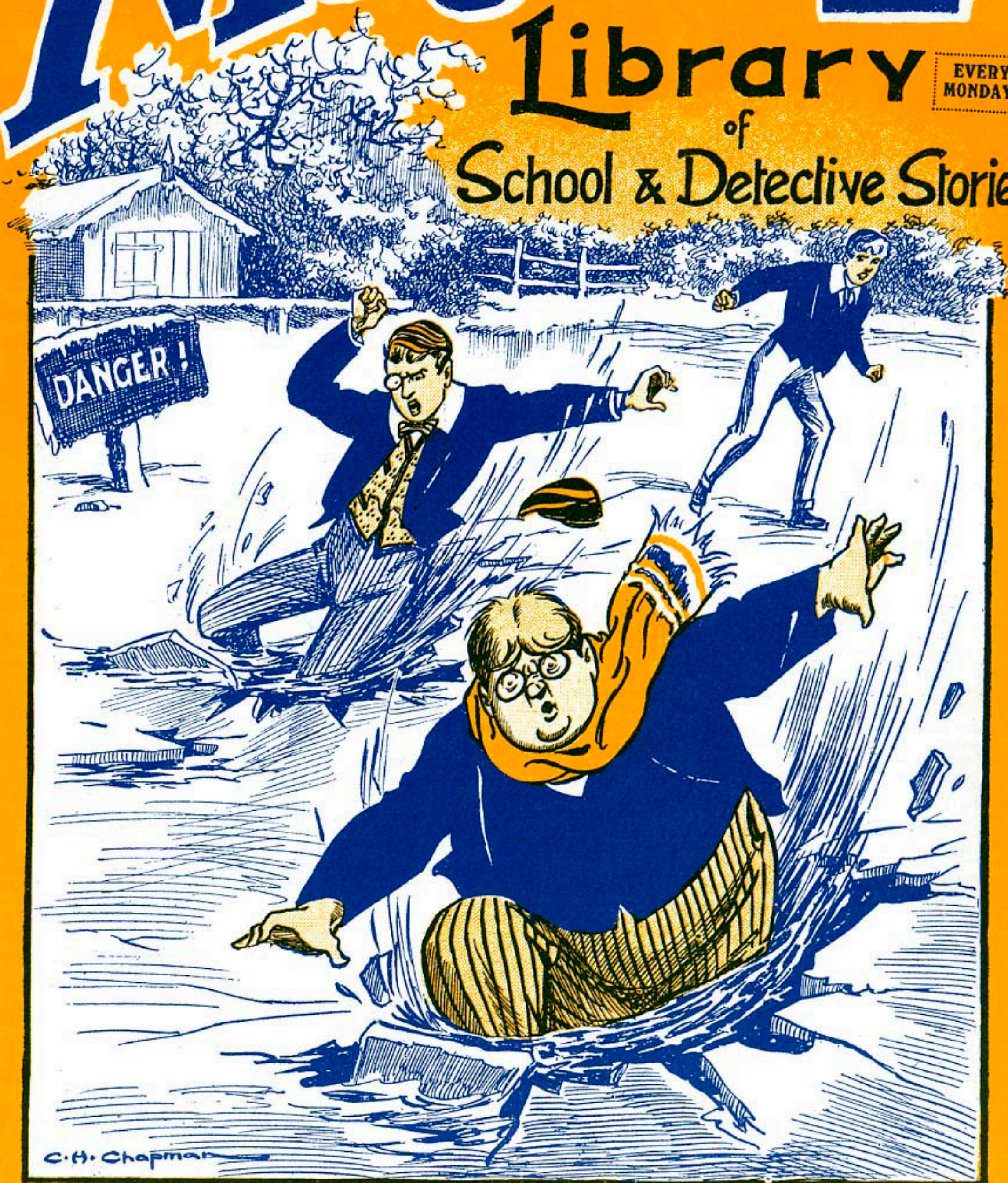


"THE WHITE FEATHER!" "KING'S EVIDENCE!" "THE YELLOW CLAW!"
And Special 4-Page Supplement.

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A PERILOUS MOMENT FOR SAMMY BUNTER AND PONSONBY!

(A thrilling incident from the long complete school story of Harry Wharton & Co., inside.)

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ANOTHER THRILLING STORY OF THE NORTH-WEST MOUNTED POLICE!



King's Evidence!

THE FIRST CHAPTER. Bailed Up!

IT was pitiable to see the state of fright the man was in. Every few steps he turned and glanced back down the rocky pass, or else stared up at the cliffs to the left, as if he expected something to pounce upon him out of each crevice.

Wherever a clump of scrubby pines clung to the mountain-side within rifle-shot of the path, he would stop short, and it would take all the efforts of Mel Ruthven and Joe Clarke to make him move on.

"Look here, Yardley," said Ruthven, at last, "if you don't move a bit quicker we sha'n't reach the summit by nightfall."

But Yardley started as if he had been struck, and his mean face was contorted with fresh terror. He started forward like a horse that has been spurred.

"No use racing!" growled Joe Clarke, a square, sturdy, silent man. "You won't last long at that pace."

"Keep between us and walk steadily," bade Ruthven curtly. "Can't you believe me when I tell you I'll get you out of it safe?"

"I know you'll try, Mr. Ruthven," whined the frightened man; "but you don't know Lach Strickett, an' I do. He's so pizon mean he'd lay out a year rather than let me git away."

Nothing else but the fact that Ruthven had passed his word that Yardley should be escorted in safety over the border into the United States would have induced either of these two North-West mounted policemen to have anything to do with this miserable coward and sneak.

The facts were briefly as follow: For the past year a whole country had been terrorised by a band of horse-thieves, under the leadership of an outlaw named Lach Strickett. The police had done their level best to break up the organisation, but Strickett's boldness and cunning had set all their efforts at defiance, and it was not until Yardley, tempted by a heavy reward, had sneaked in to Fort Alexandra by night, and offered to turn King's Evidence, in exchange for the money and his freedom, that the secret haunt of the gang had been discovered.

Then a raid in force had resulted in the capture of nine of the outlaws; only Strickett and two of his companions had made good their escape. By Yardley's evidence the nine had all been convicted and sentenced to varying terms of imprisonment.

The day after the trial a note was found pinned upon the very door of the room in the fort where Yardley was kept under guard. It was short and to the point:

"To Bud Yardley. You may ez well say yore prares, fer you won't git out of Canada alive!"

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There was no signature, but when Yardley saw it he almost collapsed with terror, and swore it was Strickett's own writing, and no other's. Whoever it was, he was a bold and clever man to have succeeded in invading the actual precincts of the fort.

The very next morning in reply to Yardley's urgent entreaties, Mel Ruthven and his friend, Joe Clarke, put the miserable fellow on a horse and started with him for the boundary.

The boundary line at this point lay in the Rockies, near the head waters of the Milk River, and the nature of the ground had forced them to leave their horses at the foot of the pass, and make their way up afoot. However, as Ruthven told Clarke, they had come so fast that even if Strickett had been warned of their starting he could never have caught them up.

Evening was rapidly closing in as the three came in sight of the summit. The sun had long disappeared behind a bank of dun clouds.

"What's the distance to the boundary now?" inquired Ruthven of his friend.

"Two miles," replied Clarke shortly.

"Here's the rain!" growled Ruthven, a minute later, as a puff of wet mist blew suddenly in their faces.

The dusk thickened visibly, and in another few moments everything was shrouded in grey cloud, which dropped like a great grey blanket from the snow-clad heights above.

A clump of pines, which overhung the path, loomed blackly out of the smother. The sound of Yardley's teeth chattering was plainly audible.

With sudden and almost awful unexpectedness the narrow path was blocked by three tall figures.

"Hands up!" came a ringing voice out of the gloom.

Ruthven's pistol, and that of Clarke, spoke simultaneously; but a yell, which proved that one at least of their bullets had found a billet, was followed instantly by a volley, and Ruthven, hit in the shoulder, spun round and fell against the rocks on the inner side of the path.

Joe Clarke, in the very act of pulling his trigger a second time, felt his hand knocked up, and his bullet flew harmlessly high in the air. Two men seized him, and in spite of his struggles he was at once disarmed.

"Catch Yardley! Don't let him run!" shouted the same sharp voice.

Ruthven, with a desperate effort of will, staggered to his feet, and, seeing a figure cowering close behind him, seized it with his unwounded arm, and tried to pull it away up into the shelter of the pines. He might have succeeded, but that the wretched man was absolutely paralysed with terror, and quite unable to walk. As the trooper vainly endeavoured to jerk him to his feet, two others of the attacking party caught hold of him.

"Not a mite of good your fighting, Mister

Ruthven," said the leader. "Yew've done all yew could."

Before Ruthven could answer Yardley had flung himself on his knees before the speaker.

"For the love o' Heaven, let me go, Strickett! I swear I won't trouble yew no more. Let me go. Don't kill me!" he wailed.

For answer, Strickett dealt the wretched coward a contemptuous kick.

"Tie him fast, boys!" he cried.

His orders were promptly obeyed.

"Naow, then, gentlemen, hev I got to tie yew 'uns, or will yew pass yewr word to keep quiet?" said Strickett, addressing the policemen.

Joe Clarke did not deign to reply.

Ruthven said, with quiet bitterness:

"I'm hit. I can't run."

"I'm mighty sorry fer that," answered the horse-thief, with unexpected mildness. "But ez yew've put a bullet through Mike Conlon's leg, I reckon we're quits there. Here, Lish"—calling one of his men—"light the lantern, an' I'll fix up Mister Ruthven's arm."

It was now almost dark, and raining thickly. The lantern light showed Strickett's party to be composed of five men including himself. The horse-thief was a tall, wiry man, with a keen, dark, powerful face. He bandaged Ruthven's arm with considerable skill. Fortunately, the bullet had not broken a bone, but the muscles were badly torn, and Ruthven had lost a lot of blood.

"You'd better let us take Yardley out of Canada," said Ruthven quietly, when the bandaging was finished. "Revenge won't get the rest of your chaps out of prison Strickett."

A fierce light flashed in the robber's eyes.

"The mean hound! I've sworn I'd get even, and I will; so it ain't a mite o' use your talking," he answered, in a hard voice. "Naow, Mr. Ruthven, I ain't got no quarrel with yew or Mr. Clarke. Ef yew 'uns like to go back home yew kin."

"Yew promised yew'd save me!" screamed Yardley, overhearing the words.

One of the robbers struck him in the mouth.

Ruthven's answer absolutely staggered Clarke.

"Very well," he said. "I see I can't resist. But I warn you, Strickett, I shall bring a party on your trail."

Strickett laughed.

"Yew've done that before. Yew're mighty welcome to try agin."

Then he and his men disarmed the two policemen, and, taking their prisoner, went off rapidly up the pass.

When they were out of hearing Clarke turned to Ruthven.

"Pretty job this!" he said bitterly.

"Dò you imagine it's all over?" replied Ruthven in a queer tone.

(Continued on page 21.)

Bob Cherry has ever been a model of manliness and pluck, but there comes a time when these sterling qualities, amazing as it may seem, earn for him the reputation of a funk.



The White Feather!

By
FRANK RICHARDS

A Splendid Long Complete Story of Harry Wharton & Co. of Greyfriars, introducing Miss Phyllis Howell of Cliff House, and Cecil Ponsonby of Highcliffe.

THE FIRST CHAPTER. Ponsonby's Victim!

YOUNG Sammy Bunter of the Second Form at Greyfriars grunted as he rolled along the frosty lane towards Friardale. It was a grunt of disgust, and it went well with the discontented expression on the chubby features of the Second-Former.

"Beast!" mumbled Sammy, his eyes glittering behind his spectacles. "Greedy beast!"

Evidently young Sammy was wrathful as well as disgusted and discontented.

"Beast!" he went on. "Got five bob by post, and didn't breathe a word to me about it! Shouldn't have known if I hadn't heard Cherry——"

He paused.

So engrossed had Sammy been in his morose reflections that he quite failed to observe that a well-dressed—not to say, elegant—youth had stepped gracefully into the roadway.

But he paused now, and looked up as a shadow crossed his path.

Then he jumped.

It was Cecil Ponsonby, the dandy of the Fourth Form at Highcliffe, who stood before him.

He smiled down through a glimmering monocle at the Greyfriars "infant"; but Sammy Bunter did not return the smile.

He shivered.

On the face of things, it seemed rather surprising that such an extremely elegant and lofty youth as Cecil Ponsonby should even deign to bestow a glance upon an insignificant fag from a rival school.

But it was not surprising to Sammy Bunter—no more surprising, in fact, than it would be to a wretched mouse, to be noticed—and pounced upon—by a hungry cat.

"P-P-Ponsonby," mumbled Sammy. "Oh dear!"

"Master Ponsonby to you, old fat lard-tub!" remarked Ponsonby pleasantly, his handsome nose elevated a trifle. "Where are you off in such a hurry, my little man?"

Sammy Bunter groaned, and glanced desperately about him. But, save for themselves, the lane was deserted at the moment; there was no escape.

But, though terrified, Sammy did not lose his wits.

He realised that Ponsonby was only playing with him—as a cat plays with a mouse before killing—and that he had not the slightest interest in his destination.

But he also realised that someone from Greyfriars might come along at any moment, and he knew his only chance was to play for time as Ponsonby was playing with him for his own amusement.

"P-Please, Pon—I mean, Master Ponsonby," he squeaked tremulously, "I'm going to Friardale—to Uncle Clegg's; I'm after my brother Billy——"

"So your brother Billy's in Friardale—eh? I want to see him, too!" said Ponsonby, his eyes glinting.

"He's there—he must be, 'cause he's not in the tuckshop at Greyfriars," explained Sammy, glancing stealthily and hopefully up and down the lane. "You—you see, he's got five bob; the pater sent it this morning. And Billy's collared it all, the greedy beast!"

"My hat!" grinned Ponsonby. "Has he, really?"

"Catch me letting him keep it, though!" sniffed Sammy, his wrath momentarily overcoming his fear. "He knows jolly well it wasn't all meant for him! As if the pater would send him five bob and me nothing. The beast!"

He stopped suddenly. From somewhere round the corner of the lane came the ting-a-ling of a bicycle-bell in the distance. Ponsonby also heard it, and as if he realised it meant rescue for his victim, he dropped his air of amused and supercilious boredom abruptly.

His hand shot out and closed with a cruel grip on one of Sammy Bunter's little fat ears.

"You snivelling little sweep!" he hissed. "You know what I want you for, Bunter minor! You had the dashed cheek to pitch a snowball at me in

Friardale yesterday—at me, you little toad!"

"Yo-o-o-ugh!" squeaked the hapless fag, squirming frantically. "Leggo! You'll have my ear off! Ow! P-please, Ponsonby, I didn't! It wasn't me; it was Billy!"

"All the same," said Ponsonby, gritting his teeth, "I'll see that fat worm, Billy, again! I suppose you thought yourselves safe because Wharton and his rotten crowd were near? You forgot I'm not the chap to forget things like that—eh?"

"Yow! Leggo, my ear! Ow! Oh, please, Pon——"

"I'll teach you to insult your betters in public!" snapped Ponsonby.

And the Highcliffe cad twisted and tugged at the hapless fag's ear until poor Sammy's squeaks rose to a shrill series of agonised yelps. He was still yelping and squealing, and Ponsonby was still twisting and tugging when an interruption occurred.

There came the swift whirr of cycle-wheels, and the next instant a girl, wearing the Cliff House colours round her hat, was on the spot.

She came up with a rush, and, flinging her machine from her, she rushed up to the two, her face flushed with anger, her eyes sparkling with indignation.

"Stop!" she cried breathlessly. "You coward, Cecil Ponsonby! Let that poor boy go at once!"

Ponsonby turned with a muttered exclamation; but he retained his grip on the fag.

"Miss—Miss Howell," stammered Ponsonby, "I—I—I——"

The cad of Highcliffe flushed crimson as he recognised Phyllis Howell, of Cliff House School. But his eyes glittered angrily as he met the scorn in the girl's face.

"Look—look here, Miss Phyllis!" he stuttered. "Who are you calling names? Dash it! This is no business of yours! I——"

Phyllis Howell stamped her foot angrily. She looked a very charming

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picture indeed as she stood there, her hair blown out by the wind, her face flushed and excited.

"Let that boy go, you bullying brute!" she snapped imperiously. "Do you hear me?"

"He checked me!" muttered Ponsonby, wilting under the girl's scornful gaze. "He—he chucked a snowball at me. You—"

"A paltry excuse for bullying a child," was the withering reply. "You always were a bully and a coward, Cecil Ponsonby! Let him go at once, or—or I'll make you!"

"Wha-a-at?"

Cecil Ponsonby gasped; but he stepped back a pace as the girl came nearer him. Then, just as suddenly, a nasty gleam came into his eyes.

"I won't!" he said through his teeth. "Dash it all! This is no business of yours, Miss Howell! If you dare to—"

"Let him go, or I'll box your ears, you coward! I mean it!"

Ponsonby's answer was not in words. He gave Sammy Bunter's unfortunate car a twist, which brought an agonised squeal from that luckless fag.

Apparently, the dandy of the Fourth at Highcliffe never dreamed that Phyllis Howell would carry out her threat; but, if so, he was very quickly undeceived.

Even as the fag's squeal rang out, the girl's flat hand met Ponsonby's sneering, insolent face with a smack like a pistol-shot.

Ponsonby reeled back in astounded surprise.

Miss Phyllis was no weakling. She was an athletic girl, and the slap had not been a light one. But Ponsonby was more astounded than hurt.

For an instant he stood, rubbing his burning cheek, and glaring blankly at Miss Phyllis. And then his face became convulsed with ungovernable rage.

"You—you—you——" he hissed. "I'll——"

It seemed for the moment as though he would throw himself at the girl; but, fortunately, the rascally dandy did not lose all control. His savage temper found another outlet—or, rather, sought it!

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Old Enemies at Grips!

YOUNG Sammy Bunter was still within arm's reach, and Ponsonby made a sudden, savage clutch at him. Phyllis Howell saw the movement, and her hand went out swiftly to restrain him.

It happened in a flash. The girl's hand reached the fag first, and—by accident apparently—Ponsonby's cruel clutch closed on her wrist.

She gave a cry of pain, and in that instant there came the whir of cycle wheels again, and a cheery voice rang out:

"Hallo, hallo! What— Great Scott!"

It was Bob Cherry of the Remove at Greyfriars. He came up with a wild rush, and his eyes took in the scene in a flash.

He was out of the saddle like lightning, and as his bike went spinning across the lane he drove a hefty fist full into Ponsonby's infuriated face.

Smack!

Ponsonby crumpled up and dropped, sprawling. Bob Cherry turned a startled, crimson face to the girl.

"Miss Phyllis, are you hurt?" he panted hoarsely. "Did that brute——"

"It—it's all right, Bob!" gasped the

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girl, a trifle shakily. "It was an accident, I think. He didn't mean to—to——"

"What was it about?" asked Bob, flushing. "What's happened, Miss Phyllis?"

"It was nothing much, really," said Miss Howell. "He—Ponsonby—was bullying Bunter minor, and—and I interfered."

"I see," said Bob Cherry. "Cut off, young Bunter. Er—ahem!—you can leave this—this affair to me now, Miss Phyllis, if you don't mind."

It was an obvious invitation to the girl to depart; but Miss Phyllis hesitated, glancing from the grovelling Ponsonby to Bob's heated face. Ponsonby had already made an effort to rise; but he had dropped back again as the curly-headed fighting-man of the Remove took a step towards him.

But as Bob now picked up her machine and held it out to her, Phyllis nodded, and took it with a smile. Then she jumped into the saddle and rode swiftly away, without glancing behind her. She hated fighting, but she also knew that whatever Ponsonby had in store he had thoroughly deserved.

Bob Cherry watched the girl cycle away, and then he looked down at Ponsonby. His usually good-humoured face was hard—hard and ruthless; his blue eyes were like steel.

"You howling cad, Pon!" he said, his voice trembling. "You always were a rotter, but I never imagined you'd descend to this, you cur!"

"It—it was an accident!" panted Ponsonby. "Hang you, Cherry! You know I wouldn't do a thing——"

"Get up!" snapped Bob through his teeth. "Get up, you crawling worm! I don't know what happened, but I saw enough. I'm going to give you the hammering of your life, Ponsonby!"

Ponsonby glanced up into Bob Cherry's face and shivered. What he saw in the Remove junior's clear eyes frightened him.

"I—I won't!" he muttered. "You know dashed well you're too much for me, Cherry, you cad! I won't——"

He broke off as Bob Cherry stepped swiftly to the hedge and dragged a stake from the frosted brambles. Ponsonby stared up in dread as he returned and showed him the stout wood.

"You can take your choice," said Bob Cherry. "A licking from my fists, or this. But you've got to have it!"

Ponsonby stared up at him with eyes glittering with fury.

"I'll—I'll fight, hang you!" he panted. "You—you rotter, Cherry! You know you can lick me! You know——"

"I'm going to fight you, with one hand!" snapped Bob. "Get up, you cur!"

Bob stepped back, and put his left hand behind him. Ponsonby stared a moment, and then his eyes glinted.

"You mean that?" he breathed.

"I mean it!"

Ponsonby sprang to his feet. There was a look on his face that was not good to see. Nobody who looked into Bob Cherry's open, rugged face ever doubted his honesty of purpose; nor did anyone who knew him doubt his word.

And Ponsonby did not now.

Without a word he lashed out at Bob, his eyes gleaming with triumph.

But Bob had expected it, and he was ready. He ducked swiftly, and his right drove home in Ponsonby's flushed face. Ponsonby yelped and staggered back.

"Try again, old tulip!" cried Bob, his voice ringing with the joy of battle. "Try— Ah, would you?"

He ducked swiftly again, neatly avoiding Ponsonby's vicious swing, and then sent a neat pile-driver into Ponsonby's ribs that nearly doubled that youth up.

Then Bob Cherry sailed in in grim earnest. Not once did his left hand come into action. But his right did—to the bewildered Ponsonby it seemed to be everywhere.

Smack, smack—thud!

The Remove drove him across the lane, Ponsonby defending himself desperately, Bob Cherry not troubling to defend himself; indeed, he had scarcely the need to do so. The sheer force of his whirlwind attack, single-fisted as it was, sent the Highcliffe junior stumbling blindly backwards, his own fists waving feebly and futilely before him.

At the ditch Ponsonby went down—and stayed down. Always a funk, he had no stomach for any further punishment from Bob's terrible right. Ponsonby was no fighting-man, even with two fists against one.

"I'm done, hang you!" he hissed. "You—you brute, Cherry!"

Bob Cherry ran and picked up the stick. Ponsonby realised his intention, and scrambled up with a snarl.

Bob Cherry dropped the stick, and in a flash they were at it again. This time Ponsonby got home a savage right; but Bob Cherry shook his head with a laugh, and the next moment Ponsonby was backing helplessly again before the avenging fury of Bob's attack. The Remove's right went in and out like a piston-rod, and it found a billet every time.

