Smithy to go and play cards with him to-night, after lights out. Smithy owes Ponsonby fifty quid! And to-night they're going to skin some poor chap of a hundred quid!"

"Rats! You're talking out of your hat!" growled Peter Todd.

"I'm not; it's all in the letter!"

"We'd better squint at it, and see what the ass means," said Harry Wharton. "If we don't learn the truth of it, Bunter will spread a yarn about the school that's nothing but lies! Hand over that letter, Bunter!"

Bunter handed it over readily.

"I may be a little wrong," he panted; "but the Bouncer's a fearful rotter, all the same! If the Head saw that note, Smithy would be sacked to-morrow!"

The Removites crowded round Wharton as he read the typewritten words.

"By gum!" muttered Squiff, who was looking over Harry's shoulder.

Wharton's face was set and grim.

"This is serious," he said. "As you've all seen me open it, I suppose I'd better read it out aloud."

"Yes, rather!"

"Let's hear it!"

Harry Wharton read the typewritten words aloud.

When he had done, there was a moment's silence, then a chorus of exclamations arose. All the Removites were looking serious.

"My hat!" exclaimed Tom Brown gravely. "It's a good job we got hold of that letter in time. If Bunter had shown it to a prefect it would have been all up with Smithy!"

"He'd have been sacked to-morrow!"

"Sare thing!" said Fisher T. Fish.

"And so he ought to be sacked!" said Snoop, with a sneer. "Smithy's a rotten hypocrite! Pretends to be reformed, and all that rot, and gambles on the quiet!"

Harry Wharton looked thoughtful.

"We'll hear what the Bouncer has to say," he said. "If this letter is his—we've only got Bunter's word to rely on—it'll prove that he's gone on the wrong road again. It's worse than gambling, according to this letter."

"Rather!" agreed Squiff. "Relieve a green 'un of his spare cash—eh? That means trickery and cheating. By gum, I can't believe the Bouncer's that sort of chap!"

Snoop chuckled unpleasantly.

"He's worse than you chaps ever suspected," he said,

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"Chucks up his old pals, and worms into your good books. Then, when you're not looking, he mixes with Ponsonby & Co., and leads a gay life! I'll bet he was at a race meeting while you were playing footer!"

"Oh, dry up!"

"Yes, you'd better keep a still tongue in your head, Snoop," said Bob Cherry threateningly. "We don't want any accusations that you can't substantiate!"

"Hadn't we better question Bunter—" began Squiff.

"No good!" growled Peter Todd, glaring at his fat study-mate. "The rotter's incapable of telling the truth! Very likely the letter isn't the Bounder's at all!"

"It is!" shouted Bunter excitedly. "I saw him shove it in the book—"

"Eh?"

"I—I mean, I saw him drop it in the Close—"

"It was in the passage a few minutes ago," said Todd disgustedly. "Shut up, Bunter, and don't tell any more lies! We'll go to Smithy, and ask him if this letter is his property. If it is, there's nothing more to be said. We'll deal with Bunter afterwards!"

"Oh, really, Toddy—"

But Billy Bunter was thrust aside, and the Famous Five, Squiff, and one or two others marched out of the common-room, with serious faces, in search of Vernon-Smith. They meant to find out the truth of the matter at once. As Bob Cherry remarked, there was nothing like striking while the giddy iron was hot.

## THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

### The Bounder Takes It Calmly!

"HALLO! What's this—a German invasion?"

Vernon-Smith made that remark as his study door burst open, and the crowd of Removites entered without waiting to be invited.

Their faces were grim and set, and Johnny Bull closed the door with a firm snap. The Bounder looked at his visitors in surprise, not unmixed with uneasiness. He could tell by their attitude that something unpleasant was brewing.

"Well," he said, "can't you speak?"

Harry Wharton handed the typewritten sheet to the Bounder.

"Is that yours?" he asked quietly.

Vernon-Smith glanced at it, then took it quickly. He cast a swift look at the book on his desk, and gnashed his teeth.

"How—how did you get this?" he panted furiously.

"Is it yours?" repeated Harry Wharton.

The Bounder hesitated for a moment. For a second it seemed to the Removites that he was going to break into a furious outburst, but he calmed himself, and sat in his chair with set lips. A cynical smile parted them before he spoke.

"What if it is mine?"

"That's not a direct answer!"

"So you want a direct answer—eh?" said the Bounder calmly. "Very well, this piece of paper is mine! It was in my possession before some rotten spy came and sneaked it! By Jove, I should like to lay hands on the cad!"

"It was Bunter," said Squiff.

"I might have guessed it," Vernon-Smith muttered. "I saw him hanging about the passage. He must have entered my study while I was away, and nosed round. I suppose you chaps made him give it to you?"

"No," replied Harry Wharton. "Bunter started telling a yarn about you, and we were bound to read the letter to find out the truth of it. We didn't want to read it, Smithy—you know that. You know us well enough by now!"

"Yes," said the Bounder quietly, "I think I do—I know you're not the chaps to make mischief. Thanks for bringing me the thing. It might have got into a prefect's hands, and that would have been awkward!"

"That's putting it rather mildly, isn't it?" asked Squiff. "It would have meant the sack, Smithy! I suppose the letter's from Ponsonby, of Highcliffe?"

Vernon-Smith started.

"Don't talk rot!" he muttered.

"Better own up, Smithy," said Johnny Bull bluntly.

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"I've thanked you for bringing me the paper," said Vernon-Smith grimly. "Is there anything else you want? Can I do anything for you?"

"Yes, you can give us an explanation," replied Harry Wharton. "We've all thought that you were a decent chap, Smithy—that you had dropped your rotten habits long ago. Now, this week, we find that you've started on the wrong road again."

"How sad!" said the Bounder coolly.

Wharton frowned.

"It's not a matter to treat lightly."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Vernon-Smith.

The Removites glared.

"You rotter!" growled Bob Cherry. "There's nothing to cackle at!"

"Isn't there?" grinned the Bounder. "Sorry! I thought there was! My mistake! It struck me as being somewhat humorous, all you fellows coming here and displaying anxiety on my account. There's no need to worry—I can look after myself all right. As long as I don't get anybody else into trouble, I don't see that it's anybody else's bizney!"

"But we're thinking of your own good, Smithy."

"Thanks! But I'm all right!"

Harry Wharton bit his lip.

"I don't like the way you're treating this matter!" he said. "Surely you don't expect us to believe in you after this?"

"My dear chap, after what?"

"Why, that letter, for one thing."

"And your breaking bounds night after night, for another!" grunted Bob Cherry. "Everything points to your having taken up those Highcliffe rotters again."

Vernon-Smith laughed, but there was a grim note in it.

"Well, everything points wrong," he said calmly.

"Do you deny it, then?" asked Nugent.

"Of course!"

"You deny having had dealings with Ponsonby & Co. recently?"

"Absolutely!"

"Was that letter written by Ponsonby?"

"No!"

"Who sent it to you, then?"

Vernon-Smith sighed.

"I wish you wouldn't bother so much!" he said.

"Look here! I'll make a statement, if it'll please you. I haven't played a game of cards for weeks—months! I haven't betted, I haven't gambled, and I haven't gone to horse-races! You can think what you jolly well like, but I'm not going to say any more!"

The Removites looked at one another grimly.

The statement of the Bounder's sounded altogether too much like a fairy tale. They remembered that Vernon-Smith had once been a very able exponent of the art of lying, and, as he had evidently resumed his old ways, it was quite natural to suppose that he was not over-particular about sticking to the truth. It was painful enough, but it was obvious to the juniors that he was lying. How could it possibly be the truth in the face of that letter? The Bounder looked round coolly.

"Well," he said, with a trace of a sneer, "any more questions?"

Bob Cherry glared.

"Questions don't seem to be any good!" he growled. "No use us asking questions, if you tell fairy tales in reply!"

"I've told the truth!"

"Rats!"

"We don't believe you, Smithy!"

"Rather not!"

"Do the other thing, then!" said the Bounder, with a glitter in his eyes. "I don't care! I've been a fool to suppose that you chaps would ever be friendly with me!" he added bitterly. "Directly somebody starts a suspicion against me, you all turn your backs!"

Harry Wharton looked uncomfortable.

"That's a bit thick," he said. "You must admit that things look black—"

"I do admit it!"

"Well, why can't you own up?"



"For the simple reason that there's nothing to own up to!"

"Oh, let's clear out!" grunted Johnny Bull.

"The clear-outfulness is terrific!" murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "The honourable Smithy is telling us the ludicrous whopper!"

"Yes, we'd better clear out," agreed Wharton. "Smithy won't explain things, so it's no good us stopping here. We don't want to quarrel—we've done enough of that in the past—and we'd better go before we lose our tempers!"

And the Removites left the Bounder's study.

They walked along the passage and entered No. 1 Study.

"Well," asked Squiff calmly, "what do you think of it?"

"I think Smithy's a frightful liar!" said Johnny Bull firmly.

"Hang it all! I'm not so sure about it!" exclaimed Harry Wharton uneasily.

"Not sure!" repeated Bull. "Why, you ass, it's as plain as a pikestaff that he's been telling crammers! We know for a fact that he went off with Ponsonby during that fight the other day in Friardale Lane. We know for a fact that he's been breaking bounds after lights out, just the same as he used to do. And we know for a fact that he's received an incriminating letter about gambling and card-sharping signed 'P.' If Smithy isn't a double-barrelled perverter of the truth, then—then I'm a giddy Hottentot!"

And Johnny Bull, having laid down his views, glared round for support.

He found it.

The facts were too plain for the juniors to think two ways; they agreed en masse that Vernon-Smith had again started on the downward path, and that he would swiftly go to the giddy bow-wows unless he was promptly checked.

"We've got to make him shove the brake on," said Bob Cherry. "He's a wilful sort of chap, and he won't stand dictation. So we shall have to take the law into our own hands and bring him to his senses!"



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Harry Wharton nodded.

"Wouldn't be a bad idea to go for Ponsonby & Co.," he said. "They're the cause of it all, I believe. They got hold of old Hazel during the summer holidays, you remember, and it was the Bounder who rescued him. It's jolly queer that Smithy should chum up with the rotters again after that."

"Queer or not, he's done it," said Frank Nugent.

"Then there was that time when Ponsonby came here and stuck his tiepin in your coat, Franky," went on Wharton. "He tried to make out that you'd stolen it—and you'd have been in a rotten corner if the Bounder hadn't mucked up the scheme. I can't help it, but I'm half inclined even now to doubt whether we're justified in taking things for granted."

Squiff shook his head.

"We're not taking things for granted," he said. "We've got the proof, my dear chap. I should be one of the first to believe in Smithy—I like him. But the facts are too jolly clear."

And the others nodded in agreement.

"I vote we stay awake to-night," said Bob Cherry. "If Smithy means to keep that appointment, he'll keep it. Of course, we could force him to remain in the dormitory, but that wouldn't do any good. It would be better to follow him, and find out where he goes."

"That's all very well," said Squiff; "but it's a jolly tricky business to follow Smithy. He's such an astute beggar! Still, I agree with you there, Bob. I've got an idea, too, that'll help us."

"An idea?"

"Yes," went on Squiff calmly. "I vote that three of us do the shadowing bizney—Wharton, Cherry, and your humble. If we wait until Smithy gets up and then follow him out of the dormitory and across the Close we might as well stay in our little cots. After what's happened to-night he's bound to be on the alert, and will wait, probably, to see if any of us are following."

"If we don't follow him, how are we going to see where he goes?" asked Bob Cherry.

"By forestalling him," said Squiff coolly. "We'll have a giddy rope in the dorm, and as soon as Smithy has gone we'll nip down it, and be out in the lane before he's crossed the Close! He won't have a suspicion that we're there, and we can follow without his having an idea of our august presence."

Harry Wharton's eyes gleamed.

"It's a good wheeze," he said. "We might be able to work it."

"We are going to work it," said Squiff. "No 'might' about it, my son!"

