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The Prisoner of the Priory.

**A Splendid
Long, Complete Tale of
Harry Wharton & Co.**

— BY —

FRANK RICHARDS.

THE FIRST CHAPTER. Caught in the Act.

HARRY WHARTON, of the Remove Form at Greyfriars, stopped suddenly.

Wharton was coming round the clump of elms near the gate of the Head's garden, when he caught sight of Bunter, of the Remove. Billy Bunter was standing under the elms, and inserting his fat thumb into an envelope, with the evident intention of taking the letter out and reading it. And it happened that as Wharton came up, he caught the name that was written upon the envelope—G. Wingate.

Wharton's brows darkened.

"You cad!" he exclaimed.

Bunter gave a jump.

He was the shortest-sighted junior in the school, and the big spectacles he wore did not seem to help him much. He did not see Wharton till the latter spoke, and then the fat junior hastily concealed the letter in his fat hand, and turned upon the captain of the Remove with an indignant blink.

"I—I— You startled me!" he exclaimed.

"I wish you wouldn't creep up and yell at a fellow like that, Wharton."

"You cad!"

"Oh, really!"

"Give me that letter."

"This—er—I-I—letter?" stammered Bunter.

Wharton held out his hand for it.

"Yes," he said. "I'll take it to Wingate."

"Wingate!"

"Yes. Give it to me."

"B-b-b-but why should you take my letter to Wingate?" asked Bunter. "I want to read it myself, you know. Besides, I expect that it contains a postal-order—I'm expecting a postal-order from a titled friend of mine. You see—"

Wharton gave him a scornful look.

"Don't tell lies, Billy. I saw the name written on the envelope—that letter did not come by post at all; it was given you to deliver to Wingate by hand."

"I—I—"

"And instead of delivering it, you were going to open it and read it!" said Harry Wharton contemptuously.

"You—you see—"

"Give me the letter."

"I'm jolly well not going to," said Bunter. "Miss Rosie gave it to me to give to Wingate, and I'm going to take it to him."

"You said just now that it was a letter of your own."



"Ahem! Well, that was only a—a figure of speech."
 "Give me the letter."
 "I'm answerable for it, you see. Miss Rosie wouldn't like me to hand it to you to deliver. I expect it's very important. Look here, Wharton," said Bunter, in a confidential tone, "I expect it's a spoony letter, you know, and it would be awfully funny to read it. I can seal it up again in a plain envelope, and Wingate will never know it's been opened at all. Let's read it."
 Wharton gave the Owl of the Remove a glance of immeasurable scorn. But it was quite lost upon Billy Bunter. He was grinning in his fat, self-satisfied way. He seemed to be quite unconscious of the baseness of his proposal.
 "You miserable cad!" said Harry Wharton. "How did you get hold of that letter? Did you steal it, in the first place?"
 "Oh, really, Wharton—"
 "How did you get it?" Wharton exclaimed angrily.
 "I was passing the Head's gate, and Miss Rosie called to me, and gave me the letter over the gate," said Bunter sulkily. "She asked me to take it to Wingate. She had her hat and coat on for going out, so I suppose it's an appointment. I think—"
 "And you were going to read Miss Locke's letter, you fat worm!"
 "Well, you see—"
 "Give me the letter!"
 "I won't!"
 Wharton advanced upon the fat junior, and Billy Bunter backed away in alarm.
 "I—I say, you know!" he exclaimed. "You see—"
 "Will you hand me that letter?"
 Bunter crammed the letter into his pocket.
 "I—I—you see—yow! Oh! Ah!"
 Bunter roared as Wharton's grasp descended upon him.
 Wharton whirled him off his feet with one swing of his powerful arms, and sat him down with a bump upon the ground.
 "Now, give me the letter, or I'll take it!" he shouted.
 "Ow!"
 "Will you do as I tell you?"
 "Yow!"
 "Bunter—"
 "Yaroor! I'm hurt."
 Wharton bent over him with an angry face. Bunter roared.
 "Ow! Yow! Help! Murder! I say, you fellows!"
 Two or three juniors were running up round the elms.
 "Hallo, hallo, hallo!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "What's the matter?"
 "Ow! Help!"
 "Bunter ill again?" asked Frank Nugent. "Poor chap! Let's bump him till he recovers."
 "Good wheeze!" exclaimed John Bull.
 "Ow! Yow!"
 "The cad has a letter Miss Locke gave him to take to Wingate," Wharton explained savagely. "He was opening it to read it when I saw him. I'm going to take it from him and give it to Wingate."
 "Good."
 "Hand out the letter, Bunter."
 "Shell out!"
 "Yow!"
 "Do you hear, you fat bounder?"
 "Groo!"
 "Shake it out of his pocket," said Nugent. "Lend a hand."
 "Good. All together."
 "Yow! Ow! Yaroor!"
 Many hands grasped Billy Bunter. In spite of his weight, which was very considerable, he was swung off the ground, and bumped down upon it again. The fat junior let a terrific yell escape him.
 "Yaroor!"
 "Give him another."
 "Yow! You can have the letter! Yah!"
 Bunter clutched the letter from his pocket, and hurled it to Wharton. The captain of the Remove picked it up. There was a great gash in the envelope where Billy Bunter had inserted his thumb, but the envelope had not been opened.
 "Let the cad go now!" he said.
 "Yow!"
 "Oh, give him another bump!" said Nugent. "Give him one for his mother!"
 "Ha, ha, ha!"
 "Yaroor! Ow!"
 "And another for his grandmother!"
 "Ha, ha, ha!"
 "Help!"
 "And another for his uncle!"
 Wharton laughed as he walked away with the letter in his hand, leaving the Owl of the Remove to the tender mercies of his Form-fellows. They were not likely to have much

