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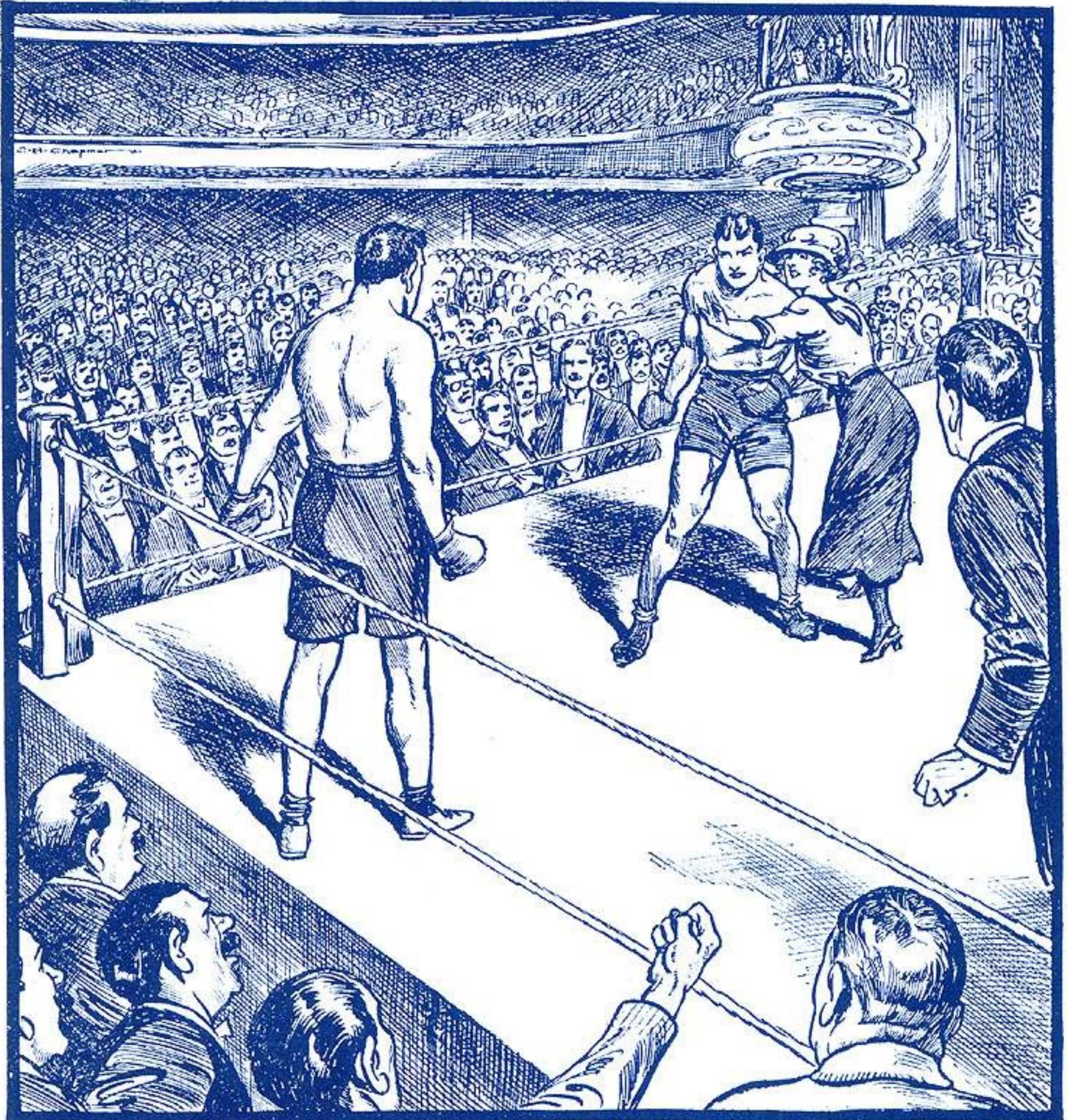
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No. 661. Vol. XVIII.

October 9th, 1920.



GRAND CINEMA SUPPLEMENT FREE
WITH THIS ISSUE.



ELSIE INTERVENES TO SAVE WINGATE FROM DEFEAT!

(A Dramatic Scene in this week's Grand Complete Story.)



With this number, all my chums will be in possession of the second part of my

GRAND FREE GIFT BOOKLET,

with its splendid pictures of famous screen favourites. That you will all be pleased with this beautifully-printed production I feel sure. I need only remind you that the third part will be presented to you with next Monday's

SPLENDID BUMPER NUMBER.

of the MAGNET, and that it will be equally good as, if not better than, the first two parts.

As far as I know, nothing like this Cinema Souvenir Book has ever been produced before—and certainly not to be given away. It is quite a new departure, and if my thousands of reader-chums appreciate it, it is in their power to repay me by conducting an active campaign to obtain new regular readers for the good old MAGNET.

And now

A WORD ABOUT OUR STORIES!

The series of powerful stories dealing with the doings of the Greyfriars chums at the Cinema School, which Mr. Frank

Richards is now running, are, in my opinion, very fine examples of this popular author's best work. The story of Wingate's devotion to Elsie Mainwaring, the charming film star who has quite captivated the big Sixth-Former's susceptible heart, will, I feel sure, live long in the memories of thousands of readers.

The one which will appear in the MAGNET next week continues this theme. It is entitled:

"HER SCHOOLBOY CHUM!"

—a story no one could help enjoying.

The next instalment of our thrilling story of Ancient Rome,

"MARCUS THE BRAVE!"

By Victor Nelson,

is a "top-hole" one, full of the excitement and romance of those wonderful times when cruel and mighty Rome ruled the world, and when the monster Nero ruled Rome.

Next week also there will be another

really funny series of pictures illustrating the antics of

"CHARLIE CHAPLIN, FORM-MASTER!"

By J. MacWilson,

as well as another splendid "Health-Knowledge" article, entitled:

"TAKE COVER!"

By George Howe.

Lastly, there is a corner for your Editor's Chat, and another for our

GRAND NEW COMPETITION,

in which the third set of puzzle-pictures will be given. Many valuable cash prizes are being offered in connection with this Competition, which is quite a simple one. Everyone should go in for it!

Your Editor

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: A Splendid Complete Story of Elsie Mainwaring, Cinema Star, and the Chums of Greyfriars School.

By FRANK RICHARDS.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Suspected!

"WINGATE a thief!"
 "Impossible!"
 "Rot!" growled Bob Cherry.
 "I say, Wharton—" chimed in the fat voice of Billy Bunter.
 "Don't worry now, Bunter!"
 Harry Wharton spoke sharply.
 The Famous Five of the Greyfriars Remove, were talking in earnest tones in the bungalow at Hawthorne Park, the headquarters of the Cyrus Hunker Film-Producing Company.
 The Greyfriars chums looked worried. For several weeks they had been quite enjoying life at the Cinema School at Hawthorne Park, a few miles from Greyfriars School, and helping in the production of Cyrus Hunker's films. But now the black suspicion that had fallen upon Wingate of the Sixth troubled them deeply.
 "But, I say—" persisted Bunter.
 "Cut off!" snapped Johnny Bull.
 "But Mr. Hunker—"
 "Bother Hunker!"
 "Wants—"
 "Never mind what he wants," said Nugent. "He can go and eat coke!"
 "To see—" continued Bunter.
 "Rats!"
 "Wharton—"
 "Bother!"
 "At once!" concluded Bunter, getting out his message at last.
 Harry Wharton gave a sound like a grunt. He was not anxious to see Mr. Hunker.
 Hitherto he had rather liked the breezy, go-ahead American producer. But Mr. Hunker's suspicion of Wingate changed all that. Mr. Hunker was a great producer of films; he had a wonderful eye for cinematographic thrills, and he was a business man "from the word go." But, apparently, he did not know that the captain of Greyfriars was above suspicion. There were, in fact,

some things that Mr. Hunker did not know, although he was not aware of the fact.
 "You'd better go," said Bunter, blinking at Wharton. "Mr. Quelch is with him, looking in no end of a bait. Hunker's talking about setting the police after Wingate."
 "The police!" ejaculated Bob Cherry.
 "I heard him!" assured Bunter.
 "The silly ass!"
 "The awful chump!"
 Wharton set his lips.
 "I'll go!" he said. And he left the bungalow, and crossed the gardens towards the main building of Hawthorne Park, to the door of Mr. Cyrus Hunker's office.
 The office door was open, and Wharton heard the voice of Mr. Hunker within as he approached.
 "I guess I'm not losing a hundred pounds without a kick! No, sir; that isn't Cyrus Hunker's way! I guess not, sir! I kinder calculate that that pesky thief is going to be had by the short hairs, sir—just a few!"
 "My dear sir—" came the voice of Mr. Quelch, the Remove-master at Greyfriars.
 Snort from Mr. Hunker.
 Harry Wharton rapped sharply at the half-open door.
 "Oh, come in!" yapped Mr. Hunker. The Greyfriars junior entered.
 Mr. Hunker was standing with his thumbs inserted in the armholes of his gorgeous waistcoat, with almost a belligerent look upon his sharp face. He was evidently in a state of great exasperation.
 Mr. Quelch was apparently soothing him. But it was not easy to soothe the enraged producer.
 A hundred pounds was a hundred pounds, as Mr. Hunker had said a dozen times at least. And Mr. Hunker "guessed" that he was going to have that sum back, just a few.
 "Ah, it is you, Wharton!" said Mr. Quelch.

"Yes, sir," said Harry. "Bunter said Mr. Hunker wished to speak to me."
 "Sure!" snapped Mr. Hunker. He spun round towards the Remove of Greyfriars, and fixed a searching grey eye on him.
 "I guess you know something about this, Wharton!" he said.
 "Very little, sir," answered Wharton. "I know that Wingate is not a thief."
 "How do you know that, Bub?"
 "I know him too well."
 Snort!
 "Any Greyfriars fellow would tell you that Wingate isn't capable of a rotten action!" exclaimed Wharton.
 "I guess that cuts no ice with me!" said Mr. Hunker. "Wingate was here, helping in the production of my films, same as the rest of you. Yesterday he left suddenly, without a word. Not a sign from him since. After he had vanooosed I found a hundred pounds had been lifted from my desk. I guess I know how to put two and two together—some!"
 "It certainly looks suspicious," said Mr. Quelch; "but—"
 "I guess the police would think so," said Mr. Hunker drily. "You've telegraphed to Greyfriars and to Wingate's home. He hasn't been seen at either place. Where is he, then?"
 "I cannot imagine—"
 "Wharton," rapped out Mr. Hunker, "it appears that you saw Wingate when he was absquatulating."
 "I met him near the station yesterday afternoon," said Harry.
 "He was going to the station?"
 "Yes."
 "Had a grip with him, I guess?"
 "A—a what?"
 "A grip!" howled Mr. Hunker. "A bag—"
 "Oh, yes, he had a bag with him!"
 "I guess the quids were in that!" said Mr. Hunker. "He was lighting out with the spondulics. He's not gone back to school or gone home. He's the thief!"
 THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 661.

"I cannot believe——" muttered Mr. Quelch.

"It's impossible!" said Wharton indignantly.

"Did you speak to him when you saw him, Wharton?"

"Yes."

"Did he explain why he was going?"

"N-no."

"Did he seem quite as usual or disturbed in any way?"

Harry Wharton hesitated.

"Out with it!" yapped Cyrus Hunker.

"He—he seemed rather disturbed," said Harry. "He—he's been a bit worried for some days."

"Short of the ready, I guess, and making up his mind to help himself!" growled Mr. Hunker.

"Nothing of the kind!" exclaimed Wharton. "It was quite a different matter that worried him."

Mr. Hunker and Mr. Quelch both fixed their eyes upon the junior at once.

"Then you know something, Wharton?" exclaimed the Remove-master.

"Kindly tell us at once what you know."

"Sharp's the word!" snapped Cyrus Hunker.

Wharton hesitated, and his colour deepened. He more than suspected George Wingate's secret, but he felt a strong disinclination to speak of it to the Form-master and the businesslike Mr. Hunker. But it was to save Wingate's good name, and to prevent Cyrus Hunker from calling in the police to track down the captain of Greyfriars.

"I—I think I know why he left Hawthorne Park," he stammered.

"Why?"

"Because—because——"

"Because what? Give it a name!"

"Because Miss Elsie had gone," stammered Wharton at last.

It was out now.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

To Search for Wingate!

"ELSIE!"

"What?"

Mr. Hunker and Mr. Quelch ejaculated the words simultaneously. Harry Wharton's face was crimson.

"What the thunder!" exclaimed Mr. Hunker. "Do you mean to say that the young guy was struck on Elsie Mainwaring?"

"Absurd!" exclaimed Mr. Quelch.

Wharton's eyes sought the floor.

"All the fellows had noticed it," he stammered. "Miss Mainwaring was in some trouble. She had been looking worried for a long time——"

"I guess I know that," said Cyrus Hunker. "But Wingate——"

"Wingate admired her very much," said Wharton. "They were great friends, especially since he saved her in the runaway trap. He was quite knocked over when Miss Mainwaring went so suddenly. And—and I'm sure that he left when he did to look for her. He believes that she's in trouble or danger, and he's gone to find her and help her."

"Oh, by hokey!" ejaculated Mr. Hunker.

The wrathful expression on Cyrus Hunker's face was replaced by a grin. But Mr. Quelch looked very grave.

"This is absurd, Wharton!" he exclaimed. "Surely Wingate was not so foolish as to allow such absurd thoughts to enter his head!"

"I'm afraid so, sir."

"I guess it's natural enough," grinned Mr. Hunker. "Elsie's turned the heads of a good many pilgrims, though she

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 661.

never took much notice of them herself. So the young jay has had his head turned by my leading lady, has he? I guess I'm not surprised. But——"

"However, this explains his action, Mr. Hunker," said the Remove-master, in some relief. "A foolish, boyish infatuation——"

"Correct! But the money's gone."

"I know. But Wingate's sudden departure is accounted for, if what Wharton tells us is correct."

"I am sure of it, sir," said Harry.