And, after much discussion, the plans were finally settled, and the juniors dispersed.

### THE NINTH CHAPTER. Ponsonby & Co. Catch It!

**S**NAP! The door of the Remove dormitory closed with a soft click. For a moment there was silence in the room—then five or six forms sat up in their beds.

"He's gone," whispered Peter Todd.

Squiff hopped silently out of bed.

"Sharp's the word," he murmured. "We shall simply have to buzz!"

Harry Wharton and Bob Cherry were out of bed instantly, and the trio buzzed for all they were worth. They rushed a few clothes on, and were ready. Squiff was at the window fastening the rope—a thick, stout one, which he had smuggled up before bed-time.

"It's as dark as pitch," whispered the junior from New South Wales. "Couldn't be better! Are you ready, you chaps?"

"Yes."

"Then follow your uncle," murmured Squiff. "Ta-ta, you fellows!"

"Good-bye, you giddy night-birds!" said Nugent.

One after the other the three juniors swarmed down



the rope. It was a bit tricky, but they all arrived safely on the ground.

"Don't make a whisper," breathed Bob. "Lights ain't all out yet!"

One or two lights gleamed out across the Close, but the Removites didn't hesitate. They slipped across to the wall, and within a minute were in the lane.

"All serene!" murmured Squiff. "We haven't been spotted—and Smithy may be two or three minutes. He's bound to have waited a certain time to see if any of us were following. My hat! We've diddled him properly!"

"Rather!" said Wharton. "When he comes we can follow without his having a suspicion. It's fearfully dark, and he'll never spot us. The main thing is to keep quiet. Good thing we raked out those rubber-soled cricket shoes!"

"Don't jaw, you asses!" muttered Bob Cherry.

And silence reigned—at least, so far as the trio of juniors were concerned; a considerable wind whined through the trees and caused quite a lot of noise.

Three minutes passed, and no sign of the Bounder.

"Looks to me as if he's given us the giddy slip!" began Bob at last.

"Shush! I believe I can hear him," whispered Squiff. "Shush!"

And Bob Cherry shushed.

Sure enough, a dim figure scrambled over the wall a moment later and set off down the lane at a smart walk. It was the Bounder. Evidently he had no idea of the fact that the three Removites were watching for him. They allowed him to get some little distance away, and then followed in single file, making no noise whatever. Vernon-Smith, on the other hand, wore boots, and his footsteps were distinctly audible.

Never once did he pause to look round. He kept straight on, and to-night he did not cross the stile. He continued walking down towards Friardale. This, to his shadowers, seemed to point that he was making for the Cross Keys, the disreputable public-house in the village.

If, indeed, he did go there, then no further proof would be needed. It would show that the Bounder had been lying, and that drastic measures were necessary.

The first cottages of Friardale were passed. They were all in darkness, for their worthy inhabitants were long since in bed—although it was not yet late. Further on lights gleamed here and there.

Vernon-Smith suddenly turned into a side-lane, which led away from the village.

Harry Wharton gritted his teeth.

"He must have spotted us," he muttered. "This is a dodge to give us the slip. Buck up, you chaps!"

Wharton didn't mean to let the Bounder escape him a second time.

He and his chums broke into a run, and turned the corner silently, but swiftly. There, dimly visible, the figure of Vernon-Smith still strode on. Harry Wharton and the others dropped into a walk again.

"It's all right!" panted Squiff. He hasn't seen us!"

"Yes, but where is he off to?" muttered Bob. "This isn't the way to the Cross Keys."

"Then he must be going somewhere else," said Squiff.

"That's obvious, you ass!"

"There wasn't any mention of the Cross Keys in the letter," said Wharton. "Smithy is probably going to keep the appointment with 'P'—Ponsonby—as likely as not. Yes, by Jove, this is the way to Highcliffe!"

They walked silently on after their quarry.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo, the Bounder's stopped!" murmured Bob. "Ease up, you fellows!"

They stood still, and strained their eyes into the dimness of the night.

Vernon-Smith was standing by the side of the road, motionless.

And in the distance three other forms were approaching. Their voices were distinctly audible to the trio of shadowers, and by the sound of them the newcomers were evidently in a gay mood.

They were upon Vernon-Smith before he could move from his position.

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"Hallo!" exclaimed a well-known voice. "It's Smithy!"

"Right first time, Pon!" said Vernon-Smith.

"Glad to see you, Smithy!" said Ponsonby, of Highcliffe; and there was a queer note in his voice. "In fact, we're very glad to see you! Anybody with you?"

"No!"

"Good!" Ponsonby chuckled. "This is ripping, you chaps!"

"Rather!"

"Absolutely!"

The three forms were those of Ponsonby, Gadsby, and Vavasour, of Highcliffe.

Harry Wharton's eyes glittered.

So the Bounder had been lying, after all! That letter was from Ponsonby, and this was the meeting-place! The Highcliffians had succeeded in getting Vernon-Smith into their clutches, as it were! Well, it was up to Harry Wharton & Co. to get him out again.

"Rush 'em!" muttered Squiff darkly. "Give the bounders the surprise of their lives! We'll bowl 'em out before they know what's happened!"

"I'm game!" said Bob Cherry. "I'm dying for a mill!"

Harry Wharton nodded.

"Right!" he murmured grimly. "We've seen all we want to! Charge!"

And the trio charged. Like an avalanche they descended upon the startled Highcliffians. Before Ponsonby & Co. knew what had happened, they were forced to put up their hands to protect themselves. Vernon-Smith stood aside, looking amazed, until a grin overspread his features, and he chuckled delightedly.

"Well I'm hanged!" he murmured. "This is jolly rich! And I never knew the bounders were after me!"

Ponsonby & Co. were "getting it in the neck," as Bob Cherry put it. They were no match for the sturdy Removites, and, although they stood up to the attack, they were getting thoroughly "whopped."

Harry Wharton dealt with Ponsonby, and Ponsonby was having an exceedingly unpleasant few minutes. Squiff amused himself with Gadsby, and that unfortunate Highcliffian was wondering if a whole regiment of prize-fighters had set upon him. Bob Cherry, meanwhile, snorted with disgust as Vavasour crumpled up at the first hefty blow.

"Get up, you rotter!" roared Bob indignantly.

"Ow—yow!" moaned Vavasour.

"Get up, you ass! I want to knock you down!" yelled Bob, dancing about.

"You beast!" snarled Vavasour. "I'm—I'm injured!"

Bob Cherry glared at him in disgust.

"You—you worm!" he exclaimed bitingly. "You ain't fit to fight a decent chap! You ain't fit to touch!"

And Bob yanked Vavasour to his feet, and planted a hearty kick upon the nether portion of Vavasour's trousers. The miserable Highcliffe junior let out an anguished howl, and fled.

Bob glared after him, and then turned to the others.

"Want any help?" he asked. "I haven't had a decent whack yet!"

"It's all right!" panted Wharton. "We can manage."

"Oh, rats!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "Don't be mean—let's have a hand in the fun! You back out for a minute and let me have a go at Ponsonby."

"Right-ho!"

But Cecil Ponsonby had no intention of standing up to Bob Cherry, the champion fighter of the Greyfriars Remove. In any case, he had decided to flee before he got completely knocked out. Now he had an opportunity.

Harry Wharton lowered his fists, and Bob Cherry stepped forward. But Ponsonby dodged and took to his heels. Bob let out a roar of indignation, and would have followed but for Wharton's restraining hand. Gadsby, seeing how his comrades had fared, and finding Squiff terribly "hot stuff," followed Ponsonby's example.

"Let 'em go!" said Harry Wharton. "They ain't worth chasing!"

"That's a fact!" exclaimed Squiff. "Gadsby landed me one on the chivvy, but I'll bet he'll remember me



for quite a long time! He'll have two beautiful black eyes to-morrow!"

Bob Cherry snorted.

"Rotten!" he growled. "I didn't have one decent whack!"

"Well, we've taught the rotters a lesson!" said Wharton grimly. "And now we'll deal with Smithy!"

"Will we?" said Squiff. "Smithy isn't here!"

"My hat!"

The three Removites looked round, but the Bounder had slipped off during the fight. Harry Wharton, Squiff, and Bob Cherry were quite alone.

Vernon-Smith had vanished.

## THE TENTH CHAPTER.

### At Dead of Night!

"THE rotter!"

"Given us the slip, after all!"

"Greased off while we were scrapping!"

The three Removites gazed at one another wrathfully.

"Well, it's no good looking fierce," said Wharton. "It's hopeless to think of following the Bounder now. He's given us the slip."

"The giddy go-by," said Bob Cherry.

"And he's with Ponsonby & Co. now, I expect," exclaimed Squiff. "They're going to hold their rotten gambling meeting. Well, they won't enjoy it much, that's one good thing! They're too sore!"

"Pity we didn't make Smithy sore, too!" growled Bob. "He deserves it more than Ponsonby & Co. for being such a silly ass as to chum up with them! There's no doubt about his guilt now—he fibbed like a giddy trooper! That letter was from Ponsonby, and this was the meeting-place."

The others nodded.

"Sure thing!" said Squiff.

Harry Wharton was silent.

"Well, we may as well get back," he said at last. "We can't go to the Cross Keys and ask for Smithy, can we? Better get in before we're bowled out by a prefect or master. We'll deal with Smithy to-morrow."

"We will!" said Bob grimly. "Not half!"

And they directed their steps back to Greyfriars. Their expedition hadn't been exactly a success, but they had the satisfaction of knowing that they had "whopped" Ponsonby & Co. And that was certainly a consolation. Besides, they told themselves, they now had proof of the Bounder's guilt. His meeting with the Highcliffians proved that he was "in" with them, in spite of his declaration to the contrary.

It was not a pleasant reflection, for Harry Wharton & Co. liked the Bounder. Lately he had proved himself to be one of the best. And now how were they to act towards him? In face of recent events, they couldn't very well continue to be on the same genial terms as heretofore.

The three Removites were somewhat gloomy as they trudged back to Greyfriars. All was in darkness when they arrived. They scrambled up the rope without much difficulty, and were thankful when they were safe back in the dormitory.

The rest of the Remove were asleep.

"Better not wake 'em," whispered Squiff. "It's late enough now, goodness knows, and we don't want to be kept awake half the giddy night jawing!"

"Why not wait for Smithy?" suggested Bob Cherry. "We'll pour water over him!"

"Oh, rats!" interrupted Wharton. "That wouldn't be any good, you ass! He'd take it all right, I dare say, but it would bring masters along, and we should all get punished. Better get right to sleep."

"So says your uncle," agreed Squiff.

"But I'm wild!" growled Bob. "I must take it out of somebody—and why not the Bounder? Anyway, let's shove pins in his bed!"

"Oh, dry up!"

"Leave the Bounder till to-morrow."

And Bob Cherry realised that it would be better to swallow his war-like feelings, as it were, until the morning. With a growl he slipped into bed, and rolled over. In five minutes he was asleep—and Squiff went off into dreamland quite as quickly.

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Not so Harry Wharton.

Somehow, he couldn't sleep. He was worried. Lately he had been feeling exceedingly pleased with the way the Bounder was behaving. And now—what a difference! Vernon-Smith seemed utterly changed. He even ceased to take an interest in football; and when a fellow ceased to take an interest in football, there was, in Wharton's opinion, something very radically wrong.

Yet, at the same time, the Bounder hadn't altogether relapsed into his old ways. Only that afternoon Wharton had seen him cuffing Snoop for bullying young Dicky Nugent of the Second. And there was no sign that he had taken to smoking again.

What was the meaning of it?

Harry Wharton dozed off now and again, but he couldn't sleep soundly. The booming of the school clock awoke him every time it chimed. He had no idea of the time until the clock chimed and tolled out four resonant notes.

Four o'clock!

He must have slept a good bit, he thought, for he hadn't been awake over four hours. He sat up in bed, and strained his eyes towards the Bounder's bed. It was still empty. What on earth could Vernon-Smith be doing all this time?

There was a slight creak, and the door opened. A dim form entered.