Across the road and back again Bob drove him, and then Ponsonby went down again, and refused to get up. His nose was streaming red; one eye was rapidly closing; his lips were bruised and swollen. His collar flapped loose; his tie was torn; his clothes dusty and rumped. He was no longer a dandy—no longer the acme of elegance.

"I'm done!" he almost whimpered. "Let me alone!"

Bob Cherry gazed down at him, breathing hard. That Ponsonby had put up such a feeble fight under the circumstances disgusted him.

"You miserable worm, Pon!" he said. "Blessed if I wouldn't rather punch a bag of sawdust! Brave enough, though, bullying Second Form babies, aren't you? Now, listen! I've licked you before for bullying Greyfriars kids; it's done no good, though. Next time I won't soil my fists on you, though; I'll use a dog-whip!"

He picked up his bicycle, and, jumping into the saddle, rode away. Young Sammy Bunter had long ago vanished—towards Greyfriars. Apparently he had decided to postpone the search for his perfidious elder brother. And Bob Cherry rode away, trying to dismiss the affair from his mind. It left a nasty taste in his mouth.

Ponsonby lay a moment, gasping, as he watched him go, and there was an ugly look on his battered features. He lay still for a few seconds, and then he staggered to his feet, his glittering eyes fixed upon the disappearing form of Bob Cherry.

"You—you hound!" he breathed at last. "I—I'll pay you back for that some day, Bob Cherry! I'll make you sorry you ever laid your dirty hands on me, you cad!"

Apparently that last licking had done the Highcliffe dandy no good, either!

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Friends in Need!

"GOOD show!" remarked Frank Nugent.

"Topping!" agreed Johnny Bull. "That cowboy film now—"

"Too much shooting," grinned Bob Cherry.

"The shootfulness was terrific, my worthy chum," nodded Hurree Singh.

"Must spend a frightful lot of their spare cash on ammunition, those cowboys," said Harry Wharton, smiling. "Anyway, time's up. We've got to get back home, remember."

And Harry Wharton hurriedly consulted his watch in the darkened cinema.

It was that same evening, and this time Bob Cherry had his chums, Harry Wharton, Frank Nugent, Johnny Bull, and Hurree Jamset Singh, the Indian junior, with him. Armed with a late pass from Mr. Quelch, their Form master, they had started out before tea for Courtfield, and after tea there had repaired to the cinema for amusement.

And they had had plenty of that, and there was a simultaneous groan as Harry Wharton announced that it was time to start back for Greyfriars.

But the Co. followed Harry's example as he started up from his seat, nevertheless. It was never wise to take advantage of Mr. Quelch where late passes were concerned.

"Buck up!" said Harry grimly. "No good grousing. Pity we couldn't have stopped to see the big film, though; I wanted to see Thelma Marshall. I've heard she's jolly good—as good as Mary Pickford at her best, some say. Anyway—"

He paused. He had been about to lead the way between the closely-packed seats, when his eyes fell upon the figure of a youth standing motionless at the end of the row they were in.

"Hold on!" he muttered, his brow clouding. "See who that is at the end there!"

"Ponsonby," breathed Nugent. Then he chuckled. "Look at his chivvy! My hat, Bob! You must have fairly hammered the cad! His face looks as if it's been through a mangle!"

"Wait a bit!" whispered Harry. "He looks like going. Let him go; I rather we didn't pass him." Harry paused, and looked rather uneasily at Bob Cherry. Bob had told him all that had happened in Friardale Lane that afternoon; and the story had disturbed Harry not a little. "You must have fairly let yourself go this afternoon, Bob," he went on quietly. "You're sure he did hurt Miss Phyllis—intentionally, I mean?"

"Frankly, I don't think so," said Bob grimly. "If I had thought so, the rotten outsider wouldn't have felt up to seeing pictures to-night!"

There was a chuckle; but Harry's face remained clouded as he stared at Ponsonby's features. The lights were up in the cinema, and he could see Ponsonby's marked features plainly.

"You'll need to watch the cad after this, Bob!" he muttered quietly. "You know the rotter's claim—that he never forgets or forgives an injury, and that he always gets his own back in the end!"

"Swank!" grinned Bob.

"Swank or not, you'll need to watch out for dirty tricks!" said Harry.

"Looks as if he's up to something now, if you ask me," said Johnny Bull. "Who's that he's so jolly interested in at the end of the row just in front of him?"

"That girl?"

"Yes. Looks almost like— By Jove, it is—it's Miss Phyllis!"

"Great Scott! So it is!"

"Phew!"

There was no doubt about it. The girl Ponsonby seemed so intensely interested in—the girl muffled up to the ears in a thick black fur—was none other than Miss Phyllis Howell, of Cliff House. She had turned her head slightly, and they all saw her profile clearly.

The Greyfriars chums looked at each other. They were staggered. But they were more alarmed than staggered. They knew how strict—how bigoted—was Miss Primrose, the headmistress of Cliff House, in regard to her pupils visiting cinemas, either in conducted parties, or otherwise—and especially at night.

It was only too obvious that Miss Phyllis had broken bounds to get there.

But risky and dangerous as such a proceeding was, the bare fact was not the only thing which alarmed the Famous Five.

What alarmed them more so was the fact that Ponsonby, the Highcliffe dandy who had such good—or bad—cause to hate her, was obviously aware of her folly—if folly it was. They could understand now why Ponsonby was watching her so closely.

"Well, my hat!" breathed Harry Wharton, in alarm. "What's she doing here? What reckless folly's brought her

here? She's in for the sack if she's caught! I—I don't like the look of this, you fellows!"

Nor did the rest of the Famous Five. It could be for no good purpose that Cecil Ponsonby was keeping watch upon Phyllis Howell—especially after what had happened that afternoon. The thought of their girl-friend's danger made the juniors grit their teeth.

"Watch!" muttered Harry Wharton tensely.

They watched—anxious and curious. And they soon learned something else. Every now and again the Highcliffe cad's glittering eyes turned from his quarry towards the head of the gangway at his rear.

"I don't quite catch on to this," whispered Harry, wrinkling his brows. "If Pon knows, then why doesn't he—"

He broke off with a smothered gasp—a gasp echoed by his chums as they, too, saw what he had seen.

A figure had suddenly appeared at the head of the gangway behind them. It was that of a prim and severe-looking lady, wearing pince-nez—a familiar figure to the juniors.

It was Miss Slinn, one of the mistresses from Cliff House School.

She stood there, peering short-sightedly around her—obviously searching for someone. And whom that someone



"Let him go or I'll box your ears, you coward!" rapped Miss Phyllis. Ponsonby's reply was to twist his unfortunate victim's ear still further. Even as Sammy Bunter's squeal rang out the Cliff House girl's flat hand met Ponsonby's sneering, insolent face with a smack like a pistol shot. "You—you—you," he hissed, as he reeled back in astounded surprise, "I'll—" (See Chapter 1.)

could be was only too obvious to the startled juniors.

"Oh, my hat!" groaned Bob Cherry. "That's done it! Miss Phyllis is done for! That howling cad Ponsonby's at the bottom of this!"

It certainly seemed like it. After hesitating a moment, Miss Slinn started down the gangway, scanning the people to right and left of her as she went. Ponsonby had seen her now. He watched her leisurely approach, with eyes that glittered with triumph. The juniors did not need to be told whom Miss Phyllis had to thank for Miss Slinn's significant presence there; Ponsonby's malicious expression was enough.

"The hound!" breathed Harry Wharton. "Quick, you chaps! One of you get to Phyllis—warn her—get her out somehow! We've got to stop Miss Slinn!"

Bob Cherry was away like a shot, squeezing his way along, heedless of good manners—of angry glares, and murmurs. After him went his chums, likewise heedless.

Their unceremonious dash brought them out on to the gangway a yard in advance of the Cliff House mistress—but it was enough!

Leaving his chums to do what they thought fit, Bob slipped towards the girl. He had almost reached her when Ponsonby stepped into his path—with what intention the Remove junior never knew.

There was a moment's quick scuffle, and as Ponsonby sprawled on the carpet, Bob went on and reached Phyllis Howell's side. And at that instant the lights went down and a new picture was flung on the screen.

It was sheer good luck, and Bob Cherry made the most of it.

"Quick, Miss Phyllis!" he whispered, touching the girl's arm. "Follow me, and—"

"Why—what— Oh, it is you, Bob Cherry! How—how you frightened me! I thought—"

The startled girl half-rose from her seat, and Bob went on swiftly:

"Miss Slinn is behind you, Miss Phyllis—no, don't look round; just follow me—quick! No time to explain."

"Oh!" Miss Phyllis gave a faint, startled gasp, and even in the deep gloom Bob saw the fear in her face. But she nodded at once, and stood up. The next instant Bob was leading the way towards the further gangway.

Not once did Miss Phyllis glance round, neither did Bob Cherry. He knew he could safely leave the rest to his chums.

Ignoring the muttered protests as they squeezed recklessly past the audience, they soon reached the gangway. Then Bob led the way swiftly towards the exit.

They reached it in safety, and soon were standing in the street, with the cold night wind blowing upon them.

"You've got your bike, I suppose?" said Bob Cherry, giving a gasp of relief. "Where—"

"It's across at Bolland's there. But what—"

"My bike's there, too. Good!" panted Bob. "No time for talking now, Miss Phyllis. The sooner you get back to school the better!"

The bewildered Cliff House girl nodded. She had guessed something of the truth now, and in a moment or two they had got their bikes and were riding swiftly out of the town.

Not until they were well out of the outskirts of Courtfield did Bob explain.

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And as she listened, Miss Phyllis gave vent to a gasp of dismay.

"But if Miss Slinn knew I was there—she must have done—then I'm done for," she said shakily. "Oh, what a fool I was to risk it, Bob!"

"It was Ponsonby's doing, of course!" said Bob, gritting his teeth. "He must have found some way of giving Miss Slinn a hint. I don't think he'd give your name, though. And I don't think Miss Slinn recognised you if she did see you."

"She's short-sighted," said Miss Phyllis. "There's just a chance, then. Oh, what a cad Ponsonby is! I saw him just as I was going in, but I didn't think he'd seen me."

"He must have done!" growled Bob. "But—but why did you take such a risk, Miss Phyllis? You must have broken bounds—"

"I did," said the girl, with a reckless laugh. "I was determined to go. I asked permission of Miss Primrose; but she refused—point-blank. I had to go, though."

"But—but—" began Bob.

"I went to see Thelma Marshall. I've always longed to see her in a big film," said Miss Phyllis simply. "You see, she used to be my governess before she went in for the screen. She's done wonderfully well. I knew she would. I was very fond of her. You can understand why I wanted so badly to see her acting."

"Of course," said Bob. He could understand now.

"I've always sort of worshipped her—swanked about her," said the girl, laughing rather shakily. "But I've never seen her play, and I simply couldn't resist risking it! That's all, Bob. Only—well, I haven't seen her, after all, and it will be rough luck if I'm sacked, won't it?"

"It won't come to that, surely," said Bob, though his tone was doubtful. "Miss Primrose isn't a bad sort, is she? Let's hope for the best, anyway, Miss Phyllis. You can get in all serene, I suppose?"

"The side gate's open—or should be. That's all serene."

"Good!"

There was little further said after that. They rode in silence, and they rode hard, their tyres whirring crisply over the frozen roads. At the gates of Cliff House they lost no time in saying good-bye, and after seeing Miss Phyllis safely inside the school, Bob jumped into the saddle and rode away.

He reached Greyfriars in a very short time, and as he dismounted, breathless, four figures detached themselves from the shadows of the old school wall.

"That you, Bob?"

"Yes. All serene, you fellows—at least, Miss Phyllis got in all right. I wish to goodness I could think it was all serene, though!" exclaimed Bob gloomily. "You managed to stop Miss Slinn, then, Harry?"

"Yes—it was rotten, though; we had to be rude. We simply stuck ourselves across the gangway, and refused to budge; we pretended to be too busy watching the picture to hear her."

"She got quite waxy!" grinned Johnny Bull.

"Luckily the lights went down, and she didn't seem to spot you going," went on Harry. "Anyway, we let her through then and cleared."

"And Ponsonby—"

"We collared the rotter outside!" said Harry through his teeth. "He didn't deny having split, and he didn't admit it. He just grinned at us—swore he'd go straight to Miss Primrose and report Miss

Phyllis if we laid a finger on him. We—we had to let the cad go!"

"Then—then Miss Slinn didn't know it was Miss Phyllis," breathed Bob thankfully.

"Apparently not; Pon can't have given her name, luckily. But—but the question is, will the cad keep his mouth shut now? I think he will myself. We threatened to flay him alive if he splits; and he knows what to expect if he does. Did Miss Phyllis say why she took such a risk, Bob?"

Bob explained, and Harry Wharton nodded.

"I thought she must have a jolly good reason for it," he said. "Anyway, let's get in now. We're late enough as it is."

They rang the porter's bell, and as Gosling grumblingly unlocked the gates, he told them to report to Mr. Quelch. But they had expected such a summons, and the thought of lines and lickings did not worry them then. And for the rest of that evening the Famous Five talked and thought of little else but the trouble that threatened their girl chum—little dreaming how that trouble was to develop.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Ponsonby Again!

"HALLO, hallo, hallo! Here they are!"

It was early after dinner the following day—a half-day at Greyfriars—and the Famous Five were standing by the stile on the footpath that led across the fields to Cliff House School. Bob gave the cry as three girls wearing Cliff House hats came into sight on the footpath. Before parting on the previous evening Miss Phyllis had promised to meet Bob there to report developments; and she was apparently keeping her word.

For once, Bob's usually cheery voice had lost its cheery ring. Marjorie Hazeldene and Clara Trevlyn were with Miss Howell, and none of the three were looking particularly cheerful. Certainly the very fact of Miss Phyllis being there was a hopeful sign; but as the juniors doffed their caps as the girls reached them, their faces were anxious, for all that.

"You've come then, Miss Phyllis?" exclaimed Harry Wharton quickly. "Is—is it all right?"

Miss Howell smiled; but it was a dismal attempt.

"All serene so far," she said. "The worst hasn't happened, thanks to you boys. I didn't get the chance to thank you last night, Harry Wharton. It was awfully sporting of you—"

"That's all right; never mind that, Miss Phyllis," stammered Harry, flushing. "What's happened? Miss Slinn didn't see you then—"

"She saw me, but didn't recognise me," said Phyllis. "She's awfully short-sighted, you know—luckily for me. She only knew that a Cliff House girl was in the cinema—"

"Did she see you go in, then?" began Harry wonderingly. "How—"

"No; some rotten sneak must have been at the bottom of it," chimed in Clara Trevlyn indignantly, and not very elegantly. "You can guess who—that cowardly cad, Ponsonby!"

"Oh, Clara!" protested Marjorie Hazeldene. "We don't know—"

"I believe he did, though I can't see how!" said Phyllis grimly. "You were right last night, I'm sure, Bob Cherry. Anyway, he failed, though I'm not out of the wood yet," she added, with a rueful smile. "Miss Slinn has reported that a Cliff House girl was there, and Miss

Primrose is frightfully angry; she's going to expel the wicked culprit if she finds her out."

Harry Wharton's face brightened.

"It's not as bad as we supposed, then?" he exclaimed. "If you sit tight it will be all serene, I'm sure, Miss Phyllis."

"What about Ponsonby?" snapped Miss Clara. "If he tries again—if he gives Phyllis' name this time—"

"That's what's worrying me," confessed Miss Howell dismally. "I'm shivering in my shoes all the time—"

"You've no need to do that, Miss Howell," smiled Harry Wharton. "He won't split. He won't dare. He knows we've spotted him, and he knows what to expect from us if he does!"

"We'll make it scorching for him!" added Johnny Bull grimly.

"Oh, good!"

The faces of the three girls brightened wonderfully at that.

"I won't worry any more, then—or worry you about it," said Miss Phyllis, laughing. "You're going skating, I see," she added, nodding at the skates slung over the juniors' shoulders.

"Yes," said Harry Wharton eagerly. "What about getting your skates and joining us? Bob's got to go to the village for some straps for his skates, in any case, first. We can wait—"

"Can't!" said Miss Clara promptly. "We're booked for a hockey match. We'd better be getting off now, in fact."

"Sorry!" added Miss Phyllis, giving the juniors a bright smile as she noted their disappointed looks. "We'll see you again and report further developments. Good-bye—and thanks again!"

The juniors raised their caps, and as the Cliff House girls walked away, Bob turned to his chums.

"So that's that!" he said. "I'm jolly glad it was no worse. Anyway, you fellows needn't wait for me—I'll catch you up later. No good cutting your afternoon short. I'll buzz off now."

"Right-ho!"

They parted then—Harry Wharton and the others cutting across the fields towards the Sark, Bob Cherry making for the village. Bob went at a trot, eager to join his chums on the frozen Sark, and he soon reached the saddler's shop in the village. Having purchased his new straps he lost no time in reaching the river.

The ice was thick and hard on the Sark, and footer was at a discount that afternoon. Bob found that stretch of the river practically deserted, however. Most of the fellows had gone further upstream apparently.

Bob knelt in the frozen grass and began to put his skates on, eager to get to business. He was still struggling with the stiff, new straps when the sound of voices and the ring of skates made him glance up.

Three figures were coming upstream at a leisurely pace, and as Bob recognised them his face darkened. One of them was Ponsonby of Highcliffe, the other two were Gadsby and Monson, his chums.

For a moment Bob eyed their ambling, careless approach, and quite suddenly his eyes gleamed. The Famous Five had given their assurance to Phyllis Howell that all was safe—that Ponsonby would not dare to "sneak" again. But Bob Cherry, at least, had his doubts about that.

With sudden decision Bob jumped to his feet, and his powerful voice rang out across the frozen river:

"Hold on, Ponsonby!" he shouted. "Just a minute!"

The three looked at the solitary figure on the bank, and Ponsonby's face sud-



"Quick, you chaps!" breathed Wharton. "One of you get to Phyllis and warn her—get her out somehow. We've got to stop Miss Slinn." Bob Cherry was away like a shot, squeezing his way along, heedless of good manners, of angry glares and murmurs. After him went his chums, whilst Miss Slinn, oblivious to the fact that the girl for whom she was searching was but a few yards away, brought up the rear. (See Chapter 3.)

denly hardened. He seemed to hesitate a moment, and then with a whispered word to his chums, he left them.

Gadsby and Monson skated on, and Ponsonby came up to Bob. Though his eyes glittered strangely, his face showed only cool insolence as he stared at his enemy.

"Well?" he said, waiting as though he already guessed what Bob was about to say. "Go ahead!"

"You—you cur, Ponsonby—"

"Thanks!" interrupted Ponsonby, with a faint, mocking grin. "Did you stop me to tell me that, Cherry?"

Bob Cherry took a step forward and then stopped, biting his lips.

"I fancy you know perfectly well what I'm going to say, Pon, you howling cad!" he muttered, holding himself in with an effort. "It—it's about last night. You know what happened there?"

Ponsonby nodded coolly. As a rule he took very great care to be civil to the fighting-man of the Remove—to keep his sneers and insolence for fellows less handy with their fists than Bob Cherry.

But, though the marks of Bob's hefty fists were still visible on his features, he made no effort to be civil now. It almost seemed as though the Highcliffe dandy felt himself the master of the situation.

"I know," he remarked, nodding coolly again. "Rather awkward for dear Miss Phyllis, wasn't it—what?"

"Awkward?" echoed Bob, his eyes blazing. "You miserable outsider! It was your doing. Aren't you ashamed of yourself? Have you no more self-respect than to sneak—to blab—about a girl? You cowardly cur! You can't deny it!"

Bob's voice was like the lash of a whip,

and the scorn in it brought a deep, dusky red into the cheeks of the Highcliffe cad.

But it was a flush of passion, and not of shame. He bared his teeth in a snarl of sudden rage.

"Hang you—hang you, Bob Cherry!" he hissed savagely. "Why should I deny it? I'm dashed well not going to deny it! I want you—and that dashed, interfering girl—to know I did it! I vowed to make you both squirm—and I'm goin' to! I'll tell you—Stand back!" he shouted, as Bob took a savage step towards him. "Don't touch me, or you'll be sorry! Touch me, Bob Cherry, and I'll go to Cliff House and finish what I started last night, you brute!"

Bob Cherry stood back, biting his lips until the blood came. He understood Ponsonby's insolent attitude now. Ponsonby had realised his power—and intended to make the most of it. He knew that Bob would suffer any insult, any indignity—would die even—rather than see his girl chum pay the price of her folly.

His passion seemed to vanish, and he grinned sneeringly as he noted the sudden fear in Bob Cherry's eyes.

"I've got you, Cherry—and her," he said coolly. "A word from me, and Miss Phyllis Howell leaves Cliff House in disgrace. Listen! Yesterday she smacked my face!" he went on, a glitter coming suddenly into his eyes. "She insulted and humiliated me before a beastly, grubby little fag! I'm not the fellow to forget a thing like that, Cherry. I saw her goin' into that dashed cinema last night. I knew it meant expulsion if she were caught."

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"You cur!"

"You've said that before. Be careful, though, Bob Cherry!" said Ponsonby, his eyes glinting menacingly. "Well, I spotted her; and just afterwards I met Miss Slinn in the street. I knew I'd got her then. Do you know what I did? I tore a page from my pocket-book and wrote a note; I gave a village kid a bob to stop Miss Slinn and hand it her."

"So that was how you did it?" said Bob thickly.

"Just like that!" grinned Ponsonby. "I didn't mention any name; I merely stated the fact that a Cliff House girl had just entered that cinema. I left the rest to her. I knew she was the Nosey Parker sort who would look into it—I knew she was up against the girls going there. She did. It would have come off if you Greyfriars cads hadn't chipped in—hang you! I haven't finished yet, though!"

"You—you're going to—"

Ponsonby laughed aloud at the anxious look in Bob's eyes.

"I haven't decided what to do yet," he grinned. "I happen to know that dear old Miss Primrose is waxy—is goin' to expel the girl when she finds out who it was. It all depends."

"Ponsonby," exclaimed Bob Cherry hoarsely, "split if you dare! You know what to expect if you do. I'll hammer the very life—"

As if Bob's words had reminded the Highcliffe dandy of his licking the previous afternoon, his laugh suddenly ceased and his handsome features went an ugly red.

He slid a step nearer on his skates, and like lightning his hand went out. His palm met Bob Cherry's rugged face with a smack that echoed across the frozen ice.

Then he wheeled abruptly and skated swiftly away.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

In True Colours!

BOB CHERRY stood as if stunned.

The suddenness, the unexpectedness, of the blow left him gasping.

But as he raised a hand to his burning cheek an ugly look came over his homely features.

And then a sudden gust of fury surged through him, and, stooping, he tugged and wrenched at the obstreperous strap, his blazing eyes still fixed upon the form of the Highcliffe dandy as he skated away.

It was fastened at last; yet even as Bob slid one skate on to the ice he checked himself, and his passion left him as suddenly as it had come.

To his mind's eye came a sudden glimpse of Phyllis Howell's appealing face; he remembered her look of deep relief, of thankfulness, when Wharton had assured her that Ponsonby would not dare to sneak.