mercy upon a fellow who had been caught in the act of reading another fellow's letter. Harry Wharton looked round for Wingate, but did not see him in the Close. It was growing dusk now, and the fellows were coming in from the playing fields.

"Seen Wingate?" Wharton asked, as he met Coker of the Fifth.

"Yes; he's gone in."

"Thanks."

And Harry Wharton made his way to Wingate's study, and knocked at the door.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Wingate Is Angry!

"COME in!" called out Wingate cheerily.

Harry Wharton entered the study. Wingate, of the Sixth, was in his cricketer flannels, and his face was ruddy and healthy. A cricket bat lay upon the table. The captain of Greyfriars had just come in from practice.

He gave Wharton a cheery nod.

"Well, what is it?" he asked. "Something about the cricket?"

Wharton shook his head.

"Not this time," he said. "A letter for you, that's all."

"Oh, good!"

Wingate took the letter. He glanced at it, and his brow darkened ominously. He saw at once, of course, the gash made by Bunter's fat thumb.

"What does this mean, Wharton? This is Miss Rosie's handwriting. Did she give you the letter?"

"She gave it to a fellow to bring to you."

"Someone has been trying to open it."

"I took it away from him for that reason, and brought it to you myself. I was just in time to stop him; you can see that the envelope has not been opened."

"Thank you, Wharton. I will not ask who the cad was. I suppose you don't want to tell me; but I'm greatly obliged to you for bringing me the letter. Wait a minute. I may want you to take an answer back."

"Certainly."

Wharton waited. Wingate opened the letter and read it, a puzzled look deepening upon his sunburnt face.

Wharton saw it, and wondered. He was wondering a little, too, why Miss Rosie had taken the trouble to write to Wingate. The Head's elder daughter was Wingate's great chum. It was not so very long since Dr. Locke's daughter had been found, after being lost to him for many years, following the career of a circus-rider, believing herself to be the daughter of Felix Lasalle, the French adventurer, who had kidnapped her. The truth had come out, mainly through Wingate himself, and the Head's daughter was now at Greyfriars, and, naturally enough, she was very often with Wingate. But as they met every day, the need for a letter was not clear.

And Wingate's expression was plain enough indication of the fact that the letter from Miss Rosie Locke was a surprise to him.

He looked puzzled at first, perplexed and wondering; and then he knitted his brows, and laid the letter upon the table.

The next moment, to Wharton's surprise, Wingate gripped him by the shoulder, his eyes glowing with anger.

"What do you mean by this?" he exclaimed.

Wharton stared at him in blank surprise.

"By—by what?" he gasped.