"Is that you?" murmured Harry Wharton.

Dead silence.

"I can see you, you ass!" whispered the captain of the Remove. "Where have you been all this time, Smithy?" Vernon-Smith crept to Wharton's bed.

"What are you doing awake at this unearthly hour?" he asked. "Waiting for me?"

"No—the clock woke me."

"That shows you weren't sleeping soundly," said the Bounder coolly. "You must have had something indigestible for supper last night."

Harry Wharton looked at Vernon-Smith coldly. The Bounder's voice sounded weary, and, even in the dimness, Wharton could see that his face was a little drawn for want of sleep.

"Where have you been all this time?" repeated Wharton.

"Oh—out!"

"That's no answer!"

"I didn't mean it to be," said the Bounder calmly.

"Been gambling, I suppose, with Ponsonby & Co.?" said Wharton bitterly.

"No."

"I don't believe you, Smithy."

"Sorry, but it's the truth!" said Vernon-Smith. "I haven't seen Ponsonby and those other two Highcliffe rotters since you whopped 'em in the lane."

There was a ring of sincerity in the Bounder's voice.

"Where did you slink off to, then?" asked Wharton.

"I didn't slink off—I walked off quite openly."

"Well, where did you walk off to?"

"I didn't see Ponsonby & Co. again, anyhow," replied the Bounder evasively. "Which reminds me, I want to thank you."

"Thank me for what?"

"For saving me from those Highcliffe rotters."

"Saving you from them?" asked Wharton, in a puzzled voice.

"Yes, you came up in the nick of time," went on Vernon-Smith, sitting on the foot of the bed. "I should have gone through the mill properly if you hadn't chipped in!"

"But you met them there by arrangement, you rotter!" said Harry Wharton indignantly. "You can't work that dodge with me, Smithy!"

Vernon-Smith chuckled.

"I'm not trying to work any dodge, my dear fellow," he said softly. "I've told you the truth. I met Ponsonby & Co. at that spot quite by accident—I expect they were off to the Cross Keys for a spree—and they'd have ragged me unmercifully if you and Cherry and Squiff hadn't kindly chipped in."

Harry Wharton was silent.

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"Well," said the Bounder, "don't you believe me?"  
 "How can I?" asked Wharton. "I want to believe you, Smithy, but it's impossible! Why, I actually heard Ponsonby say he was glad to see you!"  
 "So he was glad to see me."

"But——"  
 "They came on me by surprise," pursued Vernon-Smith. "They met me quite accidentally, and realised that they'd got me alone. That's why they were glad to see me."

Wharton looked thoughtful. He remembered, now, that curious ring in Ponsonby's voice, and realised that the Bounder was telling the truth. Ponsonby & Co. had been glad to see him because they thought that he was at their mercy.

"By Jove, I believe you, Smithy!" said Harry.

"Thanks!"

He held out his hand, and, after a moment's hesitation, Wharton took it.

"You needn't be scared, old man!" said the Bounder coolly. "I'm not sinking into the mire! All the fellows are thinking that I'm a two-faced scoundrel, but they're wrong. I'm running as straight as you are, Wharton, and I expect they'll call you an ass for believing in me. But I wouldn't lose your friendship for worlds, now that I've won it!"

Harry Wharton smiled.

"You're a queer chap, Smithy," he said. "Even now you haven't told me where you went off to, or where you've been going night after night—or why you chucked that footer match."

"You'll find out one day perhaps," said the Bounder. "I know that things look jolly black against me, Wharton, but I'm not going to say a word. It's pleased me more than I can say to find that you believe in me in spite of appearances!"

Knowing the smooth-tongued Bounder as he did, Wharton wondered whether he had been made a fool of. As Smithy had said, appearances were all against him. Wharton had nothing but his word to rely on—and at one time the Bounder's word had been valueless. Yet he had spoken with such sincerity that Harry Wharton was positive that he was dealing "straight" with him.

As Wharton lay in bed he heard Vernon-Smith slip between the sheets, and a chuckle floated across the dormitory. Something was evidently tickling the Bounder. Was it because he had succeeded in spoofing Harry Wharton, or was there some other reason, known only to himself, which would presently be revealed?

It was a worrying matter to think out, and Harry Wharton dropped off soundly to sleep in the process.

## THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER. Most Remarkable!

"S POOF!"

"Swank!"

"The rotter was pulling your leg, old man!"

"You were half-asleep, and you allowed him to cram you with whoppers!"

"The whopperfulness was terrific!"

Harry Wharton looked round No. 1 Study with a grin. It was just before breakfast the following morning, and his chums were all looking excited. They were not inclined to accept the Bounder's word regarding his mysterious movements.

"I tell you——"

"Oh, rats!" interrupted Bob Cherry. "We've got sense, ain't we?"

"Well, you ought to have, considering the size of your nappers!"

"Look here——"

"Oh, dry up!" said Squiff. "Peace, my children! We don't want to engage in a wrangling match. My opinion is this: Wharton was half-asleep, and the Bounder took advantage of it to cram him with gentle fairy tales."

"I was fully awake," said Harry Wharton, "and, although appearances are dead against Smithy, I believe in him. He's up to some little game on his own, that's certain; but I'm convinced that it's nothing shady."

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"Then your convincing apparatus must have run down," said Johnny Bull flatly.

"I'm half inclined to believe in Smithy myself," said Squiff.

"What!"

"Fact!" said Squiff coolly. "Of course, I think that the Bounder's been telling whoppers; but I don't think he's so black as you fellows paint him. He's got round Wharton, of course, and Wharton's been ass enough to swallow his yarn whole. I'm more cautious. I reserve final judgment until I have more facts."

Clang! Clang!

"Well, blow the facts!" exclaimed Harry Wharton. "I'm going to brekker!"

Vernon-Smith looked hollow-eyed as he sat down to breakfast. Nearly all the Removites took it for granted that he had been smoking and drinking; but Harry Wharton, looking at the Bounder keenly, saw that want of sleep was the only cause of his wan looks—want of sleep, and hard work. He had been exerting himself strenuously over something—but what?

Vernon-Smith was as hard as nails, however, and although he looked tired he didn't behave as though he were. In fact, he was quite cheerful. Most of the juniors took it for bravado, and regarded the Bounder disapprovingly.

In the Form-room, in spite of the fact that many juniors prophesied that Smithy would drop off to sleep, he worked with unusual care, and Mr. Quelch had nothing to say. The Bounder had evidently made up his mind not to let his nocturnal expeditions interfere with his ordinary habits.

After lessons that day Harry Wharton went to Vernon-Smith's study to borrow some jam for tea. The Bounder was not at home, and inquiry showed that he had left the school immediately after lessons. Harry Wharton was puzzled. What could be the meaning of it? Why was the Bounder spending every minute of his spare time—and his sleeping time as well—away from Greyfriars?

Tea being over in No. 1 Study, Squiff suggested a cycle ride to Courtfield. It was a clear evening, with a sharp feeling of frost in the air, and a bike ride, Squiff declared, would be just the thing to blow the cobwebs away in readiness for preparation.

The idea was approved of, and accordingly the Famous Five and Squiff sallied out to the bike shed and got out their machines.

"It'll be dark when we come back," said Bob Cherry.

"No fear!" replied Squiff.

"I tell you it will!" said Bob. "It's dusk now, and it'll take us an hour to ride to Courtfield and back comfortably. In an hour it'll be pitch!"

"Rats!"

"Oh, don't be an ass, Squiff!" exclaimed Nugent.

"I'm not!" said Squiff coolly.

Bob Cherry snorted.

"Well, if it won't be dark, what will it be?" he demanded.

"Moonlight, my son!"

"Oh," said Bob. "So it will! I forgot the giddy moon!"

"It's rising now, in all its glorious glory!" said Squiff poetically. "When we return it will be sailing across the azure heavens amid the fleecy——"

"Oh, dry up! You're making us all feel bad!"

"The feel-badfulness is terrific, my honourable Squiff!"

They jumped on their machines and rode away briskly. It was a pleasant ride to Courtfield, for the roads were hard, and the air crisp. Having made one or two purchases in the town, the Removites lit their lamps and started on the homeward journey.

As Squiff had said, it was now moonlight. The only drawback was that instead of the fleecy clouds he had spoken of the sky was covered with heavy black ones, and the well-meaning moon was completely obliterated. The night, in fact, was quite dark.

Squiff and Bob Cherry were riding in front of the others, and a white gate loomed up dimly in the distance.

"Race you to that gate!" invited Squiff.

"Bet you don't!" said Bob.

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They pedalled harder, and were soon whizzing along at full speed. Squiff forged ahead, and chuckled. Bob Cherry made frantic efforts to catch the Australian junior up, but Squiff was well away. He shot past the gate, and free-wheeled.

"Done you!" he shouted, turning in the saddle. "I'm miles ahead of—Whoa! Ow—Yooooop!"

There was a crash.

"Good heavens!" gasped Bob Cherry.

Squiff lay on the ground, yards from his bicycle. He sat up dazedly.

"Hurt?" asked Bob anxiously, jumping from his machine.

"Ow! Yes!" groaned Squiff. "I—I bashed into something!"

There was no doubt whatever on that point. Squiff had certainly "bashed" into something quite forcibly. It was a large stone, as big as a brick. He had struck it while looking behind him at Bob, and had come a fearful cropper.

The others rode up and gathered round anxiously.

"What's the damage?"

"Are you hurt, Squiffy?"

"What did you whack into?"

Squiff staggered to his feet.

"It's all right!" he grunted. "I don't think I'm hurt. Ow! Ain't I, though! I've twisted my giddy ankle!"

He hobbled up and down, and found that the injury wasn't much. His ankle was ricked, but he was able to walk.

"I shall be able to ride home," he said ruefully.

"Good!" said Harry Wharton.

"Half a mo!" exclaimed Bob Cherry, who had been examining Squiff's bike. "Your jigger's crocked. The front wheel's buckled so much that it won't turn in the forks!"

"Oh, my hat!"

Bob's verdict was true. Squiff's machine was hopelessly crippled. It would have to be doctored by a cycle-repairer before he could ride it again.

"Well, this is a nice go!" he growled. "How am I going to walk home with a ricked ankle and carry the bike? It's all your fault, Bob, for suggesting that rotten race!"

"Why, you suggested it yourself, you fathead!" exclaimed Bob Cherry indignantly.

"Did I?" grinned Squiff twistedly. "Well, it's the fault of some silly ass who shoved that stone on the road! He ought to be made to pay for the damage."

"Well, what's to be done?" asked Johnny Bull.

"If it wasn't for the bike I'd give Squiffy a ride on my step," said Harry Wharton. "We can't leave the jigger here, can we?"

Squiff looked round.

"No; but we can leave it at that house," he said, pointing to a small building a hundred yards further on. "I don't know who lives there, but they won't mind shoving my bike indoors for a bit. Then we can call at the cycle shop in Friardale and tell the chap to fetch the bike from here."

"Good wheeze!" said Bob Cherry.

It was a way out of the difficulty, and they carried the injured bicycle to the gate.

"You fellows stop here," said Squiff. "I'll take the bike—no need for a crowd of us to bother. I sha'n't be two ticks."

And Squiff hobbled in at the gate. There was a little path leading to the back, and he thought it as well to apply at the back-door. Probably there would be a handy shed at the rear.

He limped down the path, and came alongside a lighted window. The blind was not drawn, and he paused for a moment and looked into the room. Then he uttered a startled gasp, and looked again, with staring eyes.

For alone in the room was Vernon-Smith; and he was seated at a little table, operating a typewriter as fast as he could manipulate the keys!

## THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

### Bravo, the Bounder!

SQUIFF could hardly believe his eyes.

"Well I'm blessed!" he murmured in amazement.

It was the Bounder, right enough, and he was working at top speed, totally unconscious of Squiff's presence.

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ONE  
PENNY.

presence. The Cornstalk hesitated for a moment, then gently laid his machine against the hedge opposite the window, and hurried back to the roadway.