His fists unclenched, and his lips closed tightly. Whether the rascally Highcliffe cad brought disgrace and ruin upon Phyllis Howell—whether he carried out his threat to get her expelled from Cliff House or not—it should be brought about through no rash act of his.

He dare not risk it. He knew what acts of vengeful malice Ponsonby was capable of when in a passion. On more than one occasion he had carried out his threats, despite the warnings of the Famous Five.

Certainly they could lick him for it afterwards; they could make things hot for him at Highcliffe, too. But that would not help Bob's girl chum. It could not undo the harm the rascally dandy was capable of doing.

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No; insult and indignity, he must swallow them—he must humble himself for his girl chum's sake. Even now Ponsonby might sneak; Bob felt sure he would in any case. He could not imagine Ponsonby letting things go as they stood.

And when he did start upstream at last Bob went slowly, his face clouded and anxious. His savage desire to race after Ponsonby—to avenge that cowardly vicious blow, had gone now.

But Bob Cherry need not have worried on that score—he would not have done could he have seen into Ponsonby's mind just then.

Once sure that Bob Cherry had not pursued him—that he was safe—the Highcliffe Fourth-Former slowed down, and a grin came over his face.

He had been right, then; Bob Cherry was afraid—had not dared to follow and avenge that blow—had swallowed his pride, as he, Ponsonby, had expected he would.

And Ponsonby chuckled as he realised fully what a weapon he held to harm his enemy. For—and, unfortunately, Bob Cherry did not know it—Ponsonby had no intention of "sneaking" again.

He had done so the night before secretly—his note to the unpopular Cliff House mistress had been an anonymous one.

But the Famous Five knew its author now; they would know who to thank if Miss Phyllis was found out. And not even to gratify his burning desire for vengeance on Miss Phyllis would Ponsonby risk that.

It would mean a terrible reckoning with the Famous Five—and not only with them, but with Frank Courteney & Co., and with all the decent-minded fellows at Highcliffe School.

No; it wasn't good enough—Ponsonby had already decided upon that.

And, moreover, he had a stronger reason even than that. His bitter hatred was stronger against Bob Cherry than against Miss Howell—much stronger. He had had proof now that Bob Cherry would go through fire and water to save his girl friend from the results of her rash act. By holding his hand—by holding his threat over the head of his enemy—Ponsonby realised he held a strong weapon with which to strike when the time came.

And that time was to come very quickly—though at the moment Ponsonby did not know this, nor the strange manner in which it was to come about.

His chums were out of sight; but Ponsonby did not try to catch them up. He skated on leisurely, grinning as he went. His grin grew broader as his eyes fell suddenly upon a small, rotund figure sliding awkwardly over the ice ahead of him. It was a figure well-known in the Second Form at Greyfriars.

It was Sammy Bunter.

The fag blinked round and saw him at the same instant, and, with a frightened squeal, he put on speed, making for the opposite bank. At the same moment also Ponsonby heard the ring of skates behind him. He turned his head and recognised Bob Cherry.

Then he grinned—an unpleasant, gloating grin.

At any other time, in similar circumstances, Ponsonby would have—wisely—let the youngster severely alone. But he didn't now. The thought of bullying young Sammy before his protector's eyes—and without danger to himself—was an amusing thought to Ponsonby.

He turned abruptly and went after Sammy. And as he did so Bob Cherry's ringing voice was heard:

"Look out, Bunter! Oh, look out, you little idiot! Stop!"

Bob's voice ended in a shrill yell of

warning. Ponsonby did not understand why until too late.

For Bob Cherry had seen what neither Sammy Bunter nor Ponsonby had seen as yet. It was a post projecting above the surface of the ice—a post surmounted by a black board on which was printed in big white letters the one word "Danger!" and towards which pursued and pursuer were rushing blindly.

Again Bob Cherry shouted—frantically this time—and then Ponsonby seemed to see it and strove frantically to pull up.

And in that instant there sounded a loud, ominous cracking of ice. It was followed by a wild shriek of fear as Sammy Bunter crashed to the ice and smashed through. Then sounded a wild clattering of skates and a much louder splash as Ponsonby, unable to stop in time, smashed through also.

"Good heavens!" panted Bob.

For an instant of time the junior stared, horrified at the swift tragedy, and the next moment he was racing madly for the black, bubbling gap.

But he never reached it—then. The treacherous ice was cracking in every direction now—long cracks were showing under Bob's clattering skates.

He was still some yards from the bubbling gap when what the junior was dreading happened.

The heaving ice seemed suddenly to drop away from him, and, vainly striving to recover his balance, he struck the broken ice and vanished from sight.

Only for an instant, though. His head shot up—a hand caught desperately at the crumbling ice above him. It cracked and crumbled away, but he tried again, and this time it held.

Instantly—though his face was ashen and the bitter chill of the water seemed to clutch like an icy hand at his heart—his head turned towards the other gap.

And what Bob Cherry saw almost stunned him—it brought a red rush of blood to his white cheeks.

Of Sammy Bunter there was no sign. The black gap was empty, but Ponsonby's head and shoulders were visible—half way to the shore. He had found a log of wood—a frozen log released from the ice—and with this he was smashing a way to safety.

Bob stared dumbfounded. Was it possible—was it possible that Ponsonby was saving himself, was leaving the wretched Sammy to his fate?

It seemed so. Ponsonby seemed to be mad—mad with terror. With frantic lunges he carved and smashed a way through the thin ice. It was only a matter of yards. The end of the log touched the shore, and Ponsonby half-swarmed, half-hurled himself over it.

"Ponsonby!" shouted Bob, through palsied, horrified lips. "Go back! Save Bunter, you fool!"

But, if he heard, the wretched coward did not heed. He hauled himself from the black water. On the bank he turned and stared back stupidly, shivering and shaking in every limb.

"Ponsonby!" cried Bob again, appealingly.

Ponsonby opened his lips; no sound came from them. He just stared stupidly.

All doubts left Bob Cherry then as to Ponsonby's intentions.

He realised that if Sammy Bunter's life was to be saved—if there was still time to save it—then he himself must do it. Always a coward, Ponsonby was a coward still.

And, at the thought, Bob Cherry dropped the Highcliffe dandy from his thoughts. A sudden wave of savage emotion surged through him, and he

attacked the crumbling ice in a mad frenzy.

Bob had always been a fighter—with his fists. He fought with his fists now—a fight with death. And he won through.

Smash, smash, smash!

Again and again his fists crashed through the thin ice until his numbed hands and wrists bled freely, and every blow became an agony to him.

But he stuck it desperately, and the black water spurted and splashed up as the crumbling ice gave way before his savage onslaught.

The icy chill of the water struck through to his very vitals; but he scarcely felt it as he fought his way, half-swimming, half-hurling himself, through that intervening stretch of broken ice.

He reached the gap at last—the last jagged lump of ice fell away before him, and he was through.

With one swift glance around him he dived and vanished.

"Good gad!"

The words came in a trembling whisper through Ponsonby's white lips as he watched the bubbling, agitated gap of water. He took a step forward, but drew back again with a shiver. It was no good. He couldn't. Whitefaced, trembling, he watched.

Several seconds—they seemed ages to Ponsonby—passed, and then a head appeared above the surface—Bob Cherry's head. It was only visible for a moment, and then it vanished as the plucky junior dived again.

This time he reappeared almost instantly, however. His head came up, and it was followed by a second head, then a face—a small, fat face, white as death and still.

It was Sammy Bunter. He lay supported in Bob Cherry's strong arms, and he was obviously unconscious, or—

Ponsonby shook and his face went grey.

"Help!"

The cry, weak and gasping, came from Bob Cherry. It was answered almost at once by a shout—a shout that came not from Ponsonby but from behind the shivering, helpless coward.

"Hold on, kid!"

Ponsonby wheeled. The accident had taken place at the bottom of the garden of a bungalow residence fronting the river. And now from the open gate of the garden a man ran, half-dragging, half-carrying a ladder.

He came up with a rush, sending Ponsonby staggering back, and the ladder splashed amid the broken ice and water.

"Catch hold, youngster!" yelled the man.

Bob Cherry made a wild clutch, and his numbed fingers got a grip on the end rung of the ladder. The gardener—he was that, apparently—turned fiercely to Ponsonby.

"The ladder!" he hissed savagely. "Grab hold and pull, you staring fool—pull like blazes!"

Ponsonby awoke then, and his grip closed on the ladder. The man and the shivering junior pulled and tugged desperately, and Bob Cherry held on grimly; he was exhausted, but he held on with dogged energy.

Through the broken ice and water the ladder surged, dragging Bob and his helpless burden towards the bank. The terrific strain almost pulled the junior's arms from their sockets, but he held on, and a moment later Bob and Sammy Bunter were sprawling on the bank in a heap.

The gardener dropped the ladder and rushed to them.

"The kid—never mind me!" panted Bob. "See to him!"

One glance the man gave at the fag's ashen face, and then he picked Sammy Bunter up and ran. He passed through the gate and vanished towards the house.

Bob Cherry staggered to his feet, panting and coughing. Ponsonby took a hesitating, trembling step towards him.

"Cherry, I—I—"

"Better clear, Ponsonby!" panted Bob. "Better dash home and get changed—quick!"

Bob's voice was toneless; but as his eyes met Bob's, Ponsonby shrank back before the scorn in them.

"Stop!" he panted as Bob turned away. "Wait! I want a word with you, Cherry."

"Well?"

Bob Cherry stopped. The danger was past now, and he wondered at the fear, the frantic dread in the Highcliffe dandy's voice.

Ponsonby licked his trembling lips.

"You—you saw, Cherry—you thought I'd funked—"

"I did see, you cowardly worm!" hissed Bob, his voice like a whip-lash.

"You did funk! You saved your own wretched skin—you left that poor kid to drown!"

"I—I didn't. I—"

"Liar!"

With that, Bob Cherry turned abruptly and started to hobble on his skates along the bank. He knew that young Sammy was safe now, and his one desire was to get home.

But before he had taken six steps Ponsonby stumbled after him and clutched his arm desperately.

"Stop!" he cried. "You've got to hear me, Bob Cherry! If you don't, it will be the worse for you!"

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

The Bargain!

BOB CHERRY stopped at that. His head felt dizzy, his limbs felt like lead, and his teeth were chattering with cold. Now the excitement, the danger, was over, he felt the exhaustion, the full effects of his terrible experience. He felt sick and giddy, and his one desire was to reach Greyfriars—to get between dry, warm blankets—and to sleep.

Yet he stopped.

He could not fail to note the deadly menace—the grim threat underlying Ponsonby's words. He turned and faced the Highcliffe cad, savagely, wondering.

Ponsonby's features worked as he strove to steady his voice and his chattering teeth.



"Help!" The cry, weak and gasping, came from Bob Cherry as he appeared in the gap in the ice, supporting the unconscious figure of Sammy Bunter. It was answered almost at once by a shout—a shout that came not from the shivering Ponsonby, but from behind the helpless coward. "Hold on, kid!" From the open gate of the garden a man ran, dragging a ladder with him. "Hold on!"
(See Chapter 5.)

"Listen to me, Cherry," he hissed. "You say I funk'd—that I showed the white feather—that I left that kid to drown."

"You did," said Bob quietly. "Perhaps I did—perhaps not!" said Ponsonby thickly. "You say I did—you'll tell everybody I did. You—you know what that means for me?"

Bob nodded, and his lip curled. He fancied he could guess what was coming. "Go on, but cut it short!" he snapped. "We'll both catch our death of—"

"Let me speak!" hissed Ponsonby. "You'd expose me—you'd gloat in ruining me! It would be ruin! Hang the cold! But you're not going to ruin me. Understand, hang you? You know what would happen? Nobody would listen to me. They'd believe it. They'd despise me—humiliate me! Even the fags would shout funk after me. I'd never be able to hold up my head again at Highcliffe. I'd have to leave. I'm not going to leave!"

"You deserve worse than that, Ponsonby!"

Ponsonby's eyes glittered curiously.

"I've not finished yet!" he snarled.

"Listen, Cherry. Twenty minutes ago, I told you I hadn't decided yet what to do about—about Phyllis Howell. I hadn't. I have now, though. I'm going to make a bargain with you, Bob Cherry."

"Go on."

"If you'll give me your word—if you'll swear to me that you will never blab about this, that you will never tell a soul what actually happened—how Bunter fell in, or how he was got out—that you will keep me out of it," said Ponsonby in a low, eager voice, "then I will do the same in regard to Miss Phyllis. I will swear not to give her away, Cherry. You save me from having to leave Highcliffe; I'll save Miss Phyllis—I'll keep mum. Is it a bargain?"

Bob Cherry was staggered. The sheer cheek and impudence of the rascally offer left him gasping. He had expected Ponsonby to plead with him—to beg him to gloss over his cowardly action. He had hardly expected this, though.

His first impulse was to smash his fist into the handsome, finely-chiselled features of Cecil Ponsonby. The thought of bargaining with the crafty schemer was repugnant to his frank nature. And yet—

Even as the impulse came to Bob, once again in his mind's eye he saw the appealing face of Phyllis Howell. His hand dropped to his side.

After all, why not? He had had no intention of exposing the cowardly Pon; he had no special desire to do so. Nor yet had he the slightest desire to pose as a hero himself—far from it.

And on the other hand, he had a deep, an intense desire to shield, to save Phyllis Howell from the expulsion which threatened her. For Miss Howell's sake he ought to do it—he must!

Bob's head was throbbing—his mind was chaotic. He could scarcely see his tempter's face clearly. He had forgotten that Ponsonby's word was not worth a straw—was, in fact, utterly worthless. It never occurred to him then, that by giving his word and accepting Ponsonby's, he was giving all and receiving nothing back.

He nodded after only a moment's hesitation.

"Right, Ponsonby," he muttered thickly. "I agree to that. I don't see why I shouldn't. Nobody shall hear what's just happened from me."

"You mean it—you'll keep your word, Bob Cherry?"

"I've said so," muttered the junior

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savagely. "You know me. I'll keep my word. That's enough!"

It was enough. Ponsonby scarcely troubled to conceal the glitter of satisfaction that leapt to his eyes. He was about to speak again, but Bob Cherry turned abruptly away and left him.

He hobbled to where the ice was safe, lower down, and his glance went towards the bungalow. He hesitated, wondering if he ought to go and inquire about young Sammy. But as he stood thus a car showed through the leafless trees speeding along the drive, and in the back was seated a bundle wrapped in blankets.

"Oh, good!" breathed Bob Cherry. He moved out on to the ice and turned his face towards Greyfriars, and next moment his limbs were in motion as he sped away, his arms and legs working fast to drive off the bitter chill.

Ponsonby watched him a brief moment, and then he seemed suddenly to become aware of his drenched, chilled condition. Shivering violently, he stooped, and began to tear off his skates. Ponsonby had had enough of skating for that afternoon.

They were off in a flash, and he set off at a run along the bank towards Highcliffe. There was a curious, mocking smile on his white face. His fear had gone—he was safe now. He knew that the hapless Sammy Bunter had been unconscious almost before he went through the ice—the heavy fall had done that. The fag had seen nothing after that. And he had got Bob Cherry's word! He was safe! The lofty and supercilious Ponsonby shuddered as he thought of his narrow escape—of the scorn and contempt his cowardly action would have aroused among his own schoolfellows. But he was safe enough now. Bob Cherry's word was as good as gold. Though a rascal, an unprincipled and shifty schemer himself, Ponsonby could recognise honesty and steadfastness in others. He almost laughed aloud as he thought of his "bargain."

He ran on, and the exercise soon brought a warm glow to his chilled body. He suddenly became aware of the ring of skates ahead—the sound of merry voices and laughter. He looked up and saw several fellows skating rapidly towards him. He recognised Harry Wharton and his three chums. Behind them he recognised Frank Courtenay and the Caterpillar of Highcliffe School.

He pulled up suddenly—a queer, evil grin came over his face. A thought had come to him—a thought that brought a gleam of savage exultation to his eyes.

As yet, Ponsonby's only idea had been to save himself from the shame and publicity of his cowardly conduct. But the sight of the laughing juniors ahead brought another idea—a despicable, an infamous idea.

He had given his word to Cherry, for what it was worth. In reality he had given nothing; on reflection Bob Cherry would realise that—would not expect him to keep it. He would keep it, of course, for his own skin's sake. But Cherry did not know that. The weapon Fate had placed in his hands—the weapon with which he had hoped to harm the boy he hated—was still his, still as strong and sharp as ever.

And here was his chance to use it. It had come sooner than he had expected. And he could use it safely.

He stepped out upon the ice, and his voice rang out:

"Hold on, you fellows! I want you."

"Hallo! It's old Pon!"
The voice was Courtenay's, and he led the way towards the solitary figure at the edge of the ice. Harry Wharton and the others followed, and their eyes looked the drenched figure over curiously.

"What—why, you're wet, Pon!" exclaimed the Caterpillar, grinning. "What—"

"I wanted to warn you chaps," said Ponsonby. "Watch your steps lower down the river. There's been an accident—the ice gave way. Three of us have been in."

"What happened, Pon? Anything serious?" demanded Courtenay sharply. "You—"

"Nothing really serious—at least, I hope not," said Ponsonby gravely. "That little fat kid, Bunter minor, is in a bad way, though; he was unconscious when I fished him out—"

"Mum-my hat!" choked the Caterpillar. "You—you whatter?"

"You fished him out?" ejaculated Wharton, staring, putting emphasis on the "you."

"I fished him out—yes," said Ponsonby coolly, though his eyes glittered as he noted the looks of derision. "Cherry was all serene, though—he wasn't in long enough to take much harm."

"Cherry?" echoed Harry Wharton. "Was—"

"It was all my fault, I suppose," said the cunning rascal, as if half-ashamed of the statement. "I was chasing young Bunter—he checked me. And Cherry chipped in. He reached the fag, and they went in together—smashed through some rotten ice."

"And—and you—"

"I managed to fish Bunter out—at least, I held him until help came," said Ponsonby calmly. "Dash it all, I couldn't very well stand there—see the youngster drown, could I? Anyway—"

"Half a minute!" snapped Harry Wharton quickly, eyeing Ponsonby fixedly. "You're leaving something out, Ponsonby. What about Cherry—what happened to him?"

Ponsonby looked grim, and his teeth came together with a snap. Ponsonby had all the makings of an actor in him.

"You'd better ask Cherry that," he said bitterly.

He was turning away as if to go, but Harry Wharton gripped his arm and held him.

"What do you mean by that, Ponsonby?" he snapped fiercely. "What are you hinting at—explain, you rotter! We know you!"

"Yes—explain, you sneering cad!" growled Johnny Bull. "There's something fishy!"

"I'm saying nothing. I'd rather say nothing about it," said Ponsonby quietly. "It's for Cherry to explain himself."

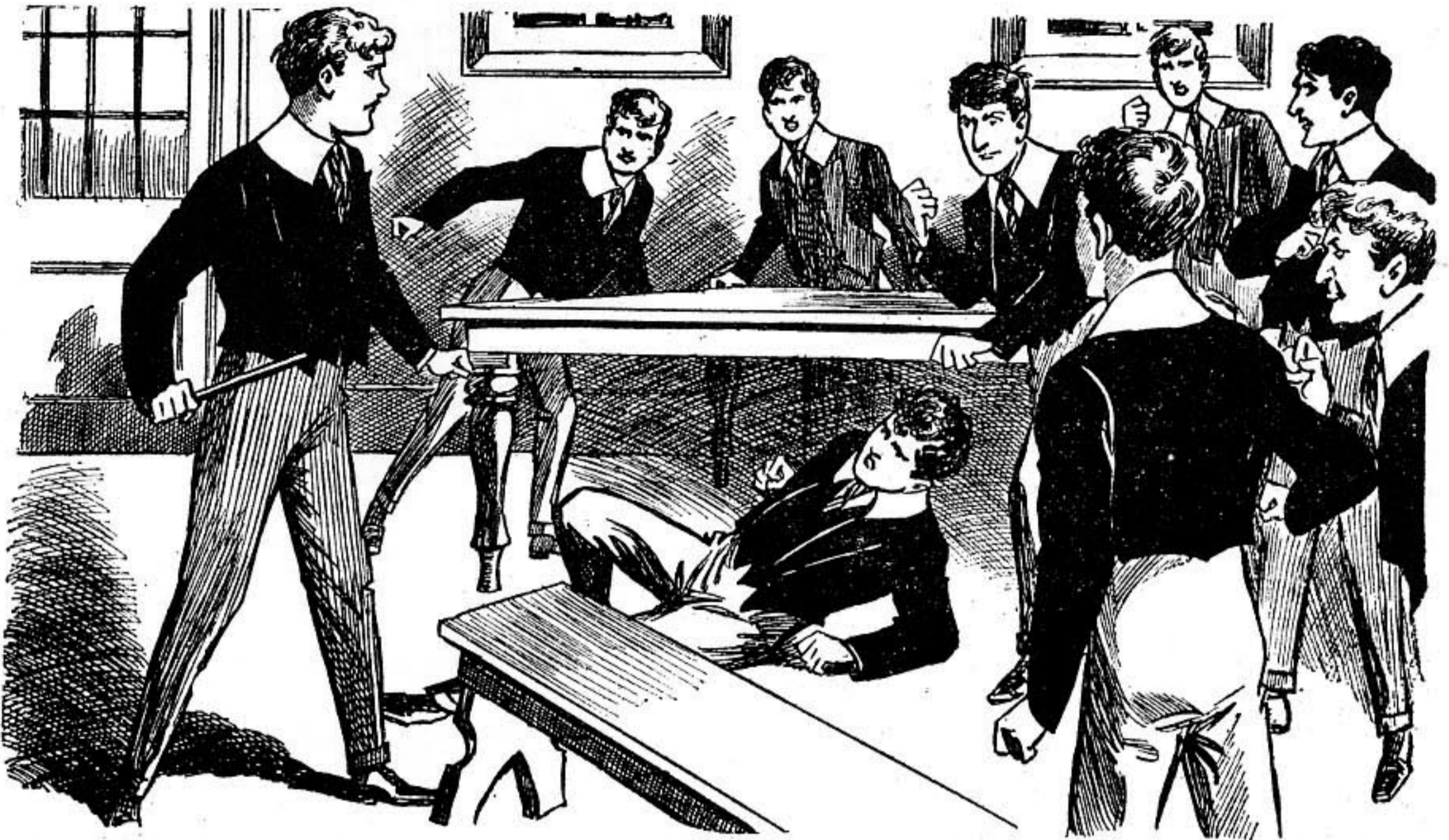
"You'll explain now!" shouted Harry Wharton angrily. "You've hinted at something rotten! You'll tell us here and now, you cad!"

"I tell you—" Ponsonby broke off savagely, as though he could keep back his pent-up indignation no longer. "Hang you, Wharton!" he shouted. "You want to know, and I'll jolly soon tell you! Cherry played the coward—the poltroon. He saved himself and left that youngster to his fate. He was hardly in before he was out again—before I reached the spot. He scrambled ashore, leaving me to do what he should and could have done if he'd had the pluck."