"I guess it's all very well, and if Wingate comes back to say something for himself——"

"He would come back at once if he knew that he was suspected of theft,"

exclaimed Harry Wharton warmly. "He hasn't the faintest idea of it, of course. He doesn't even know that a theft has been committed. As soon as he can be told, he will come back; but you have no right to call in the police and disgrace Wingate and our school."

Snort!

"I agree," said Mr. Quelch. "You must at least allow time for Wingate to be found, and given a chance to return, Mr. Hunker."

The Transatlantic gentleman removed his thumbs from his waistcoat and took two or three turns up and down the office, thoughtfully.

"I guess it's possible the kid's right," he said. "I'll give Wingate a chance. You're a bright young sprig, Wharton!"

"I—I hope so, sir."

"I'll give you a week to find Wingate. Go after him and bring him back, and I'll hear what he has to say for himself."

Wharton looked at Mr. Quelch.

"If you'll permit it, sir, I'll be glad to go, and I think we'll be able to find him. If you'll let my friends come with me, we'll leave no stone unturned to find him and bring him back——"

Mr. Quelch hesitated.

"If you don't, the police will!" said Mr. Hunker grimly.

That remark decided the Remove-master.

"Let it be so," he said. "You and your friends shall follow Wingate and find him, if you can. You can inquire for what place he took his ticket at the station yesterday, and no doubt you will learn where he has gone. Make your preparations at once."

"I won't lose a minute, sir!" exclaimed Wharton joyfully.

"Good luck to you!" said Cyrus Hunker, with a touch of sarcasm. "And, remember, if you don't find Wingate, the police will!"

Harry Wharton made no answer to that.

He hurried from the office and cut across to the bungalow to rejoin his chums.

Bob Cherry and Johnny Bull, Frank Nugent and Hurree Janset Ram Singh, gathered round him at once.

"Well?" asked four voices in unison.

Harry Wharton explained rapidly.

"Good idea!" said Bob. "We'll find old Wingate all right, and he'll come back like a shot when he knows what the matter is."

"Yes, rather!" said Nugent.

"The ratherfulness is terrific!" remarked Hurree Singh. "Let us start at once!"

"Buck up!" said Harry.

It did not take the Famous Five long to get ready to start. They packed a couple of bags for the five. Vernon-Smith and Squiff and Skinner, and some more of the juniors, gathered round them to inquire what was "up," and they all wished the five good luck—excepting Skinner. Harold Skinner stated his opinion that Wingate wouldn't be found, because he was engaged upon "blow-

ing" Mr. Hunker's hundred pounds on a "razzle."

Harry Wharton gave the cad of the Remove a scornful glance.

"I haven't time to lick you now, Skinner," he said. "Can I leave that to you, Smithy?"

"Leave it to all of us," said Squiff.

"Here, I say!" ejaculated Skinner in alarm.

Harry Wharton & Co. quitted the bungalow and started for the gates. As they went, there were sounds of woe behind them. Skinner was wriggling in the grasp of half a dozen angry Removeites. By the time they had finished with him, Skinner was deeply repenting that candid expression of his opinion.

The Famous Five hurried out of the gates of Hawthorne Park, and started for the station. A fat voice hailed them as they started.

"I say, you fellows——"

"Go and eat coke, Bunter!" Bob Cherry howled back.

"But, I say, it's important!" yelled Bunter, plodding after the five juniors as fast as his fat little legs would carry him.

Harry Wharton paused.

"Perhaps the fat duffer's got a message," he remarked. "Wait for him to come up."

The juniors halted, and William George Bunter came up breathlessly.

"Well, what is it?" asked Harry.

"Groogh!"

"What did you call us for?" hooted Bob Cherry.

"Yow! Groogh! Give a fellow time to draw his breath!" gasped Bunter. "I say, Wharton——"

"Well?" exclaimed Harry impatiently.

"You're going to look for Wingate?"

"Yes, yes!"

"Got money for your expenses?"

"Eh? Yes, we're all in funds," said Harry, staring at him. He had not expected Bunter to concern himself about that.

"Good!" said Bunter, with much satisfaction. "If you've got plenty of cash, you can change a banknote for me."

"Eh?"

"I want change for a tenner——"

"You silly ass!" roared Bob Cherry, in great wrath. "Are you stopping us to try and squeeze a loan out of us?"

"You fat chump!"

"I—I want——"

"I know what you want," granted Johnny Bull, "and you're going to get it! Collar him!"

"I say, you fellows—— Yaroooh! I'm not gassing! I've really got a tenner—— Yoooooop!" roared Billy Bunter, as the Famous Five grasped him and sat him down forcibly in the grass by the roadside.

"Come on!" said Harry.

"Yaroooooooh!"

Harry Wharton & Co. hurried on towards the station. William George Bunter sat in the grass and roared.

And the chums of the Remove did not see Bunter again ere they started on their strange quest. William George limped back to Hawthorne Park in a state of breathlessness and great wrath; and the Co. did not waste a further thought upon him.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Wingate's Quest I

"DOWN him!"

Thud!

George Wingate stopped suddenly.

The street was dusk and lonely. Wingate, with his cap pulled down over his brows, was moving slowly, buried in deep and troubled thought.



A constable was struggling in the grasp of three rough-looking assailants, and even as Wingate came speeding up, the policeman went to the ground with a heavy thud. "You cowardly brutes!" shouted Wingate, rushing into the fray. (See this page.)

The Sixth-Former of Greyfriars had plenty to think about just then.

He was conscious that it was folly that had led him to quit the cinema school at Hawthorn Park—folly, he knew. But was it not folly that had led him there in the first place? Had he not gone there simply because he knew that Elsie Mainwaring was a member of Cyrus Hunker's acting company?

After Elsie had gone without a word, Hawthorne Park was dreary enough to George Wingate. He had thought of returning to Greyfriars. He had his duties there, and but for the knowledge that Elsie was in trouble—perhaps in danger—Wingate would have gone back to his old place in the Greyfriars Sixth.

But he remembered the cloud upon the fair brow, the look of fear in Elsie's blue eyes—he could not forget that. She had fled from trouble, from danger, in which perhaps he could help her. At all events, if he could find her, there should not be wanting a strong arm to defend her if peril threatened. It was folly, perhaps:

but it was the folly of a brave and generous heart.

He must find her—he would find her. That was his fixed determination when he left Hawthorne Park. And he had traced her, with more or less certainty, as far as Fritchester. He was almost certain that she had left the railway at Fritchester Station. And then?

He banished other thoughts from his mind, and set himself to his task, to find Elsie Mainwaring. He had taken a cheap lodging near the station: money was a consideration. He could not write home for money. He had sent a brief note to say that he was well, and that was all. The few pounds he had and the few pounds he had borrowed from his chum Gwynne of the Sixth would not last him long.

But if his money went, he would find work: he was sure that there was always work for willing hands to do.

Every day he walked in the Fritchester streets now, hoping to find a trace of Elsie, making inquiries here and there:

sometimes watching the crowds on the buses, sometimes glancing at windows, conscious of the hopelessness of his search, but never quite giving up hope.

He was in a brown study now, thinking deeply, as he paced slowly along the dusky street, and he had hardly noticed the sounds of a scuffle near at hand, till a rough voice shouted:

"Down 'im! Club him, Nobby, you fool!"

"Help!"
A cry for help was enough for Wingate of Greyfriars. The dark thoughts in his troubled mind fled as he was roused instantly to action.

"Help!"
He ran in the direction of the cry. A constable was struggling in the grasp of three rough-looking assailants, and, even as Wingate came speeding up, the policeman went to the ground with a heavy thud.

Wingate did not stop to think. He rushed into the fray without a
THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 561

pause. The scene did not require any explanation, and he was prompt to act. The three ruffians were gripping the hapless officer as he struggled on the pavement, too intently occupied in their ruffianly work to observe Wingate's approach. He came on them like a whirlwind.

"Look out!"

One of the ruffians went whirling under Wingate's clenched fist, and the other two sprang up.

In an instant they turned upon him savagely.

"You cowardly brutes!" shouted Wingate, his eyes blazing.

"Go for 'em!" muttered one of the ruffians. And they closed in savagely on the Sixth-Former of Greyfriars.

Wingate's hands were up, his eyes flashing over them.

The ruffians were two to one, but Wingate was strong and sturdy, and a splendid boxer. He held the attack at bay until the third man scrambled up and came to the help of his confederates. Then the captain of Greyfriars was hard pressed.

But he stood gamely up to his assailants. The policeman was on his knees now, trying to rise, and blowing his whistle.

"Out 'im!" muttered one of the ruffians. "There's somebody coming! Out 'im!"

The three ruffians hurled themselves on Wingate. His right, clenched and as hard as iron, caught one of them fairly on the jaw, and sent him spinning into the street. The grasp of the other two was on him, and Wingate reeled back, nearly borne to the pavement. But he freed his hand, and struck upward, catching one of his assailants under the chin, and the man released his hold, and sprawled, yelling, on the pavement.

A blow in the face from his last assailant dazed Wingate, but he grappled with the ruffian, fighting hard at close quarters. A hefty body-blow made the ruffian gasp and stagger.

Wingate followed it up with a drive fairly on the jaw, and the man reeled, and crashed on the pavement.

Wingate stood panting.

He was dizzy from the blows he had received; but he was still game. There was a sound of rapidly approaching footsteps. A man in evening-clothes, his open coat showing a gleaming shirt-front and a sparkling diamond stud, came up at a run.

The policeman had staggered up now, a streak of blood on his face. The three ruffians were sprawling on the pavement and in the road; but they leaped to their feet, and for a moment Wingate prepared for a fresh attack. But the arrival of the stranger, evidently ready to help, caused the ruffians to change their minds, and they raced off down the dasky street, panting out curses.

Wingate staggered against the wall behind him, breathless, and his head reeling a little. The constable made a quick step towards him.

"You're hurt, sir?"

"N-no!" gasped Wingate. "Only—only a knock or two! I'm all right!"

"I reckon you've saved me from pretty serious damage sir. They had me down when you came up."

"I'm glad I was by!" said Wingate. "Hallo! Your whistle's been heard!"

Two constables came running up from different directions.

"You're all right, sir, if I leave you?"

"Quite all right, thanks!" panted Wingate.

The constable joined his two comrades with a hurried word of explanation, and the three rushed in pursuit of the ruffians, THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 661.

who had disappeared round the nearest corner.

Wingate leaned on the wall, breathing hard. He was hardly conscious of the fact that the man in the white shirt and diamond had drawn nearer to him, and was regarding him with a curious glance. But as he recovered a little he glanced up and caught the stranger's eyes fixed on him.

"You're fairly hefty with your hands, young 'un!" said the stranger, eyeing Wingate.

The Greyfriars captain smiled faintly, and nodded.

"You've done some boxin'?"

"Yes."

"In the ring?"

"The ring!" repeated Wingate. "Oh, no! At school."

"Don't tell me you're a schoolboy—and you knocked out three hefty ruffians in a scrap!"

Wingate laughed.

"But it's so. I'm in the Sixth at—"

He broke off. "I'm not exactly at school now. I think I'll be getting along."

"Hold on a minute!" said the stranger coolly. He was lighting a cigar, watching Wingate the while, evidently interested in the Greyfriars captain. "I've got an eye for a lad's form. I dare say you don't know who I am?"

"I haven't an idea."

"Stranger in this town?"

"Yes."

"I dare say you've heard my name, all the same—Jeff Blake, promoter."

"I'm afraid I haven't, Mr. Blake," answered Wingate, smiling.

"You've never been inside the Flitcheater Ring, perhaps?"

"Never."

"Then you've missed seeing some real good glove-fights?" said Mr. Jeff Blake, blowing out a cloud of smoke. "I'd be glad to see you there, any time you care to come along. Ask for Jeff Blake, and that'll see you through. My office is in the building in the High Street. I reckon you're a game bird, young 'un, and if you're ever ambitious to try your luck with the mittens, come along and see me, and I'll give you a chance. I saw you handle those three toughs, though I was too far off to help, and I reckon you're made for the ring. If you ever want to try your luck for a purse, you come along and see me. Savvy?"

"I'll remember," said Wingate, with a smile. "It's not likely; but thanks!"

"Well, I hope I'll see you again."

And, with a genial nod and a last flash of his big diamond, Mr. Jeff Blake was gone. Wingate, feeling himself again now, went on his way, smiling as he thought of Jeff Blake and his offer. At that moment there was no thought in Wingate's mind of accepting it, so little did he dream of what the near future held. In a few minutes, however, he had forgotten the scuffle with the ruffians and his talk with the boxing promoter; the sweet, sad face of Elsie Mainwaring was before his mind's eye once more, and the smile died from his lips.

"If I could only find her!" he whispered.

— — —

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Found at Last!

"YOU!"

"Elsie!"

"You!" repeated the girl.

And there was fear in her voice and in her dilating eyes as she looked at the man before her.

The room was bare and poor and cold—a mere garret. It was clean and neat, but poverty was grimly apparent on all sides. And Elsie Mainwaring, the cinema-star, was changed—strangely changed—since

her days at Hawthorne Park, when the Greyfriars fellows had seen and admired the beautiful cinema-actress.

The face was still beautiful, as of old; but it was pale, and haunted with care and fear.

The girl had been sitting by the window, gazing out over Flitcheater garret-windows and roofs, when a tap had come at the door. She turned her head as she called "Come in!" supposing that it was her landlady; but the door opened, to admit a young man in a fur-collared coat and silk-hat. He took off the hat, and bowed over it, with an ironical smile, as the girl started to her feet with a cry.

"You!" she breathed.

"I have found you, Elsie!"

"You—Vernon Carson!" whispered Elsie Mainwaring, shrinking back to the wall.

He laughed lightly.

The girl's fear seemed to amuse him. He stepped farther into the room, the door half-open behind him.

Her eyes rested on his face with fear, repugnance, almost horror.

Yet Vernon Carson was what would have been called a handsome man. His features were good, his eyes deep and dark; the cruel curve of his lip was half-hidden by a curled black moustache. But there were signs in the handsome face that told of a hard and cynical nature; it was not a face, handsome as it was, that man or woman would have liked or trusted. In the "villain's" parts in the "pictures" Vernon Carson was in his element; he not only acted the parts, he lived them. Few of the thousands who had seen the handsome, mocking face on the films dreamed that in real life Vernon Carson was the same man as he was seen on the "movies"—but such he was.