"By bringing me this letter!" exclaimed Wingate. "I suppose it is a jape. Is that it, you young rascal?"

"A—a jape?"

"Yes. This letter was not written by Miss Locke."

"Not written by Miss Locke!" exclaimed Wharton, in amazement. "My hat! Does that mean that Bunter was pulling my leg all the time? The young bounder!"

Wingate frowned darkly.

"If this is a joke of Bunter's, or of yours, it will have serious consequences for the joker!" he exclaimed. "Miss Locke's name cannot be used in your japes, as you will find out!"

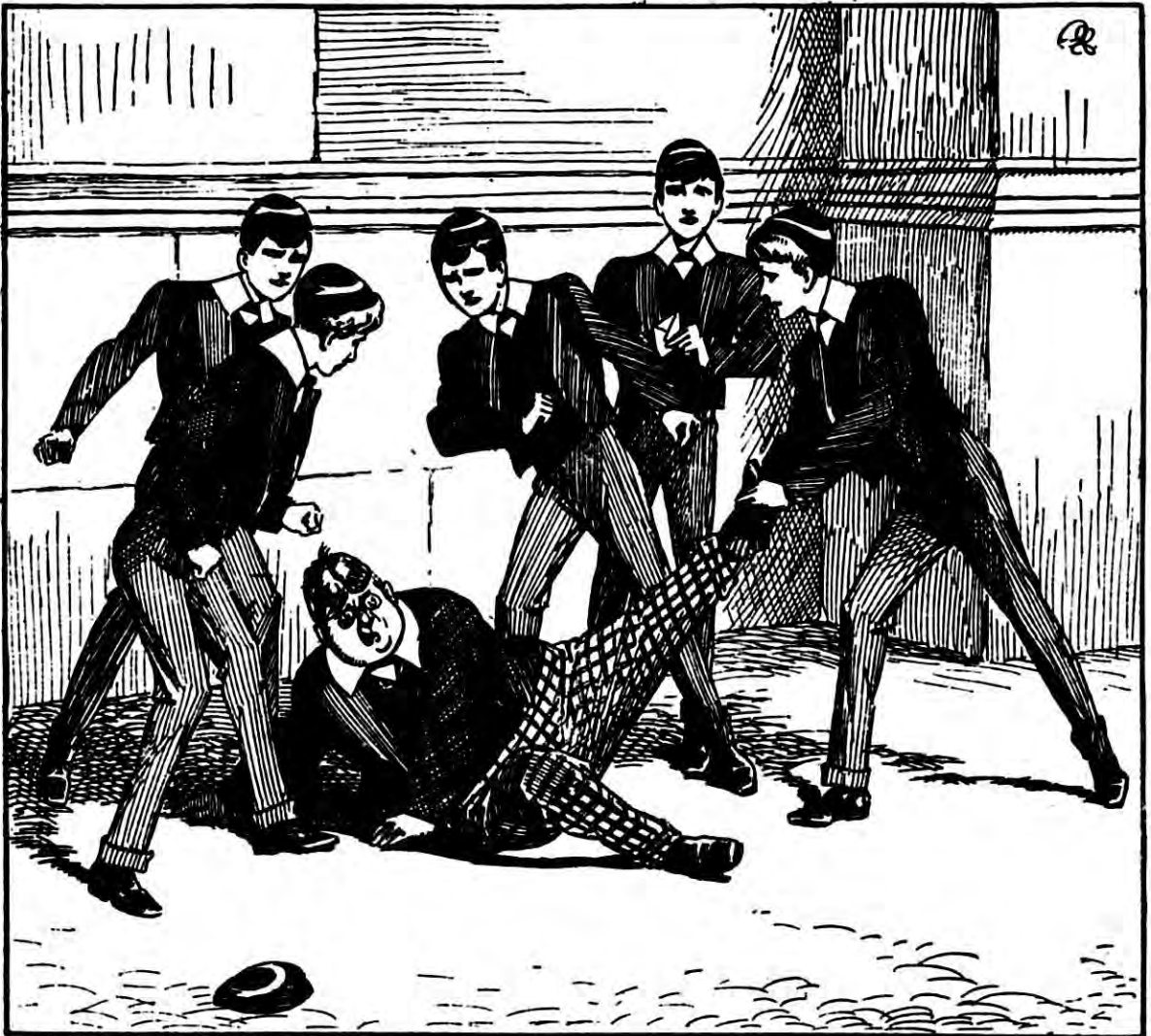
Wharton flushed.