"Wha-a-at?"

"You've asked me, and I've told you."

ANSWERS
EVERY MONDAY—PRICE 2:



"Smash the cad!" roared Bolsover. "You rotter, Bob Cherry!" panted Nugent. "Yah! Funk!" howled Skinner gleefully. "Sling the rotten funk out!" A chorus of angry cries rang out and Bob Cherry faced the ring of infuriated juniors defiantly. "Try it—try to sling me out!" he hissed through clenched teeth. "Hang the lot of you!"
(See Chapter 8.)

I don't pretend to know why he did it; it wasn't like Cherry to do it. He seemed mad with fear. But he did it. You'd better ask Cherry himself why."

And with that Ponsonby wrenched himself free from Wharton's petrified grip and jumped ashore. Then he ran. He left his hearers staring after him dumbfounded; all—that is, with the exception of the Caterpillar. That light-hearted junior was cackling. The very thought of Ponsonby's claims made him gurgle with mirth. Ponsonby a hero!

But though he heard the Caterpillar's derisive mirth, Ponsonby was smiling as he ran along the towpath. He was beginning to sneeze. He was chilled to the bone, and his clothes clung to his stiff, aching limbs. But he scarcely noticed it. He felt he had sowed good seed in fertile ground. He knew the curiosity of the fellows would do the rest.

He knew—none better—that Bob Cherry would stick to his word—would never speak the truth, or dare to defend himself, come what may.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Developments!

THE wintry dusk was falling over the ancient quadrangle of Greyfriars when Harry Wharton, Johnny Bull, Frank Nugent, and Hurree Singh tramped into the lighted hallway of the School House.

The juniors' faces were ruddy, and glowing with health and vitality; but they looked anything but merry and bright. They were puzzled and perplexed.

Since leaving Frank Courteney and the Caterpillar, they had seen the scene of the accident—the broken ice, the ladder still lying there. They had also heard from Gosling at the gate that young Sammy Bunter was in the sanny

—was out of danger, but very ill. And they tramped into the School House, more troubled and perplexed than ever.

What did it mean? Knowing Bob Cherry as they did—knowing Ponsonby as they did—how could they accept his statements and claims with anything but scorn and derision? And yet, why had Ponsonby made them, unless he could prove them? Why had he asked them to ask Bob Cherry himself?

It was amazing, and just a bit disturbing!

"It's spooft," said Johnny Bull savagely, "rotten lies and spooft!"

"Must be!" sniffed Frank Nugent. "Old Bob would be waxy if he knew we even doubted it!"

"We'll soon know, anyway," said Harry grimly, laughing a trifle nervously. "And we'll punch Pon to a jelly for having made us doubt old Bob."

"Yes, rather!"

They crowded into Study No. 1, and they found Bob Cherry there, as they expected. Bob was getting tea ready for them, and he greeted them cheerily.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Here you are, you cripples!" he bawled. "Tea's nearly ready!"

Harry Wharton flung his skates down and looked curiously at his chum. Bob looked none the worse for his adventure. He was a healthy, hardy youth, and a hot bath and brisk rub-down had soon put him right. He grinned at Harry as if expecting questions. As he glanced at his frank, open face, all Harry's doubts left him. He felt ashamed of them.

"I hear you've been exploring the bottom of the river, Bob?" he exclaimed, with a laugh. "What is the yarn?"

Bob Cherry flushed curiously. It dawned in upon him quite suddenly then that he would have to step warily if he was to keep his word with Ponsonby.

"I have," he said, grinning faintly. "And it was jolly cold, I can tell you! That's why I didn't come up after you.

Blow the yarn, though! Let's have tea now."

"Oh!"

It was a simultaneous exclamation. Four pairs of eyes glanced curiously at Bob Cherry. Bob coloured. He hated to have to be secretive with his chums; he saw now that he would have to be. He saw his chums were surprised; but he did not dream of the real reason.

"Look here, Bob!" muttered Harry Wharton hesitatingly. "We don't want you to tell us, if you'd rather not. But—but we've had the yarn from Ponsonby—his yarn, that is. He—he says that you funk'd saving Sammy Bunter—that you—that you saved yourself, and that the kid would have drowned if he hadn't fished him out."

"Wha-a-at?"

"We don't believe his rotten lies and swank, of course!" Harry hastened to explain. "But—but it's queer. Other fellows may believe the silly yarn! He—he actually told us to ask you. You'd better stop his lying tongue, Bob!"

"Yes, rather," added Johnny Bull, eyeing Bob fixedly.

Bob did not answer. He could not. He was staggered. In a blinding flash he realised the trap into which he had fallen. He realised the utter unscrupulousness of the rascally Ponsonby. What could he do? What could he say?

Nothing! He was hopelessly trapped. He bit his lips until the blood came in sheer, helpless rage.

"Well, Bob?" muttered Harry, his brow clouding as he saw the look on his chum's dark face.

Bob gave a laugh—a harsh, bitter laugh.

"I've nothing to say," he said. "If Ponsonby's told you the story, then what's the good of my saying anything against it? Let's get tea, you fellows."

There was more than a suspicion of sarcasm—bitter sarcasm—in Bob's words. Harry Wharton flushed hotly.

"It's no good talking like that, Bob!"

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he said, steeling his voice to calmness. "You know we don't believe that lying rotter's claims; we know you better than that. But—but—"

He paused, scarcely knowing how to finish. The others made no effort to help him out. They were too staggered.

Bob Cherry crossed to the glowing fire, and, taking the eggs from the saucepan, he dished them out in silence. In silence, he took the plate of buttered toast from the hearth and laid it on the table.

The meal started in an atmosphere of chilly silence until, unable to stand it any longer, Harry Wharton started a feeble discussion on footer. They talked awkwardly, and Bob Cherry sat in moody silence, not joining in the conversation.

The miserable meal ended at last, however. Bob Cherry was the first to rise from the table, and as he did so the study door opened, and Peter Todd looked in. He gave Bob Cherry a curious look, and handed him a sealed note.

"Kid from Highcliffe brought it about an hour ago, I believe," he said grimly. "I caught Bunter with it. The fat villain meant to open it, I fancy. He—he was gassing with the kid a long while."

He walked half-way back to the door, and then he glanced round curiously at the Famous Five. He saw at once that there was trouble in the family.

"By the way, Cherry, old man," he said, grinning faintly, "that Highcliffe kid brought a silly yarn over. He's told Bunter, and the fat toad's spreading it all over the shop! It's about that business on the river this afternoon. I—"

"Oh!"

"I see you've heard it, though. All rot, of course!" added Toddy hastily, as he noticed the tense atmosphere in the study. "Silly rot! I—I thought I'd warn you, though. Better bring a boot along to that fat gossip and stop it, Cherry. Cheerio!"

Obviously, Peter Todd had intended to say more—much more. But the chilly silence—Bob Cherry's dark face—did not encourage him. He departed hurriedly, and they heard him gasp as he vanished through the doorway.

"That's done it!" groaned Harry Wharton. "Bob, old fellow—"

Bob Cherry turned abruptly away, and tore the note open. It was a sheet of paper, with a few words scribbled upon it. They were to the point, and ran as follows:

"Remember, I'm keeping you to your word, Bob Cherry! This is where I make you squirm, you bullying cad! I've got you tight. Keep mum, and I'll keep mum. Speak, and you'll be sorry—so will Miss Phyllis. Understand?"

That was all. No signature—nothing but the handwriting to tell from whom it came. But Bob did not need to recognise the handwriting to tell him that.

His heart sank like lead, and walking to the fire he tossed the note in, watching it burst into flame. Then he set his lips hard.

He would keep mum. He saw trouble before him—black trouble. But he did not flinch from it. Whatever happened—whatever came or went he would be

loyal to his girl chum—would save her whatever happened to himself.

Without a glance at his staring chums he left the room.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

Sent to Coventry!

"ROT!"

"Rubbish!"

"Gammon!"

"Tell that to the marines, you fat fibber!" grinned Bulstrode of the Remove, flipping a roasted chestnut playfully towards the fat face of Billy Bunter.

"Yow! You rotter, Bulstrode!" yelled Bunter, hurriedly retrieving the chestnut and cramming it into his mouth. "It's true enough—"

"Gammon!"

"Spoof!"

"I tell you it's true!" howled Bunter. "I stopped Cherry and asked him. You can ask Wharton. I felt it my duty, as it was my brother the beastly rotter left to drown—left to drown, mind you! But old Pon saved him. Fancy that! Cherry fairly shrivelled—he couldn't deny it, you know."

"Oh!"

"It's true enough, you fellows," said Skinner, approaching the group round the Common-room fire, and grinning. "I've asked Cherry, too. He didn't deny it. It's true! The faces of his pals will tell you that."

"Draw it mild!" urged Bolsover. "I'm no pal of Cherry's, but—"

"Too steep!" agreed Vernon-Smith coolly.

The fellows simply couldn't believe it, excepting the fellows who wanted to believe it—especially Skinner & Co.

Bob Cherry—of all fellows—playing the coward! And Cecil Ponsonby—of all fellows—playing the hero! It was too astounding to be easily believed.

Billy Bunter blinked round at the assembly, his eyes glittering behind his spectacles.

"He kicked me, the rotten coward!" he said. "Kicked me 'cause I asked him a question about it. You fellows stand by me and I'll jolly well ask him again! He'll be in here soon, I bet. Fancy a rotten funk like—Yarough!"

Billy Bunter howled as Peter Todd came up behind him and planted a hefty foot behind the fat junior.

"Dry up, you fat mischief-maker!" he granted. "Pity it wasn't you instead of your minor, Sammy, who went in!"

"Oh, really, Toddy, you beast—"

"We could have understood Bob Cherry refraining from rescuing you, old top!" sniffed Peter Todd. "He'd have done a public service by letting you drown!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"He'd have earned the gratitude and approbation of every fellow in the Remove, anyway!" said Toddy.

"Hear, hear!"

"Yah! Beasts!" snorted Bunter.

He blinked indignantly through his big glasses at Peter Todd.

"I'm surprised at you, Toddy!" he said loftily. "Cackling at such a serious subject! My view is that it's jolly serious! The Remove ought to take the matter up. That's my view. Any fellow who's disgraced the Form by showing the white feather ought to get it hot! That's my opinion!"

"Good!" said Toddy blandly. "Then I vote that as Bunter disgraces the Form every day of his life, we start by sending him—"

"Oh, really, Toddy—"

(Continued on page 17.)



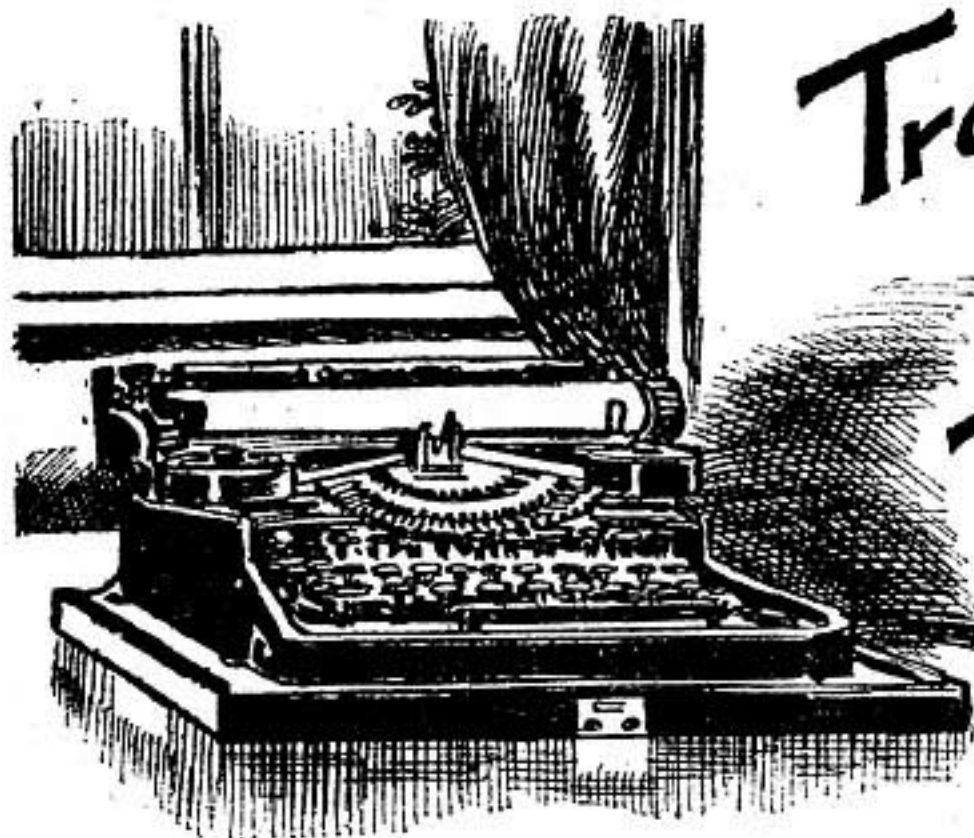
Miss Clara took charge of the situation in her usual masterful way. "Now," she said firmly. "First of all, you silly foolish boys will shake hands. Go ahead!" Bob Cherry hesitated, bewildered, white-faced. Harry Wharton stepped forward frankly, his hand outstretched. "I'm sorry, Bob, old man," he said. "We ought to—" "No time for gassing," interrupted Miss Clara coolly. "Shake!" Bob laughed—his old hearty laugh, and the hands of the juniors met. (See Chapter 19.)



Supplement No. 163.

HARRY WHARTON
EDITOR

Week Ending February 23rd, 1924.



Tragic
History
of a
Typewriter!

I FIRST saw the light of day in New York, having been manufactured in that city in 1895.

In those days a typewriter was considered a great luxury. Only the very wealthy business houses could afford to buy one.

My sale price, I remember, was seventy pounds. Nowadays you can buy a portable typewriter for thirteen guineas. Some difference!

I came over to England during the first year of my career, and was installed in a Government office in London. Here I enjoyed a very quiet and restful existence for many years. There was an atmosphere of drowsiness in the office, and it was very seldom that anybody came near me. Sometimes a sleepy-looking clerk would type a letter on me, or an official document, and then put my cloth cover over me and leave me in peace for the rest of the day.

Happy days, those—days of dreamy tranquillity! But they came to an end at last, as all good things do.

In 1905, when I was ten years of age, the Government officials decided that they must part with me. There were many new makes of machines on the market, and I was fast becoming old-fashioned and obsolete. So I was put up for sale by public auction, and a young literary man bought me, and took me to his private house.

He was a glutton for work, this literary man. His methods differed vastly from the methods of the drowsy Government clerks. He rose early in the morning, and hammered my keys until lunch-time. Then I had an hour's rest, and after that my owner would start thumping me again—often until a late hour at night.

It was rough and harsh usage that I received; and I had several breakdowns in consequence. My carriage refused to work, and I shed quite a lot of screws, and drove my owner to despair.

In 1907 I was sent to a typewriter factory to be thoroughly overhauled; and the very next year I was sold by private arrangement to a schoolmaster

named Quelch. I have been with him ever since, and he is a positive brute to me. For fifteen years he has been engaged in writing a history of Greyfriars, and I have had to do all the donkey-work for him. He has no regard whatever for my well-being. He frequently neglects to clean me, and for long periods I am denied the soothing application of oil. The result is that I have grown rusty, and have lost all my youthful sprightliness.

I wish somebody would invent a gland for putting new life into old typewriters! I feel as if I'm on my last legs, and one of these days I shall go on strike and refuse to work for Quelch any more. Then he can consign me to the scrap-heap, if he likes, or sell me to a vendor of old iron.

I'm just about fed-up with my present existence. Not only does my owner overwork me, but when he happens to be out playing golf a mischievous junior pops into his study and uses me for the purpose of writing letters to his people, or contributions for the "Greyfriars Herald."

Still, I've got one consolation, even in this dark hour. My career as a typewriter would have ended long ago, but for the fact that I spent ten years of almost complete idleness in a Government office!

Teacher: "If you are kind and polite to your playmates, what will be the result?"

Scholar: "They'll think they can lick me!"

Carpenter: "Didn't I tell you to notice when the glue boiled over?"

Assistant: "I did. It was a quarter-past ten."

New Boarder: "How's the fare here?"

Old Boarder: "We have chicken every morning."

"That's first rate! How is it served?"

"In the shell."

EDITORIAL!

By
HARRY
WHARTON.

L OUD cheers! The editorial staff of the "Greyfriars Herald" has just been presented with a typewriter. Sir Timothy Topham, the sporting baronet, and a governor of Greyfriars, is the generous donor. The machine he has given us is a real beauty. It is the very latest model, and among its many fine features is a special device which automatically records the number of words that are typed.

As a matter of fact, our gift typewriter looks so new and bright and good that we hesitate to start using it! It seems almost a sacrilege to thump its shining keys with our ink-stained fingers. Bob Cherry says we ought to put the typewriter in a glass case, and simply regard it as a valuable ornament, to be exhibited to all visitors who drop in to Study No. 1.

The unexpected but welcome arrival of this handsome gift has given us a brain-wave. Why not a Special Typewriting Number of the "Greyfriars Herald"? The typewriter plays such an important part in modern progress that it deserves more recognition than it gets. We have had a Special Telephone Number and a Special Gramophone Number. Then why not a number dealing with the romance of the typewriter? And those who shake their heads and pooh-pooh the notion of there being anything romantic about a mere mechanical contraption, will find that we have been able to squeeze quite a deal of romance out of it. And plenty of fun into the bargain!

Of course, it won't be possible for everybody to use our typewriter at the same time. As editor, I shall claim priority; and when I happen to be using the machine, my pals will have to write their contributions in the usual way—with pen and ink. This, by the way, is intended specially for the eyes of William George Bunter. You will read of his amazing cheek in taking to pieces our brand new typewriter, and sending in the bill to me for its repair elsewhere in these pages. I nearly collapsed when the bill was presented to me, and our tame porpoise did likewise when I broached the matter to him, for I handled him first and talked afterwards. The day may come when we shall possess a typewriter apiece.

In conclusion, we must pass a vote of thanks to Sir Timothy Topham. May his shadow never grow lessfully smaller, as Hurreo Singh would say!

HARRY WHARTON.
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SKINNER, THE SPEED MERCHANT!

By MICKY DESMOND.

TYPEWRITING isn't a compulsory subject at Greyfriars, like Latin and Greek. But if any fellow nurses the ambition to become an expert typist, he goes to Quelchy, who generously gives him lessons out of school hours.

Quelchy himself is a tip-top typist, and so he ought to be, having been at the game for years.

About twenty-five per cent of the fellows in the Remove know how to work a typewriter. The other seventy-five per cent neither know nor care to know.

Vernon-Smith is one of the best typists in the Form, and the other day, in class, he suggested to Quelchy that a special speed contest should be held, and that the fellow who averaged the greatest number of words per minute should be awarded a prize.

"A very excellent suggestion, Vernon-Smith!" said Quelchy. "The contest shall take place here and now. Kindly go and fetch the typewriter from my study."

Vernon-Smith hurried away, and returned in a few moments, staggering beneath the burden of Quelchy's weighty machine. He heaved it on to the Form master's desk; and Quelchy pulled out a drawer and produced some typewriting paper.

"Those who wish to enter this contest," he announced, "will come forward one at a time. They will type as

much of Longfellow's poem, 'Excelsior,' as they can possibly manage in two minutes. And the boy who succeeds in typing the greatest number of words—accurately, of course—will be awarded the prize. The latter will consist of ten shillings."

About a dozen fellows decided to compete. They all knew "Excelsior" by heart, and some of them had hopes of typing the whole of the poem in two minutes. A tall order!

Vernon-Smith took first turn, and he fairly made the fur fly. His fingers raced over the keys, and he was still going along like a house on fire when Quelchy called "Time!" Smithy hadn't managed to complete the poem, but he got a good way with it.

Wharton and Linley and Penfold and Newland followed on in turn; but nobody seemed to be able to reproduce Smithy's high speed, until it came to Skinner's turn. And Skinner—whom nobody had ever suspected of being a clever typist—worked the keys at a marvellous turn of speed which left everyone breathless, himself included.

Finally, Quelchy collected the papers, and examined them.

Skinner was quite elated.

"I'm positive I've won!" he muttered. "I typed pretty nearly the whole poem. Didn't even look at the paper while I typed. My eyes were glued to the keyboard the whole time."

Skinner had certainly typed more than

anyone else; but he had failed to notice that the "figure" key had been pressed down when he started to type. The result was that the first verse of "Excelsior," instead of commencing "The shades of night were falling: fast," commenced in this fashion:

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&@½5-
@½ 5£497:£ @— @½08-3 '8½@:3
0@½13%
@ 6075£ 2£9 943 = ; 8% ½-92 @-%
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When Quelchy showed Skinner the result of his handiwork, the cad of the Remove nearly had a fit.

"M-m-my hat!" he murmured, in blank dismay. "How did that happen, sir?"

Quelchy smiled.

"Evidently you failed to notice, Skinner," he said, "that the 'figure' key was pressed down when you started to type. Consequently, figures and signs appeared on the paper instead of letters. I must, therefore, disqualify your entry."

"Oh crumbs!"

"The prize of ten shillings," Quelchy went on, "will be awarded to Vernon-Smith, whose speed averaged fifty-six words per minute, and whose typing contains not a single error."

"Good old Smithy!"

Vernon-Smith flushed with pleasure as he accepted a ten-shilling note from Quelchy. It was Smithy who had suggested the typewriting contest, and the proposal had turned out very profitably for the proposer.

Smithy expended the ten shillings on an extra-special study feed, to which the writer of this article was invited.

THE SONG OF THE "TAPPER"!

By DICK PENFOLD.



With fingers weary and worn,
With face all haggard and lean,
Old Quelchy sat at his study desk,
Thumping his merry machine.
Tick-tickety-tack!
He pressed his aching napper;
And still in a voice like a duckling's
quack
He sang the song of the "tapper"!

He hammered the shining keys
Just like a mad musician;
He knew the letters by heart,
And he thumped without remission.
"Don't worry me now!" he cried,
As in came Mr. Capper;
And then (as if he'd a pain inside)
He sang the song of the "tapper"!

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A page—a quire—a ream,
And his efforts did not slack;
The answering echoes rang
With his tickety-tickety-tack!
His hair was straggling wild,
No longer smooth and dapper;
And still, in the voice of a squalling
child,
He sang the song of the "tapper"!

At last he called a halt,
Collapsing in his chair;
And his colleagues looked alarmed
When they found him huddled there.
They bore him off to bed,
With a blanket for a wrapper;
And still (though he must have felt
half-dead)
He sang the song of the "tapper"!

"TIPS" FOR TYPISTS!

By FRANK NUGENT.

IF you are fortunate enough to possess a typewriter, mind you look after it well. Typewriters, like human beings, want cleaning and grooming. Brush the keys every morning, and go over the various parts with a duster. Oil the machine every evening, but don't give it an oil-bath, or you'll know all about it next day, when the oil leaks all over your typescript! A proper oil-can, with a thin nozzle, should be used. Don't recklessly dash a deluge of oil over the machine. And mind you put your typewriter to bed each night—that is to say, put its cover on. If you leave it exposed all night it will accumulate dust and dirt.