"You do not seem glad to see me, Elsie!" he said, with mocking reproach in his tones.

She panted.

"You know I am not! How did you find me?"

Carson laughed again.

"You could not escape me for long," he said. "You fled from Hawthorne Park to escape me—after I had warned you to await my coming. Did you think I had forgotten you?"

"I—I hoped—"

"You do yourself injustice, Elsie—you are not so easily forgotten!" he said. "Is it not time that this comedy ended? There are many women who would be glad to accept the offer I have made you—"

"Not if they know you as I do!" said the girl bitterly.

Carson shrugged his shoulders.

"With me to help you, you may achieve fame and fortune," he said. "You were already successful as a cinema-actress; I have been successful on the films in a different way. Will you give it all up, for the sake of this—prejudice? Your career is at an end, unless you make terms with me. And you know my terms!"

"Never!"

He smiled.

"'Never' is a long time," he said.

"But a woman's 'never' may mean tomorrow. I do not like to remind you of your position, but it is not every man of my standing who would give his name to a convict's daughter—"

Elsie moaned.

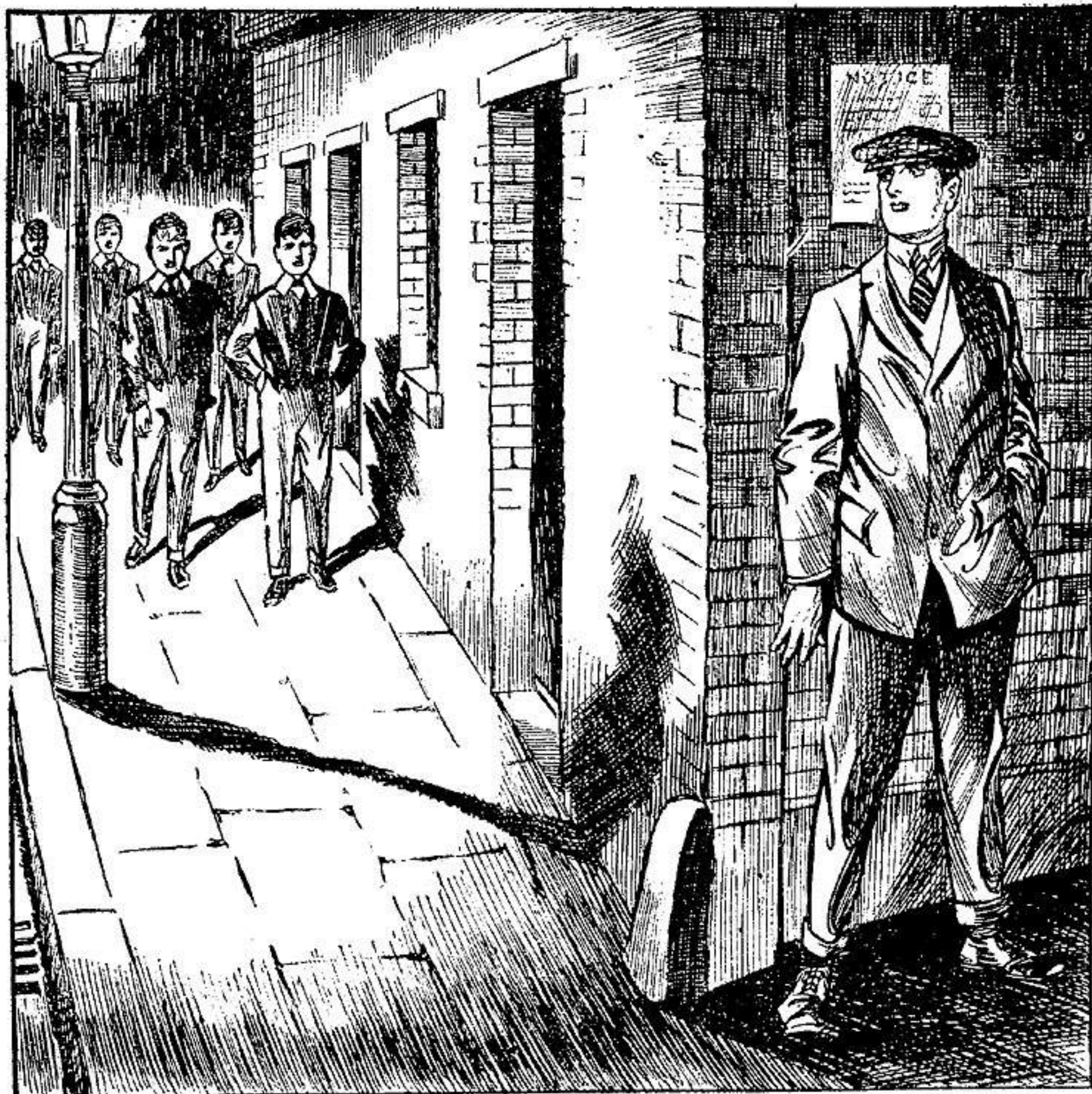
"My father was innocent—"

"Possibly! Innocent men have been sent to prison before now, and may be again," he assented, "but does the world believe so? And if John Mainwaring's hiding-place was discovered—"

Elsie gave a cry.

"You do not—you do not know—"

Her voice failed her.



"Oh, we'll find him alright!" Wingate started as he heard the voice of Bob Cherry of the Greyfriars Remove. In the glimmer of the street-lamp, he saw a group of juniors coming towards him. In an instant he had darted into an alley-way, breathing hard! (See chapter 5).

Vernon Carson fixed his black eyes on the pale, terrified face.

"Suppose I tell you that I have discovered his hiding-place—that I can hand him over to justice whenever I choose—"

Elsie sank into a chair.

"Then all is lost!" she moaned. "That is what you were going to tell me at Hawthorne Park if I had awaited your coming?"

He nodded.

"I thought so—I felt it!" she whispered. "Villain and spy, how did you find him?"

"That does not matter. The world believes that John Mainwaring is dead. I know that he lives, and can place my hand on him," he said coolly. "You know the price of his liberty. He is safe, if you choose. It is for you to say the word. When I am his son-in-law, it will be to my interest to save him, and to save you, from disgrace. My own interests have always been safe in my hands."

"Villain!"

"Calm yourself, Elsie! You are not acting before the camera now!" said Carson. "This is not a film-scene—it is deadly earnest. I have found you again, and I am here for your answer. I have been seeking you long enough, and I have found you at last—"

"And while you have been seeking me my father has been seeking safety!" interrupted Elsie, with flashing eyes. "I knew what you had to tell me, and I sent my father warning at once. Betray him if you will—they will not find him now!"

Vernon Carson's mocking manner left him, and a black scowl came over his brow.

"Is that true?" he exclaimed roughly.

"You will find it so!" said Elsie scornfully.

"You have been fooling me, then!" He ground the white teeth that glistened under the black moustache. "You have led me on this wild goose chase, while your father—"

"Yes! And now go!" The girl rose

to her full height, and her outstretched hand pointed to the door. "You have no right here, Vernon Carson! Go! If you trouble me longer I will call for help, and have you turned from the house like a dog!"

He gritted his teeth again.

"So that is your answer—"

"That is my answer! Villain—coward—go!"

He strode towards her, his eyes blazing with rage. There was a step on the staircase below, and a voice:

"The top room, sir! Knock at the first door!"

"Thank you!"

Elsie heard the voice on the landing without, and started, trembling. She knew the deep, ringing tones of George Wingate of Greyfriars. What was Wingate doing there, in that cheap lodging-house in a back-street of Fitchester?

The grasp of Vernon Carson was on her wrist. In his fury, the film-actor did not hear or heed the voices and the footsteps

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 551.

without—footsteps that were approaching the half-open door of the garret.

"Elsie! I swear—"

"Release me! Help!" shrieked the girl.

The door crashed open.

It was George Wingate who stood on the threshold. He had been about to tap on the door when Elsie Mainwaring's cry reached him.

Carson, with a curse, stared round at the interruption, his teeth set, his eyes glittering savagely.

Wingate took in the scene at a glance.

With a blaze in his eyes, he strode into the room. In a second his grasp was on the shoulder of the rascal.

"Release that lady instantly!" His voice trembled with rage. "You dog, do you hear?"

Without an answer, Vernon Carson struck at his face. With a swing of his powerful arm, Wingate sent him spinning across the room.

"Elsie—" he breathed.

"Oh, take care!" panted the girl.

Vernon Carson had staggered against the wall, but he recovered himself in a moment.

He sprang towards Wingate with his fists clenched and his eye ablaze. Quietly Wingate placed Elsie behind him, and faced the rush of the enraged cinema-actor.

"You meddling hound!" shouted Carson. "I will—"

Crash!

Wingate's fist struck him fairly on the mouth, and Vernon Carson reeled back, and fell with a crash to the floor.

"Oh, Heaven!" breathed Elsie, clasping her hands.

Wingate stood over the sprawling villain, his fists clenched, and his eyes flashing.

"You dog!" he said thickly. "Get out! Do you hear? Get out, or I will throw you from the room like the cur you are!"

Carson staggered to his feet.

A stream of red trickled from the corner of his mouth. He panted with rage.

"You—you—"

"Get out!" thundered Wingate.

He advanced upon the rascal, and Carson backed quickly to the door. He had felt the weight of the Greyfriars captain's arm once, and he did not want to feel it again.

In the doorway he paused to cast a savage glance back at the Sixth-Former of Greyfriars and the panting girl.

"I will go. But I will return!" he hissed. "I will—"

Wingate made a stride towards him, and, leaving the sentence unfinished, Vernon Carson rushed away, and his hurried footsteps rang down the stairs.

Wingate turned back.

"Elsie!"

He held out his hands.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Almost Discovered!

"BUT you came to find me?"

Elsie Mainwaring had drawn her hands away, a blush on her cheeks. She motioned Wingate to a chair.

"I came to find you, Elsie," he answered quietly.

"You have left Hawthorne Park, then?"

"Yes."

"But your school—"

"I am not bound to go back to Greyfriars yet. I have leave from the Head. Anyway, I should not have gone," said Wingate, in the same quiet tone. "I could not rest till I had seen you again."

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 661.

I knew you were in distress, and then you went—so suddenly—"

"I had no choice," whispered the girl. "I cannot tell you all, but there is danger—danger and trouble."

Wingate's brow darkened.

"From that man Vernon Carson?"

"Yes. And—and I cannot tell you all." Her colour deepened. "I must leave here. He must not find me again."

"But why should you fear him?" broke out Wingate. "I am here. I can protect you."

Elsie smiled faintly.

"You cannot protect me from what he can do to harm me. I must go. Through me, once, he has traced out someone whom I love, and whose safety he has threatened. So long as he knows where to find me, he will watch and spy, and sooner or later—"

Wingate felt an icy chill at his heart.

"Someone whom you love?" he breathed.

Elsie looked at him quickly.

"My father!" she said.

"Oh! I—I understand!" Wingate breathed again. "Your father's safety is threatened by that villain?"

She nodded.

"Yes."

"But I do not see—"

"I cannot explain, even to you, my dear friend. But so it is. I must escape him, or through me he will trace my father. I would tell you all if I could. But I cannot. But you— Why did you follow me from Hawthorne Park?"

He did not answer. He could not answer. But perhaps the girl read something of his secret in his face, for she went on hurriedly:

"This is folly! You must return—"

"And you?"

"What matters?" said Elsie wearily. "I shall find a hiding-place somewhere where that dastard cannot trace me out!"

"Not alone?" said Wingate.

"Yes, yes!"

"You have no brother?"

"No," said the girl sadly.

"Let me take your brother's place, then?" said Wingate steadily. "You need help and protection. I shall help and protect you. So long as you are in distress, Elsie, I shall not leave you."

He glanced round the bare room. "You are in need—I can see that. Money—"

Her lip quivered.

"I have little," she whispered. "I—I had to help someone—my father. It was necessary for him to make a sudden journey. I cannot explain, but—but it was for his safety. I did not tell him it was all I had—"

"And yet you would not let me help you—you who sacrifice so much for others," said Wingate, with a throb of tenderness in his voice. "You are pale and ill. You need care. Elsie, I shall care for you as if I were your brother."

"Ah, if that could only be!" she murmured.

"If you are afraid of that villain finding you again, you shall change your quarters at once," said Wingate. "I have a room in a house at the farther end of the town. You shall take up new quarters in the same house. I will ask for a room for my sister."

She coloured.

"Then you have been here long?" she asked.

"A week—seeking you. It was only today that I was able to trace you," he said.

"Thank Heaven I have found you here."

"But—but your friends—"

"They do not know I am here. They know I am safe, and that is all." He smiled reassuringly. "I shall take care of you now, Elsie—until you need my help no longer. You need it now."

She smiled faintly.

"I am so tired—so troubled," she murmured. "A friend in need is a friend indeed," the saying goes. I ought to send you away, I know; but—but I cannot."

"I should not go," said Wingate, with a smile. "We were friends at Hawthorne Park, Elsie. We are friends still—for ever!"

"For ever," repeated the girl softly. "Only friends—but for ever."

"You need money," said Wingate. "I shall work for you, as if I were your—your brother."

"You work! My dear boy!" she murmured tenderly.

"I can work," said Wingate. "Indeed, I have had an offer already from a man I met by chance. And now I shall go and see him. I have been offered a boxing engagement, if I choose to take it up. And that will see us through for some time, Elsie."

"Us?" she repeated.

"Us!" said Wingate firmly. "Some day you will return to your cinema engagement, and then, if you choose, you can call it a debt to be repaid. At present I am head of the house." He smiled. "Now, Elsie, you must leave the management in my hands."

She looked at him.

She was older than the captain of Greyfriars, though she hardly looked older. But there was a strength, a self-reliance, in George Wingate, that was strangely comforting to the distressed, troubled girl. He seemed like a tower of strength to her in her forlorn weakness and loneliness. She could not send him away. If she could have had a brother like this! But he had said that he would be her brother. Of the boyish, half-realised love deep down in his heart, not a word!