"I hope you don't think I would use Miss Locke's name in a jape!" he exclaimed.

Wingate's face relaxed.

"Well, I don't think you would, Wharton," he said. "But Bunter has done so, then, for this letter cannot be from Rosie—from Miss Locke, I mean."

Wharton looked perplexed. Wingate had released him, and Harry felt no resentment for the momentary grasp upon his shoulder. He knew how Wingate would naturally feel at the idea that Miss Rosie's name had been used disrespectfully.



"Give Bunter another bump!" said Nugent. "Give him one for his mother, and another for his grandmother, and another for his uncle!" "Harrooh! Ow!" yelled Billy Bunter. (See page 2.)

"I don't understand it, Wingate," he said. "The address on the envelope was in Miss Locke's handwriting. I know that."

Wingate nodded.

"The writing is exactly like hers," he said.

"Then how do you know—"

"It cannot be from her. You may look at it, and you will see," replied the captain of Greyfriars.

Wharton picked up the letter from the table, and looked at it. It was a brief one, and it ran:

"Dear George,—I will certainly come, though I do not understand why you could not speak to me in the garden as usual.—ROSIE."

Wharton looked up from the letter.

"Well, what's the matter with that?" he asked.

"It is written as if in reply to a note or message from me, asking Miss Locke to meet me somewhere outside Greyfriars."

"Certainly."

"Well, I never sent any such note or message."

"Oh!" said Wharton.

"Either this note is got up by some japer, or some note has been sent to Miss Locke, purporting to come from me," said Wingate, his brows darkening angrily.

Wharton nodded.

"It looks like it."

"You say Bunter gave you this letter?"

"I took it from him."

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"Then perhaps Bunter may have something to tell me. He shall tell me if he knows anything about it," said Wingate, between his teeth. "Or I'll—"

"Hold on," said Harry. "I let out Bunter's name—I ought not to have let it slip—it's putting me in the position of a sneak if you go for Bunter. And I was only trying to do you a service, Wingate, in bringing you the letter."

Wingate paused.

"You're right," he said. "I won't punish Bunter. But he will have to tell me what he knows about this letter."

And crumpling the letter in his hand, Wingate strode away, leaving Harry Wharton to his own devices.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

The Frenchman.

"WHEREFORE that worried brow?" asked Frank Nugent, as he met Harry Wharton in the passage a little later, and clapped his chum on the shoulder. Wharton started out of a brown study.

"Hallo, Frank!"

"Penny for your thoughts, my son!" grinned Nugent.

"Were you thinking out something in Euclid, or going to sleep standing up, like a giddy horse?"

Wharton laughed.

"Neither," he said; "I was thinking about that letter I took from Bunter. It turns out to be a jape of some sort—"

NEXT WEEK: "LAST MAN IN!"

A Splendid Tale of Harry Wharton & Co. at Greyfriars.
By FRANK RICHARDS.

somebody is having a joke at the expense of Wingate and Miss Rosie."

Nugent whistled.

"I don't envy him when Wingate lays hands on him, then," he remarked. "But I suppose it's nothing to do with us. Look here, I've got a pass from Mr. Quelch to go down to Friardale."

"What do you want to go to Friardale for?"

"To see my uncle."

Wharton stared.

"Your uncle! I wasn't aware that you had an uncle in Friardale."

"I am referring to Uncle Clegg!"

"Oh, you ass!"

Uncle Clegg was the keeper of the tuckshop in Friardale. The juniors of Greyfriars sometimes patronised his little shop, though most of their custom was bestowed upon Mrs. Mumble, who kept the school shop within the precincts of Greyfriars.

"I suppose you haven't forgotten," said Frank severely, "that to-morrow is a half-holiday, and that we're going to have our first picnic of the spring?"

"By Jove, I had!"