When learning to type, don't bash the keys as if you owe them a grudge. The harder you hit, the worse it is for the typewriter. Besides, a light-fingered typist always makes speedier progress than a "basher." (By the way, when I talk of "light-fingered" typists, I do not insinuate that they are thieves or pickpockets!)

Never lend your typewriter to a beginner. Not if it's a new machine, that is. If he wants to learn to type, let him try his prentice hand on some ancient machine that doesn't resent being knocked about. To loan a new typewriter to a raw beginner is simply shrieking for trouble!

If you want to become a first-class typist, never sacrifice accuracy to speed. Practise accuracy, no matter if you go at a snail's pace. Speed will come in time. Of course, it looks very spectacular to type at a terrific pace; but what is the use of it all if the letters and words don't come out correctly?

One word more. When writing home to your people, stick to handwriting. It's bad form to type letters to your mater or pater. Business letters and letters to your boy pals may be typed; but communications to members of the fair sex should always be in handwriting—even if you possess the spider-like scrawl of a Coker or a Bunter!

Of course, only one fellow in a hundred is lucky enough to possess a typewriter; but the other ninety-nine would do well to take these "tips" to heart, for they never know when they may come into possession of that wonderful invention—a Typewriter!

[Supplement ii.]



The Vanished Typewriter!

By
TOM BROWN

GOOD! The coast is clear!" Billy Bunter made that observation. The fat junior had pushed open the door of Study No. 1, half an inch at a time, until he was able to command a view of the interior.

The study was unoccupied. Harry Wharton and Frank Nugent, its joint owners, were engaged in kicking goals on Little Side, for it was a half-holiday.

Billy Bunter rolled into the apartment. He closed the door behind him, and took the precaution of turning the key in the lock. Then his little round eyes gleamed behind his spectacles as they lighted upon a certain object which stood on the table.

It was a typewriter—a brand new, gilt-edged, eighteen carat machine, which Sir Timothy Topham had generously presented to the editorial staff of the "Greyfriars Herald."

In Billy Bunter's opinion, Sir Timothy was "a mean old buffer!" He was guilty of the greatest of all crimes, in Bunter's eyes—that of personal favouritism. He had gone out of his way to give a typewriter to the "Greyfriars Herald," and he had actually ignored the existence of "Billy Bunter's Weekly," which was by far the more important journal—in the opinion of its plump editor!

Sir Timothy Topham's offence was really unpardonable. He might at least have given a typewriter to each editor. But to favour Harry Wharton, and to leave Billy Bunter out, was not playing the game.

However, here was the typewriter, all ready for use; and Billy Bunter proposed to use it. He had his editorial to write, and it would look much nicer typed than handwritten. The printers would be impressed; and to impress people was Bunter's vision, his aim, and his creed.

"My hat! Isn't she a beauty?" murmured Bunter, speaking of the typewriter as if it belonged to the feminine gender. "Must have cost forty quids, if she cost a penny! Blessed if I can understand this keyboard, but I shall soon get the hang of it."

The fat junior calmly purloined a sheet of paper from Wharton's desk, and inserted it in the machine—the paper, not the desk! Then he started to type.

Bunter's fat, stubby fingers did not make for accuracy in typing. He invariably hit the wrong key, and naturally, the wrong letter came out. His editorial looked even more comical, in type, than it would have looked in handwriting. The printers, if that editorial ever got to them, would be unable to make head or tail of it.

Biff! Crash! Clatter!

Like many beginners in the art of typewriting, Bunter hugged the delusion that the harder he hit, the better the results. And he hit very hard indeed. It was a wonder that sparks didn't begin to fly from the machine.

Bunter was too engrossed in his task to notice that the typewriter was moving nearer and nearer to the edge of the table. It seemed to resent such ill-usage, [Supplement iii.]

and it showed its resentment by taking short jumps to one side.

Presently the inevitable happened.

Bunter was groping for the capital "B," in order to start typing his own name. He found it, and struck it a sledgehammer blow.

Crash!

The typewriter, which had been nearly half-way over the edge of the table, now lost its balance, and fell to the floor with a terrific impact.

"Oh crumbs!"

With a gasp of dismay, Billy Bunter stooped to examine the wreckage. He expected to find the typewriter in fragments. But to his relief—it seemed to have escaped damage. The two ribbon-spools had come off, and about a yard of purple ribbon trailed across the carpet. But that could easily be remedied.

Bunter heaved the typewriter on to the table, and replaced the spools, and resumed his editorial. At least, he tried to resume. But the typewriter refused to function. Bunter struck about half a dozen letters in turn, and they all came out on top of one another. The carriage, instead of moving along as each key was struck, remained immobile.

"The beastly thing's gone on strike!" growled Bunter.

He removed the sheet of paper from the machine, and started to take the typewriter to pieces, to see if he could discover what was wrong with it.

Now, it is one thing to dismantle a typewriter, and quite another thing to assemble it again as it was in the beginning. It needs the skill of a mechanic; and Billy Bunter was no mechanic.

With the aid of Wharton's small screw-driver—borrowed from the table drawer—Bunter succeeded in taking the machine to pieces. But he failed to discover what was wrong.

"I'd better buck up and put the thing together again," he mused. "Wharton and Nugent will be coming in to tea presently, and I shouldn't like 'em to catch me in here."



With the aid of a screwdriver Bunter succeeded in taking the machine to pieces.

Putting the typewriter together was easier said than done. It was a heart-breaking business, as Bunter soon realised. He had forgotten where the various screws and nuts belonged to.

Just as all the King's horses and all the King's men had failed to put Humpty-Dumpty together again, so Billy Bunter failed to reconstruct the typewriter. He stood blinking at an array of screws and nuts and "spare parts," and he hadn't the foggiest notion what to do with them.

A wave of alarm surged over the fat junior's mind. Supposing somebody arrived on the scene, and forced the door open, and caught him there with the dismantled typewriter?

It wasn't a pleasant prospect. That was a brand new typewriter—the apple of Harry Wharton's eye, and the pride and joy of the "Greyfriars Herald" staff. If it were found in pieces, it was possible that Billy Bunter would share a similar fate!

Bunter's brain worked swiftly.

"I know!" he exclaimed, at length. "I'll take the typewriter over to Courtfield, and get it put together again."

There was a packing-case standing in the corner—the case in which the typewriter had arrived. Bunter carelessly threw the various portions of typewriter into it, and hammered the lid on, using the poker as a hammer.

Having completed this manoeuvre, he unlocked and opened the door, and blinked cautiously up and down the passage.

The coast was clear. The majority of the Removites were still playing footer on Little Side.

Now came the task of carrying the typewriter to Courtfield. It was no light task, for it was no light typewriter. Billy Bunter panted and puffed and perspired with his exertions, and every yard he covered seemed a mile. He felt tempted to drop the packing-case into a ditch and leave it there; but even Bunter was incapable of such a shabby trick as that. So he rested for a while by the roadside, and then continued to plod his weary way in the direction of Courtfield.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Where's the giddy typewriter got to, Harry? You don't mean to say you've pawned it already?"

Thus, Bob Cherry.

The Famous Five had just come in from the footer, and Wharton and Nugent had invited the other three to tea in Study No. 1.

Bob Cherry gazed round the apartment, as if in search of something. The others gazed round, also.

Harry Wharton gave a shout.

"Some confounded sneak-thief has been and bagged our 'tapper'!"

"That's so," said Nugent. "It's vanished—taken unto itself wings."

"We'd better explorefully investigate, my worthy chums," said Hurreo Singh.

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The Famous Five looked very annoyed as they started a tour of the Remove studios. They had every reason to be annoyed. The purloining of their brand new typewriter was an unpardonable act of piracy.

"You fellows seen our typewriter?" asked Wharton, thrusting his head round the door of Study No. 2.

"Yes," said Bulstrode, looking up from his tea. "It's a beauty!"

"Eh? When did you see it?" demanded Wharton quickly.

"When it first arrived," was the calm reply.

"You—you—"

Wharton bottled his wrath, and the juniors went on "exploredly investigating." But they failed to find their typewriter. Nobody seemed to have seen it—not that day, at all events.

"This is a pretty go, and no mistake!" growled Johnny Bull. "I never knew that typewriters could walk, but ours seems to have set the fashion!"

"The question is, where has it walked to?" said Bob Cherry.

"Echo answers, 'Where?' " said Nugent.

The Famous Five hunted high and low for the missing machine. But they found it not. It began to look as if there had been a daylight burglary.

Three days sped by, and there was no sign of the vanished typewriter. Harry Wharton was very upset, and he was about to write to Sir Timothy Topham, telling him of the tragedy, when there was a tap on the door of Study No. 1, and in marched a man with a packing-case.

"Your typewriter, sir!" he announced. Wharton jumped to his feet.

"Where on earth has it been?" he demanded.

The man looked surprised.

"You ought to know where it's been, sir, seeing as how you sent it over to us—the Courtfield Typewriter Company—for repair."

"What!"

"It came to us in pieces," the man continued, "and some of the parts were so badly knocked about that we had to

replace them. Here's the bill for repairs—one pound seventeen-and-six. I was instructed to wait for the money. You're Master Wharton, I take it?"

"Yes, I'm Wharton. But I—I don't understand. Can you describe the person who brought this machine to you for repair?"

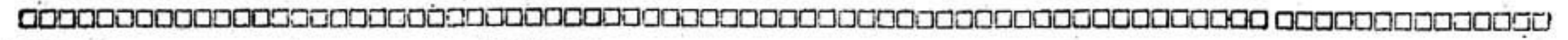
"Certainly. I happened to be in the shop at the time. The young gent who called with the machine was as fat as a barrel. He wore glasses, and he had rather a squeaky voice. He asked us to repair the typewriter, and send in the bill to Master Wharton."

"Oh, did he?" said Wharton grimly, seeing daylight at last. "Well, here's the money. It wasn't I who sent the machine to you for repair; still, I'd better foot the bill, I suppose."

The man took the money, and scribbled out a receipt. When he had gone, Wharton picked up a cricket-stump and strode out of the study, with an expression on his face that was positively Hunnish.

He was going to look for Bunter!

THE END.



TYPEWRITING TOPICS!

By BOB CHERRY.

THE GREYFRIARS POLICE COURT!

Bad for Billy Bunter.

LORD MAULEVERER finds it "too much fag" to work a typewriter, and he frankly admits that he is ignorant of the subject. Although not a typing expert, however, his lordship can certainly claim to be a "tie-pin" expert!

* * *

MR. QUELCH'S typewriter is fifteen years of age, and it belongs to the old school of typewriters. It is obsolete and out-of-date, and is known as an "invisible machine"; but we can't quite "see" that!

* * *

"FEMALE TYPEWRITER REQUIRED." Thus runs an advertisement in the local paper. We are not quite certain of the sex of our own machine, or we'd send it along!

* * *

Very few people are aware that Mr. Prout possesses a typewriter; but it broke down some years ago, and has been out of action ever since. It may be a type-writer, but it certainly isn't a "right typer"!

* * *

BILLY BUNTER hopes to purchase a typewriter as soon as his celebrated postal-order arrives. Typewriters will have to drop considerably in price before this can happen!

* * *

FISHER T. FISH declares he can type at the rate of 150 words a minute, which would certainly be a Greyfriars record, and pretty nearly a world record. But we incline to the belief that 150 words a day is Fishy's normal speed!

* * *

HORACE COKER is going to ask his Aunt Judy to send him a typewriter. Before Coker can hope to become a successful typist, he will need a patent spelling device to be attached to his machine!

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AT the Box-room Petty Sessions this week, the first name to be bawled by the Court Usher was William George Bunter. There was no response.

Magistrate: Where's our tame porpoise got to?

Mr. Robert Cherry, K.C.: I suggest that he's vanished through the ventilator, your worship.

Magistrate: He's not slim enough for that. It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for Billy Bunter to squirm through a ventilator! (Laughter.) What is the charge against him?

Mr. Cherry: He is charged with annexing, abstracting, and appropriating a tin of prehistoric sardines, your worship, from the cupboard in Study No. 1. The sardines were of a great age, having been purchased before the Christmas Vacation. Prisoner was seen to emerge from Study No. 1, pressing one hand to his nose, and clutching the tin of sardines with the other, at a convenient distance.

Magistrate: Am I to understand that the sardines gave forth an aroma?

Mr. Cherry: They certainly did, your worship! At that time, the Borough Surveyor of the Remove received numerous complaints about the state of the drains. (Loud laughter.)

Magistrate: Where is prisoner now? Detective-Inspector Penfold explained that Billy Bunter was in the sanny, having contracted ptomaine poisoning.

Magistrate: Through eating the sardines?

Witness: No, your worship; the smell of them was sufficient! (Laughter.)

Mr. Harold Skinner, K.C., C.A.D., for the defence, submitted that prisoner had taken the sardines in order to oil his bicycle. "Your worship ought to be very grateful to him for getting rid of the beastly things," added Mr. Skinner.

At this juncture, Billy Bunter staggered into Court, leaning heavily on two

stalwart constables. His complexion was a sickly yellow.

Magistrate: What have you got to say for yourself?

Prisoner: Yow! I—I'm ill! I'm dying! I thought those sardines were young and frisky, and instead of that they were ripe for their Old Age pensions! (Laughter.) I've made a new resolution that I'll never touch another sardine—never!

Magistrate: I also have made a resolution that prize porkers who purloin sardines shall be severely punished! You will receive a dozen prods with the Court poker, a dozen swipes with the map-pole, and a sound bumping!

Total collapse of prisoner!

REPORT IN BRIEF!

A dissolute youth named Gerald Loder was charged with smoking a cigarette during the Court proceedings.

On his agreeing to hand over the remainder of the packet to his worship, prisoner was acquitted.

A HEADMASTERS' SUPPLEMENT.

The "Greyfriars Herald" for our next issue shows some of the trials of the Head. George Wingate has been busy delving amidst the wonderful archives of Greyfriars. The result of his researches into past history are set forth in brilliant style. The old records are a mine of literary wealth. But the new supplement is no mere peep into the past. Writers, who ought to know what they are setting down, speak of the duties and difficulties of the life of the Head. Taking one consideration with another, the life of the Doctor is not all happiness, though it has its sunshine patches to relieve the monotony of toil. The new supplement is a jolly good one, anyway.

[Supplement iv.]

THE WHITE FEATHER!

(Continued from page 12.)

Bunter paused, and his eyes glittered behind his spectacles as the door of the Common-room opened just then to admit Harry Wharton. Behind Harry were Nugent, Bull, and Singh.

"That's my view, anyway!" went on Bunter loudly. "You fellows can think as you like. I happen to have the good name and reputation of the Form at heart. Bob Cherry ought to get it hot for disgracing the Form. He kicked me—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, shut up, you fat frog!" muttered Peter Todd uneasily.

Bunter went on unheeding. He had manoeuvred his fat form behind the burly Bolsover, and he went on:

"He funk'd it—showed the white feather, you know. All Highcliffe's talking about it, I believe. Nice thing for the Remove, isn't it? Left poor Sammy to drown, you know. Rotten—"

He stopped then. Harry Wharton, his face red, had taken a threatening step towards him. His chums' faces were dark. There was a silence.

"That's enough, Bunter!" snapped Harry angrily. "You've said enough!"

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

Wharton took another step towards the blinking Owl of the Remove, but this time Bolsover interposed.

"Hold on, Wharton!" he snapped. "Leave Bunter alone! Bunter's quite right—this is a matter for the Form."

"That's my view, too," said Skinner, shaking his head gravely. "We can't have Highcliffe crowing over us. If Cherry doesn't want to be thought a funk, he's only got to deny the yarn. Let him. We'll believe him before old Pon, of course."

There was a nasty sneer in Skinner's last words; but most of the fellows nodded. Skinner's words sounded fair enough to them.

"I don't pretend to understand it," exclaimed Tom Brown quietly. "But Bunter's right about all Highcliffe gassing about it. I was there and heard Ponsonby's yarn. The fellows there are fairly stumped; but some of 'em believe it. I sha'n't believe it, though, until Bob Cherry—"

He broke off, and a sudden dead silence fell. The door had opened again, and a junior had entered. It was Bob Cherry. He carried a book in his hand. He must have noted that all eyes were upon him. But he walked across to a form and seated himself, unheeding. Bob Cherry wasn't the sort of fellow to hide himself when trouble threatened.

Harry Wharton hesitated a moment, and then he crossed to him.

"Here you are, then, Bob!" he said, striving to speak cheerily. "We've been hunting everywhere for you."

"Here I am, then," said Bob coolly.

There was a slight note of anger—or bitterness in Bob's tone. He could understand his chums being surprised at his silence. But he felt they, as his chums, ought to have faith in him—ought to have believed him innocent without the necessity of his denying the charge. They should have known him better—in his view.

Bunter broke the silence with a chuckle.

"I say, you fellows, leave it to me!" he said in a whisper that carried all over the room. "You fellows back me up, and I'll jolly soon ask him—point-blank."

Grinning, he moved over to Bob, ready

to retreat at the slightest sign of hostility from Bob. He planted himself before the junior.

"Look here, Bob Cherry," he said. "The Form want you to answer a question."

"And you're their spokesman?" ejaculated Bob, looking up. "Can't they find a more responsible specimen—"

"Oh, really, Cherry—" began Bunter warmly. "No good rotting—"

"Shut up, you burbling fat frog!" growled Bulstrode, slinging Bunter aside like a sack. "Now, Cherry, no good beating about this business! The Form want to know the truth; and they mean to know it!"

"Pile in," encouraged Bob, though his eyes were gleaming now.

"I'm going to. I reckon you know what we want to know, Bob Cherry," said Bulstrode doggedly. "You've heard that cad Ponsonby's yarn. He claims that you played the coward on the river this afternoon—that you acted like a white-livered jellyfish. He claims that you left young Sammy Bunter to drown, and that he had to fish him out. Is that true?"

"Naturally—if Pon said so!" said Bob sarcastically.

"Drop that rot! Is it true?" insisted Bulstrode savagely.

"Find out!" snapped Bob. "I'm saying nothing!"

"Oh!"

There was a deep murmur round the room, and as he heard it Bob flushed to the roots of his hair. Wharton was about to speak, but he closed his lips again—tight.

"Don't be a silly ass, Bob!" said Peter Todd, looking distressed. "You know what this means—you know what you're making the chaps think—"

"Let them think and say what the thump they like!" snapped Bob through his teeth. "I'm saying nothing! Hang the lot of you!"

"Bob, old chap—" began Frank Nugent.

Bob's eyes blazed, and he glanced round defiantly.

"I'm explaining nothing—answering nothing!" he said savagely. "You can go and eat coke!"

He opened his book and pretended to read. But the letters were blurred and meaningless before his eyes. He was inwardly shaking with emotion. He felt he could stand anything but this. To be

thought a rascal—a thief, even he could stand. But to be thought a coward—a heartless poltroon—he could not stand it. And his own helplessness to defend himself made him rage inwardly with hopeless passion. The ring of accusing eyes—the questioning glances—made him writhe. Why didn't they leave him alone?

And—strangely enough—his anger was more bitter against his own chums than the others. Hang them! But his own chums ought to understand—they ought to be standing by him now. Perhaps this was unreasonable of Bob—his chums had given no hint of what they thought as yet. They were simply bewildered—dumbfounded by Bob's own stubborn attitude.

But it was plain enough now what the rest of the Remove thought, with few exceptions. What else could they think? By his silence Bob Cherry had condemned himself in their eyes. He was silent simply because he could not deny Ponsonby's charge—amazing as it seemed.

It was just then that Skinner took a prominent hand in the affair. He had been busy for some moments with pencil and paper, and now he handed the latter to Bunter, with a chuckle. Then he took a pin from his coat, and handed that to Bunter, nodding towards Cherry's broad back as he did so.

His meaning was obvious—even to Bunter—and, glancing at the paper, Bunter grinned broadly.

"You fellows stand by me—back me up if I do?" he whispered. "Honour bright?"

"Honour bright," agreed Skinner.

"Yes, rather," added Snocop. "Go ahead, Bunter, old man."

And Bunter gave a fat chuckle and went ahead. Before Wharton or anyone else had grasped what was afoot, he had tiptoed across to Bob Cherry.

He fumbled for a moment at Bob's jacket, and suddenly Bob Cherry leaped to his feet with a wild yell of pain, and clapped a frantic hand to his back.

"What the—"

Bob's hand came away, and with it came the sheet of paper. He glanced sharply at it, and as he did so his face went white.

On the white paper was the pencilled drawing of a feather. Beneath it was a single word in big letters—the word "FUNK!"

Bunter had done his work only too well; he had sent the pin about half its length into Bob's back, and he was hurt—very much hurt.

But he scarcely felt the pain now. He stared dumbly at the paper and then his face flushed red with rage. It was the last straw for Bob.

Bunter saw the signs and jumped for safety—but too late.

Bob's savage clasp closed on him, and, after shaking the fat junior like a rat, he flung him across a form and snatched up a ruler.

The next moment Bunter's wild yells rang through the Common-room.

Whack, whack, whack!

"Yarroogh! Oh, crumbs! Yow! Oh, help! Rescue, you— Yarroogh!" roared Bunter frantically. "You fellows said you'd back me— Yarroogh!"

Whack, whack, whack!

Bob was in a right royal rage—there was no mistake about that. He laid it on savagely, passionately. Skinner & Co. sat tight and grinned. Skinner's "Honour bright" was a slender reed for a fellow like Billy Bunter to lean upon.

But several other fellows sprang forward to the rescue. They saw that Bob

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was going too far—that he scarcely realised what he was doing in his rage.

Harry Wharton reached Bob Cherry first, though. As the skipper of the Remove, he felt he ought to interfere. He feared that Bob might do the fat junior serious harm; he saw also that Bob was unconsciously, perhaps, ruining his case by giving way to temper. Moreover, he feared a master hearing Bunter's wild shrieks.

"That's enough, Bob!" he cried. "Stop it, you fool!"

He grabbed Bob's upraised arm, and as he did so Bob wrenched loose with a snarl.

"Get out—don't you interfere!" he shouted. "I'm going—"

Harry grabbed again at Bob's arm—and then it happened.

Mad with rage now, Bob swung his fist round behind him, and it took Harry full in the face.

Crash!

Harry staggered back with a cry, stumbled over a form and went down headlong with a crash.

There was a stunned silence. Bob dropped Bunter then; the fat junior leaped for the door, roaring. Nugent bent to help his chum to his feet. His eyes were shining fiercely as he did so.

Bob's fist dropped to his side.

"I—I—I'm—" He paused. He was about to say "I'm sorry, Wharton!" But a sudden, bitter look came over his rugged face. "I—don't care!" he finished defiantly. "He—he asked for it! He'd no cause to interfere! Hang the lot of you!"

"You—you rotter, Bob Cherry!" panted Nugent.

"Smash the cad!" roared Bulstrode.

"Sling the rotten funk out!"

"Yah! Funk!" yelled Skinner gleefully. "Send the cad to Coventry!"