"It shall be as you wish," she said at last, in a low voice. "I need a friend so much. It seems as if Heaven itself must have sent you to me. It shall be as you wish, my dear, dear friend."

"You shall not regret it, Elsie," he said, with grave calmness. "Now, I will leave you, and engage the room for you that I spoke of. You will be ready to go? I will call for you in an hour."

"But that man—" She shivered.

"If he is watching—" "I shall keep my eyes open. If he is watching I shall soon stop his spying!" said Wingate grimly. "Good-bye for a little while, Elsie!"

"God bless you!" she said.

He touched her hand, and was gone. His footsteps rang on the bare, uncarpeted stairs.

"God bless him!" the girl whispered again, as the footsteps died away below.

Wingate quitted the house, his heart beating fast, and a light in his eyes. He had found Elsie; she had allowed him to take his place as her defender; he was not to part with her again. That was more than enough to bring the light of happiness to Wingate's eyes. Dusk was falling, and the street-lamps were lighted as Wingate strode away. He looked about him keenly as he went, but there was no sign of Vernon Carson. The man with the black moustache was gone.

Wingate strode on through the dusky streets. His mission was accomplished now, and of Greyfriars he did not think. The present was enough—the future could take care of itself. But Greyfriars was brought suddenly back to his mind as he strode on. A voice he knew fell on his ears.

"Oh, we'll find him all right!"

Wingate started.

He knew the voice of Bob Cherry of the Greyfriars Remove.

Ahead of him was a street lamp, and in the glimmer of its light he caught sight of a group of juniors, coming towards

him. In an instant he had darted into an alley-way, breathing hard as he stopped out of sight of the juniors.

Were they seeking him? In any case, he was anxious not to be seen in Fritchester. The voices came to his ears as the juniors came on, little dreaming how near they were to the one they sought.

"He's in this town." It was Harry Wharton speaking. "It was the Fritchester postmark on the letter he sent home—we've found that out. There was no address, but the postmark—"

"He may have gone since," said Johnny Bull.

"If he has, we'll follow, and find him. He's got to come back, and clear his name."

The voices died away.

Wingate emerged from the alley when the juniors were gone. There was no doubt now that they were seeking him. What did Wharton's words mean—to clear his name? Those words puzzled Wingate. He was far from dreaming of the black suspicion that had gathered round his name at Hawthorne Park. But he dismissed the matter from his mind as he strode onward. He had Elsie to think of now.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

A Boxing Engagement!

"COME right in!"

Mr. Jeff Blake's voice was genial and hearty.

It was the following day; and Wingate, after long thinking the matter out, had decided to call upon the boxing manager at the Fritchester Ring building.

He had to have money—his little supply was almost gone, and there was Elsie. But for the strange fear that haunted her, and made her a fugitive, Elsie Mainwaring had a princely salary at her command. She had but to return to Hawthorne Park, where Cyrus Hunker would have welcomed back his lost cinema star with open arms. But that could not be. Wingate did not fully understand why, but he knew that it could not be. For some reason he but dimly comprehended, the girl he worshipped had to remain in hiding, for through Vernon Carson a peril threatened which even Wingate's strong arm could not guard against.

Of Carson nothing had been seen. Wingate did not believe that the rascal had traced Elsie to her new lodging. There, too, Elsie was taken as Wingate's sister, and had adopted his name—an additional safeguard against discovery.

But it was necessary to earn money, and Mr. Jeff Blake's offer was the only opening that presented itself to Wingate. With hesitation, and a little timidity, the Greyfriars captain entered the big building on Fritchester High Street, and asked to see Mr. Jeff Blake. And the hearty greeting of that portly and expensively-dressed gentleman quite banished all his doubts.

Mr. Blake was seated at a desk in a handsomely-furnished office, and he jumped up at once to shake Wingate by the hand.

"So you've come?" he smiled.

"I've come, sir," said Wingate.

"To take my offer?"

"If it's still open—yes."

"Good man!" Mr. Jeff Blake waved his cigar towards a chair. "Sit down. You must be a thought-reader, young man."

"A thought-reader?" repeated Wingate, puzzled.

"You see, I was just thinking about you," explained Mr. Blake. "I've been let down."

"Oh!" said Wingate, not quite understanding.

"I dare say you've heard of the Fritchester Chicken?" said Mr. Blake, with a puff of smoke.

"N-no."

Jeff Blake chuckled.

"Don't tell the Chicken that, if you want him to let you off lightly," he said. "The Chicken's fairly well known, outside Fritchester, too. That's his mug on the boards outside the ring."

Wingate remembered seeing a depicted bruiser on the boards outside, in the street, and he nodded. So far as he had noticed the mug of the Fritchester Chicken, the Chicken wasn't a very pleasant gentleman to look at.

"Well, the Chicken was meeting a man in the ring in a couple of days' time," said Mr. Blake, in explanation. "The man's cried off sudden."

"I see."

"I've got to get a man to stand up to the Chicken, for the sake of the thin end of the purse," said Mr. Blake.

"The—the what?"

I won't deceive you. You'll get a bit knocked about. Mind that?"

"I'm not soft," said Wingate.

"You don't look it. But you haven't fought before?"

"Oh, yes!"

"Not this kind of fighting?"

"Well, no. But—"

"It's a bit different from schoolboy slogging, you'll find. But you're not afraid of a bruise or two?"

"Not at all."

"You're a good plucked 'un," said Mr. Blake, with an approving wave of his cigar. "I like you! Years to come you'll make a good man in the ring, and walk over a whole barnyard of Chickens, if you take it up seriously. Thinking of doing that?"

"No. Only—"

"I see—temporary shortage of the needful?" said Mr. Blake, with a comprehending grin.

"Exactly!" said Wingate.

"The tenner is worth enough to you to take a hammering for it?"

"Yes."

"Good enough!"

"I shall beat the Chicken if I can, though, if the fight's arranged," said the Greyfriars captain.

"More power to your elbow," said Jeff Blake cordially. "Hallo, here he is! Blow in, Chicken!"

The Chicken blew in.

Wingate glanced at him curiously. He was a powerful-looking man, with a hard, tough face and little, sharp eyes. Undoubtedly he did not look a pleasant customer to deal with. Mr. Jeff Blake introduced Wingate, who shook hands with the bruiser. The Chicken's manner was not very civil. He felt the completest scorn for the lad who was to stand up to him for the thin end of the purse, and he did not take the trouble to conceal it. Polished manners had been left out of the curriculum where the Chicken was trained. He gave Wingate's hand a terrific grip, for the pleasure of seeing him wince, but Wingate did not wince, though his hand was almost numbed by the grip. And he set his lips a little as he watched the scornful grin on the Chicken's face, while Mr. Jeff Blake was explaining how matters stood.

"Well, it's agreed," said Mr. Blake briskly at last. "It's only a question of signing on now. I'll look out the ticket."

Mr. Blake sat at his desk, and the bruiser grinned across him at Wingate. Wingate looked back at him, calmly and steadily. Whether he could stand up to the Chicken or not, he meant to do his best, and there was nothing like fear in his heart.

"Here you are, lad," said Mr. Blake, looking up.

Wingate knew little enough of such affairs, and he was willing to leave himself in Mr. Blake's hands. The boxing-manager, at least, meant well by him, though the Fritchester Chicken's look was far from encouraging.

"Don't forget to make your will, young 'un!" called out the Chicken, as Wingate shook hands with the manager and turned to go.

Wingate made no reply to that.

He left the manager's office with a feeling of elation. He meant to do his best in the fight; but, whatever happened, the ten-pound note was secure, and that was what he was fighting for—his bread, and Elsie's. And it was with a light heart that he hurried back to the lodgings to tell Elsie the news.

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"If the fixture's carried on, there'll be a purse on the fight, and the loser takes a ten-pound note out of it," explained Mr. Blake. "That's where you come in, if you take it on."

Wingate flushed a little.

"You're sure I should lose the fight, then?" he asked.

"Well, a fight's never lost till it's won," said Mr. Blake diplomatically. "You're a hefty young fellow, and you might—well, I wish you the best of luck. I'm expecting a visit from the Chicken now. Will you look at him, and tell me whether you'll stand up to him in the boxing-ring? If so, I shall want you to put in some training here first, as far as the time allows—you can fix that?"

"Quite easily."

"Not at school now?" grinned Mr. Blake.

"Not at present."

Jeff Blake blew out a cloud of smoke, and eyed Wingate rather curiously.

"Look here," he said, after a pause. "I believe you could stand up to the Chicken for a few rounds and make a fight of it."

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Harry Wharton to the Rescue!

"IT'S Elsie!"

"Miss Mainwaring?"

"Yes," breathed Harry Wharton.

The dusk was falling in the narrow street, looked upon by grimy windows. Harry Wharton & Co. had come along from the High Street of Fritchester, scanning the doors of the dingy houses as they came, in the growing dusk.

For a week the chums of the Remove had been in Fritchester, seeking for George Wingate.

That he had been in the town, and almost certainly stayed there for a time, they knew; the postmark on his brief letter home told as much.

Beyond that they knew nothing; but their want of success had not discouraged them. George Wingate had to be found; and not one of the chums doubted that when he knew the charge that was hanging over him he would hasten back to Hawthorne Park to meet it. But the week's grace Cyrus Hunker had granted had expired now, and the juniors were getting very anxious. They had taken rooms at the hotel near the station, and every day they pursued their inquiries in the town, and more than once they had fancied themselves on the track, only to be disappointed. But luck had come their way at last. Of Wingate they could hear nothing; but at a shop at the corner of Rood Street they heard something of a Miss Mainwaring, who lived in poor lodgings further up.

They could hardly imagine Elsie, the beautiful cinema star, in poor lodgings in such a street; but it was a clue, and the chums of Greyfriars were following it up. It could only lead, after all, to another disappointment at the worst.

They knew—they were sure—that Wingate had left Hawthorne Park to seek Elsie. And if they could find Elsie, she might be able to help them in seeking Wingate. It was a chance, at least. And it was with renewed hope that Harry Wharton & Co. made their way along the dingy street, scanning the doors for No. 35, Elsie's old lodging, from which—as of course they could not guess—she had removed.

They were close to the dingy house when Harry Wharton caught sight of a figure in the dim light at the porch. It was a shabbily-dressed figure, and there was a thick veil over the face. But Wharton felt sure that he had seen it before. The graceful figure of the Star of the Films was not easily forgotten.

"You're sure?" whispered Bob Cherry, peering through the dusk at the figure.

"I feel sure," said Harry, "that is the house we were told about, too—No. 35. And if it is Miss Mainwaring—"

"She may know where Wingate is."

"Exactly!"

"We can ask her, at any rate," said Frank Nugent. "She will help us, if she can, when she knows what's the row at Hawthorne Park."

"I'm sure of that!" said Harry. The juniors drew a little nearer. There were no front gardens to the houses in Rood Street, Fritchester. Only a deep, dark area, with iron railings, separated each house from the pavement, and there were dingy stone steps into a dingy porch. From the doorway—the door was open—dusky gaslight glimmered out, revealing a woman with a shawl over her shoulders, who had evidently come in answer to Elsie's knock.

"Is there a letter?"

set all their doubts at rest. That sweet, tremulous voice was Elsie Mainwaring's.

"Yes, miss."

The landlady disappeared for a moment, and returned with a letter in her hand, which she passed out to the girl in the porch.

"Thank you! Good-night, Mrs. Gooch!"

"Good-night, miss!"

The door closed. Elsie stood for a moment or two on the steps, with the letter in her hand. She was looking at the superscription in the dim light from the fanlight over the door.

Harry Wharton & Co. waited for her to come down the steps to speak to her. The girl was evidently deeply interested in the letter, though she had not opened it. Apparently she was looking at the address, to ascertain the hand in which it was written.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" whispered Bob Cherry suddenly.

A figure crossed the dusky street rapidly towards the house.

The juniors caught a glimpse of a young man's face, with a black moustache and sharp, black eyes.

He did not notice the schoolboys in the dusk; all his attention was fixed upon the girl on the steps.

He sprang lightly on the step beside Elsie, and suddenly grasped her wrist—the wrist of the hand that held the letter.

Elsie gave a sharp cry.

"We meet again!" grinned Vernon Carson, still gripping her wrist.

"You! Let me go!"

"Not till you have given me the letter."

"The letter! It is mine!"

Carson laughed.

"I have watched the house, or had it watched, ever since you stole away," he said. "I knew that you must come back for letters—that your father would have written to you here. That is from your father?"

"I will not tell you."

LIGHTING-UP TIME FOR THIS WEEK.



OCTOBER.

4th Monday	- - -	6.0 p.m.
5th Tuesday	- - -	5.58 "
6th Wednesday	- - -	5.56 "
7th Thursday	- - -	5.53 "
8th Friday	- - -	5.51 "
9th Saturday	- - -	5.49 "
10th Sunday	- - -	5.47 "

"You need not—your look is enough," said Carson coolly. "I have lost your father's track; but that letter will set me on it again. Give it to me!"

"I will not!" cried Elsie. "What right have you to take my letter?"

"The right of the stronger!" grinned Carson, as he tightened his grip on the girl's wrist. "Give it to me!"

"I will cry for help!" panted the girl. "Vernon Carson, let me go!"

"No need for that, Miss Mainwaring!" shouted Harry Wharton. "Help is here. Come on, you fellows!"

For a few moments the suddenness and strangeness of the scene had held the juniors spellbound. But the spell was broken now. Harry Wharton ran forward as he shouted.

Elsie gave a cry.

"Help—help me!"

"We're here, miss!" yelled Bob Cherry.

Vernon Carson faced the juniors for a moment, with a curse on his lips. Then, seeing at a glance that they were too many for him, he suddenly snatched the letter from Elsie's hand and sprang away.

"Stop him!" shrieked Elsie, in terrified tones. "He has taken my letter! For mercy's sake—"

With a bound, Harry Wharton was upon the film actor as he sprang away. Wharton's grip closed on his shoulder.

"Hands off, you young fool!" shouted Carson, striking at him savagely.