"All serene?" asked Harry Wharton.

"My hat!" ejaculated Squiff.

"I haven't seen it!" said Nugent.

"The Bounder's in there!" exclaimed Squiff breathlessly. "Smithy's in there, working a typewriter for all he's jolly well worth!"

The Famous Five stared.

"Smithy's in that house?"

"Yes."

"Working a typewriter?"

"Yes; I've just seen him!"

"Rats!"

"I tell you I have!" said Squiff quickly. "Come and squint for yourselves, if you don't believe me. Don't make a sound, though."

The Famous Five looked at one another doubtfully, then followed Squiff through the gateway. They were sure that their chum was mistaken. What on earth could the Bounder be doing in this little house?

"Now," said Squiff, "look there!"

The Famous Five looked—and started.

"My sainted aunt! You're right, Squiffy," murmured Bob Cherry. "It's the Bounder, sure enough! Well, I'm jiggered!"

"What can it mean?" whispered Wharton. "What's he doing?"

"Typewriting."

"Yes, but—but it's so jolly queer!"

"The queerfulness is terrific!"

"I'm going to know the truth of this," said Harry Wharton. "The window's unlatched, and we'll shove the lower sash up. Catch hold!"

Several hands caught hold, and the window flew open. Vernon-Smith twisted round with a startled expression.

Six well-known faces stared at him.

"Great Scott!" gasped the Bounder, completely taken by surprise.

"What's the game, Smithy?" asked Harry Wharton quietly. "Squiff's busted his bike, and was coming here to ask permission to leave it here, when he spotted you. What, in the name of all that's queer, are you doing?"

The Bounder recovered himself, and grinned cheerfully.

"Working," he said briskly. "Buzz off; I'm busy!"

His matter-of-fact tones took the juniors by surprise. Vernon-Smith seemed to think that it was quite an ordinary proceeding for a Greyfriars junior to be typewriting in a strange house.

"Half a minute," said Wharton. "We're not going to buzz off, Smithy."

"No fear!"

"Not until you explain!"

"We want to get the hang of things, Smithy!"

Vernon-Smith sighed.

"The secret's out now, so I suppose I shall have to satisfy your beastly curiosities," he said resignedly. "I never dreamed that you'd come buzzing round this house!"

"Well, we have," said Squiff. "Quite by chance, you know."

"You'd better come in," invited the Bounder. "Don't make a noise, though, or you'll disturb Mrs. Mason."

"Mrs. Mason?"

"The tenant of the house, you asses," explained Vernon-Smith.

Mystified, the juniors scrambled into the room.

"Now," said the Bounder briskly, "I'm jolly busy, so if you'll keep quiet I'll explain things. I can't spare more than ten minutes, because I've got to get page two hundred and five finished before locking-up."

"But—"

"I'm doing the jawing," said the Bounder coolly. "Now, for several days past, you chaps have been looking on me with dark suspicion; in fact, all the fellows have been thinking that I'd chummed up with Ponsonby & Co., and had generally gone to the bow-wows."



"Well, we did think something of the sort," admitted Johnny Bull. "Of course, if we are wrong we'll apologise—"

"Dry up, and I'll explain," pursued Vernon-Smith. "You remember that day I promised to treat you all at Uncle Clegg's? Well, we met Ponsonby & Co., didn't we, and one of the rotters chucked a stone at me. Ponsonby chucked it."

"Well?"

"Well, my sons, while you were engaged with Gadsby, Vavasour, Merton, and the rest, I took Ponsonby aside for the especial purpose of giving him a thundering good hiding. We went right into the wood, and had a regular mill. I knocked Ponsonby out completely, and he crawled off vowing fearful vengeance. I got knocked about a bit myself, and my nose was bleeding beautifully. My chivvy was simply covered with gore, and I knew I couldn't enter the village in such a state. So I went through the wood, and came out in sight of this house. I came here and asked for a wash. Mrs. Mason opened the door to me, and when I was clean I saw that she had been crying rather badly; in fact, she was weeping when she opened the door."

"My hat!"

"That was rotten, Smithy."

"Of course," went on the Bounder. "I didn't like it, and asked the old lady what I could do. After a bit she broke down, and told me everything. She was alone, you see, so I suppose it was a relief to have somebody to talk to. Well, to cut it short, the facts were these."

"Mrs. Mason has lived here with her son, Richard Mason, for years. He's an author, although he hasn't had much stuff published. Well, he'd just completed a novel—a regular stunner—his first big work. He'd typed the first part of it out, and sent it to a publisher for consideration. The publisher merchant was fairly knocked over with the yarn, and offered to pay a hundred quid down, spot cash, if the rest of the story was as good as the part he had read—a hundred quid, spot cash, with big royalties to follow upon publication. Of course, Mrs. Mason and her son were delighted, because they badly wanted that hundred quid to pay off a mortgage which becomes due in a fortnight."

"Go on!" said Harry Wharton interestedly.

"Things looked bright," said Vernon-Smith. "In fact, everything in the garden was lovely, so to speak. The novel was finished—the writing of it, I mean—and it only had to be typed. Then, like a giddy bombshell, Mr. Mason, who was an eligible man, was called to the Colours. He had to go immediately, leaving the novel untyped."

"How rotten!"

"It was worse than that," said the Bounder. "They were jolly hard-up, and Mrs. Mason, who can't use a key of the giddy typewriter, couldn't afford to send the manuscript to a typewriting office. It's a fearfully long book, you see, and it would cost quids to have it done. So she sent it as it was, and the publisher returned it unread, saying it was useless in that state."

"Silly ass!" grunted Johnny Bull.

"Well, there you are—publishers are queer merchants," said the Bounder. "It was awful for Mrs. Mason. She was faced with two blows—the departure of her son, and foreclosing on her property; for the mortgagee, I understand, is a regular outsider. Yet all the time there was a certainty of a hundred pounds, if the novel could only be typed and submitted to the editor-johnny."

Harry Wharton's eyes sparkled.

"And you—you—"

"I offered to do the work," said the Bounder quietly. "I'd used a typewriter before, and knew I could do it. I promised to get it completed within a week, so that the yarn could be sent in promptly. The money was wanted very urgently, you see. I knew that I should have to use every second of my spare time, and should have to break bounds, too, after lights out, in order to get the thing finished."

He chuckled.

"The idea rather appealed to me, too," he went on, with a grin. "I decided to say nothing to you chaps, and see what would happen. I knew you'd spot me breaking bounds, and after walking off with Ponsonby as I did it

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would look suspicious. You took the bait beautifully, and suspected me of rotten things. Wharton, though, in spite of everything, believed in me."

The others looked penitent.

"We're awfully sorry, Smithy—"

"Oh, don't say anything!" said the Bounder coolly. "I used to be a regular rotter—I know it, and don't mind admitting it—but I've got more sense now, thank goodness! It was rather a lark while it lasted, and made this giddy typewriting work less monotonous."

"But—but that letter," began Nugent.

Vernon-Smith grinned.

"That wasn't a letter at all," he explained. "It was simply an extract from this novel. I thought it would liven things up a bit at Greyfriars, you know. I let it drop on purpose, and appeared very anxious to regain it in Bunter's presence. I knew the gentle Billy would make strenuous efforts to get it. He did!"

"Well I'm blessed!" ejaculated Bob Cherry, grinning.

"And I met Ponsonby & Co. last night quite by accident," said Smithy. "I should have been fearfully handled if you chaps hadn't come along. Ponsonby wants to have his revenge for the licking I gave him. And—Great Scott! Look at the time! Buzz off, you fellows!"

"But, Smithy, we want to apologise—"

"Rot!"

"And to say how proud we are of you—"

"Piffle!"

"You're a brick, Smithy! We've been suspecting you of rotten things, while you've been doing a splendid action—a noble action—"

"Noble tommy-rot! Buzz off!" said the Bounder briskly. "Mrs. Mason is upstairs, lying down, and you'll waken her with all this jaw. Clear!"

And the Famous Five and Squiff cleared, realising that they were hindering the Bounder all the time they stayed. When they reached the road they gazed at one another silently. Then Johnny Bull stepped in front of Harry Wharton.

"Kick me!" he said gruffly. "I deserve it! Kick me hard!"

"Certainly!" said Wharton obligingly.

Johnny Bull roared.

"Ow—yow! You burbling ass!" he howled. "I didn't mean as hard as that!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Come on; let's get back to Greyfriars," said Squiff.

And they mounted their bikes, and rode off, leaving Squiff's damaged machine still leaning against the hedge. As a matter of fact, Squiff had forgotten all about it.

The fellows were greatly surprised when they learned the news. There were many, of course, who declared that they had believed in Smithy all the time. But the majority of the juniors were sincerely sorry for having doubted the Bounder, and when he returned at calling-over he met with a great reception. Vernon-Smith himself regarded it as a most unnecessary fuss.

But although he wouldn't admit that he'd done anything noteworthy, he was quite deserving of his Form-fellows' praise. The Bounder hadn't relapsed; he'd proved himself to be a regular Good Samaritan.

The Famous Five and Squiff had the pleasure of meeting Mrs. Mason a few days later, and a kindly old lady they found her to be, overflowing with gratitude towards the Bounder for his noble action.

And soon afterwards they learned good news. The novel had been accepted, and the hundred pounds had come to hand. Vernon-Smith was delighted. It was fully enough reward for all his labours. He had not worked in vain, and he was satisfied.

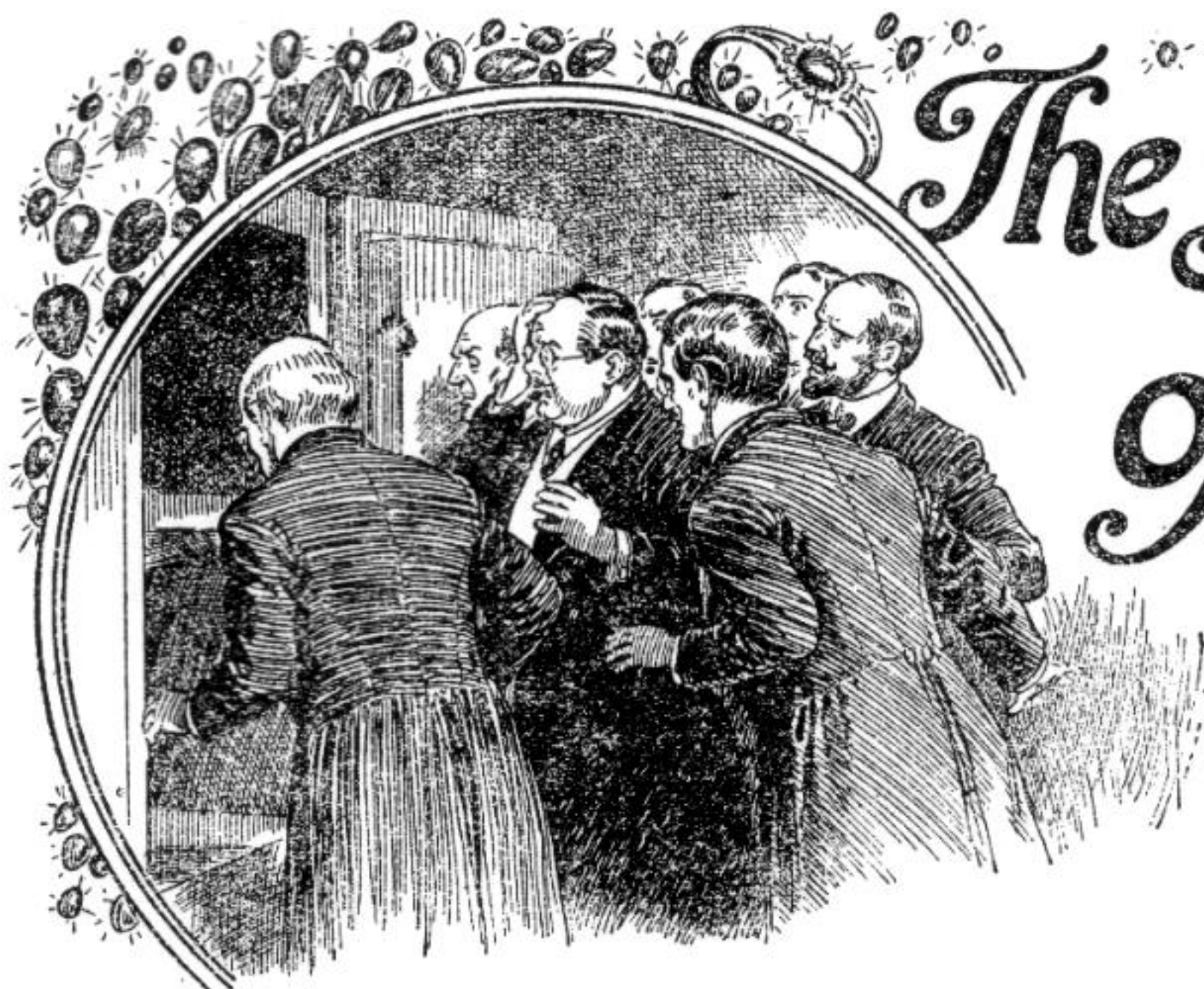
His self-sacrificing action had turned the tide of fortune for the old lady, and her troubles were at an end. As the Removites unanimously declared—Bravo, the Bounder!