A chorus of angry cries rang out, and Bob Cherry faced the ring of angry faces defiantly. He was shaking in every limb now.

"Try it—try to sling me out!" he hissed through his clenched teeth. "But—but you've no need to try. I'm going. You can send me to Coventry if you want! I don't want to speak to any of you! Hang the lot of you!"

He flung the ruler across the room and went out, banging the door savagely after him.

There was another silence. Wharton was on his feet now, wiping a thin trickle of red from his mouth. He stared round him dazedly as if unaware that Cherry had gone.

Bulstrode jumped on to a form excitedly.

"You fellows," he shouted, "that's settled it. Cherry's had his chance to explain—to deny the charge. He wouldn't explain—he couldn't deny it!"

"Guilty!" roared Skinner.

Bulstrode nodded.

"He's guilty right enough," he said. "He's disgraced the Remove—he's let Greyfriars down! He's proved himself a funk—a rotten, miserable coward! The Remove aren't standing it! I vote we show the cad what we think of him by sending him to Coventry! All those in favour shove their hands up."

A forest of hands went up. From being the most popular fellow in the Remove Bob Cherry had suddenly become the most unpopular. Only a few steadily held their hands down.

"You can count me out!" snapped Harry Wharton, speaking then.

"And me!" came in a rather doubtful chorus from his chums.

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"You can count me out also," said Peter Todd and Mark Linley.

"I don't pretend to understand the game," said Peter Todd, as the fellows began to protest. "But I'll believe Bob Cherry played the coward when he tells me so himself. You silly asses can do what you like!"

And with that, Peter Todd marched out of the Common-room. Mark Linley followed at once.

"Look here, Wharton—" began Bulstrode angrily. "You may be skipper, but you've got to toe the line to the Form! I should think—"

"Go and masticate coke!" snapped Harry Wharton savagely. "Come on, you chaps!"

He left the Common-room in a buzz, his chums at his heels. The trouble he had expected had started—and it had started far, far more seriously than he had ever dreamed it could. His face was dark and clouded as he led his silent chums to Study No. 1.

Bob Cherry was not there—they had not expected him to be there; and they were thankful he was not there. Harry himself hardly knew what he would say—or do—when he did meet him face to face. It would be wrong to say that Harry was not angry with his old chum—he was bitterly angry. But he had no desire whatever to avenge that blow. He could understand—or thought he could understand. Nugent, Bull, and Singh were more bitter than he was.

The Remove went up to bed in a buzz of excitement that night. Only two fellows spoke to Bob Cherry—Peter Todd and Mark Linley. They did not attempt to speak to him twice. He snubbed them rudely. Nobody else attempted to speak to him. Harry could scarcely have done so had he wanted to, after what had happened.

But, though still defiant, Bob himself was more wretched and miserable than he had ever been. He cared little for the open scorn and contempt of the Remove as a whole. But the fact that he had quarrelled hopelessly with his own chums—and that it was his own temper that had caused it—hurt him bitterly; and he slept little that night.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

Light at Last!

BOB CHERRY awoke the next morning with a queer, confused feeling in his mind that the events of the previous evening had been but a dream—a horrid dream he had experienced during sleep.

But as he glanced across the dormitory and met Wharton's cold glance, saw the swollen lip of his erstwhile chum, he realised it was stern reality, and a sick feeling of despair took possession of him.

Strangely enough, he seemed to see things in their true light now. What a fool he had been to lose his temper the night before! Why hadn't he been more patient with his own chums? He felt an almost irresistible desire to rush across and apologise humbly to Wharton—to offer to take a licking as payment for that wretched, hasty blow.

But he couldn't; it was too late for that now, he reflected bitterly. He knew that Toddy and Linley had refrained from joining in with the others in passing judgment of Coventry upon him. He did not dream that his old chums had also refrained. They had not spoken to him, and he took it for granted that they had joined the majority.

He felt he could not stand a rebuff from them; could not bear to have his

advances met with chilly silence—perhaps worse. It was hopeless.

He rose and dressed in silence, conscious of the mutterings around him—that he was the object of sneering remarks, and cold but silent hostility. He heard the buzz of conversation break out directly he closed the dormitory door after him to go downstairs.

And—he did not know it, unfortunately—Harry Wharton, at least, watched him go with a feeling of bitter disappointment. He had hoped—had half expected—that the cheery, good-natured, loyal Bob would have got over his temper by morning; would have apologised for striking him, would have been more amenable to reason. Harry also had slept little, and during the night watches he had resolved to forget and forgive. He had fallen asleep at last, feeling sure that all would be well the next morning.

But Bob Cherry had not spoken—he had not made any attempt to repair the rift in the lute. And Harry Wharton began to realise then that the break was not to be healed so soon, after all.

And he was right. That day passed, and the next, and the next, without any sign of the rift being healed. They were miserable days for Wharton, Nugent, Bull, and Singh, as well as for Bob Cherry. The sentence of Coventry was being carried through rigorously, mercilessly, and Bob's chums might just as well have been a party to the general attitude—excepting that they were fiercely "up against" the fellows who took a fiendish delight in throwing sly gibes and taunts at the outcast of the Remove.

Bob still shared Study No. 13 with Linley, Singh, and Wun Lung; but they saw little of him. He spent his time mooning about alone, or in going long walks. He had not seen Miss Phyllis since that fatal afternoon; he had carefully avoided meeting his girl chums from Cliff House. He did not want any awkward questions to be asked.

For the same reason Harry Wharton and his chums had done likewise. But on the Wednesday afternoon following the four of them met Miss Phyllis, Miss Clara, and Miss Marjorie walking along the cliffs.

There was no avoiding a meeting, and the juniors stopped and doffed their caps. The girls stopped and eyed the juniors fixedly, but without smiling.

"Well?" exclaimed Miss Clara severely. "What's the meaning of it, Harry Wharton? We've wanted to see you for days. What's wrong?"

"Wrong?" echoed Harry, colouring violently. "Nothing—really, Miss Clara. We—we haven't been this way lately. We—we—"

"Don't try to evade the point, Harry!" snapped Miss Phyllis. "You know what we mean. What is wrong between you four and Bob Cherry?"

"Oh!"

"We've heard all about it from Hazeldene—from Marjorie's brother," said Miss Phyllis quietly. "Aren't you ashamed of yourselves? Have you no more faith in your chum than to believe what that cad Ponsonby says about him?"

"We—we've never admitted that we did, Miss Phyllis," said Harry Wharton a trifle huffily. "You—you see, Bob never—never—"

He stammered and stopped, flushing.

"Tell us all about it," ordered Miss Clara Trevlyn. "How did you come to quarrel at all, then?"

Harry tried to tell as best he could; he did not like telling about that wretched blow. But there was no help for it. Miss Clara, at all events, would



"Smash the cad!" yelled Bulstrode. "Leave the howling rotter to us, Cherry!" There was a rush of feet and Ponsonby disappeared beneath the avenging swarm. The last the Famous Five saw of him was his muddy, dishevelled figure as he emerged suddenly from the scrum, with the crowd in full cry at his heels. (See Chapter 10.)

have no evading the issue. And the girls got the story at last.

"Well," said Miss Clara, "so that's that! I hardly know who to blame for the silly quarrel—Bob or you. But never mind that now."

"Talking won't do any good certainly," said Harry, anxious to change the subject. "What about you, Miss Phyllis? You've heard nothing more about the cinema trouble, I suppose; you're safe enough now?"

"I am! A hundred Ponsonbys couldn't harm me now!" snapped Miss Phyllis. "But never mind that; it's finished with, I think. We've got something else to do yet." She paused, and then went on in a voice which made the juniors fairly jump: "Have you done anything to clear your chum's name, Harry Wharton?"

"N-no. How could we?" ejaculated Harry. "He—he won't deny it himself. He—he—"

"Is that necessary?" said Miss Phyllis indignantly. "You know and we know, Harry Wharton, that Ponsonby didn't save that boy; we know and you know—or should do—that Bob didn't play the coward—he couldn't!"

"But—but why—"

"We've got to find that out—and we're going to!" snapped Miss Clara. "We've got a jolly good suspicion why Bob won't speak—at least, Phyllis has. It dawned upon her only this morning. If you weren't blind you'd guess something of the truth, too. But we've got to prove Bob innocent first. It was the gardener of Riversdale—that bungalow by the river—who took charge of Bunter minor, wasn't it?"

"My hat!"

Harry saw what Phyllis was aiming at now.

"Yes, it was!" he added eagerly. "I wonder—"

"Don't stop to wonder!" snapped Miss Clara. "Come on!"

And she marched away, leaving them to follow. They did so, a little puzzled—more than a little ashamed. Why hadn't

they thought of it? Why hadn't they made an effort to clear their chum?

It was not a far cry to Riversdale, and they soon reached it. And a few inquiries soon brought the gardener in question on the scene. They eyed him eagerly, hopefully. He might have seen what happened; he must have seen something of what happened.

He eyed the seven curiously as they made their request to hear the story of the accident.

"Why, yes," he said, "I saw it all certainly—leastways, I saw what happened after the little nipper went in—though the lanky chap with the eyeglass went in just afterwards."

"Oh!"

"Then the other youngster—the curly-headed chap, he was—smashed through lower down," explained the man, staring at their faces—wildly excited now. "A good 'un, he was, and no error! He—"

"Tell us exactly how it happened," breathed Harry Wharton, his eyes gleaming.

The man did, in detail. They listened breathlessly, with growing joy.

"The master saw most of it, too, from the window yonder," said the gardener. "He sent me down, and I went soon as I got a ladder. Is that nipper all right—"

"He's nearly better now," panted Harry. "But—but you're certain it was the tall chap who—who funked—you're certain of that?"

"Absolutely!" was the prompt reply. "A nice lad he was—I don't think. He might have bin a toff, but he was a white-livered skunk—if you'll excuse my saying so! Just hopped out and stood staring at the kid drowning. The other chap was a good 'un, though—chap from your school," he added, looking at Wharton. "You should have seen him smashing his way through that ice! Fairly made it fly, he did!"

"Look here!" exclaimed Harry Wharton eagerly. "If—if it's necessary—if we wanted you to do so—would you

swear to that story before those two chaps themselves?"

"Well, yes, of course, sir! Why shouldn't I?" said the man, staring.

"That's good enough, then!" snapped Harry Wharton. "And—thanks!"

The Cliff House girls, triumphant now, thanked the gardener also, and they left him then, staring after them, not a little puzzled.

"Now for Bob Cherry!" exclaimed Miss Phyllis, her eyes dancing, as they left the garden of the bungalow. "If you boys are quite convinced now—"

"We're more than convinced," said Harry, blushing as he noted the deep sarcasm in his girl chum's tone.

"Yes, rather!"

"Then we've got to find Bob now," said Phyllis grimly. "Do you know where he will be?"

"I hardly know," confessed Harry. "But—but he may be on Big Side, watching the Highcliffe match—"

"Then come on; we'll try there first."

"Oh crumbs!" murmured Johnny Bull. "Now for it!"

The Cliff House girls led the way, and the juniors followed like sheep—they had to. But they were more than uneasy. The thought of an interview with Bob Cherry before the indignant girls was not a comforting thought.

But they never reached Big Side then. For as they approached Friardale Lane a Greyfriars boy dropped over the stile on to the footpath they were treading. It was Bob Cherry.

"Oh, good egg!" cried Miss Clara boyishly.

Bob saw them and stopped abruptly. Then he turned to go back.

And at that all Harry Wharton's nervousness left him. He took the plunge, careless whether Bob rebuffed him or not.

"Bob!" he shouted. "Come back, you ass!"

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

All Serene!

BOB heard the voice, and the words; he also heard the slight tremble in Wharton's tones, and he stopped dead, a queer feeling in his throat. The appeal in Wharton's words was unmistakable, and Bob was the last fellow to fail to respond to it.

He stopped, and a moment later they had surrounded him.

Miss Clara took charge of the situation in her usual masterful way.

"Now," she said firmly, "first of all, you silly, foolish boys will shake hands. Go ahead!"

Bob hesitated, bewildered, white-faced. Harry Wharton stepped forward frankly, his hand outstretched.

"I'm sorry, Bob, old man!" he said. "We've been asses! We ought to have—"

"No time for gassing!" remarked Miss Clara coolly. "Shake—get it over—do!"

Bob laughed at that—his old ringing laugh. His hand closed on Wharton's, and then on the hands of Nugent, Bull, and Hurree Singh in turn.

"Now, to business!" said Miss Clara. "We've just been talking to that gardener man who took charge of Bunter minor, Bob Cherry. He saw the accident, and he's just told us the true story."

"Oh!"

Bob Cherry jumped.

"Not that it made much difference," went on Clara coolly. "We knew the truth before. We knew you couldn't play the coward, Bob Cherry—we knew Ponsonby couldn't play the man. What we want to know now—and what we mean to know—is why you did it, Bob? Why you allowed that cad Ponsonby to make such an outrageous, infamous claim?"

Bob Cherry was dumbfounded.

"I—I—I—"

He stammered and stopped, shutting his lips tightly.

"If you won't tell us," went on Miss Trevlyn calmly, "then Phyllis will tell why."

"I guessed it this morning, Bob Cherry," said Miss Phyllis quietly. "If I am wrong, then I'm sorry. You did it for me, Bob. You kept silent to save me from expulsion. Ponsonby, the rascal, made you promise to keep silent—vowed to report me if you defended yourself on the charge of cowardice."

"Great Scott!"

Harry Wharton gasped—as did his chums. In a blinding flash they saw it all now.

Bob Cherry did not answer. He couldn't. How the quick-witted girl had managed to guess his secret he could not imagine.

"It was splendid of you, Bob!" went on Phyllis, her eyes shining like stars. "You let that cad bully you—you faced scorn and contempt—you threw away the friendship of the only fellows who would have stood by you—you allowed yourself to become an outcast rather than break your word—to save me! It was jolly good—jolly sporting of you, Bob Cherry—and I'm grateful!"

"I—I—I—"

Bob stammered again and stopped. His crimson face was quite enough to tell them that Miss Howell's guess had hit the mark. Bob saw it was useless to deny it.

"Look—look here, Miss Phyllis," he stammered. "It's all serene! I didn't mind—at least, I don't mind now I've got my chums back. Don't let it out for

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goodness' sake! It would be awful if you had to go! I can stand it—I don't mind standing it."

"You've no choice in the matter now; it's going to come out," said Miss Phyllis, laughing shakily. "You silly boy! Do you think I would let you stand it another moment when I knew. I guessed it this morning, and I went straight and owned up to Miss Primrose. I wasn't going to let Ponsonby have his revenge on you."

"Oh, my hat!"

Phyllis laughed as she saw the alarm in the juniors' faces.

"Miss Primrose was a brick!" she said. "I hadn't told her why I broke bounds—why I went to the cinema. I told her this morning, though, and it made all the difference. She forgave me. She's let me off with a frightful wiggling and heaps of lines," added Phyllis ruefully.

"Oh, good!"

Bob Cherry gave a gasp—a gasp of deep thankfulness.

"Then—then it's all right?" he mumbled. "I can—"

"You can tell the world," said Miss Phyllis, laughing. "If you don't we shall."

"Yes, rather!" exclaimed Miss Clara emphatically. "And now I fancy you'll be wanting to have a chat with Ponsonby about it."

Almost unconsciously Bob Cherry clenched his big fists, and even the gentle Marjorie Hazeldene laughed.

"We—we would like to talk to him!" breathed Harry Wharton. "If—if you don't mind—"

"Good!" grinned Miss Clara. "I think we'll ask ourselves to tea with you. We've earned it—you can't deny that! So we'll run along to your study while you find Ponsonby. And you might give the cad a good one for me!"

"Oh, Clara!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Miss Trevlyn's boyish expression had broken the tension, and it was a merry party that hurried on to Greyfriars. At the gates the girls left the juniors, and Harry Wharton led the way at a run for Big Side. Bob had seen the rascally Ponsonby watching the match, and they hoped to find him still there.

They found him easily enough amidst a crowd of Highcliffe juniors. He stared as the little group of grim-faced juniors came rushing through the crowd. Something seemed to tell him whom they wanted.

"We want you, Ponsonby!" yelled Harry Wharton.

"Put your fists up, you rotter!" hissed Bob Cherry, the first to reach the Highcliffe dandy. "Put them up!"

"Oh, by gad! What—"

Ponsonby jumped back with a gasp as Bob went at him. He lifted his hands; but Bob brushed them aside, and his fist took Ponsonby on his long nose. He crashed to the muddy ground.

There was a yell of amazement.

"Here, I say, you know!" protested Courtenay. "Don't knock our merry old hero about like that, Cherry, old top! What—"

There was a rush of fellows to the spot—Greyfriars and Highcliffe. The Famous Five could scarcely have chosen a better place for exposing the rascally schemer.

There was a chorus of exclamations as the onlookers saw who the combatants were. Ponsonby stayed where he had fallen, mopping a streaming nose. He realised that something had gone wrong with his plot, and he felt it wiser to stay where he was.

"This beats the band!" said Frank Courtenay, staring from Bob Cherry to Ponsonby. "What's the merry old trouble?"

"I'll soon tell you that," said Harry Wharton. There was no reason why the story should not be told now. He told it from the beginning—how Ponsonby had been thrashed by Bob for bullying—and of what it led to. And as he told how Ponsonby had sneaked about the Cliff House girl, there arose a yell of disgust and wrath from fellows of both schools. Ponsonby shivered as he heard it.

But there was more to come. And as they learned how the Highcliffe dandy had forced Cherry into silence—how he had behaved on the ice, and afterwards, the wrath of the listeners knew no bounds.

"It's a lie!" hissed Ponsonby, shrinking before the furious faces above him. "It's a lie, I tell you! Let him prove it!"

"You deny it, then?" snapped Harry Wharton.

"Of course I do, you cad!" panted Ponsonby, his face livid with rage and fear. "Prove it, prove it!"

"Right!" said Harry. "Then you won't object to our making the whole affair public, and bringing the gardener from Riversdale here as a witness, will you? Mr. Marshall, who lives there, also saw what happened. Will that suit you?"

"I—I—I—"

Ponsonby stammered and stopped. His face was witness enough against him. The angry crowd did not need further proof.

"Leave the howling rotter to us, Cherry!" yelled Bulstrode.

"Yes, leave him to us!"

"Smash the cad!"

"Spifficate the treacherous rotter!"

There was a roar of furious voices, and Ponsonby cowered before the storm. The Famous Five got no chance even to reach him. There was a rush of feet on the grass, and he disappeared beneath the avenging swarm. In vain he shrieked for Courtenay—for his schoolfellows to save him. Courtenay, indeed, was among the first to start the angry rush. And the last the Famous Five saw of Ponsonby that day was his muddy, dishevelled figure as he emerged suddenly from the scrum and dashed frantically away, with the wrathful crowd in full cry after him.

Ponsonby had had his revenge; but as is always the case with those who seek revenge, it had recoiled upon his own head.

It was a merry party that gathered in Study No. 1 on the Remove passage that evening for tea. Besides the three Cliff House girls and the Famous Five—reunited once again—Peter Todd was there, as were Mark Linley, and several other Removites. It was, indeed, a celebration. But it did not pass without interruption, by any means. For one after another, fellows looked in to see Bob Cherry—to express their regrets for things that were past, and to shake his hand in friendship again. And never the fellow to bear malice, Bob met their stammering utterances with a cheery:

"All serene, old chap!"

THE END.

(Don't miss "The Young Pretender", next week's grand story, boys.)

KING'S EVIDENCE!

(Continued from page 2.)

"We've got no arms," said Clarke sourly. "But they have," was Ruthven's significant reply. "Great Cæsar, you don't imagine I'm going back to the fort?" "I didn't know," Clarke answered humbly. Ruthven gave a short laugh. "Come on!" he said, and struck up the path on the track of Strickett and his gang.

THE SECOND CHAPTER. A Marvellous Shot!

THE place where the robbers camped for the night was a "dug-out" in the hillside, many miles off to the left of the main pass. The hut lay in a deep glen, approached only by a narrow path at either end. Strickett, knowing that it would be at least eighteen hours before assistance could be sent from the fort, had not even troubled to set a sentry. Yardley, lying on the floor of the rough cabin, sleepless with terror, and listening to the snoring of his gaoiers, suddenly heard a slight sound at the unglazed window above him. He looked up, and could hardly believe his eyes at sight of Ruthven's profile against the grey dawn. A finger motioned silence. A knife dropped beside him, and the head disappeared.

Rolling towards the knife, within five minutes Yardley had succeeded in cutting the ropes he was tied with. Sheer despair gave him some sort of courage. He rose silently, and crept towards the window. Not one of the sleepers stirred.

Ruthven's head appeared again. "Get me a gun," he whispered fiercely. Yardley hesitated. "I'll leave you if you don't!" hissed the trooper.

Shivering all over, Yardley turned, crept across the room in his bare feet, picked up the first rifle that came to hand, and returned with it to the window.

Ruthven took it, and beckoned to Yardley to climb out. In a few seconds he was standing safely outside. It was now early dawn, and still raining, but there was no wind.

Ruthven, who looked shockingly pale, and seemed hardly able to stand, drew Yardley out of earshot.

"Are they all in there?" he inquired, motioning to the hut.

"Yes," answered Yardley. "But where's Mr. Clarke?"

"He's had a fall and sprained his ankle," replied Ruthven shortly. "There's no time to lose. Clear as hard as you can. That's your way"—pointing. "Up the pass, then across Mussell Creek Ford. Another mile beyond will bring you to the boundary."

"I can't travel as fast as you. I must hold them off if they follow. Go! They may miss you at any moment, and be after you."

The miserable man cast one frightened glance at the hut; then darted off as fast as his shaking legs would carry him. Ruthven followed more slowly, making not for the pass itself, but for a high point of rock which commanded it.

Before he reached it the rain, which had slackened at dawn, came down more heavily than ever, so thickly as to hide entirely the dug-out from his sight.

Yardley also disappeared entirely in the heavy downpour.

A loud shout rang out from the direction of the hut. There was the sound of a slamming door, more cries, then footsteps on the hard, rocky ground.

"Sooner than I reckoned," muttered Ruthven, hurrying forward.

It was above all things essential to reach the top of the rock before the robbers came racing up the pass.

But he was terribly tired, the rocks were slippery with rain, and his left arm was almost useless. Before he could gain the point which commanded the pass, he heard the feet of the first of the robbers, far ahead of the rest, pounding along beneath him.

Instinctively, he knew that it must be Strickett.

Three more came racing up in a mob. Ruthven's voice rang out, stern and commanding:

"Hands up, or I fire!"

One man raised his gun. Instantly a bullet smashed it in his hand. He dropped the broken stock with a yell, turned, and ran. The other two hesitated an instant, then followed.

Ruthven hurried on the track of Yardley and Strickett.

Presently a roaring sound was audible in the greyness ahead. Ruthven knew it to be the voice of Mussell Creek, swollen with rain. He wondered if Yardley had managed to cross in safety.

The ground rose steadily.