"Back up, you fellows!"

Wharton returned the blow fiercely enough, and closed with Vernon Carson. The man was too strong for him, but in a moment his chums were swarming to his aid.

Right and left their hands were laid upon Carson, and he was dragged to the muddy pavement with a crash.

"Oh, Heaven!" moaned Elsie, clinging to the iron railings for support, almost fainting with terror.

"Pin the cad down!" panted Johnny Bull.

With the letter crumpled and gripped in his hand, Vernon Carson struggled savagely with the Famous Five.

But they were too many for him.

Johnny Bull's heavy knee crashed down on his chest, pinning him on his back on the pavement, and Nugent trampled on his kicking legs, with direful results to Carson's natty trousers.

Wharton gripped his wrist, and twisted it, to force him to let go the stolen letter.

"Let it be, you thief!" exclaimed the captain of the Greyfriars Remove.

A curse was the only answer.

"Hold him, you fellows!" said Wharton quietly. "I'll have the letter off him or crack his wrist!"

"Go it!" grinned Bob Cherry.

There was a yell of agony from Carson. Harry Wharton was not handling him gently.

His clutching fingers unclosed on the letter, and Wharton jerked it away.

"All serene. I've got it!" he exclaimed.

Carson made a savage clutch at him, and the juniors thudded him down on the pavement again, and once more Johnny Bull's knee pinned him there. The rascal raved out curses as he was held.

Harry Wharton ran back to Elsie with the letter in his hand, and held it out to the trembling girl.

"Here is the letter, Miss Mainwaring!" he panted.

"Oh, thanks—thanks!" The girl almost snatched the letter. "Thank Heaven he was not able to open it—"

"He hadn't time for that," said Wharton, with a breathless laugh. "But, I say, Miss Mainwaring—"



Mr. Blake sat at his desk, and the bruiser grinned across him at Wingate. Wingate looked back at him, calmly and steadily. There was nothing like fear in his heart. (See chapter 6.)

"Do not let him go!" breathed the girl. "Wharton, thank Heaven you came, though I cannot guess how you came here! But do not let that man follow me. He is my enemy. He seeks to injure me. Keep him from following me, I beg of you!"

Without waiting for Wharton to reply, Elsie darted away, and in a moment the evening shadows had swallowed up the fleeing figure.

Wharton, taken by surprise, stood irresolute.

He had intended to question Elsie regarding Wingate, but the girl was gone so suddenly that he had had no time to speak. He could see that she was in deadly fear of the man on the pavement—Vernon Carson, as he had heard her call him.

"Miss Mainwaring!" called out Wharton, taking a step after the fleeing girl.

But Elsie was gone.

Harry Wharton turned back to his chums, surprised and disappointed.

"Hold the cad, you fellows!" he called out.

"You bet!"

"Let me go!" shrieked Carson, struggling furiously.

"Tap his head on the pavement!" said Johnny Bull. "Perhaps that will calm him a bit."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There was a fiendish yell from Carson as his head was tapped, not gently, on the hard, cold stone. But he ceased to struggle, though curses still poured from his lips.

"Keep him there!" said Harry. "Miss Mainwaring is afraid of him, the rotten bully! We'll give him a lesson about frightening a woman."

"Yes, rather!" said Bob.

"Has she gone?" exclaimed Nugent, looking round.

"Yes. She asked me not to let that brute follow her."

"We'll do that!"

"Let me go!" hissed Carson.

"So that you can follow Miss Mainwaring, and try to steal her letter again," said Wharton scornfully.

"You young fool, you don't understand—"

"Hold your tongue!" said Wharton roughly.

"Will you let me go?" hissed Carson, between his teeth. "I'll yell for the police—"

"Yell away! If you want to explain to the police that you were stealing a letter and that we stopped you, you miserable thief!"

Carson ground his teeth with fury.

The juniors allowed him to rise to his feet, but they kept a tight grasp on him. Vernon Carson did not shout for the police as he had threatened. He remained in the grasp of the juniors, quivering with rage and chagrin. For fully five minutes the chums of Grey—

friars held the enraged rascal a prisoner, to give Elsie Mainwaring time to get clear.

"I think that will do," said Harry Wharton, at last. "Now, you scoundrel what—"

"Hang you! Let me go!"

"You've been frightening Miss Mainwaring, trying to steal a letter from her, and—"

"Fool! Miss Mainwaring is to be my wife!"

Wharton started.

"I don't believe that!" he said curtly. "You are a liar as well as a bully and a ruffian. You're going to have a lesson. If Miss Mainwaring were willing to make a charge against you, we'd take you to the police-station. As it is, we'll deal with you ourselves. Roll him over, you fellows! There's plenty of mud in the gutter, and it will do him good!"

"Hear, hear!" chuckled Bob Cherry.

Carson struggled savagely, but his resistance did not avail him. He was jerked across the pavement, and he came down with a squash into the thick wet mud in the gutter. And with loud chortles the juniors rolled him over in the mud.

Then they left him.

Vernon Carson scrambled out of the gutter, foaming with rage, smothered with greasy mud from head to foot. As he tramped away, leaving a trail of mud behind him, he ground his teeth, and hissed threats of vengeance.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

At Last!

"BUT I fear for you!" whispered Elsie.

Wingate smiled, and shook his head.

"There is nothing to fear!" he said.

The two sat at tea, in a dingy little sitting-room, which was brighter than a palace to George Wingate at that moment. There was a quiet happiness in Wingate's face. But Elsie was looking sorely troubled.

As the date of the fight came nearer, it troubled her more and more. She had heard and read something of the Fritchester Chicken, and she feared for Wingate. She did not want to discourage him, but she could not disguise her fears.

It was for her sake, she knew, that he was facing the bruiser in the ring. For Wingate had taken the lead. He was the breadwinner now for the strangely-assorted pair. The situation was strange enough, in truth, yet it seemed, somehow, natural to Wingate. Elsie was older in years, but she was persecuted, and almost penniless; and Wingate, Sixth Form schoolboy as he was, was strong and self-reliant, with boundless pluck and determination. Both were very nearly at the end of their resources, and the ten-pound note at the Fritchester Ring was sorely needed.

If Wingate had faltered, the thought of how necessary the money was would have sustained him. But he did not falter. Win or lose, he was ready to stand up to the professional bruiser. If he had a suspicion that he was, as a matter of fact, merely being put up to be knocked about by the Chicken for the entertainment of the patrons of the Fritchester Ring, he did not allow the suspicion to affect him in any way. He had made his bargain with Mr. Jeff Blake, and signed his agreement, and it could not be said that the promoter had not warned him, fairly and squarely. Wingate never thought of faltering.

"There is nothing to fear," he repeated reassuringly. "It is only a fight THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 661.

with the gloves, you know. I've been through a good many sloggings with the gloves on in the gym at Greyfriars."

"But this is different. A ruffian like that—"

"Not exactly a ruffian," said Wingate, with a smile. "The Chicken is a bit of a bruiser certainly. But I dare say he's a good enough chap in his own way."

"But you will be hurt?"

Wingate laughed.

"I'm not made of putty, dear Elsie," he said. "Don't worry about me. It's an honest way of earning one's bread."

"It is all my fault!" whispered the girl. "It is I who have taken you away from your friends—"

"Nothing of the sort. It is I who will not allow you to send me away," smiled Wingate. "Don't think about it any more, dear. It will be over this evening, anyway."

The girl shivered.

"I shall come!" she said.

Wingate looked grave.

"I—I suppose you could come in the audience," he said. "But—but wouldn't it be better not? You won't care for the scene."

"I should be too anxious to stay here and wait," said Elsie. "I—I must be there. If it is only a glove fight why should I not see it?"

"No reason at all," said Wingate, rather slowly. "Lots of women go to see the shows at the Ring, I think. But—"

There, if you've made up your mind I won't say any more. Only don't worry if you see me getting a bump or two. I can stand up to all the Chicken can give me."

Elsie nodded, and the subject was dropped. She tried to speak cheerfully now that she realised that Wingate's mind was made up. She would not discourage him. And she smiled a tremulous smile when Wingate left her to keep his appointment with Jeff Blake at the Ring building.

But when he was gone the trouble returned to her face. Her look was very kind and tender as she thought of Wingate. How brave and noble-hearted he was, how true and loyal a friend, when she needed a friend so bitterly! How could she ever repay his devotion!

She could not help realising that it was not merely as a friend that he thought of her. She smiled sadly as she thought of that. She was but a few years older than Wingate, but she felt ever so much older in many ways. She

understood him, though perhaps he only half understood himself. The love of his young heart was a boyish fancy that would pass, she thought, but it would leave behind an undying and tender friendship. And it was as a friend, a kind and loyal chum, that she liked to think of George Wingate.

The dusk was falling when she left the house and made her way to the High Street. She wore a thick veil, for the fear of being seen and followed by Vernon Carson was still heavy upon her mind. She shrank a little as she came into the glare of lights outside the great building in the crowded High Street of Fritchester. Crowds of people were going in, and there was a buzz of voices. Close by the buildings a group of schoolboys stood looking over the thronging crowd. She did not notice them, but the eyes of one of them followed her as she passed.

"That's Miss Mainwaring," said Harry Wharton. "My hat! She's going in. Shall we follow?"

"Why not?" said Bob Cherry. "I'd rather like to see the show. I've heard somebody say that the Chicken is meeting a new man—somebody who hasn't fought at the Ring before. This Chicken seems to be a tremendous big gun in the fighting line, from what the folks are saying. Might pick up a tip or two about boxing from watching him."

Wharton reflected.

Since the meeting in Rood Street, when Vernon Carson had been baffled by the chums of Greyfriars, the Co. had been pursuing their search without success. They were growing anxious now. Wharton had telephoned to Cyrus Hunker, at Hawthorne Park, telling him that they were on the track, and asking for an extension of time. Exactly how Hunker regarded the matter he did not know; but the film producer had gruffly agreed to hold his hand until the end of the week. If George Wingate had not returned to Hawthorne Park by Monday morning, Cyrus Hunker's mind was made up. And to-day was Saturday. No wonder the chums of the Remove were anxious.

They felt that the producer would keep his word, and the thought of the police seeking George Wingate of Greyfriars on a charge of theft made them shudder.

It was as a sort of last resource that the chums had stationed themselves that evening by the Ring building, where the Fritchester crowd was thickest, in the hope of seeing a face they knew in the crowd. They had no clue to guide them further; but Chance, as often happens, came to their assistance. The sight of Elsie as she passed in the crowd renewed Harry Wharton's hopes.

Whether Miss Mainwaring knew anything of Wingate's movements he could not tell, but he thought it very probable. He had a strong belief that where Elsie was Wingate would not be far away. And as soon as the girl knew what Wingate was suspected of, she would help them—he was sure of that. Her faith in Wingate would be as firm as his own, and she would wish him to return to Hawthorne Park and clear his name.

It was only necessary to get speech with the one-time cinema star, and this time Harry was determined that he would not fail.

The chums of the Remove passed into the building with the crowd, and Wharton glanced round eagerly for Elsie as they took their seats among the numerous audience.

But the crowd was great, and he could not see the slight, shabby figure among so many.

He dropped back into his seat at last. "She's here," he said. "I can't spot

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her, but I know she's here. Keep your eyes open for her, you fellows."

"You bet!" said Bob.

"If we don't spot her during the show, we'll go out early and wait for her to come out," said Wharton. "Then we can't very well miss her."

"That's a good idea," assented Nugent. "May as well see the show while we're here."

"Oh, yes!"

The juniors little dreamed, so far, of the nature of the "show" they were to see, or the identity of the unknown young boxer who was to face the redoubtable Chicken in the ring. Their eyes were wandering over the thronged gathering for a sign of Elsie, and after a time Wharton thought he detected the graceful form close up in the front seats, but he was not sure. He hardly noticed Mr. Jeff Blake—important as that portly gentleman was—but he looked round when a burst of cheering greeted the entrance of the Fritchester Chicken.

The Chicken was evidently popular with his fellow-townsmen. He grinned and smirked at the cheering crowd, all eyes—or nearly all—being upon him. But not quite all. Bob Cherry suddenly clutched Harry Wharton by the arm.

"Harry, look!"

"What—"

"The other boxer—"

"My only hat!" breathed Nugent, in amazement.

And Wharton gasped:

"Wingate!"

They had found him at last!

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

In the Ring.

GEORGE WINGATE glanced over the crowded house, his heart beating a little thickly.

He was cool and collected, and he made a splendid athletic figure in his scanty attire; but the sea of faces turned towards him had a strange and thrilling effect upon his nerves. But he was partly relieved by the fact that all the attention of the audience was fixed upon the popular Chicken. Knowing fellows who looked at Wingate and "sized him up" expected to see him put up a good fight against the bruiser, but few, if any, supposed that he had a chance of a win.

In that sea of faces Wingate was not likely to notice the five that he had known at Greyfriars—the faces of the chums of the Remove. He was not even aware that Harry Wharton & Co. were still in Fritchester. He was not thinking of them at all, and did not dream that they were in the audience watching him.

As he looked about him, with half-raised

eyes, he was thinking of Elsie Mair-wareing.

But he could not see her, and he hoped that she had changed her mind and had not come. In a way he would have liked her to see him face his opponent when she knew that he was fighting for her. But he knew that he was going through a stiff fight, and in all probability a severe mauling, and that he preferred her not to see. He drew a quick breath of relief at the thought that she was not in the building.

And all the time the girl's eyes were upon him unseen. And when she looked at his bulky adversary Elsie felt a contraction at her heart. There was a grim and cruel smile on the Chicken's hardened face; it told of little mercy for the brave lad who was to face his hammering fists.

But Wingate faced him calmly when the time came.

Jeff Blake, glancing at him, nodded with approval. The promoter had not the faintest idea that Wingate would beat his opponent. But he was sure that there would be a tough fight, which would make the patrons of the Fritchester Ring feel that they had had their money's worth. And that was what Jeff Blake thought about chiefly. He was a kind-hearted man in his way, but business considerations came first with him.

He whispered a word of encouragement

SOMETHING QUITE NEW!