THE END.

(Do not miss "HAZELDENE'S HONOUR!" next week's grand story of the chums of Greyfriars, by FRANK RICHARDS.)

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# The Rubies of Sheba.

- - By - -

**EDWIN WOOTON**

**THE FIRST CHAPTERS OF A GREAT NEW SERIAL STORY  
OF MYSTERY AND ADVENTURE.**

## THE FIRST CHAPTERS.

MR. DELAVILLE, formerly chief cashier at the GREAT SOUTHERN BANK, is under suspicion owing to the fact that the RUBIES OF SHEBA, some gems of immense value, which were placed in the bank's keeping, are missing.

TOM HEReward, a junior clerk at the bank—to whom, with his sister Dora, Delaville is acting as guardian—determines to sift the matter out to save his guardian from disgrace.

He discovers that PETER SULLOWBY, previously employed as porter at the bank, is in possession of some of the missing gems, and accuses him in the presence of Delaville.

Sallowby admits his guilt, but is then stricken with paralysis, which causes him to lose his power of speech.

On searching the place where Peter is known to have hidden the rubies, they find them again missing.

Tom has suspicions about Mr. Bare, a neighbour of Peter's, and seeks an interview with him.

(Now go on with the story.)

## On the Track.

"I told the landlady my 'usband wasn't at 'ome!" Mrs. Bare exclaimed.

"And she delivered your message. I am here on legal business. How many rooms have you?" said Tom.

"This and two garrets," answered the woman, an expression of terror showing itself in her features.

"How long have you had this room?"

"I took it this morning. We moved from the garret."

"Have you access to any rooms in the house besides these three?"

"I—I don't quite know your meanin'."

"Do you use any of the remaining rooms for storing things in?"

"No, sir; that I'm quite sure we don't!"

"Very well. Now, you can take your choice between my sending for the police and having the place ransacked—which would cause a scandal—and letting me do the work without bother or fuss."

"I don't want no police! What's Jim been a-doin' of?"

"Nothing, I trust."

Tom went to the bed. Half a minute satisfied him that it contained nothing incriminating. Two trunks were in the room; these yielded negative results. The floor had no carpet, but was partly covered with loose rugs, and the boards showed no sign of having been moved. The hearth revealed nothing, and the chimney spoke of soot only.

"By the way, who left you that legacy?" asked Tom.

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"A aunt of my 'usband's. You can't prove nothin' agin 'im. He's as honest, an' sober, an' 'ard-workin' a man as you'll find."

"He has a good little wife; I'm sure of that," returned Tom. "And now we will go upstairs."

The garrets were nearly bare. They were situated back and front, quite differently from those in Peter's house. Tom's judgment was that they contained no hiding-place for the gems. A trapdoor led to the space beneath the slates. Tom mounted by means of three neatly adjusted chairs, pushed back the trap, and climbed within. The light from a wax-match showed him dust, fragments of slate, and shavings, but not anything suggestive of a receptacle for treasure.

Tom descended to the landing.

"Well," said the woman maliciously, "you've brought enough dirt down with you! 'Ave you found anythin' else?"

For a moment or two Tom occupied himself in freeing knees and elbows from their accumulation. Then he said, with startling abruptness:

"The fact is, we have good reason for believing that your husband has been engaged in a robbery."

"What of?" asked the woman hoarsely.

"Well—valuables."

"Oh, don't go for to think it, sir! An' why should 'e, when 'e 'as come into a legacy, an' all? Jim ain't risky enough for that. 'E's mair risky in many things, though. Times I've said to 'im, 'Don't go crawlin' over roofs to Bill Jones. But 'e will, just for the fun of it. There ain't no 'arm in Jim. 'E's a good 'usband."

"Where does Bill Jones live?" asked Tom.

"Down at the end 'ouse, sir."

"I see. I am satisfied there is nothing here. As you say, it is risky going over the roof."

"That it is, sir," returned the woman, with sudden, excited cheerfulness born of Tom's words. "P'r'aps someone's seen 'im, an' thought 'e was up to no good," she went on. "'E might fall orf quite easy, standin' up. On'y the evenin' before 'e was told of the legacy 'e went a-trampsin' over the slates, an' come back not 'alf pale. 'E wouldn't let on 'e'd nare 'ad a accident, but I knew it, an' told 'im so. 'E says at last, 'Well, Bessy, it's true, an' I feel a bit shook. I'll take a day orf to-morrer. An' when 'e come 'ome 'e told me 'e'd met a lawyer chap what 'ad said 'is aunt 'ad left 'im five 'underd pounds."

Tom took his leave, and made his way to the asserted abode of Bill Jones. This gentleman had no hesitation about receiving visitors. On hearing that he was wanted, he leant over the banisters, and inquired hoarsely:

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"Who is it—the boss?"

Tom, without reply, went upstairs. The man stood on the top landing. The lad recognised him as one of the workmen seen on the scaffolding.

"What's up?" queried Mr. Jones.

"Tell you in your room," was the answer.

"Now," said Tom, when the door had been closed, "answer my questions, for I am here on law business. When did your chum Jim Bare last pay you a visit over the roof?"

"Night afore last."

"And did you accompany him home?"

"Not me! 'E come in seemin' a bit queer. Sat thinkin', with 'is eyes a starin'."

"And wearing his coin?"

"Yus. 'E 'ad on 'is watch an' chain. When 'e left 'e says, 'Lend me a chisel.' 'What for?' I says. 'Ain't yer got one?' 'Yus,' 'e says; 'but mine's broke, an' I've got a bit of a job to do at 'ome. Nex' day 'e never come to work."

"Had he an aunt?"

"Never 'eard tell of one till 'e come into this 'ere legacy. What's 'e been up to?"

"That remains to be seen. I can find my way out—thanks!"

### Tom Makes Progress.

When Tom had quitted the residence of Mr. Bill Jones, he went straight to that of Jim Bare. The landlady answered his summons with a scared face. Tom, without a word, passed her, and went upstairs. He entered the bed-sitting-room. The woman was seated on the floor, sobbing. The child was crying loudly.

"And now what's the matter?" asked Tom.

The woman looked up. Then she sprang to her feet, disclosing a discoloured orbit.

"It's you!" she screamed. "It's you! 'E come back just now, an' I told 'im about what you said, an' what we was talkin' of, an' 'e 'it me. Never did it before. 'It me, 'e did! An' 'e's gone orf, an' ain't never comin' back, 'e says."

"Where has he gone?"

"'Ow should I know? Find out! An' just as we was preparin' to move into a 'ouse of our own."

"A likely story!" commented Tom.

"It's the truth, so there! In Pompey Terrace it is—out of Harker's Road, an' sixteen is the number. Just been finished. Get away, can't yer? I ain't done nothin', an' 'e ain't done nothin' neither."

"I must see the other rooms again," said Tom.

"Go an' see 'em," returned Mrs. Bare.

But Tom, suddenly changing his purpose, quitted the house, and made for Pompey Terrace. This revealed itself to him as a thing of the past, present, and future. The past was represented by two tenantless, dilapidated cottages. Two dozen unfinished houses stood for the present, and the future offered bare ground plots for the speculative builder.

Tom found number sixteen, not by any figures on the door, but by counting the houses that would be. Inquiry directed to a special constable elicited the fact that the properties belonged to a building society, and that the foreman resided in the neighbourhood.

This man, on being interviewed by Tom, confirmed the statement that Bare had taken number sixteen, then in course of being painted. But the information was given reluctantly, and not until Tom had more than hinted that there was police work afoot. Indeed, the mention of police appeared to upset the man's nervous system.

"I wonder why?" thought Tom.

However, feeling it was not his place to prescribe for nervous tremors, Tom contented himself with two sentences. The first was an inquiry whether the foreman had seen Bare within the past few hours, and the second was a request for the key of the house.

"My name's Forbes," returned the other, and I've got charge of this buildin'. D'ye want to go inspectin' of it, or what?"

"My good man, it's no concern of mine if you build the houses upside-down. I'm going to look for stolen goods."

Mr. Forbes' jaw dropped.

"There can't be nothin' there," he said. "I was over the 'ouse this afternoon, with one of the men. There ain't no 'idin'-place, so far as I know."

"Could anyone get in without breaking the window, if he had not a key?" asked Tom.

Mr. Forbes seemed struck with the idea.

"I expect 'e could, now that you mention it," he said emphatically. "Yes, them winders is open, an' you may bet as any burglar kind o' chap could get in an' out like winkin'. But lookin' for stolen things there! Who'd be fool enough to 'ide 'em? 'Tain't in reason!"

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"Let us see whether it is in knowledge," said Tom drily.

"Are you coming?"

"I s'pose it'll be in order, as the place is in my charge," said Forbes. He had lost nearly all his nervousness, as evidenced by his next words: "Well, I'm hanged! What will they be up to next? 'Idin' things in empty 'ouses! What is it—marine-store or buildin' stuff?"

Tom shook his head.

"If I'd on'y caught 'em at it!" said the foreman meaningly.

"Ah," returned Tom, "if you had! And to himself he added: "I should have believed in you more than I do now!"

Mr. Forbes was careful not to let the "detective" spoil his clothes with the paint. Not only had nervousness gone, but enthusiasm had come in its place.

"Now we'll begin at the beginning," he said, when they had entered. "Mind them steps! There don't look nothin' unusual in this 'ere 'all. 'Tain't under the floor, I don't think. Them boards ain't been touched since they were laid down, I bet a quid! Now we come to the fust room, this 'ere parlour. Nothin' in the cupboard, barrin' plaster, an' a couple of 'ammers. Lemme 'ave the candle. Can't see nothin' up the chimbley!"

Neither could Tom see anything.

"Think it 'ud be worth while a-takin' up the 'earth?" questioned Mr. Forbes doubtfully.

As it was of wet concrete, Tom growled.

"Now for the back room. Same 'ere. Nothing in the cupboard. Yus, there is—a beer-can. 'Ere, this board up in the corner is loose!"

"Pooh! It's against the bricks!" said Tom. "Let us go to the top of the house!"

Mr. Forbes seemed hurt.

"Don't see there should be anythin' at the top more'n at the bottom, but we'll 'ave a look!" he returned.

Forbes, carrying the candle, led the way upstairs. The house had three storeys. On the second floor the foreman paused, and asked:

"Back or front?"

"Neither," said Tom curtly.

A pair of steps stood by the wall. Tom placed them in position immediately beneath a trapdoor in the ceiling.

"'Tain't no good nosin' about there," put in Forbes hastily.

"I looked into it myself this afternoon!"

"Ah!" commented Tom drily.

"You'll get some paint on your things," Forbes objected.