Suddenly the trooper found himself on the edge of a sheer precipice. Some fifty feet below roared the creek, rising visibly every minute.

Ruthven paused, uncertain what to do next. Suddenly a terrible scream rang out at some distance to the right—that is, in the direction of the pass and ford.

As Ruthven reached the angle of rock between the river and the pass, a strange and awful sight lay before him.

To one of the wooden posts which marked the ford a man was firmly fastened by a single thick rope, which was noosed tightly round his chest and arms. It was Yardley. On the bank stood Strickett, like a jeering fiend, laughing horribly as the water rose inch by inch up his victim's body, and taunting him horribly.

Another five minutes, and nothing could save the man's life. Even if he were loose then, the torrent would sweep him away. But how to cut that rope?

Ruthven saw that he could shoot Strickett—who had not yet seen him—from where he stood, yet he could not bring himself to do so, even to save Yardley. The horse-thief had behaved wonderfully well the previous evening, and had dressed his wound with his own hands. Besides, his grudge against the miserable Yardley was a very bitter one.

Yardley's treachery was absolutely unpardonable in his eyes.

With the thought of his rifle, suddenly an idea flashed into Ruthven's head—a wild idea, and yet a possible one.

Would not a bullet cut the cord as well as a knife? Risky? Yes, of course; but there was no alternative.

Instantly the policeman was on his face on the soaking summit of the slippery cliff, cuddling his rifle-stock to his sound shoulder, he glanced along the barrel. The rifle was a .44 bore Winchester—a useful weapon, carrying a bullet heavy enough to cut the rope at one shot, if he could only hit it full.

Ruthven was a fine marksman, but he was worn out now and shaky. This, too, was a very different thing from shooting at a bullseye on a fine day. Yet a man's life was the prize, and the thought braced him.

For a few seconds he lay there, motionless, feeling his heart beat quickly. Yardley was silent now, and the only sound was the splash of the rain and the deepening roar of the river. Ruthven's finger tightened. Crack! A spit of flame flashed from the muzzle, and the whip-like report echoed up and down the cliffs.

Ruthven saw Yardley start violently—saw splinters leap from the post. The rope was half through. He fired again—missed by an inch. A third time. The rope flew apart like a snake uncoiling, and, with a wild shout, the captive was free and battling with the yellow flood.

As Ruthven sprang to his feet there was a second shout—a yell of baffled fury and vengeance—and Strickett dashed into the water and began fighting his way across the ford.

"Come back, you fool!" roared Ruthven, for at first plunge the man was off his feet. In his haste he had stepped into a hole below the ford.

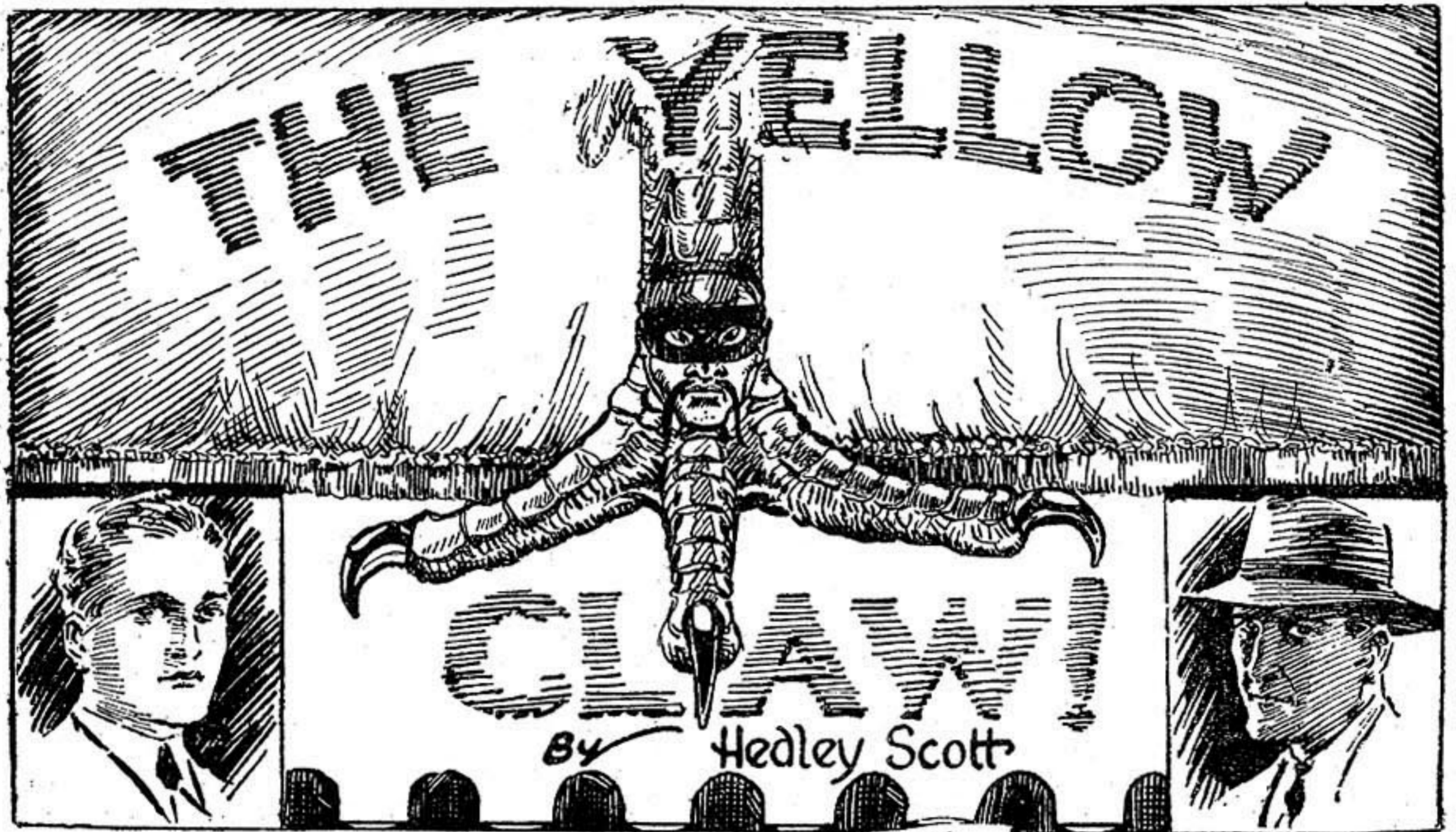
Next instant the trooper was down in the pass and rushing to the bank. Yardley had reached the far side in safety, but Strickett, struggling with all his might to save him—

(Continued on page 27.)



With sudden and awful unexpectedness the narrow path was blocked by three tall figures. "Hands up!" came a ringing voice. Ruthven's pistol and that of Clarke spoke simultaneously; but a yell, which proved that one at least of the bullets had found a billet, was followed instantly by a volley. Ruthven uttered a cry and spun round against the rocks on the inner side of the path, claspings his shoulder.

START THIS MAGNIFICENT STAGE AND DETECTIVE SERIAL TO-DAY, BOYS!



Featuring the world-famous scientific investigator, **FERRERS LOCKE**, and his clever boy assistant, **JACK DRAKE**.

Not John Huntingdon!

AS Sir Malcolm's despairing words rang out Ferrers Locke stiffened sharply, and then, catching sight of his companion's twitching features, he placed a supporting arm about him.

"Take it quietly for a bit, Sir Malcolm," he urged. "Besides, things might not be so bad as you imagine. Come, let us investigate!"

"Investigate! Investigate!" shrilled the financier, his voice almost rising to a scream. "That's all you detectives talk about—investigate! Will that give me back my boy—"

The remainder of his sentence choked in his throat, and he would have fallen but for the sleuth's supporting arm around his middle.

Several people in the front rows of the stalls had overheard the financier's remarks, and now, full of curiosity to hear more, they pressed forward. But one look from Ferrers Locke was enough—there was something in his expression that warned these curious people that they were not wanted, and they obeyed the unspoken command.

"Come, Sir Malcolm," said the sleuth at length; "let me assist you to the stage."

The big City financier nodded dully and allowed himself to be led to the pass-door that lay beyond the boxes. Through this metal door Locke and Sir Malcolm passed until they reached the stage. There a strange sight met their gaze.

On the floor-cloth, still lying in much the same position as the sleuth had last beheld him, was the stricken actor. On their knees by his side knelt two doctors clad in evening-dress, for they had been summoned from the audience immediately the tragedy had occurred. Around the two medical men were a group of

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scared and anxious artistes, all wanting to be of use.

But by the grave expressions on the faces of the medicos as they rose to their feet it was possible to read that the unfortunate actor had passed beyond all mortal aid.

"Well?" queried Mark Chaerton.

"Is—"

The taller of the two doctors shook his head gravely.

"We can do nothing," he answered simply.

IN THE LIMELIGHT.

THE YELLOW CLAW, a mysterious and powerful organisation that preys upon wealthy Englishmen.

SIR MALCOLM DUNDERFIELD, a successful City financier, whose family the Yellow Claw has threatened to wipe out.

FERRERS LOCKE, the famous detective, of Baker Street, who has been engaged by Sir Malcolm to bring the dreaded society to book.

JACK DRAKE, the sleuth's clever boy assistant.

MARK CHAERTON, a successful playwright, who has also been threatened by the Yellow Claw. He, too, seeks Ferrers Locke's services.

Ferrers Locke and Sir Malcolm Dunderfield are present at the opening performance of Mark Chaerton's latest play, in which the financier's nephew John Huntingdon, plays the "lead." Jack Drake has been given a job behind the scenes as "dresser" to Huntingdon.

At the end of scene two in the second act the "lead" suddenly emits a piercing shriek and collapses on the stage. From a rent in his forehead a trickling stream of crimson emerges, and everyone amongst the audience feels certain that the poor fellow has been shot.

The City financier clutches at the sleuth for support.

"My poor boy!" he says brokenly. "Ferrers Locke, you have failed! The Yellow Claw has—has killed my boy!"

(Now read on.)

The words were spoken quietly enough, but, even so, they reached the ears of Sir Malcolm Dunderfield. He clutched Ferrers Locke's wrist tightly, whilst the white showed at his knuckles—indication of the nervous strain to which he was being subjected.

"Are you sure, doctor?" he gasped at length. "Can nothing be done?"

Mark Chaerton started slightly as he heard the financier's voice, and then hurried forward, a peculiar expression upon his face.

"Sir Malcolm," he greeted, clasping the hand of the baronet, "pray don't distress yourself unduly. I—I forgot. The man lying dead there is—is not your nephew John; it's—"

"What!"

"Not Huntingdon!" Sir Malcolm Dunderfield and Ferrers Locke voiced the exclamations simultaneously. The former grabbed the famous playwright by the elbow and shook him fiercely.

"W-what do you mean, man?" he gasped hoarsely. "Was— Is it not John, then?"

Mark Chaerton shook his head negatively.

"It is not," he replied. "I will tell you the circumstances in a moment or so, Sir Malcolm. But rest assured your nephew is safe and sound."

Ferrers Locke had the greatest difficulty to stifle the cry of amazement that rose to his lips, and Sir Malcolm, to whom self-control at such a moment was more than could be expected, showed a decided tendency to faint for the second time in almost as many minutes.

"Thank Heaven!"

The financier emitted a sigh of relief, and then, with a slight smile upon his rather coarse features, turned to the great detective.

"Forgive me, Mr. Locke, for my outburst of a few moments ago; I was beside myself with grief and anxiety.

must confess that I am all at sea, but a great weight has been lifted from my mind. You are not making a mistake, Mr. Chaerton?" he added, all the old doubt and anxiety returning. "You are positive?"

"I have already assured you, Sir Malcolm on that score," returned the playwright a trifle testily. "But if you doubt my word, take a glance at the poor fellow on the stage there."

Sir Malcolm was not a strong man, and the mere idea of gazing at the victim of such a mysterious tragedy in view of the fact that he had imagined the unfortunate fellow to be his own nephew, turned him faint with horror. He covered his face with his hands and turned away.

But to Ferrers Locke, to whom the revelations of Mark Chaerton had come as a great surprise, the silent corpse a few feet away presented no such qualms. In the course of a long and varied career he had come to look upon tragedy in every shape or form as part and parcel of his profession.

With a muttered word, therefore, to Sir Malcolm Dunderfield and Mark Chaerton, who were now heading in the direction of the dressing-room, the sleuth reached the side of the deceased man and knelt beside him.

His keen eyes fixed themselves immediately upon the ugly wound in the man's forehead, and for some moments a perplexed expression rather disfigured the sleuth's clear-cut features.

The wound was situated high up in the victim's forehead, and the angle at which the bullet must inevitably have entered the flesh was such that it caused the world-famous detective to whistle with surprise.

He was about to turn the corpse over for further inspection when two uniformed police-officers pushed their way through the group of artistes.

"Here," exclaimed the foremost officer pompously, "don't disturb the corpse, young man! Things should be left in stato quo, you know," he added loftily.

"Really, Inspector Morrison," replied Ferrers Locke, rising to his feet, a sarcastic smile upon his face. "I am sorry if I have infringed the law."

The pompous expression on the features of the inspector faded away as if by magic as he came face to face with the celebrated detective of Baker Street whom he had addressed as "young man."

"Sorry, Mr. Locke," he apologised. "Didn't know you were here, sir."

"I'm investigating this case for Mr. Chaerton," replied the sleuth. "I think it will prove interesting. If I can be of any assistance, inspector—"

"I think I shall be able to tackle it on my own, Mr. Locke," interrupted Inspector Morrison, drawing himself up to his full height. "When I have made my examination of the deceased man we can talk then."

"Very well," returned Ferrers Locke stiffly.

The inspector and his companion knelt down beside the deceased man, whilst the private detective occupied himself by standing directly behind the spot where the actor had last been seen alive. His eyes were constantly roaming from the footlights to where the dress-circle and the gallery would lie were a direct line carried out to either of them.

"No sign of a bullet!" Inspector Morrison rose to his feet, and pulled savagely at his moustache. "Look around, Thomson, will you?"

The constable moved to do his superior officer's bidding what time

Ferrers Locke again knelt by the corpse. His keen eyes gazed long and intently at the ugly wound in the unfortunate actor's forehead, and then he turned the body over. An ejaculation of triumph escaped his thin lips as he perceived a rent in the coat between the shoulder blades, from which an ominous stream of crimson flowed.

"Bullet passed through!" he muttered half aloud.

"That's so, Mr. Locke," chimed in the inspector. "But there's no sign of it about. I understand that the deceased man was facing the audience at the moment of his death. Is that so?"

"It is," replied Ferrers Locke gravely. "I was in the second row of the stalls myself."

"Ah, well, that helps us in one way," continued the police-officer, "for we can cut out any theory that the poor fellow was shot by someone on the stage. The bullet entered the forehead, and passed through the body. Wish the deuce Thomson could find that bullet! It would be useful. Hallo! What's that, young lady?"

The inspector turned sharply as he overheard a few words of conversation taking place between two chorus ladies.

"We—we think you ought to know, inspector," said the spokesman of the two, "that Mr. Woodstock's life had been threatened only this morning."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Morrison eagerly. "And by whom, may I ask?"

"Don't know the gentleman's name," returned the young woman quickly. "But I was passing Woodstock's dressing-room this morning when I heard a heated conversation going on between Mr. Woodstock and a stranger. The fellow threatened to kill Woodstock if he gave him away. That's all I heard, for I passed on to my own dressing-room."

"But you made it your business to catch a glimpse of the chap you had overheard threatening Woodstock, did you not, miss?" queried the inspector slyly.

The chorus lady blushed a trifle and then smiled.

"Well, I did, as a matter of fact," she answered.

"Good!" ejaculated the inspector, rubbing his hands. "Would you know him again?"

"Of course. In fact, I saw him to-night!"

"What!" Inspector Morrison ceased to rub his hands, and an exultant gleam shot into his eyes. "Where, my dear young woman—where?"

"Sitting in the fifth row of the stalls at to-night's performance," returned the young lady. "I mentioned the matter to my friend here when we came off from the first act."

"This is very interesting," granted the inspector, turning to Ferrers Locke. "I don't think we shall have to look far for the assassin."

"Indeed!" exclaimed the private detective dryly. "Aren't you a little hasty—aren't you rather jumping to conclusions?"

The inspector did not answer the query. Instead, he turned to the two young chorus ladies and engaged them in conversation. He was rather puzzled to understand what his informers had been doing at the theatre in the morning, but he was made easy on that score when he was informed that it was customary for every member of a new company to inspect his or her wardrobe in the morning of the day upon which the show was due to "open."

In less than five minutes the inspector was telephoning his station a description of the man who, it had been alleged, had

threatened Woodstock's life that same morning. The description was broadcast to all the London stations, and special plain-clothes men were despatched to all parts of the Metropolis to trace "their man."

As Inspector Morrison returned from the stage-manager's office, from which he had telephoned, he encountered Mark Chaerton and Sir Malcolm Dunderfield. He engaged the former in conversation, whilst the financier beckoned to Ferrers Locke.

"What have you discovered, Mr. Locke?" asked the financier eagerly, as the celebrated sleuth drew level with him.

"It is rather early to say yet," returned the sleuth, with a smile. "Let me, in turn, ask you a question. What have you discovered? Is your nephew all right?"

"Ah!" exclaimed Sir Malcolm. "He's not so bad; wants a complete rest, I think. It appears that a few moments before the curtain was due to go up John was taken ill with a heart attack, and, thanks to the counsel of your young assistant, he was not permitted to perform. Rather than disappoint a keen public on such an important occasion as a first night," continued Sir Malcolm, "the manager of the company insisted that the understudy—Woodstock—should fill the gap, as it were, and that the public should be kept in ignorance of the last-minute alteration until the curtain had been rung down. As you know, the public is apt to be prejudiced when it learns that a 'star' man like John has been substituted by his understudy—"

"I thought something like that had happened," remarked Ferrers Locke. "But tell me, Sir Malcolm, do you suspect the work of the Yellow Claw in this regrettable affair?"

"That I can't answer truthfully," replied the financier. "For Mr. Chaerton is rather inclined to the belief that the shot was meant for John, and that it was dispatched by an emissary of the Yellow Claw Society. I don't know whether I quite believe in that theory myself."

"It's certainly a poser," said Locke thoughtfully. "But here comes Inspector Morrison. He looks as if he's discovered something."

The inspector and Mark Chaerton approached the sleuth and his companion. The former treated Ferrers Locke to a knowing wink.

"You didn't let on that Mr. Chaerton had been threatened by the Yellow Claw, Mr. Locke!" said the officer rather peevishly.

"What of it?" said the private detective. "Does that have any bearing on the present case?"

"I should just think so!" grunted the inspector. "It's evidently the work of this confounded society!"

"For the second time, inspector," said Locke quietly, "let me remind you that you are jumping to conclusions."

"Call them theories," replied the officer. "In any case, I shall learn more when this fellow we are hunting for now is found."

"Are you, then, prepared to nurse a theory that this chap who threatened Woodstock is a member of the Yellow Claw, and that he fired the fatal shot?"

"A theory on those lines will bring me near the truth," grunted the inspector haughtily. "If I get my man—well, it won't matter much how I went to work to get him, will it?"

"Perhaps not," smiled Ferrers Locke. "Still, if you will take a word of advice from an old hand, you would not pay too much attention to the man who was present in the stalls to-night—when you catch him—for I assure you, Morrison,

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that it was not he who fired the fatal shot!"

"I'm not asking for any advice, Mr. Locke," returned the officer stiffly. "Thomson"—he turned to his subordinate—"superintend the removal of the corpse to the mortuary at once."

"Very good, sir!"

The constable, pleased to escape from the uncongenial task of looking for a bullet that seemed to have disappeared from the face of the earth, saluted smartly and withdrew.

And ten minutes later Inspector Morrison took his departure preparatory to making his report at official headquarters.

A Narrow Escape!

ON the following morning Inspector Pycroft, of Scotland Yard, presented himself at Ferrers Locke's chambers before the sleuth had finished his breakfast.

"What do you think, Mr. Locke?" he blurted out as soon as the door had closed behind his back.

"I think it's a very fine morning," replied the sleuth thoughtfully.

"Oh, don't rot!" grunted the C.I.D. man, who was evidently labouring under some excitement. "The Chief is on the war-path with a vengeance."

"Really?" murmured Ferrers Locke, pouring himself out a cup of coffee. "Will you try a cup of coffee, Pycroft?"

The man from Scotland Yard ground his teeth together, and his heavy features assumed a purple hue.

"Will you be serious, Mr. Locke?" he exclaimed irritably. "This is no joking matter!"

"Pycroft," smiled Ferrers Locke, "I am never serious until I have had my breakfast. It seems to lay a good foundation for the troubles of the day. Do have a cup of coffee—I can thoroughly recommend it."

Inspector Pycroft said something very uncomplimentary under his breath and deigned to drink a cup of coffee. That he was fretting with impatience the while he sipped the beverage Ferrers Locke, who was enjoying himself, could see.

"And now, Pycroft," said the sleuth at length, pushing back his plate and filling his favourite briar, "let's hear what it is that's brought you to my place at such an early hour."

"The body at the mortuary—" commenced the C.I.D. man.

Ferrers Locke's eyebrows elevated a trifle.

"Are you referring to the case that Inspector Morrison has in hand?" he queried.

"Of course!" grunted Pycroft. "As I was saying, the body up at the mortuary was again examined this morning, and, to the astonishment of everyone present, the face of the poor fellow Woodstock now bears that hideous symbol of the Yellow Claw."

"You surprise me!" muttered Ferrers Locke, pausing in the act of lighting his briar. "There was no sign of the Yellow Claw symbol on the unfortunate fellow's face yesterday."

"That's what Inspector Morrison says!" exclaimed Pycroft. "He's crowing it at headquarters that he told you all along that the Yellow Claw was mixed up in this theatre shooting affair."

"He jumped to some such conclusion, I'll admit," said Locke quietly. "But I should like to visit the mortuary and see the symbol for myself before I follow his example. But tell me, Pycroft, how on earth did anyone obtain admittance to the mortuary to fix that hideous transfer?"

"Beats me!" grunted the C.I.D. man.

scratching his head. "Beats everyone. The place was locked and guarded overnight in the usual way. The Chief is storming the office down. This mysterious Yellow Claw gang is getting on his nerves—"

"Did anyone accompany the body to the mortuary last night?" interrupted the sleuth.

"Yes, Mr. Locke," returned Pycroft. "Let me see, Thomson was in charge; Mr. Chaerton and a member of the company journeyed down to the mortuary formally to identify the body."

"I see. Now, let's switch on to another point," said Ferrers Locke. "Can you tell me if the fellow who threatened Woodstock's life yesterday morning has yet been arrested?"

"He has not."

"Pity!" reflected Locke, with a smile. "Inspector Morrison is very anxious to get his hands on him. But come, let us run down to the mortuary."

The sleuth reached for his hat and coat, and, leaving a message with Sing-Sing for his young assistant, Jack Drake, he ordered his car. In a very few moments the Hawk was heading for the mortuary in Horseferry Road.