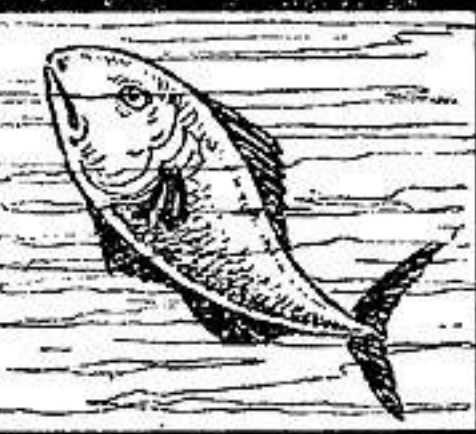

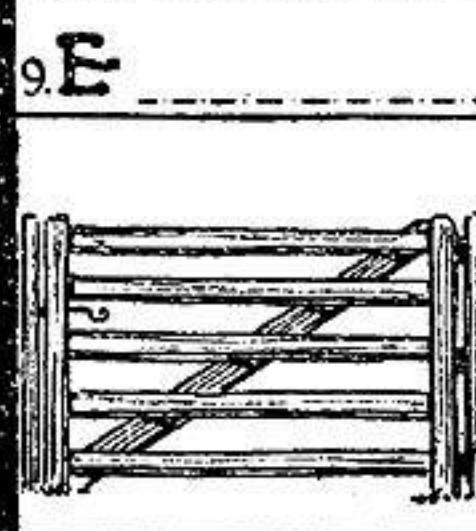



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Here is something novel for you in the way of competitions. On this page you will find a set of eight drawings, and beneath each drawing is an initial letter. The name of the word represented begins in each case with the letter shown. Thus No. 9 is Eye, and so on. **WHAT YOU HAVE TO DO** is to fill in the missing letters, then cut out the picture puzzle and keep it by you until we publish directions as to how and when your efforts are to be sent to us.

There will be six sets of puzzles in all—four more will appear after the one on this page. The above splendid First Prize will be awarded to the reader who sends in a complete solution of the words represented which corresponds exactly with the list which is in the possession of the Editor. The other prizes will be awarded in order of merit.

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9. E	10. E	11. F	12. F
			
13. G	14. G	15. H	16. H

KEEP THESE BY YOU UNTIL THE SIXTH SET APPEARS!
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so the amateur before he entered the roped ring.

"Feeling fit—what?"

Wingate nodded and smiled.

"That's right! I wish you'd had longer to put in at the training; but you shaped first-class at the punch-ball, anyhow! Do your level best now—no man can do more."

Wingate dropped on the seat in his corner of the ring, and he did not look at the crowded faces again. He tried to feel as if it was only a friendly spar in the old gym at Greyfriars, and to forget the crowd.

His second was an old "pug," employed at the Ring, and he, as well as Jeff Blake, looked over the Sixth-Former of Greyfriars with an approving eye. George Wingate "stripped well."

"Don't let 'im get too close if you can 'elp it," the old pug murmured in Wingate's ear, "and look out for his left."

"I'll look out."

Mr. Jeff Blake coughed. He was time-keeper. Wingate drew a hard breath, and resolutely dismissed the sea of faces from his mind.

"Seconds out of the ring! Time!"

Wingate stepped forward, and the adversaries shook hands in the centre of the roped ring. The Chicken leered as he shook hands in a perfunctory way.

The old pug's warning that the Chicken was "tricky with his left" stood Wingate in good stead, for the instant the hands parted the bruiser struck. But a quick side-step saved Wingate, and he struck back, so sharply that the Chicken seemed taken by surprise, and he stopped the clenched glove with his square chin.

A very ugly look came over the Chicken's tough face, and his little eyes glittered.

In a second more they were going it hammer-and-tongs.

The Chicken was attacking hotly, and Jeff Blake's eyes had an anxious look for a moment. The Chicken was in a bad temper, and Mr. Blake did not want to see the amateur knocked to pieces half-way through the first round.

But that was not likely to happen. Wingate was made of sterner stuff than the Fritchester champion supposed.

He stood up gallantly to the pro, taking punishment and giving it, and the Chicken certainly received more than he had bargained for.

His annoyance grew, and his sparring became a little wild, a circumstance of which Wingate took full advantage. Twice, thrice his drives came home, and the muscular boxer staggered.

"Good old Wingate!" breathed Bob Cherry, who was looking on with all his eyes.

"Good old Greyfriars!" said Wharton.

The Chicken cooled down, however, as he realised that he needed to keep cool.

He began to press Wingate harder, but more warily, and his "tricky left" came suddenly into play, and Wingate staggered. But he recovered, and fought on gamely to the call of time.

He was a little breathless as he went to his corner, and the old pug sponged his heated face.

He whispered advice, which Wingate hardly heard. Gamely as he had fought, Wingate had taken the measure of his adversary, and he knew that he had no chance against the heavier professional. But he was grimly determined to go on while he could stand.

"Time!"

Wingate stepped up lightly enough.

"The Chicken means business this time!" Elsie heard a voice near her murmur. "The Chicken's got an ugly look in his eye!"

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The girl trembled.

She closed her eyes for a few moments, and opened them again as there was a deep murmur in the crowd. Wingate, fighting gamely, was standing up to his opponent, taking heavy punishment.

The girl's heart beat nigh to bursting. It was for her sake that he was facing this—for her sake! She breathed a prayer of thankfulness when Jeff Blake called "Time!" and the second round was over.

The minute's rest fled all too quick!

"Well, you're a game 'un, sir!"

The old pug sponged Wingate's heated face. The minute seemed to fly like a second, and Jeff Blake's voice was heard again.

"Time!"

Wingate came steadily up to the scratch, but not so lightly as before. But as he caught the cruel grin on the Chicken's face, he felt that he would die before he gave in.

Gallantly he stood up to his adversary, and Fortune favoured him once more, and he put in a body-blow that made the bruiser stagger. With a glitter in his eyes the Chicken closed in on him, hitting. Wingate fought hard, but the blows came through, raining on him like iron hail. The audience hung breathless on the scene. Harry Wharton & Co. clenched their teeth as they watched. Elsie covered her mouth with her hand to keep back a scream of horror. She could hear the thudding of the blows.

Would time never be called? It was for her sake—for her sake! The words seemed to beat in her brain. Wingate was reeling, and, with a cruel grin, the bruiser was closing in to finish him, when there was a scream that startled the crowded throng in the Fritchester Ring.

Bob Cherry bounded to his feet.

"Elsie!" he gasped.

Forgetful of everything in her fear and horror, the girl had sprung from her place. Before a hand could be raised to stop her she was springing into the roped ring.

"Stop!"

Wingate reeled; it was Elsie's arm that caught and supported him.

"Stop—stop!" Elsie panted. "You shall not—"

The Chicken's arm had been drawn back for the finishing blow. He dropped it in sheer surprise. Jeff Blake muttered an oath under his moustache. The audience were all on their feet now, in a buzz of excitement. Wingate made one effort to recover, but he was at the end of his endurance, and he sank back on the supporting arm of Elsie Mainwaring.

"Elsie!" he whispered.

Then the lights swam before his eyes, and he knew no more.

Harry Wharton was by Wingate's side when the Greyfriars captain opened his eyes again in the dressing-room.

Wingate stared at him dazedly.

His head was throbbing; every bone in his body seemed to be aching. His brow was wet; he passed his hand dizzily across it.

"Wharton!" he muttered. "You here!"

"I'm here, Wingate. The other fellows are outside."

"Elsie—where is she?"

Wharton smiled.

"Bob's got a cab for her. She's waiting for you when you're ready to go. I say, Wingate, it was no end of a fight! You stood up to him splendidly! Don't move in a hurry; rest a bit."

But Wingate was already getting up. Wharton helped him change into his own clothes. His head was swimming. He

leaned a little on Wharton as the junior guided him away. Jeff Blake met them at the door, with a grim expression on his face. He did not speak to Wingate, but gave him a curt nod as he passed. Possibly he did not blame the schoolboy boxer for what had happened, but the dramatic end of the fight had made the promoter feel very sore, all the same. But Wingate gave him hardly a thought; he did not even think of the "thin end" of the boxer's purse, for which he had faced the hammering blows of the bruiser. He was only thinking of Elsie.

The cool night air on his face revived him a little. A sweet, sad face looked at him from the cab to which Harry Wharton led him. Bob Cherry opened the door.

"Here you are, Wingate!"

A soft hand from within helped Wingate in. Harry Wharton & Co. raised their caps as the cab drove off. And then Harry hailed a taxi, and the chums of Greyfriars followed. They had found Wingate; they did not mean to lose him again.

But it was not till the next day that they came to see Wingate, and found him in the little sitting-room, looking pale and fatigued, with Elsie; and then they explained what their mission was in Fritchester. Wingate's brow knitted at the sight of them, but it cleared as Wharton explained. Elsie gave a little cry.

"You must go back at once!"

Wingate set his lips.

"They suspect me—me of taking the money!" he muttered. "Does anybody who knows me think—"

"Nobody who knows you, Wingate," said Harry quickly. "But Hunker—"

"I will go back," said Wingate quietly. "They shall not say that I was afraid to answer such a charge."

"I knew it!" said Wharton, with a deep breath.

"I'm glad you came and found me," said Wingate, with a faint smile. "Of course, I never knew. You can leave me now; and tell Cyrus Hunker that I shall be at Hawthorne Park to-morrow morning, to face anybody that dares to call me a thief!"

And the chums of the Remove left them together. Wingate turned to Elsie.

"I must go," he said. "But I cannot leave you here, Elsie; you are not safe, alone, from Vernon Carson. You must come."

"I cannot—I dare not!" The girl shuddered. "He will find me again; and, through me, he will find my father. I dare not!"

"You must come, Elsie. You will be safer at Hawthorne Park than here," said Wingate quietly. "I shall be there to protect you from that scoundrel. If he should spy upon you, I shall be there to defeat him. Trust to me, dear, and come. For I cannot leave you, and if you do not come, I remain."

Elsie was silent for a moment. Then she raised her eyes to Wingate's.

"I will come," she said simply.

And on the following day Harry Wharton & Co., at the gates of Hawthorne Park, announced by a ringing cheer that Wingate of the Sixth had returned—to clear his name!

THE END.

(Another magnificent story of Harry Wharton & Co. next week, entitled: "HER SCHOOLBOY CHUM!" Order early.)

MARCUS THE BRAVE!



By VICTOR NELSON.

The young gladiator knelt like a figure carved in stone, save that his back quivered beneath the vicious lashes from the lead-tipped whip.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

In Dungeon Deep—Leo's Resolve!

MARCUS, a young gladiator in the days when Nero ruled in Rome, was in love with Eunice, a Christian slave-girl.

Marcus was the commander of the *Couqueror*, a great ship specially commissioned by Nero to capture a notorious pirate, who had for many years robbed and sunk ships laden with costly cargoes intended for Rome. The gladiator's task was now accomplished, and he had returned to Antium to claim his reward. The captive pirates had been led away under the eyes of the emperor himself. Then, kneeling, Marcus claimed his reward, namely, the release of Eunice from bondage, so that he could marry her according to Nero's pledged word. To the young gladiator's despair and rage, the emperor repudiates his promise.

"The girl is a Christian girl, and you cannot marry her. She is to be thrown to the lions!" he says cynically.

"Tyrant and murderer!" bursts out Marcus. "How long shall Rome suffer your infamous rule?"

Nero took a step backwards, his bloated face blank with amazement.

His eyes were wide, his thick lips parted. He could not at first believe that he had heard aright.

Was it really possible that a commoner—a man who had been brought up to the life of a gladiator—could dare address such language to him, Nero, the all-powerful ruler of Rome?

Then, as he looked into Marcus' flashing eyes and saw the incredulous stares of those gathered about them, he knew that his imagination had played him no trick, and his fury knew no bounds.

With a cry of rage, he snatched a sword from a soldier, and Eunice gave a low scream of fear as the despot thrust with all his might at her lover's heart.

Marcus had no time to defend himself—but, after all, it mattered little.

Nero's short-sightedness made it impossible for him to see very far in front of his imperial nose, and probably he had failed to observe that Marcus wore his breastplate. At all events, the point of the sword clanged harmlessly against the burnished metal, and snapped off short.

Nero, realising what had happened, hurled the crippled weapon full at Marcus' head.

Just in time the gladiator ducked, and the sword struck a pretorian soldier at his back, severely lacerating his cheek.

"Seize him!" Nero cried in a terrible voice.

voice. "By Bacchus, never before have I been so insulted! And he shall suffer so that he prays for death!"

Marcus saw fully half-dozen pretorians rushing at him, and, knowing that he could not make matters worse now, he drew his sword and flung himself upon guard.

But others of Nero's bodyguard joined in the scrimmage, and it was only the matter of seconds ere the plucky lad's legs had been kicked from under him, and he was struggling in the midst of his adversaries upon the ground.

Weight of numbers told, though Marcus gave a good account of himself. He was in a blind rage at the cynical manner in which Nero had betrayed him, and more than one burly pretorian had reason to regret that rough-and-tumble fight.

At length the gladiator's hands were secured, and he was dragged, still defiant and angry, to his feet.

"Whips!" Nero ordered, his evil face distorted with a fiendish wrath. "Strip him to the waist, and lash him until I command you to stop!"

"You dog!" he said to Marcus, glaring into his face. "You might have had honours, riches, power—all that a man could desire. As it is, you shall receive tortures that cause you to grovel for mercy and end your days in the arena!"

Marcus looked back steadily into the despot's unhealthy eyes. He made no reply, but his expression of contempt stung Nero far more acutely than any words could have done.

But for feeling that such an action would be beneath his dignity, the emperor would have struck the helpless lad in the face.

He stepped back, with a cruel smile, as three of his pretorians advanced with their formidable, lead-tipped thongs.

The soldiers holding Marcus unbuckled his breastplate, and flung it with a clatter to the ground. Then his tunic was slashed down the back with the blade of a sword, and it was wrenched away so as to leave his back bare.

He set his teeth as he was forced to his knees. It was useless to struggle now, and he was determined that, if the whipping went on until he fainted, he would not give Nero the satisfaction of hearing him cry out with the pain.