"Fathead! Look here, I've got a brilliant idea—really striking! If we get the grub at Uncle Clegg's, instead of at the school shop, we shall only have to carry it half as far, as the village is on the way to the old priory, where we're going to picnic. I propose to trot down to the village this evening, and order the grub, and have it made all ready for us to call in for to-morrow."

"Good egg!"

"Johnny Bull's coming, too; he's got a money order to cash at the post-office, from some blessed rick-stunt or other, and he's going to make an extra contribution."

"All right!"

"Well, are you ready?"

"Yes, when I've got my cap."

"Buck up, then; we want to be back for calling over."

In a few minutes more, Wharton, Nugent, and John Bull of the Remove went out at the school gates. Wharton was still looking very thoughtful. He could not help being perplexed by the affair of Miss Rosie's letter. That Bunter would venture upon such a jape was incredible; besides, the fat junior had been attempting to read the letter addressed to Wingate, which showed that he regarded it as genuine. But who was at the bottom of the strange affair, then? Wharton thought of Bulstrode, and Skinner, and Snoop, but he dismissed them from his mind. They were fond enough of playing japes upon Alonzo Todd, the Duffer of Greyfriars, but they would hardly venture to select Wingate of the Sixth as a victim.

Wharton had to give the matter up as a puzzle, but he knew that there was trouble to come. Someone evidently had been playing pranks, and he hoped that it was not a member of the Remove.

Upon reflection, he decided that it was far more likely to be some of Wingate's enemies in his own Form—the Sixth—such as Loder or Carne or Ionides, the Greek.

Wharton had fallen into a mood of reflection again. He was aroused by a sudden exclamation from Frank Nugent.

"My only hat!"

Harry looked up quickly.

"What is it?"

"That blessed Frenchman!"

"Great Scott!" ejaculated Wharton.

The sound of wheels had caused the juniors to step to the side of the lane, to allow a trap to pass.

There were two men in the trap; one a stout, red-faced man, with a fat cigar in his mouth, and the other a sallow Frenchman with a pointed moustache. The latter was driving, and the juniors recognised him instantly, in spite of the growing dusk.

It was Felix Lasalle, the French circus-rider, who had once passed as the father of Rosie, the kidnapped daughter of the Head of Greyfriars.

The man behind him in the trap was Signor Benson, the proprietor of the circus to which Lasalle had belonged, and in which Miss Rosie had performed in her days as a circus-rider.

Lasalle glanced at the Greyfriars juniors as the trap passed them. He evidently recognised the lads, for a dark scowl passed over his face at the sight of them, and a glint came into his eyes.

"It's Lasalle!" exclaimed John Bull.

"What is he doing here, I wonder?" exclaimed Harry Wharton, looking up at the trap as it passed.

Lasalle's eyes were fixed upon him.

"You whelp!" he muttered, and the words came to Wharton's ears as the trap came dashing up.

Wharton's eyes flashed.

"You scoundrel!" he retorted promptly.

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Lasalle gritted his teeth, and as the trap came abreast of the juniors, he leaned over a little towards them, and made a savage cut at Harry Wharton with his whip.

The attack was unexpected, and the long lash caught Harry across the shoulders, and curled round his body.

Wharton uttered a sharp cry.

Lasalle grinned as the trap rushed on. Wharton sprang out into the road. It was not only the pain, but the insult of the attack that angered him. Reckless of the danger he ran, Harry leaped up at the back of the trap, and caught on with his hands.

So sudden and unexpected was the action that neither Lasalle nor the circus-master realised for a minute that Wharton was hanging on the back of the trap, his feet clear of the ground, and being carried on by it.

Then Felix Lasalle half turned.

"You fool!" he shouted to Benson. "Knock him off!"

Wharton held on grimly. He meant to get at Lasalle if he could, and return his blow. He was not afraid of the Frenchman.

He noticed idly, for he was thinking of other things, that there was a mass of canvas in the bottom of the trap, and that there came a movement of it, as if an animal, perhaps a dog, were beneath it, and was stirring.

Signor Benson leaned over towards Wharton.

His fat, red face had gone suddenly pale, and Wharton was astonished to see it, for the fat, burly man could hardly fear him enough to change colour at his approach.

But change colour Signor Benson certainly did.

"Get off!" he muttered.