Inspector Morrison was the first person to greet the private detective upon his arrival.

"What about the Yellow Claw now, Mr. Locke?"

Ferrers Locke paid no heed to the remark. He entered the room which sheltered the grim remains of Anthony Woodstock and stood gazing down at the peculiar yellow painted symbol of a claw that stood out in bold relief on the face of the deceased man. Then, peering closer, an examination of astonishment escaped his lips.

"What's wrong?" queried Pycroft; whilst his colleague Morrison frowned darkly.

"This is no symbol of the Yellow Claw!" said Ferrers Locke crisply. "This is a fake!"

"What!" ejaculated Morrison and Pycroft, in unison.

"A fake—and a very poor fake at that!" said Ferrers Locke. "Look closely at the thing, Pycroft. You, at least, have seen the work of the Yellow Claw before. Is there nothing different here from the last painted symbol you gazed at?"

The C.I.D. man bent lower over the features of the deceased man and searched them eagerly.

"You're right, Mr. Locke," he said, at length. "That painted sign is nothing like the other signs that have been used by the Claw society in the past. There is an extra claw, for one thing, and the scales are totally different. Looks to me like an ordinary chicken's claw."

"Exactly," said Locke grimly. "And that's what the reproduction is—a chicken's claw. Much more harmless than a golden eagle's claw, eh, Morrison?"

The inspector who had charge of the theatre shooting affair scratched his head in perplexity. First he glanced at the painted figure on the deceased man's face, then he looked at Ferrers Locke and thence to Inspector Pycroft.

"Well, I'm blowed!" he exclaimed, at length. "You're right, Mr. Locke, now I come to look at the blessed thing closely. I've seen some reproduced specimens of the Yellow Claw's favourite symbol up at the Yard—and this thing is a rotten fake, sure enough! Beats me, though, how it got here!" he added. "Someone will get hauled over the coals for this!"

Ferrers Locke nodded.

"There's one thing, though," he remarked. "The motive is very plain. The assassin, knowing the mystery surrounding the work of the Yellow Claw society, thought it a good plan to shift his crime on to their shoulders by making use of their grim sign. As the scoundrel, no doubt, had only read a newspaper description of the peculiar sign, he left it to his imagination to fill in the gaps—"

"And his imagination supplied a chicken's foot!" chuckled Pycroft.

"Exactly. But come, Pycroft," continued Ferrers Locke. "I have an important experiment to show you that will narrow down the chase, I feel sure. Morrison, if you care to accompany me to the Thespian Hall, you may see something that will help you." J

With an alacrity that was surprising in a person so clever and important as Gerald Morrison, of the C.I.D., the inspector avowed his willingness to accompany Ferrers Locke. Together the three detectives entered the Hawk, and were rapidly carried to the Thespian Hall. They were met by the business manager and Mark Chaerton, the playwright, in the vestibule of the theatre.

After the party had exchanged greetings, Ferrers Locke addressed Mark Chaerton.

"Will you prevail upon your business manager to allow me the use of the stage for a few moments?" he asked. "I wish to try out an experiment that will, I hope, lead us to the murderer of poor Woodstock."

"Most certainly!" answered Mark Chaerton. "I've been fearfully worried over the regrettable affair all night—hardly slept a wink, you know!"

For a man nearing the age of sixty, at which time of life one is apt to show the bad effects of a sleepless night in one's countenance, Mark Chaerton looked extremely fit and well.

Chatting away in light strain, he moved towards the pass-door of the theatre, and with Ferrers Locke and the two Scotland Yard men in tow, walked on to the stage.

"Another favour I would like to ask is the setting of the scene in which Woodstock met his tragic end. If possible, I would like nothing omitted—everything in its accustomed place, you understand?"

"Most certainly!" reiterated Chaerton, unable to conceal the surprise he felt, however. "I will instruct the stage-hands to get busy. Will you want the curtain up?"

"That is one of the most important items in my experiment," rejoined Ferrers Locke. "Up, if you please, Mr. Chaerton!"

The playwright moved amongst the stage-hands and gave them their instructions, what time the famous private detective buttonholed the "property" man.

"I want you to do me a favour," he said, with a smile. "I have here the exact height of poor Woodstock. Will you make me up a dummy figure to these proportions, and follow the points in this rough diagram? The height must be exact with the measurements written down here, you follow?"

"Yes, Mr. Locke," replied the property-man, in astonishment. "I'll soon rig you up a dummy."

He walked away to his den and was soon busy in the task the famous sleuth had set him. Inspectors Pycroft and Morrison stared after his retreating figure in astonishment.

"What's the game, Mr. Locke?" demanded Pycroft, at length. "I'm all in the dark!"

cloth behind him!" exclaimed Pyecroft eagerly.

"Exactly," smiled Ferrers Locke. "The angle from which the shot was fired and the passage of the bullet was such that it was not deflected in any way. Will you, therefore, gentlemen, kindly examine the foot of the back-cloth—taking half the width of the stage, the left half. I rather fancy that you will find—that is, if the cloth is hanging in exactly the same position as it was last night—a bullet-hole within two inches at most from the flooring of the stage. When you have found the bullet-hole in the cloth, you will find the actual bullet—unless it has been extracted already—embedded in the flooring of the stage not two or three inches from it."

number would have been up with a vengeance. But tell me, Mr. Chaerton, is it usual for fifty-six pound weights to be on the bridge that spans the flies—for that's where that one came from?"

"That's so gov'nor!" exclaimed the scene-shifter, who had warned the great detective. "I saw it dropping!"

"Good for you!" smiled Locke.

The Experiment!

MARK CHAERTON turned upon the chief machinist for an explanation, but that worthy was as ignorant as to how the weight came to be on the bridge above, or how it happened to drop, as the rest of the people present.



"Look out, sir!" yelled a stage hand. "Jump for it!" Ferrers Locke made a frantic leap to his right, almost falling into the arms of the stage hand. And as he did so a fifty-six pound weight struck the flooring of the stage with a sickening crash. (See this page.)

"You won't be in a moment or so," returned Locke, with a grim chuckle.

He walked down the stage as he spoke and stood directly over the crimson stair that marked the spot where Woodstock, on the previous night, had fallen. Mark Chaerton and the two C.I.D. men followed him with interest, whilst one or two stage-hands paused in their labours to take stock of the man who was reckoned to be England's smartest private detective.

The curtain had been raised, and from his point of vantage Ferrers Locke could see out into every part of the theatre. For one fleeting second his eyes rested on the dress circle before him. Then, with a grunt, he elevated his eyes until they came on a level with the gallery.

"It's the gallery that concerns us most," he said to his companions. "When the stage is fully set, Mr. Chaerton, I would like you to order everyone into the wings. My experiment will consist of firing a number of shots from the gallery—and those shots will be dangerous! Before I commence operations from the gallery, I want you to take a good look at the back-cloth. I am now standing in much the same position as did poor Woodstock last night. The bullet that laid him low entered his forehead and passed straight through his neck. It finally emerged from between his shoulder-blades—"

"And must have pierced the back-

Full of curiosity, Chaerton and the two C.I.D. men hastened forward to do the sleuth's bidding. Ferrers Locke remained where he was, practically in the same position as Woodstock had been on the previous night. Suddenly, from the wings, there came a frenzied shout:

"Look out, sir! Jump for it!"

A scene-shifter came rushing on to the stage, one hand pointing in the direction above Ferrers Locke's head.

"Move, sir!" he exclaimed. "Quick! For your life!"

The celebrated detective had no time to look round. Instinctively, he knew that he was in danger of some sort, and with the knowledge came action. He made a frantic leap to his right, almost falling into the arms of the scene-shifter who had rushed forward. And as he did so there echoed out behind him a terrific crash. A fifty-six-pound weight had struck the flooring of the stage and was half embedded in it. And it had struck that spot upon which Ferrers Locke a moment before had been standing.

Full of concern, Mark Chaerton, the two Scotland Yard men, and half a dozen stage-hands rushed forward.

"Are you hurt?" asked Chaerton quickly.

"Thank heaven—and my good friend here who warned me, no!" replied Ferrers Locke fervently. "Had that little present hit me I'm afraid my

"The last chap I saw up there was Costello," he grumbled. "But he's such a careless cuss that I can't be responsible for everything he does."

"Where is Costello now?" inquired Mark Chaerton sharply.

Every one of the stage hands looked at each other, but there was no sign of the man named Costello.

"Very well," muttered Ferrers Locke. "I think we had better continue our investigations. I'll take good care that I'm in the way of no more 'fly'-weights."

Mark Chaerton instructed the chief machinist to find Costello, and then he resumed his quest of the bullet hole in the backcloth. But it was Inspector Pyecroft who found it first. He stood upright and gave a whoop of triumph.

"I've got it, Mr. Locke!" he exclaimed. "And the bullet is still embedded in the floor a few inches away, as you said."

Mark Chaerton, Ferrers Locke, and Inspector Morrison joined Pyecroft, who had now resumed his position on his hands and knees again. Before the C.I.D. man was a small circular puncture in the backcloth, and behind the cloth itself was a piece of lead sunk well into the floorboard.

"Bravo!" exclaimed Ferrers Locke, slapping Pyecroft on the back. "We'll

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Radcliffe Wilson.

With a gasp of terror the man stood staring down at the strange object that had been thrown at his feet, shivering as though with the ague.
(See page 26.)

dig out that piece of lead—it will be useful.”

So saying, he extracted his clasp knife, and in a very few moments had loosened the piece of lead sufficiently to allow of its being taken out. Undoubtedly it was a spent bullet. Wrapping it carefully in a piece of chamois leather Ferrers Locke replaced it in his pocket.

“Now, gentlemen, for the remainder of the experiment,” he remarked. “Kindly imagine a line from where you found that bullet that will lead directly to where I am now standing, or where Woodstock was standing last night when the bullet struck him. Where, if you continue the line and allow it to rise at its natural angle, does it terminate?”

“I should say somewhere in the region of the centre gangway of the gallery,” said Pycroft thoughtfully.

“Exactly,” agreed Locke. “And it is from one or two points there that I intend to fire a few shots. The property man has kindly arranged me a dummy figure which is exactly the same height as the deceased man. I will place it in exactly the same position as I last saw Woodcock alive—so.”

He took an ordinary dummy figure propped up by a wooden stand at the back and placed it in position. The face of the dummy was like a target in some respects, for it contained a big daub of ink high up on the forehead that resembled a bullseye.

“I follow the idea,” interrupted Pycroft. “You are endeavouring to trace the exact direction from where the fatal bullet was fired. By means of this dummy figure you hope to find your bullet settle in pretty well the same spot as where we found the bullet just now.”

“Quite so. The daub of ink on the paper face represents the spot where the shot entered Woodstock’s forehead. You will kindly make a distinguishing mark around the bullet hole in the backcloth before we start, so that I make no

mistake. I will fire single shots, and after each report you will find where the bullet comes to rest and mark the spot accordingly—number one for the first bullet, number two for the second, and so on. “Fraid, Mr. Chaerton,” added the sleuth, “I shall make two or three holes in your backcloth—”

“Oh, don’t worry about that!” smiled the playwright. “They can soon be patched up.”

With an ease that many an athlete would have envied, Ferrers Locke jumped lightly from the footlights into the stalls below. The next the party saw of him was in the gallery in the region of the centre gangway, revolver in hand.

“By means of geometry, taking into account the angle at which the bullet entered and left the body of the deceased man,” called out Ferrers Locke, “I have worked out that the shot must have been fired from someone standing up in the gallery. I will fire my first shot from the rail at the back of the seats. If you fellows hop into the stage box you will be able to follow my experiment without danger to your skins.”

Mark Chaerton ordered off the stage the mechanics and scene-shifters, and after having closed the doors, he made a move in the direction of the stage box. The two C.I.D. men followed him inside.

“Ready?” called out the private detective from the gallery. “Here goes!”

Crack!
A bullet hissed through the air, and the watchers in the stage box saw that it struck the bullseye fair and square. At a sign from Ferrers Locke they clambered out from the box and hurried on to the stage. Then examining the dummy figure to see where the bullet had entered and passed through the clothing, they endeavoured to trace it.

It was Mark Chaerton who found it. “It hasn’t touched the backcloth!” he yelled. “The bullet’s entered the flooring of the stage a foot in front of the cloth.”

“As I expected!” yelled back Ferrers Locke. “I am too far back. I will now try a shot from this limelight.”

He advanced down the centre gangway until he came to the “spot lime” lamp situated at the edge of the gallery.

“This, gentlemen, will prove my theory, I feel sure,” he called out. “Get back to the box.”

The trio below made tracks for the box, and anxiously awaited the sleuth’s second shot. It was a fair trial of skill

with the revolver, for the distance between the gallery and the dummy was out of revolver range, but Ferrers Locke made no mistake. Not for nothing was he the holder of a fine collection of cups and medals as a marksman.

Crack!

A second bullet was despatched on its errand, and once again the trio in the box jumped to their feet and made tracks for the stage. Again the process of discovering where the bullet had left the dummy figure was gone through, and again the “scorers” moved forward towards the backcloth. This time three shouts of triumph reached Ferrers Locke up in the gallery. For within an inch of where the original fatal bullet had pierced the backcloth, and then entered the flooring of the stage, was another fresh bullet hole.

“Hurrah!” yelled Pycroft excitedly. “Locke, old man, you’ve got it!”

“The shot was fired from the spot lime!” exclaimed Mark Chaerton, starting slightly.

“And who is the man working the spot lime?” demanded Inspector Morrison eagerly.

“Costello!” replied Chaerton. “I’m beginning to see daylight now. That fifty-six pound weight never dropped by accident, I’ll wager—Costello had got the wind-up with the way Ferrers Locke was handling the case, and he feared detection. It was a deliberate case of attempted murder.”

“Good heaven!” gasped Pycroft. “This chap Costello is not safe outside a cell. We must round him up.”

“We must!” agreed Mark Chaerton with a fervour that rather surprised his two companions.

By this time Ferrers Locke had rejoined his colleagues on the stage, and they poured their congratulations on him.

“Wonderful!” exclaimed Chaerton.

“A very fine piece of deduction—very!”

“Marvellous!” ejaculated Morrison with a warmth that made up for all his previous churlishness. “And you’ve saved me, Mr. Locke, from arresting the wrong man.”

“Yes, I shouldn’t bother to follow up the clue of the man who sat in the stalls last night, and who, it was alleged, had threatened Woodstock early in the morning. If the words spoken of were true they might merely have been the outcome of a heated quarrel, and that’s all,” said Ferrers Locke.

“But what started you on this experiment business?” asked Morrison.

“Why, the peculiar wound high up in Woodstock’s forehead told me that the shot was fired from somewhere near the roof of the theatre,” said the private detective. “You yourself helped me to complete my theory, inspector.”

“Me!” exclaimed Morrison, with a complete disregard of grammar. “How?”

“By causing your man Thomson to hunt for the bullet—the bullet which he did not find. Remember, the backcloth was down at the time he hunted round for it, and I’ll wager he didn’t think of looking there for it.”

“Well, I’m blown!” grunted Morrison. “But I’m wasting time—I must get the bracelets on this man Costello. You really don’t think he is a member of the Yellow Claw, do you, Mr. Locke?” he added.

“Most certainly I do not!” replied the sleuth. “He sought to throw the police off his track by seeking refuge behind the powerful society that is terrorising London. I take it, Mr. Chaerton, that

this man Costello accompanied you to the mortuary last night to identify the body of the murdered man?"

"He did!" replied Chaerton. "No one else had the nerve to carry out the task, and as Costello had worked in our other companies for some time he knew Woodstock pretty well, so I took him along with me."

"And it must have been then that he branded his victim with what he fancied was the symbol of the Yellow Claw," returned Ferrers Locke.

"Maybe," said Chaerton. "For there was ample opportunity of carrying out such a scheme. But I am relieved, thanks to you, Mr. Locke, to know that the terrible affair of last night was not the work of the Yellow Claw. Perhaps the accursed society will let me alone."

"I sincerely hope so," muttered the sleuth, "or it will go hardly with them! I'm as keen as mustard to lay their chief by the heels, for I am certain that one man and one man only directs their campaign of action, and that man is a master of his trade. Get him and the society will fade into obscurity in double-quick time."

Late that evening a furtive figure, muffled in a greatcoat, and with a felt hat pulled well down over the face, shuffled along a dirty, narrow street in the region of Limehouse Causeway. A sickly light from a neighbouring street-lamp revealed a face that was stricken with fear. The eyes were wide open in an unnatural stare, the mouth twitched spasmodically.

A few yards ahead appeared the blue uniform of a constable, and upon catching sight of the man in blue the muffled figure in the greatcoat broke into a run and dived down another side turning.

He had not traversed very many yards when he heard the soft patter of footsteps behind him. He halted and shivered as though with the ague. His eyes tried to pierce the gloom, to pick out the form of the person following him, but before he achieved his object there came from three other directions the same creepy pattering of feet. Then, just as his hand sought his hip-pocket for a weapon, something whizzed through the air and landed at his feet.

With a gasp of terror, the man stood staring down at the object, shivering as though with the ague. Forced on by something more than curiosity he stooped and picked the object up. A cry of pain escaped his lips as his hand closed over it, for it seemed that several needle-points had bitten into his flesh. Slowly his hand opened to reveal an eagle's claw, bright with the lustre of a coat of gold paint.

For a few seconds the man stood staring at the claw, whilst the shooting pains in his hand were now beginning to travel up the arm—were seizing hold of him at his heart. And as his senses began to dim the sounds of the pattering feet grew nearer.

Now he could see four evil-looking Chinamen approaching him, their yellow faces distorted in cruel grins. He tried to shriek, but the words seemed to jam in his throat; he tried to stand, but a deadly poison was eating its way into his system and his muscles were beginning to lose their power. He sank lower and lower, inch by inch. And in equal measure the four hideous Chinamen advanced. Then, with a shudder that shook his whole frame, the man in the greatcoat sprawled on the dirty pavement—a lifeless heap.

(Don't miss next Monday's wonderful instalment of this ripping serial, boys.)

YOUR EDITOR'S CHAT.

"THE YOUNG PRETENDER."

By Frank Richards.

NEXT week's yarn of Greyfriars will come as a surprise. It shows William George Bunter actually overdoing it. We know his caution. All Greyfriars understands that the porpoise is a sparing, careful sort of trencherman. But there are inglorious exceptions when prudence sleeps, and rash actions prevail.

"THE YELLOW CLAW!"

By Hedley Scott.

There are many brisk developments in next week's stirring instalment. Jack Drake falls into the clutches of the dreaded organisation of crime. From that point the thrilling yarn leaps into an entirely new plane of interest. There is no mere theatrical coup, but a fresh character suddenly appears, and the author weaves into his fabric of well sustained mystery a supremely attractive feminine interest. It is all thoroughly in keeping, and the totally unexpected advent of a girl character who is as brave as she is clever in her intervention, will be welcomed!

"THE NEW RECRUIT."

That is the title of the new story about the Mounted Police. It is a well-put-together account of the exploits of a trooper who has to stand and face danger in the back of beyond. We hear of an illicit spirit distiller who is well within the meshes of the law, and of a certain surprising "change over" for the delinquent, which bodes good for this future.

KING'S EVIDENCE!

(Continued from page 21.)

self, was clinging to a slippery rock a few yards below the ford.

Somehow or other—he never knew how—Ruthven reached him, and in the very nick of time stretched the rifle-stock to him. Strickett seized it, and was pulled ashore.

But the effort reopened Ruthven's wound. Black dots danced before his eyes, and he knew no more.

When Ruthven came to he was lying in a hollow, sheltered from the rain. Strickett's coat was under his head, and the horse-thief himself was sitting beside him, with a queer, whimsical expression on his rather saturnine face.

"Reckon I'll have to give you best this time, mister," he remarked. "Yet it's an all-fired pity thet skunk got away."

"I gave my word to save him," replied Ruthven gravely.

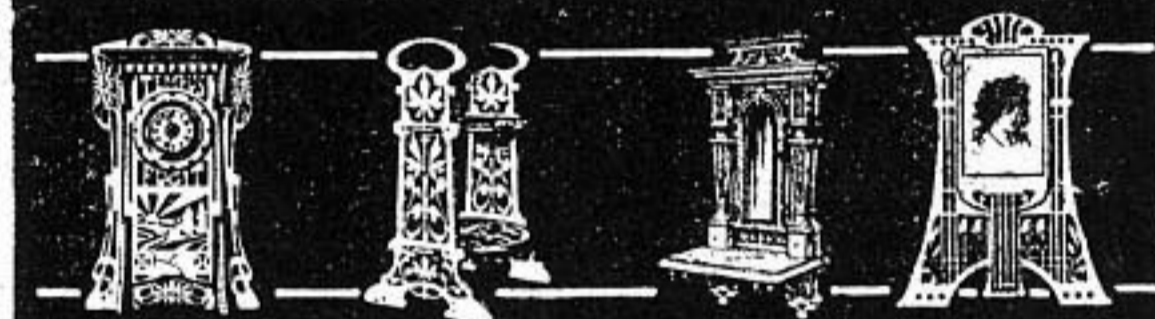
"Yew've kept it right well, young man. And naow, ez I don't want to give yew the trouble ov arresting me jest at present, I'll say adoo! Yew jest lay here a bit, and I'll send help when I gits the chanst. So long!"

In another moment he was lost to sight in the still falling rain.

But he kept his promise. A few hours later two men appeared, leading Ruthven's own horse, and by night he was back in a lumberman's camp, where he had left Clarke after his accident of the night before.

As for Strickett, he was never again seen in the district. But Ruthven has heard since that he is over in the States, making an honest living as a cowboy in Montana.

(Another ripping Mounted Police story next Monday, boys, entitled "The New Recruit!" Don't miss it!)

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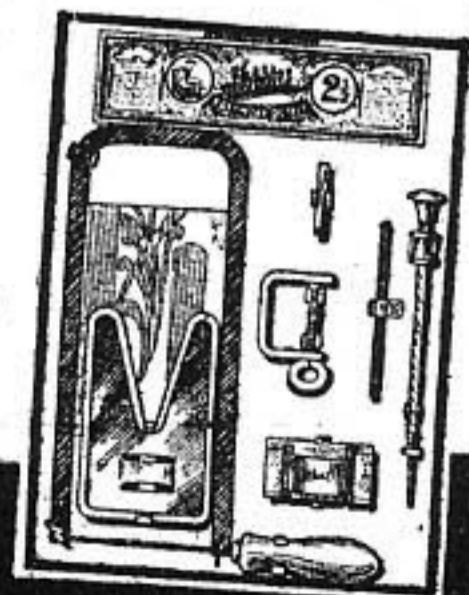
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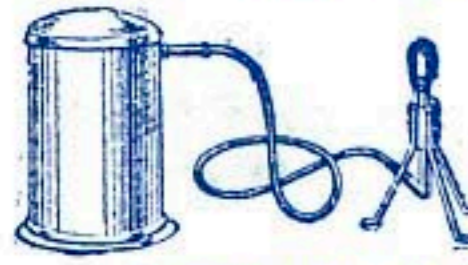


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