Eunice instinctively tried to move forward as she saw one of the soldiers prepare to use his terrible whip, but one of her guards struck her a brutal blow with the flat of his sword, and she reeled back until brought up short by her chains. She hid her face in her hands, with a little cry of anguish, as the whips began to hiss through the air and cut into her lover's back.

On the Conqueror Leo was finding it hard to hold the men and officers in check.

Tacon, the third in command, was by his side, his face angry and his hands clenched.

"Are we going to stand by and make no effort to help him, O Leo?" he asked indignantly.

"Master, let us give these soldiers combat!" a sailor pleaded, his hand upon his sword.

"Nay; it would do no good!" Leo answered, shaking his head. "What chance should we stand against Nero's hordes?"

"By Hercules, you surprise me, Leo!" Tacon said contemptuously. "I, for one, will die, if necessary, by his side. Men, are you with me?"

A chorus of assent answered him. To a man the sailors and the warriors the Conqueror carried moved forward, their faces fierce, hands dropping to weapons.

Leo faced them sternly, and motioned them back.

"Fools!" he said, speaking only just loud enough for them to hear. "Did you not hear that when this punishment is over he will be kept for the arena? Do you not realise that the girl he loves is to go there, too, unless—"

"Unless?" Tacon asked doubtfully.

"We can aid them to escape from prison!" Leo returned, his tone significant. "Think you now that it would be for the best for us to rush blindly into a fight that would end, not perchance, but with not the least doubt, in our all being slain or taken prisoners?"

They saw the wisdom of his reasoning, and fell back slowly, though angry murmurs ran through them as they gazed upon the scene of savage cruelty being enacted upon the quay.

Marcus knelt like a figure carved in stone, save that his cut and bleeding back quivered beneath the viciously-dealt lashes from the lead-tipped whip.

The agony was maddening—too terrible to describe, and a thin trickle of blood ran down his chin from where he had driven his teeth into his under-lip in his determination that Nero should hear no murmur from him.

As for the all-powerful ruler, he had folded his arms and, in his supreme conceit and delight in his power, struck an attitude. His eyes still smouldered with mingled anger and satisfaction at seeing the lad who had dared to throw the truth in his face under the torture of the pretorian's whips.

How long he would have allowed the inhuman flogging to continue it is impossible to say. It was to end with unexpected abruptness.

So intent was Nero upon watching Marcus' torment that he failed to notice the suppressed anger displayed upon the Conqueror or what was happening amongst the crowds of sightseers.

At first the people had seemed unable to believe that it was Marcus who had been stripped, and was now being lashed by the soldiers, and when they did realise the fact, their aspect quickly became ugly.

The young gladiator who had returned to his native shores with so many victorious achievements to his credit was rightly looked upon as a hero, and when he was seen in his present humiliated position the indignation and wrath of the throng was boundless. Already the guards were finding difficulty in not coming into serious collision with the more bold and hot-headed members of the crowd, and suddenly Horace, the prefect of the pretorians, approached his august master.

"If I may be permitted to offer a word of advice, O divine one, methinks the gladiator's punishment should cease," he said in a low tone.

Nero raised his emerald and regarded him with cold displeasure.

"Does the sight of just punishment sicken you, Horace?" he sneered. "If I have a prefect of pretorians who has the heart of a love-sick maiden—"

"I care not if you allow the dog to be lashed to death, O Cæsar," Horace interrupted quickly. "But the people do not see with my eyes, and, perchance, they will become troublesome unless the soldiers are commanded to stop!"

"By Hercules! Am I to study the whims of the rabble?" Nero demanded angrily. "I—"

"After recent happenings, sire, might it not be judicious?" the prefect reminded him meaningly.

Nero started, and again bringing his emerald to his eyes, made an attempt to study the crowds separated from him by his hordes of guards and slaves. He

could make very little of them. They were out of his range of vision, but their angry murmurs reached him plainly enough and could not be misunderstood. He even heard actual words that were insults flung directly at himself.

Some time ago Nero had given out that he had sacrificed his board to Jupiter, but rumour had had it that he had discarded it because it was an unpleasant, flaming red in hue, and mingled with persistent cries of "Drunkard!" and "Murderer!" was that of "Bronzebeard!" which secretly caused him to fume with rage.

"Hold!" Mindful of how near his subjects had been to revolution prior to his shifting the blame of the firing of Rome on to the shoulders of the Christians, Nero had for once acted with discretion.

He uttered the word with the air of one who wished to be merciful, and accompanied it with a lordly gesture to the soldiers plying the whips.

They fell back from the half-swooning Marcus, and he was raised to his feet by the other pretorians who had held him.

"Is he to be taken to the prison, sire?" Horace asked, in an undertone.

"Nay—to the dungeon beneath the palace," Nero returned, with a significant smile, as their eyes met; and Horace understood that Marcus' punishment had been merely stayed whilst in public. Within the privacy of the palace walls, it would be renewed at the emperor's pleasure.

Horace was as evil-natured and as ready to delight in the sufferings of others as was Cæsar himself, and he, too, smiled, though his wizened face was quickly serious again. He was wondering if there would be trouble when Marcus was led away under arrest.

Nero probably anticipated something of the kind, for he returned to his chariot, taking no further notice of Marcus, who stood swaying between his guards. A word to a slave, and the emperor's magnificent equipage moved majestically away down the road, the man and a fellow-servitor leading the twelve white horses.

The several processions of slaves and the Sicambrian detachment of warriors followed; but the majority of the other bodies of soldiers remained by Horace's orders behind, and none of the crowd was allowed to follow in the direction Nero had taken until he had had time to arrive at the palace he was occupying in the town.

Commands rang out suddenly, and the party of Christians were led away towards the prison by their guards, Eunice being forced along with them in her chains. For just a moment her eyes met those of Marcus, and, although he felt dazed, and could scarce hold up his head, he tried to flash her an encouraging glance.

His heart was heavy, however, and he was plunged in the blackest despair. Himself a prisoner, what could he hope to do to help her?

The dreams of happiness they had cherished had been swept away by the capricious whim of Cæsar, to whom honour and a pledged word were as naught. They would eventually both face the lions in the arena to make sport for the callous fiend and murderer whose rule had already turned Rome into a shambles, and who was even now planning fresh crimes, fresh inhuman cruelties!

The murmuring amongst the crowd broke out again, as Marcus' guards forced him to march. It welled into an angry roar that was like the beating of a heavy sea, and Horace narrowed his eyes and looked anxious.

A sudden rush was made by a part of the mob, evidently with some idea of rescuing the lad. There came the flash of steel and hoarse shouts and threats, as the soldiers drew their swords and forced the people back.

The sight of the weapons quietened them somewhat, though they still murmured their discontent.

On the Conqueror, Leo was looking after Marcus and the soldiers in charge of him.

His hand went out and gripped Tacon's arm.

"Follow!" he ordered sharply. And instantly the third-in-command was galvanised into activity. "Bring me word whither he is taken!"

Tacon needed no second bidding. He slipped ashore with as little show as possible, and, traversing a narrow passageway leading from the docks to a road turning off that the soldiers and their prisoner had taken, he contrived to get slightly ahead of them.

Within half an hour he was back on the ship, and had approached Leo, who was seated under an awning, deep in thought. An aged sailor stood near, attending to some trivial duty.

"He was taken to the palace here—the palace Cæsar is occupying on the Apollo Hill, Leo," Tacon announced.

"Without doubt to be placed in the dungeons beneath it!" Leo murmured, his brows contracting. "Woe is me! In a prison it might have been possible to bribe or ply the guards with wine and rescue him. Alas! I fear it would be impossible to get past Nero's host of slaves and guards, and reach him whither he has gone now!"

"Master!"

"Well?" Leo turned sharply upon the sailor, for it was he who had spoken. The gladiator saw that his eyes were alight with eagerness, and evidently there was something he considered of importance which he wanted to say.

"Speak!" Leo commanded, as the old man hesitated.

"It is not for me to know more than you, master," the sailor said, "but, perchance, you were wrong when you said it would be impossible to reach your friend and our beloved commander!"

"What meanest you, man?" Leo demanded, leaning quickly forward, with his keen eyes searching the seaman's lined and sun-tanned face.

"That there was once said to be a secret entrance to the Apollo Palace, master," the sailor returned quickly. "Many years ago the mysterious murder of a courtier took place there, and 'twas said the assassin entered by this means. In those days my father was employed as a jester in the palace, and he well remembered the supposed key to the secret entrance, though, like everyone else, he could never solve it, and, if the subterranean passage didst exist, as was rumoured, it was never found. Methinks that now very few save myself canst recall the stories told of it."

Leo gave an exclamation of excitement as he listened.

"Your father knew the key! Perchance, he passed it down to you, my man?" he asked; and, to his satisfaction, the old sailor inclined his head.

"It is in the form of a doggerel—a rhyme, O master," he replied. "There may be nothing in it, after all, but if you cared to hear it—"

"I do care—of a certainty!" cried Leo, ready to snatch the most slender possibility of being able to help his friend. "Repeat it to me!"

The old sailor wrinkled his brows, and for a moment Leo thought he must have forgotten the wording of the doggerel.

But suddenly his face cleared, and he said:

"It was this, master:

"Where the cypress-trees combine,
Draw it thirty cubits line.
Tarry until the godlike lips
Shall the eagle's beak eclipse.
Cubits twelve across the first,
There shall lie the tomb accurst!"

"It sounds meaningless," the sailor said, as he concluded the strange combination of words, "yet in the ancient writings of the palace it is still to be found, I doubt not, and, according to my father, held the solution of the mystery of the whereabouts of the secret entrance."

"Bring me a reed and parchment, Tacon," Leo said, swinging round upon his lieutenant. "I would commit the rhyme to writing. If there be anything in this—if the doggerel can take me by secret means into the palace, somehow I will solve its mystery and rescue my friend, or perish in the attempt!"

The Tomb!

THROUGH most of the remainder of the day and the early evening Leo had paced the Conqueror's deck, thinking, thinking.

Food had been brought to him, but he had stopped to take only the merest mouthful; for his brain was too busy with the rhyme that was said to hold the key to the palace's secret entrance to allow him to think of eating.

It might be just a myth, a meaningless jumble of words, yet, somehow, Leo could not bring himself to believe so. Some instinct seemed to convince him that the doggerel was going to enable him to reach and rescue his comrade.

He had thought it over carefully, coming to the conclusion, from the mention of the "tomb accurst," that the entrance to the secret passage must lay in some burial-ground. What the reference to the "eagle's beak" and the "godlike lips" could mean he could not imagine as yet, but evidently some cypresses stood at no great distance from the tomb the rhyme mentioned.

Afraid of spies, he thought it best to remain upon the ship until darkness fell. But, knowing that there was a cemetery at no great distance from the Apollo Palace, he had despatched Tacon there, with instructions to mark the position of any cypress-trees he found therein.

Tacon had returned about two hours again, and reported that cypresses were unusually few within the cemetery walls. There was one long line of them standing in the approximate centre of the burial-place, but that was all.

Leo noted this, and thought that it might greatly simplify the task he had set himself.

He walked to the vessel's side, and stood, listening. The night was growing advanced now, and the moon was bright—all too bright for his liking, if the truth be told.

"The Christians to the lions!"

From the shore came the cry that had rung out over and over again all through the day. The merciless persecution of Nero's dupes was still going on, and party after party of the unhappy men and women who were known to follow the faith of Christianity was being arrested, and forced along the dusty roads to the prison over the fields.

Leo's fine eyes filled with contempt as he listened.

Rome was satiated with cruelty, yet was ever ready for more, and the amusement of watching the Christians lashed and beaten by their guards on their way to prison had soon caused the people of Antium to forget their hero Marcus.

The pretorians had had not great trouble with the crowd after the one outbreak. The sightseers had dispersed more or less quietly when Marcus had been led out of sight in the wake of Nero's chariot and hosts of slaves and bodyguards.

Leo called Tacon to him as he glimpsed him crossing the deck.

"I go now, Tacon," he said quietly.

"Let me come with you, Leo!" the Conqueror's third-in-command begged eagerly. "Why not reconsider your decision to make the attempt alone?"

Leo laid his hand affectionately upon his comrade's shoulder.

"Why, no, good friend," he answered. "But I want your word for this—that if I fail to return, you will try to rescue him in my stead."

Their hands met.

"I swear it by the shade of my mother, Leo!" Tacon returned solemnly.

Leo's hand dropped to his sword, to make certain it hung in its place from his girdle. He delayed only to throw a dark cloak about his shoulders, then was rowed ashore, and hastened away into the shadows.

He made his way to the cemetery by the less-frequented roads. He had seen no signs of Nero having posted spies to watch him, but he knew that it was quite likely the arch-despot had done so. Now that Marcus had offended him, it was not impossible that Nero would look round for an excuse to have him—Leo—arrested, too.

When he reached the burial-place Leo found it closed for the night; but this troubled the agile young giant but little. He glided around the wall, made sure there was no one about to watch him, and, making a quick spring and gripping its top, he drew himself up, and dropped lightly on the other side.

The graves and tombs were picked out errily by the moonlight, as Leo stole among them, and an imaginative person might easily have pictured ghosts of the dead lurking in the many weird shadows. But Leo did not suffer with "nerves," and, supposing it really existed, his one aim was to find the means to reach the palace in secret, and attempt to rescue his friend.

He came upon the cypresses of which Tacon had told him, and stood for a moment, letting the lines of the doggerel run through his mind.

"Where the cypress-trees combine," he muttered musingly. And he moved about until he had the three trees in a direct line in front of him, and could see only the first of them.

Then slowly he backed the distance of thirty cubits, which the verse mentioned, judging it as nearly as he could.

He looked about him, and, with a start, realised that the dome of the Apollo Palace was now visible through some adjacent trees growing near the cemetery's farther wall.

"Tarry until the godlike lips shall the eagle's beak eclipse," he muttered, half-aloud. "By Bacchus! What canst that mean?"

For well over an hour he pondered and puzzled over the words. He grew disconsolate at last, and was almost inclined to give in and return to the ship, when suddenly the rhyme's significance rushed into his brain.