"Stop the trap!"

"Nonsense! Get off!"

"Ma foi! Knock him off!" yelled Lasalle. "You fool! Why do you waste time over him?"

"But—"

"Hack at his fingers!"

Benson still hesitated. He was evidently not the ready villain that the Frenchman was. Lasalle uttered a fierce oath in his own language, and, standing up, leaving the horse to itself for a moment, he slashed back at Harry furiously with the whip.

The lash descended upon the lad's face, leaving a deep red mark across it, and with a cry Harry Wharton dropped back into the road.

He lay there gasping and dazed, while the trap dashed on, and turned a corner, and speedily disappeared from sight.

Nugent and John Bull had been running at top speed, but the speed of the trap had left them behind. They dashed up now, panting. Nugent lent Harry a hand, and the captain of the Remove staggered to his feet.

His hand went at once to his face.

There was a deep red mark across it, which was not likely to fade soon away. The junior's eyes were glittering.

"The coward!" he muttered.

"The rotter!" said John Bull. "But it was jolly reckless hanging on the trap like that. We may meet him again—"

Frank Nugent shook his head.

"That is not likely!" he said. "He's not likely to stay in this neighbourhood. The puzzle is, what he came back here at all for, when he knows that the Head could have him arrested if he liked."

Wharton was very silent as the chums tramped on towards Friardale. The cut across his cheek was smarting; but Wharton was not thinking only of that. He was wondering, with some disquietude, what the sudden reappearance of Felix Lasalle in the neighbourhood of Greyfriars could mean. It was only too probable that it meant mischief.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER

Bad Business.

UNCLE CLEGG did not seem pleased to see the Greyfriars juniors. On an unforgotten occasion, after Uncle Clegg had taken an unscrupulous advantage of Alonzo Todd, the Duffer of Greyfriars, Harry Wharton & Co. had visited him, and given him a pelting with his own eggs, in his own shop.

They had paid for the eggs, certainly, but that was small comfort to Uncle Clegg, who had not been able to get rid of the odour of ancient eggs for a long time.

Juniors have short memories, but Uncle Clegg had a long one. Harry Wharton & Co. had already forgotten all about the incident, but it remained as fresh as ever in the mind of Uncle Clegg.

And the crusty old gentleman frowned heavily as the three juniors entered the little tuckshop in the old High Street of Friardale.

He did not bid them good-evening, and did not nod his crusty old head, but gave a sort of grunt, and settled down more comfortably in his chair.

Wharton had a sovereign in his pocket, and John Bull, who had just cashed his money order at the post-office, had three, and Nugent was well supplied. They had the funds for the picnic between them, as a matter of fact, and they had a big order for Uncle Clegg. But the tuckshop keeper was not aware of that.

"Good-evening!" said Wharton cheerfully.
Uncle Clegg grunted.
"What have you got to-day, uncle?" asked Nugent.
Another grunt.
"Rheumatism, I should think," said John Bull.
"Ha, ha, ha!"
Uncle Clegg pointed towards the door.
"You get hout," he said.
"Eh?"
"Get hout!"
"What the dickens—"
"I don't want you 'ere."
The juniors stared at him.
"Is that the way you always treat your customers?" asked Harry Wharton. "You must do a roaring trade—I don't think!"

"Get hout!"
"What I like about Uncle Clegg," said Nugent, "is his polished manner. You can't beat it."
Uncle Clegg rose to his feet, and pointed to the door, with a decidedly ugly look upon his crusty old face.
"Will you get hout?" he roared.
"Certainly, if you like," said Wharton. "But don't you want our order?"

Mr. Clegg sniffed.
"Twopence, I suppose!" he sneered.
"Oh, more than that!"
"Sixpence, then."
"More than that."
The old man grunted.
"Well, I don't want it," he said.
"Look here—"
"Get hout! I've 'ad enough of you, young himps!"
Harry Wharton laughed.
"Oh, you're thinking of that affair of Todd!" he exclaimed.
"Well, you swindled poor old Alonzo through thick and thin, you know, and you should expect to be called to account for it."