Tom made no answer. He mounted the steps, and pushed back the wet trap. Then, not troubling Mr. Forbes for the candle, he withdrew his box of wax matches, and struck one. Tom looked within the space between ceiling and roof until the match burnt low.

Then he lighted another, placed it on a joist, drew himself up, extinguished the match, lighted yet another, and crawled some little distance, peering into the corners as he went. One small object lying on the laths he picked up, and placed in a pocket. When he had returned to the steps, he asked:

"Have the workmen been in there very lately?"

"Can't say. Quite often enough an' late enough to spot any lead pipin' or whatever else you may be lookin' for, if there was any."

"Very well. I've seen all I need to just now."

Tom, when he had passed from Pompey Terrace, inserted his fingers into the ticket-pocket of his coat, and took therefrom an object about the size of a large cherry. In colour it was blood-red. On arriving at the nearest hairdresser's he had a wash and brush down. Then he went into a jeweller's shop, and placed the object on the counter.

"What is your charge for testing this?" he asked.

The man took up the stone which Tom had placed before him, and shook his head.

"I am not a buyer," he said coldly.

"Nor I a seller. I am engaged as a private detective, and wish to know whether it is a ruby."

The jeweller, taking the stone, withdrew behind a glass screen. Before two minutes had passed he came forward, and, handing back the stone, gave his verdict.

"It is a ruby of the very finest colour, and worth about five hundred pounds. But it's cut very strangely—just like a common carbuncle. Must be an antique."

Tom nodded, and placed a half-crown on the counter.

"For your trouble," he remarked.

Then he went out, his face grave. Rubies worth five hundred pounds are not dropped by honest workmen in unfinished houses. Where that ruby had been found the Byzantine gems had lain!

To find the man, and wrest the box from him without making public the character of its contents, now became Tom's task. The "Yard" would supply him on the instant with half a dozen men, but not one would keep the secret





Tom struck a match. Its momentary light showed the form of Forbes stretched upon the muddy pathway. Symons uttered a cry, met by Tom's commanding "Silence!" (See page 26.)

invioiate. No; he must turn elsewhere. Luckily, he knew in which direction.

A taxi conveyed him to a dingy but respectable street in Bloomsbury. Here, at an unmistakable lodging-house, he alighted, dismissed his vehicle, and inquired of the typical domestic who answered his summons whether "Mr. Henry Symons" was within.

"Is that you, Jack?" called a voice from the ground-floor sitting-room.

Tom passed within, for the voice was that of the man he sought. The speaker came forward, wiping his lips with a serviette. At sight of Tom—who had removed his facial hair—he smiled.

"Are you at your meal?" the detective asked.

"No, sir; just finished. Is there anything I can do?"

"Yes; I must speak to you in privacy for five minutes."

"Come to my room, sir," said Symons, leading the way to a sleeping chamber on the first floor.

"Cosy quarters," remarked the visitor, looking at the bright fire and two easy-chairs. "Better than Portland would have been—eh?"

The other shivered.

"There," said Tom, "I'm not going to rub it in! But you know as well as I do that Mr. Delaville acted rather generously in not prosecuting you for that attempt to burgle

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 411.

his house two years ago, and in finding you honest employment."

"He did that, sir, and I'm grateful."

"Well, you can prove it. As you know, the bank has smashed, through the robbery of those gems. Now, there are private circumstances which render it wise to prevent the matter being handled by the police. We want it carried through without their aid."

"I understand, sir."

"We think that a man named Jim Bare has been in possession of the box of gems very recently, and that he may be in possession of it now. The box is about so large." He framed its size with the hands. "I will write you a description of the man."

Tom covered a leaf in his notebook with memoranda, tore it out, and handed it to the other.

"That," said Tom, "gives you his latest known address, and the situation of the house he had just taken." Then he added, thoughtfully: "I think I'll have a run to Pompey Terrace myself presently. We will go together, if you're not engaged."

"You want me to get the box?" questioned Symons.

Tom nodded.

"Use your own judgment as to how," he said.

As the vehicle they had taken set the two down in

**OUR NEXT NUMBER WILL BE ON SALE AT ALL NEWSAGENTS' ON CHRISTMAS EVE.**



Harker's Road, a church clock struck nine. The night was dark, and a fine rain fell. Altogether the physical conditions in Pompey Terrace merited the term "miserable."

"That is the house you are to keep watch over," said Tom, indicating No. 16.

Symons shivered.

"Very good, sir!" he replied. "There is no need to stay now, I suppose?"

"No. Pass by as frequently as you can in the day and evening. Hallo! The rain is coming down like cats and dogs! Let us get inside that porch. Hang that mortar! I've trodden in it. Hallo! More mortar? No, a sleeping tramp. Poor wretch! I must give him the price of a doss."

Tom struck a match. Its momentary light showed the form of Forbes stretched upon the muddy pathway. Symons uttered a cry, met by Tom's commanding "Silence!" Tom stooped, and struck another match. No need to feel heart and pulse. The brow that surmounted that bloodstained face had been crushed out of human shape.

"I'll stay here," said Tom. "Go you and fetch a constable. There has been murder."

But when Symons, unnerved, had stumbled away on his errand, Tom seized on the dead man's clenched right hand and forced it open. Within lay two rubies!

### Who Killed Forbes?

Tom Hereward, with that sharp, clear, decisive judgment which seemed developed in him to the point of positive genius, had decided during the few minutes Symons was away what his explanation would be to the constable.

Symons and himself had gone into the porch for shelter, and had stumbled on the dead body. Nothing should be said as to the rubies, and nothing—unless his hand was forced—as to Bare. All this secrecy was to shield Peter, for if it was proved that Bare had been in possession of the gems, he would confess to having stolen them from Peter's house.

A weeping woman identified the body. Had it been necessary, a score of witnesses would have confirmed her statement. The medical evidence was direct and simple. The man had been killed by sustaining a fracture of the skull. This had been occasioned either by falling from a height or by a blow given with a heavy and blunt weapon.



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As there was no height near from which the man could have fallen—his body had been found ten feet from the porch—and as the police had found a brick, one end of which was smeared with blood, the blow suggestion was accepted, and a verdict of "Wilful murder against some person or persons unknown" was given by the jury.

Tom told his secret knowledge to Delaville, and handed him the three rubies he had found. The latter was appalled. At first he was inclined to blame Tom for rashness; but a few words from his ward showed the late cashier that Tom had acted and was now acting rightly.

"We must get the remaining gems, and send the lot to Sir Samuel," the boy declared. "You see, sir, this dreadful murder is a sort of red herring drawn across the path. It will make it more difficult to pursue our search; but, on the other hand, it points to the certainty of the gems being in the hands of someone connected with building."

In Pompey Terrace hammers rang and workmen whistled. Plain-clothes constables put in an appearance now and again, conveying to the minds of innocent persons the misery of being under suspicion.

Tom, paying a surprise visit to Pompey Terrace ten days after the murder, came upon a new character. He made the other's acquaintance by being ordered by him from the doorway of a building. On hearing the peremptory words Tom turned upon the speaker, a man of about thirty, by his costume a white-handed labourer, and, by the advertisement of the pen behind his ear, a clerk.

"Ah!" said Tom solemnly. "You must be someone of importance. Why don't you wear a label?"

The other returned, in tones that were half American, half "horsey," but wholly vulgar:

"I am clerk of these works, and accordin' to that printed rule"—pointing to a notice signed "Stephen Scathel"—"I allow no admission except on business."

"A jolly good rule, too," returned Tom, "though I am puzzled to see why anyone should come here for amusement. Are you the gentleman who composed that literary gem?"

"I'm the Mr. Scathel who has ordered you off, and you'll go jolly quick, too! Here, Dick!"

He turned to a workman, who grinned.

"Even if I am here on business?" suggested Tom amiably.

"Well, if you 'ave any, say what it is. This isn't a theatre."

"But it is the place of a tragedy!" flashed Tom. "Run away, man! Even if I were an idler, I would not move when spoken to in that way. As a fact, I am here on legal business."

Mr. Scathel paled.

"No offence, y'know!" he returned. "Why didn't you say right off what you were doin'? Have a cigarette?"

"Thanks—no!" returned Tom. Then, looking about him: "Rather a waste of time and money to go on building. I expect the row will have to be pulled down."

Scathel's face became at first scornful, then it expressed debating doubt, and possibly something else.

"Why?" he asked, in a flat, harsh voice.

"Because it may hide secrets we wish to be known. On the other hand, it may hide nothing. Hasn't it occurred to you that Forbes may have been watched on the night of the murder?"

"Don't quite sense what you mean," said Scathel weakly.

Tom did not explain, but went on:

"You are building a row of houses in the next street, I believe. It is just possible that Forbes was murdered there and brought here. The distance is only two hundred yards, and two men could easily have carried him."

"But the man was here, and alone," exclaimed the other—"at least, I suppose so."

Tom nodded slowly, but Scathel did not like the expression of his smile.

"I only judge from the evidence, of course," said the clerk.

Tom nodded and walked away. Scathel looked after him as one who is troubled.

Picking his way between the scattered building materials, Tom was too occupied mentally to notice the appearance of a man against whom he stumbled. But at the words, "We have him!" Tom came to a stand, and recognised Symons.

"Well?" questioned Tom.

"Bare is in the hands of some chums of mine. I found him near his old home, watching, I suspect, for his wife."

"Poor chap!" said Tom.

"I bluffed him into coming quietly," went on Symons, "but you'll either have to hand him over to the police, or let him go."

Bare was found by Tom haggard of face. Two men were in the room. At a word from Tom they quitted it, and he was alone with the prisoner.



"A nice predicament for the possessor of five millions!" said Tom.

The man stared stupidly. He had lost the spirit of retort. "Now to business, my friend," went on Tom. "You know, of course, that we are aware of your little adventure in the garret. You know, also, that Forbes, the foreman, has been murdered. It is, however, just possible that you may be in a position to urge some reason for my believing that you did not kill the man."

"That I what!"

"Did not kill Forbes?"

"How could I?"

"Very easily, I should have thought."

"An' me down at Deal! I know when he was killed, for I read it in the paper. If that was all you 'ad agen me I should get orf pretty quick!"

"You can prove you were at Deal, I suppose?"

"I guess that the police down there can. I was run in as a drunk at about nine in the evening, an' brought up next day at the court. The name I give 'em was Thomas, an' the fine was forty bob."

"But as to the jewels, Bare?"

"Oh, I took 'em! Hang 'em! I see the old chap, Sallerby, or whatever 'is name is, a-andlin' of 'em, an' I was tempted. I put the box in one of the 'ouses in Pompey Terrace—up in the roof it was. But let that bide. You're the chap what I seed and talked to down street one day. When I 'eard what the missus 'ad to tell, I guessed you was a 'tec, an' I dodged round to Pompey Terrace. The box was gone, mister. As true as I'm sittin' 'ere, it was gone. I 'ad on'y one thing out of it—one o' them stones."

"What did you do with that?"

"Sold it. But I ain't goin' to lay on who it was. The chap give me a 'undred an' fifty for it."

"When had you last seen the box?"

"I'd took it round the night previous, an' a dickens of a job it was to dodge the missus."

"Did you meet anyone on your way to or from the place?"

"Yes; I come acrost old Forbes just as I got out. 'E passed a word or two, an' asked what I was doin' of round there, an' I told 'im I was goin' to buy number sixteen."

"Did you tell him anything else?"

"Made up a yarn about a legacy."

"Did anyone near where Forbes was found speak to you about this legacy?"

"Yes; Scathel did—the clerk chap. Forbes must 'ave told 'im."

Tom sat putting one and one together.

"You must have been seen on that night when you placed the box in Pompey Terrace," he said. "Now, my friend, I may tell you that you are an uncommonly lucky man. I'm about to let you go free, conditionally. Don't forget this—no matter who has the box, you stole it. You are going to tell me who bought that stone from you."

"A chap they call a 'fence.'"

"And where did you make his acquaintance?"