As he stared abstractedly towards the dome of the palace, which was caressed by the bright moonlight, he saw both the "godlike lips" and the "eagle's beak," and uttered a cry of understanding. On one side of the dome stood a magnificently-carved statue of Hercules, and on the other was the emblem of the Roman eagle, moulded in some description of metal, and gilded. And from where he

stood the carved lips of the statue exactly covered the beak of the graven bird!

With his heart pounding hard in excitement, Leo recalled the last two lines of the rhyme. He walked in a straight line for twelve cubits, and then pulled up with a cry of triumph.

Before him stood a large and seemingly very old vault, the carving upon which was chipped and weather-beaten.

There was little doubt in his mind that he had found the tomb the doggerel was intended to indicate, and with unsteady hands he made to tug at the entrance stone. By chance he must have touched a part of the carving destined to set it in motion, for, with a rasping, grinding sound, it swung round upon a pivot, leaving a black void before him, into which he stared, with bated breath.

He wished now that he had thought to bring a torch with him, but he did not let the darkness impede him for any length of time. Stepping into it, he felt for the steps that led down into the heart of the tomb, found them, and went cautiously down, until he found himself upon which felt like a tiled floor.

Feeling about in the darkness, he reached the nearer wall, and it was only a few seconds later that he had followed it to where the mouth of a narrow passage lay.

The air was foul and thick, with an oppressive earthly smell, but nothing could daunt Leo now, and, though he shuddered with repulsion, he advanced into the inky darkness, finding that the passage wound tortuously this way and that, and rose steadily.

For fully five minutes he went on through the impenetrable gloom, his hand lightly touching the slimy wall for guidance. Then, with startling suddenness, his toes struck against the first step of a worn stone flight, and he fell to his knees upon them.

He was quickly up again, and lost no time in mounting the staircase, until he was again checked by feeling his outstretched hands touching stone or marble that was thick with cobwebs.

It must form the secret door that would take him into the palace, he told himself; and feverishly he began to run his fingers over it, seeking for some means of causing it to swing away from before him, as the entrance-stone of the vault had done.

For a long time it eluded all his efforts to learn its secret; but at last his groping fingers came into contact with an almost unnoticeable protuberance near its top. He pressed upon it, and the slab that had barred his progress began slowly to slide on one side, grating a little in its progress.

A glimmer of light shot through the aperture it left. It was faint enough, but, after the intense darkness, it dazzled Leo for a moment. Then, as his eyes became accustomed to it, he found an oblong opening before him, and beyond, curtains.

Could it be possible, he wondered, that the secret passage led into some private chamber occupied by the mountebank monarch?

Trembling with suppressed excitement, Leo silently drew his sword, then, stretching out his hand, he gently parted the curtains, and peered through them.

He could have shouted aloud in triumph then; for, sitting before a magnificently-carved table of marble, was Nero himself, and he was alone!

(There will be another instalment of this grand serial next week. Order your copy of the MAGNET early!)

“TAPS!”

A Splendid Article, containing Valuable Tips to add to your
Stock of Health-Knowledge.

By GEORGE HOWE.

YOU’VE told me about small leaks; but what about a burst, or if the bleeding “doesn’t stop?”

“An intelligent question that does you credit, my boy. There’s no need to look vexed; I mean it. If you can’t stop the bleeding by putting your thumb on the spot, and you will always do that first, a large vessel or artery has been injured, and it will be necessary to shut off the supply at the nearest convenient tap.

“Arteries are the supply pipes under pressure from the pumping of the heart. They are more elastic than the veins, and much thicker. If a small artery is cut, the ends contract, and are sealed by the clotting of the blood. But the pressure on a large artery is so great as often to wash away the clot, and that is the time to use the tap.

“The taps are points over the arteries where these bloodvessels come near to the surface, and can be pressed against a bone so as to regulate the blood supply to that part of the body.

“The first tap is just behind that bump at the back of my ear, and controls the blood supply to the neck and back of the head. It is not very easy to find, and you have almost to hold your breath before you can feel the pulse.

“The second is in front of the ear, on a level with the eye, and shuts off the blood from the scalp. Useful to know when the scalp-hunters are round.

“About an inch in front of the angle of the jaw is the third. The pulsation can easily be felt, and if you put your thumb over the spot and press against the jawbone you shut off the blood from that side of my face.

The artery which supplies these three taps, and all the blood to the head, passes up the neck. But don’t trouble about the tap. You will probably never need to use it, and it is a dangerous thing to play with.

“Number 5 is in an awkward place. It lies behind the collar-bone, just about the middle. When you get the spot you will feel the pulsation. If the shoulder is down and forward, you will find it quicker. Now, by pressing your thumb down and back, you push the artery against the first rib, and stop all supply to the arm. In place of your thumb use the padded handle of a doorkey, if somebody hasn’t borrowed it.

“Raise my arm, and where the muscle from the chest joins the top of the arm you will find Tap Number 6. It is on the arm side of the armpit. Press it against the bone of the arm, and you stop the blood flowing to the rest of the arm.

“Now put my arm out straight from the body and level with the shoulder. Feel on the inner side along the edge of the biceps muscle. I thought you would know the biceps. It is a muscle you like to show off. Don’t pinch, you rascal! Do you feel the mighty throb of my manly pulse? Now press the artery against the bone, outwards and backwards, but don’t dig your fingers in. That’s Number 7.

“The next tap is in the bend of the elbow. The easiest way to turn it off is to put a pad or a few folds of the coat-sleeve well down in the bend, as the forearm is brought up to meet the arm. Fasten with a bandage round the arm, crossed between the arm and the forearm, and tied above the wrist. Number 13, in the bend of the knee, is turned off in the same way. They control all leaks below the elbow and the knee.

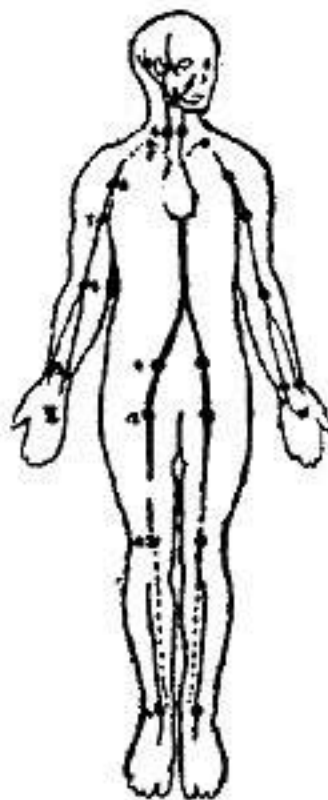
“Then you’ll feel my pulse. I won’t put out my tongue, or you may think I’m rude. The spot is about an inch above the wrist; but as another artery runs parallel with this, you will have to stop both of them to get any result. The pressure points are level with each other, and about the same distance from the sides of the arm. Another pair of taps is Number 14, one in the centre of the front of the ankle, and the other behind the large bone on the inner side of the ankle. They can both be stopped in the same way, by putting the rounded side of a cork, cut in two along its length, on the points, and fastening tightly with a bandage.

Number 11 is in the groin. It controls the whole of the leg, just as Number 5 controls the arm. The spot is on line of the groin, half-way between the fork of the leg and the top of the haunch-bone. The artery is very strong, and about the thickness of the little finger, so to get a good pressure use both thumbs, one on the other. Similar pressure is needed for Number 12, which is a hand’s-breadth from the fork. To get a good effect, bend the leg up and out, and press towards the bone of the leg.

“The palm of the hand holds Number 10 tap. It is only mentioned to fill in the numbers.

“In all cases of severe bleeding, send for the doctor, raise the bleeding part above the level of the heart, if possible; put pressure on the wound, keep the person quiet and warm, and never give alcoholic stimulant.”

(Another of these splendid articles next week.)



This diagram shows just where the “taps” are in the human body.



CHARLIE CHAPLIN—FORM-MASTER!



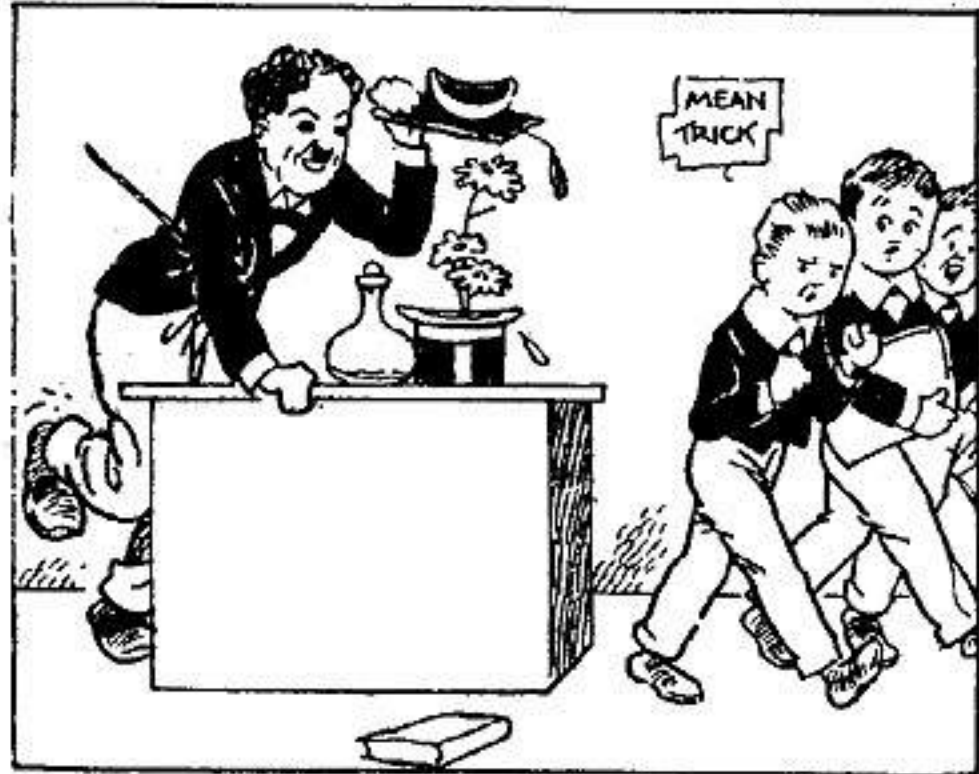
New Series of Really Funny Pictures, specially drawn by J. MacWilson.



1. Just cast your papers over the above touching little scene, boys and girls. What peace, what happiness! Y'see, Willie Wagg & Co. have plucked the dainty daisies from the dewy dell, and have presented them to their friend and Form-master as a token of their esteem. Thoughtful lads!



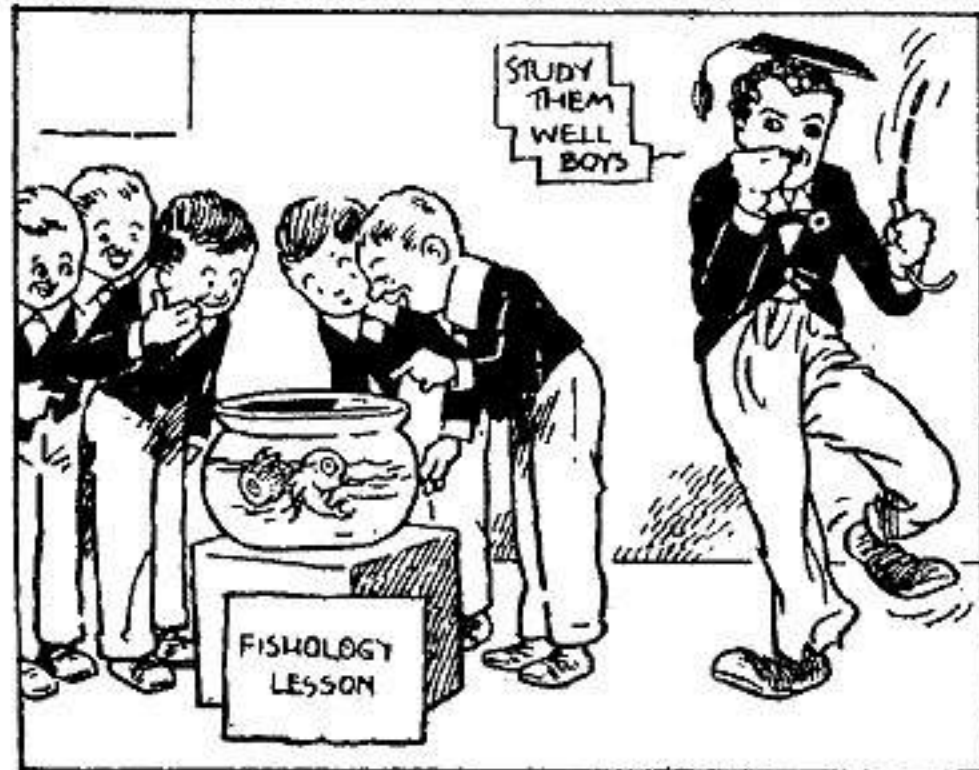
2. But, instead of giving 'em a half-holiday, as the kind little fellows expected, Charlie said: "Thank you, boys! I'll keep these bright blooming blossoms on my desk while we do our lessons. Now lend me your hat, Willie! Ah, thank you!" And straightway Charlie filled it with watery wetness.



3. "There, you see, this topper makes a topping flower-vase. Now go to your places, turn to page sixty of your history books, and learn how Bruce's spider tracked down flies in the winter-time." "Urr-grurgh!" groaned the class.



4. Meanwhile, Charlie went out of the Form-room to fetch certain species of the funny tribe for the fishology lesson. But, alas! on his return, the cheeky fags gave him the merry old school utensils right where the chicken got the chopper.



5. "Now, boys," said Charlie, "come round the flowing bowl, and study the habits of those denizens of the deep known to scientists as the Boneybac Hippennicus. Don't be afraid of 'em; they won't bite, as any angler could tell you!"



6. Then, just as the nippers were contemplating the wonders of Nature, Charlie raised his number eleven! "Oooch! Woof!" gasped the unfortunate fags as they took a header into the bottled briny. "That's done us! But, ah! See next Monday's MAGNET!"

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