"Well, it was like this: One of my mates 'ad a brother sent to quod 'bout six months ago for stealin' a portmanteau, an' 'e told me who the chap was as bought it."

"I will trouble you for his name and address."

Bare hesitated.

"It 'ud be a measly thing to do!" Bare returned.

"Not so 'measly' as letting the scoundrel keep the stolen property. And I can guarantee the man won't be prosecuted. There is only one end in view—to recover the stone."

Bare gave the information desired.

Tom stood looking at him thoughtfully.

"See here," he said presently; "I have set another man to find and recover the box, and I can't take the job out of his hands very well, but I think you may help without clashing. No one connected with the police knows you had the box. I want you to haunt Pompey Terrace after dark. Go to work quietly. Search as you, a practical workman, may think best. If the gems are hidden, find them. If you see anyone moving secretly, watch him—follow him—don't lose sight of him until he has an address. Is that plain?"

"Surely!" returned Bare.

### Bare's Discovery.

Jim Bare went to his new task with better qualifications than any man yet employed on the case. He was not a fool. He was fairly able to meet the cunning of men who were not above his own level of thought. His familiarity with houses in course of construction gave him a very marked advantage over Symons, and Tom himself. Before this, when about to hide the box, Bare had debated the relative advantages of each of a score of hiding-places. Also, he was perfectly familiar with the where, when, and how relating to his placing the box in the roof.

Lastly, a successful issue would be certain to bring a reward. It was quite plain to him that he had been watched when secreting the box. Probably Forbes had seen him. Someone had spied on Forbes. This spying had most likely

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EVERY  
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ONE  
PENNY.

taken place after dark. It was most improbable that any of the workmen would return to Pompey Terrace after their day's labour. Sallowby was out of the argument. Will was a strong lad, but not by any means the equal of Forbes. Bare was eliminating all the false "leads." No; he must think.

There had been thefts of building materials. There had been complaints by Forbes and his employers. Forbes had volunteered to act as night watchman now and again, in the hope of catching the thieves. Still the petty thieving had gone on. Now, was it not likely that someone volunteered to watch Forbes himself? And with this thought Bare almost started, for he had come very close to the truth.

Without taking a light, Jim Bare, on the evening following his talk with Tom, went up the stairs of number sixteen. The steps had been taken away from the top landing, but a plank rested on the floor and balustrade rail. Bare seized it, thrust the trap open, and so stood the plank that it could be used as a climbing medium. Then he went up it, as in earlier days he had gone up trees after birds'-nests.

When beneath the roof he moved at once to the far end against the house front. Here he knelt down, placed the lantern he was carrying on a joist, lighted it, and gazed searchingly at one spot. He had reason to know it; there he had placed the cause of all this trouble.

Whoever had stolen the thing must have passed there, and there—Yes; there, too. As he decided this, Bare knelt forward a little, resting on his palms. Something was hurting the ball of his thumb. Bare shifted his support, and looked down at the supposed nail-head; but the object that had hurt him was a red stone, larger than a hazel nut.

"By gum! It's one of 'em!" he said almost inaudibly.

Bare sat down, placed the stone in his watch-pocket, and moved his eyes wonderingly about the place. So the box had been opened here! As he was debating the how and when of the matter, there came from outside the house the bang of a fallen plank.

Bare extinguished the light, went to the trap, and listened. He heard something like the sound of footsteps in the roadway. They paused; then resumed, and passed into the distance. Bare thrust the lantern into his coat pocket, slid down the plank, and having gone into the front-room, whose window stood wide, carefully looked out.

There were no lamps in the rough thoroughfare. There was no moon; but in the murk Bare could distinguish a figure that, almost at the instant he espied it, stepped from the road to the entrance of a house.

Then there moved through the shadows something so near the ground that the watcher at first took it for a dog; but presently he saw that it was a human form in a crouching attitude. This also went in at the open doorway, but quite noiselessly.

Bare passed down the stairs and into the open. He tripped softly and carefully between the various obstacles until he came to the house into whose interior the figures had passed. Here he crouched, and moved forward slowly.

Of old he had spent many a pleasant hour in reading the adventures of American Indians, all invented by clever authors. Now there came upon him a sense of boyhood. He smelt the fir-tree, a nook 'midst whose branches had been his place of retreat when the paternal voice bade him come and work. It seemed to him now that he was engaged, as often in those days he had been, with chums in playing at "Indians." The imagined subtlety of movement then associated with his Redskin heroes he now involuntarily mimicked.

Forward on hands and knees, slowly, noiselessly, peering into the gloom of the house entry, mounting the steps, pausing, listening, breathing inaudibly; so the entry was gained. Then from above came a noise—gurgling, whistling, many sounds in one—and Bare knew that by some means the ball of the house cistern had been moved.

The watcher rose. Should he stay here in the passage? For what? To seize on the other when he came down? But the man might be some innocent future tenant.

Bare went on to the stairway, then up this, slowly, and with scarce a creak of the boards. At the first landing another noise met his ears. This was as if someone had alighted on a floor from a height. Other noises followed, which the latter explained as steps descending the stairs.

Bare drew back towards an open doorway. The steps on the stairs were arrested. Then followed the peculiar pat-pat made by some object bounding from stair to stair. A voice muttered hoarsely "Hang!" Now came the striking of a match, its outbreking glimmer, and Bare saw before him Scathel, the clerk.

(Another long instalment of this grand serial next  
Order your copy early.)


OUR NEXT NUMBER WILL BE ON SALE AT ALL NEWSAGENTS' ON CHRISTMAS EVE.



**OUR COMPANION PAPERS:** "THE BOYS' FRIEND," 1d., Every Monday. "THE GEM" LIBRARY, 1d., Every Wednesday. "THE BOYS' FRIEND" 3d. COMPLETE LIBRARY. "THE PENNY POPULAR," 1d., Every Friday. "CHUCKLES," Price 1d., Every Saturday.

# MY READERS' PAGE

The Editor is always pleased to hear from his chums, at home or abroad, and is only too willing to give his best advice to them if they are in difficulty or in trouble. . . . Whom to write to: Editor, The "Magnet" Library, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.



Quite up to the usual high standard is next Monday's long complete story of Greyfriars, which is of the dramatic order. Sidney Snoop, the reprehensible cad of the Remove, endeavours to coin a considerable sum of money by backing Highcliffe to beat Greyfriars in a forthcoming football match. To safeguard his position, he hopes to oust Hazeldene from the team, and to persuade Wharton to give him a trial. The little plot succeeds almost up to the hilt, Snoop intending, of course, to let the team down by playing a poor game in goal. At the eleventh hour, however, Hazel is vindicated, and proved innocent of the charge which Snoop contrived to lay at his door, with the result that the rascally intriguer catches it hot, while

### "HAZELDENE'S HONOUR"

remains untarnished, and the cloud under which he had fallen is happily lifted.

### "MAGNET" STORY COMPETITION.

#### A Gigantic Success in Every Way!

Little did I dream when I offered an award of fifteen pounds for the best Harry Wharton story, written in the style of Frank Richards, that the scheme would be attended with such excellent results. No less than

#### Nine Hundred Stories

were submitted in connection with the competition, and as the work of adjudication is so colossal, my chums must possess their souls in patience for a week or two, when it will be my pleasure to announce the name of the lucky winner, together with the names of other competitors, who will be awarded handsome consolation prizes.

An author of high repute is working in conjunction with your Editor, and we find that not a single manuscript is lacking in interest. At the same time, quite two-thirds of the entrants have disregarded the rules governing the contest, which provided that the stories should be 30,000 words in length. In too many cases, alas! three or four thousand words cover the entire yarn.

I believe it was Solomon who said that there was no new thing under the sun, and I readily appreciate the difficulty of conceiving a novel plot. Nevertheless, several of the competitors have poached upon Mr. Richards' preserves to an almost unforgivable extent. Ideas exploited quite recently in the MAGNET Library have been utilised again and again by my readers, with no attempt at originality.

Others, again, seem to imagine that if they introduce half a dozen phrases such as "Rats!" and "Ha, ha, ha!" on each page, they have written a successful MAGNET story. The necessity of a good strong plot, with plenty of exciting incidents, does not appear to have occurred to them.

Apart from this, some of the stories submitted are of high merit, and the ingenuity and perseverance of the budding authors are alike remarkable.

One competitor tells me that when he was at work upon his story his parents laughed at him, and asked him if he were fool enough to suppose that the contest was genuine. But my chum's faith in the MAGNET Library never wavered. He

*For Next Monday:*

### "HAZELDENE'S HONOUR!"

By Frank Richards.

went ahead with his tale, and sent it in. Perhaps when the postman brings him a substantial cash prize his father and mother will change their tune.

### The Value of Neatness.

Many of the manuscripts are models of neatness. Many, on the other hand, were nothing if not slipshod. Of course, I did not expect every story to be typewritten, for typewriters are only the property of the few; but there is no excuse for the competitors who perpetrate an indecipherable scrawl on both sides of the paper, and do not take the trouble to split the story up into paragraphs. It is taking hours to wade through stories of this unappetising nature, and in future my chums should remember that neatness goes a very long way with the judges.

Look out for the long list of prize-winners, which will appear in the MAGNET Library shortly!

### A MOTHER'S LETTER.

The interest in our Story Competition has been by no means confined to boys, as the following letter will show:

"St. Leonards-on-Sea.

"Dear Mr. Editor,—I do not know if all your readers are at liberty to enter your Story Competition, irrespective of

age. I am the mother of one of your most loyal readers, and take almost as much interest in the Greyfriars boys as he does. As he is an only child, and has been in ill-health for the past three years, and unable to attend school, your papers—of which we take three each week—are of tremendous interest to him. In fact, he revels in them.

"I am enclosing my first attempt at writing a story. If it is not eligible for the competition, and is of no use

to you, will you kindly return same, my son being keenly interested in his mother's efforts?

"I must congratulate you upon the healthy tone of all your papers. We think they are splendid, and a tonic for young and old. Thanking you.—I am, yours truly,

(Mrs.) N. C.

"P.S.—We send our papers on to the soldiers when we have read them, so I am unable to refer back to the rules governing the competition."

I have written a personal letter to this good lady, assuring her that it was quite permissible for mothers of Magnetites to compete in our story-writing contest. I have also thanked her for her sound and broad-minded letter, which should go far to counteract any prejudice which may exist in the minds of other parents concerning the tone of the companion papers.

### FOOTBALL CHALLENGES.

We are now at the height of the football season, but there are still many teams who are short of fixtures. Among them are the following:

M. Wilson, 6, Rockland Road, Waterloo, Liverpool, is captain of an eleven whose average age is 11. He would be glad to hear from club secretaries in his district who require matches.

(Continued on page iv of Cover.)



## OUT TO-DAY!



**FRANK NUGENT,**  
Art Editor.



**H. VERNON-SMITH,**  
Sports Editor.



**HARRY WHARTON,**  
Editor.



**ROBERT OHERRY,**  
Fighting Editor.



**MARK LINLEY,**  
Sub-Editor.

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**The GREYFRIARS**  
**HERALD.** 1<sup>D</sup>/<sub>2</sub>

No. 6. Vol. 1.  
Week Ending  
Dec. 25th, 1915.

FRANK NUGENT,  
Art Editor.

H. VERNON-SMITH,  
Sports Editor.

HARRY WILSON,  
Editor.

of Study 1. Greyfriars School.

No. 6. Vol. 1.  
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Dec. 25th, 1915.

No. 6.  
Week Ending  
Dec. 25th, 1915.

# THE

Edited by Harry Wharlon & Co of Study 1. Greyfriars School.

## THE PICTURE-STORY OF DICK WHITE

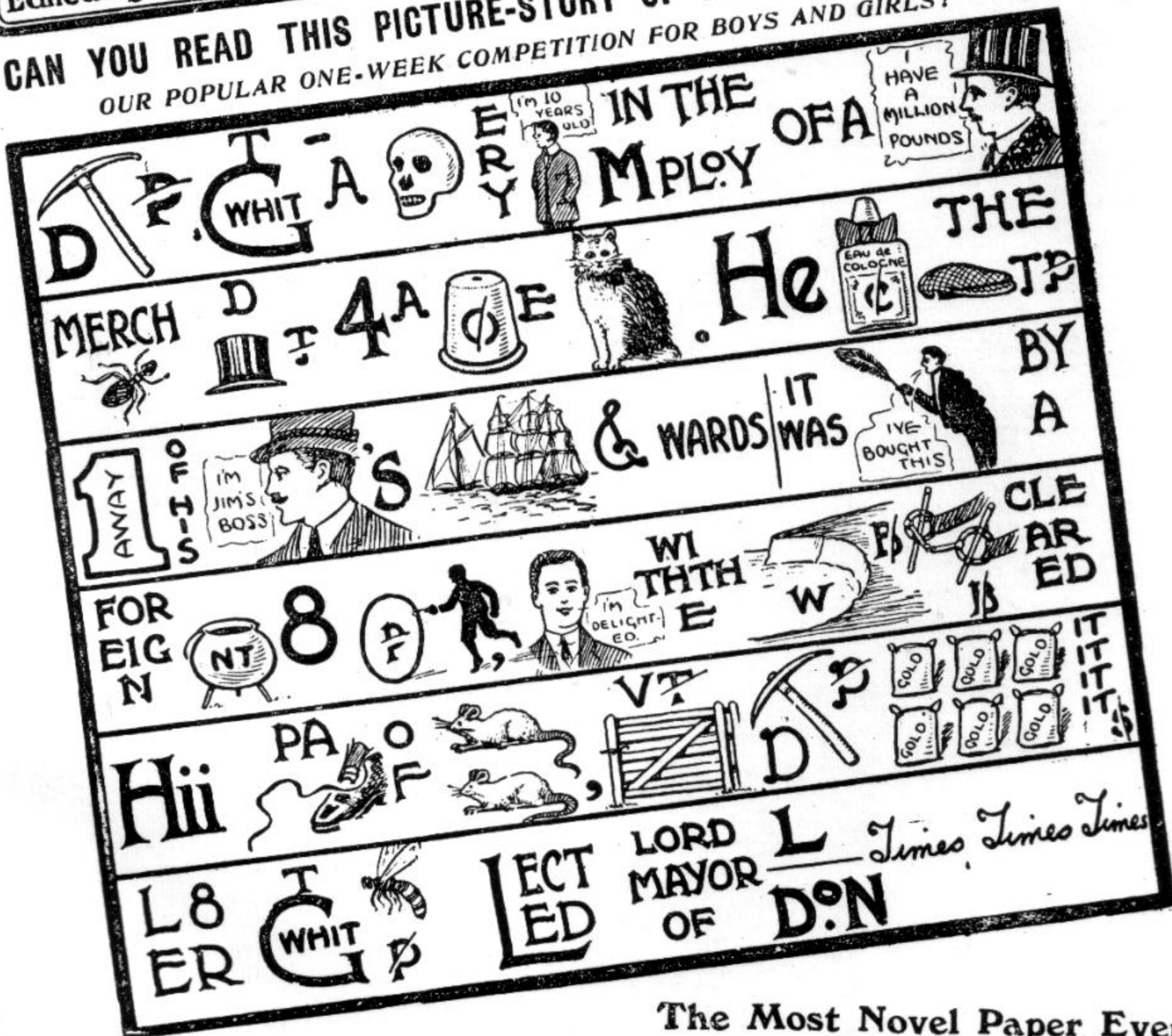
BOYS AND G

Edited by Harry Wharlon & Co of Study 1. Gresham

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OUR POPULAR ONE-WEEK COMPETITION FOR BOYS AND GIRLS!

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**GRAND TUCK HAMPERS AS PRIZES! FIRST LIST OF PRIZE-WINNERS** in this issue.

## The Most Novel Paper Ever Published!

## The Paper With "The Magnet Library" Behind It!



FOOTBALL CHALLENGES (*continued*).

Billinghay Football Club (average age 15) require home and away matches with teams residing within a radius of seven miles. Apply John Fawcett, 22, Summergate Place, Parkinson Lane, Halifax, Yorks.

St. Mary's Football Club (average age 16) are in need of matches. Apply to Secretary, St. Mary's F.C., 23, Beaconsfield Street, Leamington Spa.

A team of Hampshire juniors (average age 15) have the following dates open: January 1st, 15th, and 22nd, 1916. Apply to Secretary, Holm Mead, Rampart Road, Bitterne Manor, Southampton.

The Harley Football Club (average age 16) require home and away matches for the New Year. Applicants must reside within easy distance of Finsbury Park. Apply to C. G. Lane, Oakleigh House, 87, Regina Road, Tollington Park, London, N.

Ullswater Rovers F.C. (average age 14) require matches with local teams. Apply to Hector McKelvie, 75, Ullswater Street, Everton, Liverpool.

## REPLIES IN BRIEF.

J. Reginald Blundell (Southport).—No; all the members of the Sixth Form are not prefects.

Reg Clark (Canada).—Thank you very much for your letter. I will try and carry out what you suggest.

"Boxer."—Sorry I have been unable to answer your letter before. The replies to your questions are as follows: (1) "Prep" means preparation. (2) "Adsum" means "Here!" (3) I am afraid I cannot forward you the address of one of the grumblers; they never give it! (4) My readers didn't care much for the character in question; and he dropped out of the running. (5) The puzzle competition in the "Greyfriars Herald" is complete in itself each week.

Gunner G. Peters, 7th Battalion 3rd West Riding Brigade, Royal Field Artillery, British Expeditionary Force, France, would be very grateful for spare copies of the companion papers.

"Zib" (Herne Hill).—The reproduction of Harry Wharton's photograph in the "Greyfriars Herald" has caused a good deal of comment, but personally I do not consider it to be at all a bad likeness.

Gladys E. M. L. (Walkden).—Very many thanks for the splendid work you are doing in order to popularise our new venture.

"A Scout Magnetite" (Berwick).—Harry Wharton was the originator of the scheme in question. I quite agree with you when you say: The "GREYFRIARS HERALD" is a GEM. It attracts like a MAGNET, and is already the BOYS' FRIEND with its POPULAR stories, which evoke CHUCKLES all round!

W. R. (Barrowford).—My word! We're coming to something now! Who is the best penalty-shot in the Remove? You will be asking how many hair: Wharton has on his head next! Joking apart, I should say that there is no outstanding penalty-shot in the Remove football team. All the members of the eleven are sure marksmen. For the rest of the information you require, I must refer you to the special supplement given away with our Christmas Double Number.

"Tom" (Tunbridge Wells).—Mr. Richards is far too busy at present to write a story dealing with Marjorie Hazeldene's schooldays. Perhaps later on the subject will come up for consideration, if the majority of my chums approve.

"Anxious" (Edinburgh).—I can make no definite promise concerning the possible reappearance of the character you mention. There are twenty-six "Magnets" to a volume. Yes, Coker is the possessor of a motor-cycle.

W. K. (Bucks).—I do not insert advertisements of such a nature.

W. S. (Manchester).—Many thanks for your fine letter of appreciation.

"A Loyal Reader" (Hucknall).—I have passed on your kind suggestion to Mr. Frank Richards.

Howard, C. K. (Worcester).—Thank you very much for the information contained in your letter. I shall know what to do in future.

Charles H. (Wokingham).—A correspondence exchange is a medium for putting readers into touch with each other all over the world. Unfortunately, the war has put a decided stopper on the exchange which was formerly run in connection with the "Gem" Library. Perhaps it will blossom forth again later on. We must patiently wait events.

B. R. B. (Cambridge).—The artist for the "Magnet" Library is Mr. C. H. Chapman, and for the "Gem" Library Mr. R. J. Macdonald. Best wishes!

C. Kingsley (Bermondsey).—Many thanks for your loyal promise of support in connection with the companion papers.

H. E. A. (Winnipeg).—It was most unfortunate that a large quantity of "Magnets," bound for America, should have been sunk by the wily Germans. I have sent on to you the copy in question.

Jack N. (Bishop's Stortford).—Hope you enjoyed "The Boy Without a Name," even though you received it so long after

publication. You might inform your chums that there are still a few hundred copies obtainable. They will be despatched on receipt of four penny stamps.

F. C. (Colchester).—Plenty of exercise is the best and only cure for the ailment you mention.

F. W. (Battersea).—I will bear your suggestion in mind.

C. G. (Hornsey).—No, sir; Harry Wharton & Co. are not going to advance in Forms. How many more times?

W. Watson (Southampton).—I am afraid it would entail too much time to do as you suggest. Best wishes!

"The Young 'Uns" (Hull).—Why, you must be blind! Didn't you see the announcements which have appeared on my Chat Page concerning the "Magnet" story competition?

C. K. (London).—I am not an authority on Zeppelins, although the beastly things have passed clean over my private house!

"A Loyal Lassie" (Somewhere in Scotland).—Thanks very much for your note of appreciation concerning the "Greyfriars Herald."

S. A. (Montreal).—Hope you thoroughly enjoyed "School and Sport."

"Edith" (Birkenhead).—The persons and places mentioned in your letter are fictitious.

Edith K. (Old Kent Road).—Verses not quite up to standard. Have another shot!

E. F. (St. Helens).—Dick Penfold is a very popular character with my chums, and I will persuade Mr. Richards to bring him into the limelight more.

"Magna-Gem" (Deal).—See reply to "Edith" (Birkenhead), printed above.

T. P. P. (Barnsley).—The next "Magnet" serial is now in course of preparation, but I am not yet allowed to divulge the name of the author.

"A Brawny Scotchman and Four Loyal Pals."—Very many thanks for your letter and loyalty.

Maurice R. (Boscombe).—I am afraid a competition on the lines you suggest would not appeal to the majority of my readers.

Albert E. S. (Newington Causeway).—Thank you very much for your offer, but the wishes of my readers have always been complied with in that respect.

"A Reader" (Stepney).—It is small wonder you have not been replied to, with a nom-de-plume like that! Try and think of something a little more novel. St. Jim's and Greyfriars are about twenty miles apart. No; there are no grumblers in Stepney; at least, I hope not.

C. F. B. (Southsea).—I received numerous complimentary letters from Sunny Southsea concerning "The Remove Eleven on Tour." I hope Frank Richards' recent three-penny book story was appreciated in your famous seaside town.

"Quo Vadis."—Many thanks for your loyal letter. Much as I resent the slanderous epithets of "Evil-wisher" and others, it would be useless to conduct a campaign against them, as you suggest. They refuse to come out of the rat-holes in which they reside.

Pat McK. (Stirling).—I do not think it would find favour with the majority of my readers were I to insert dry articles on photography in the "Greyfriars Herald." We want the latter paper kept bright and breezy.

"The Wolf" (Wolverhampton).—Your effort was not at all bad, but I wish you better luck next time.

Private H. Smith (Royal Engineers).—Very many thanks for a most interesting letter.

"Loyal Reader" (Southport).—See reply to Pat McK. (Stirling) printed above.

Albert C. (Scotland).—I shall be happy to do as you suggest.

"Chuck" (Keighley).—I am much indebted to you for your continued loyalty to the companion papers.

S. W. (London, E.).—Your alphabetical rhyme, like the curate's egg, is good in parts; but it is inferior to those now being published in the "Greyfriars Herald."

N. C. S. (Muswell Hill).—Very many thanks for your kind letter of appreciation.

"Scorcher" (Battersea).—Would that all my chums might follow your illustrious example and purchase three copies of the "Greyfriars Herald" every week. We should then have "Tom Merry's Weekly" on the market before you could say "fiddlesticks." Very many thanks!

E. N. C. (Hampshire).—Glad to see you have enrolled yourself as a member of the "Boys' Friend" Anti-German League. Its numbers are now very strong, and all Magnetites who are not yet members should apply for the magnificent certificate.

*Your Editor*