"Get hout!"
"You did him thoroughly, and we gave you a lesson on the subject of honest trading," said Nugent. "You ought to be grateful to us."
"Will you get hout?"
"Certainly! Eggs is cheap to-day!"
"Ha, ha, ha!"
Uncle Clegg turned purple.
"I'll call in the policeman if you don't get hout!" he yelled.

"Then we'll get hout," said Harry Wharton cheerfully.
"Ha, ha, ha!"
"Come hon," said John Bull; "but you must be a rich old man, Uncle Clegg, to be able to turn away orders for four or five pounds."

Uncle Clegg snorted.
"Four or five threepenny bits," he replied. "You ain't got it."

"Oh, yes, we have, old son!"
"I don't believe you."
John Bull turned crimson.
"Look here, Uncle Clegg!" he exclaimed, rapping his knuckles on the counter. "You can do as you like about serving us, but if you're not civil, we'll bump you in your own tub of butter."

"Hear, hear!"
Uncle Clegg shrank a little.
"Just you get hout!" he said.
"Come on," said Harry, "we'll get the things of Mrs. Mimble, after all. It's all the same to us."

Uncle Clegg looked a little dubious.
If the juniors had really been going to give him such a handsome order, the old gentleman realised that he had been a little too hasty.

"Old on," he said. "If you've really got the money—"
"I've told you so," said John Bull.
"I'd like to see the colour of it."
John Bull knitted his brows.
"Oh, show it to him," said Nugent, with a grin.
"Right-ho!"

The juniors dragged the sovereigns out of their pockets. The sight of five golden coins seemed to exercise a magic effect upon Uncle Clegg, as if he were mesmerised. The crusty expression faded from his face; he unbent his brows, and he tried to smile—a smile that seemed to crack up his ill-tempered, old, leathery face.

"Which I didn't mean to be uncivil," he said. "I'm willing to serve you, young gents—hold customers as you are, too."
"Changed your mind, eh?"
"Well, it was only my little joke. Wot was you goin' to horder?" asked Uncle Clegg.

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Nugent winked.
"No harm in telling him that," he remarked.
The others nodded.
"Go ahead!" said John Bull.
"Nice pork-pies," suggested Uncle Clegg, "and ham—beautiful ham—the best ham you can get in the county, young gents."
"Yes, I suppose we shall have ham and pork-pies."
"And jam-tarts—all fresh made—and jolly good."
"Well, yes."
"Then you'll want ginger-beer?"
"Oh, yes."
"How many bottles?"
Nugent considered.
"Well, I suppose we shall want six dozen," he remarked.
"And eggs?"
"Six dozen."
"And tongue, and potted 'am, and nuts and apples, I suppose?"
"Certainly."
"And cake?"
"Yes."
"Jam?"
"Rather."
"Anything else?"
"Yes, up to five pounds."
Uncle Clegg rubbed his horny hands.
"Which I shall be only too pleased to serve you, young gents!" he exclaimed. "Shall I make the things up into a parcel, and send them to the school?"
"Oh, no."
"You'll take them with you?"
"No."
"Ah! You mean that you'll call for 'em?"
"Not a bit of it," said Nugent coolly. "We don't want them here."
"Eh?"

"We're not getting them here," said Harry Wharton, returning the sovereigns to his pocket. "You said just now that you didn't want our custom."

"That was only a—a joke!" stammered Uncle Clegg.
Wharton shook his head.
"You shouldn't set up as a joker at your time of life," he said. "You're likely to be taken quite seriously, you know."

"Look 'ere—"
"Good-evening, Uncle Clegg!"
"Wot do you mean by givin' me that list of things, if you didn't mean to buy any?" roared Uncle Clegg.
"Oh, that was just to satisfy your curiosity," said Nugent coolly.

"You—you—"
"Good-evening!"
"I—I—"
"Nice weather, ain't it?"
"I—I—you—you—"

The juniors walked out of the tuckshop, leaving Uncle Clegg spluttering. They grinned as they walked back towards the school. Uncle Clegg said things, after they had left the shop, which it was just as well that they did not hear.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Gone!

"WINGATE'S been inquiring for you," said Bob Cherry, as Billy Bunter came into the junior common-room.

"He's looking for you."
Bunter blinked at Bob Cherry through his big spectacles. The Owl of the Remove seemed to be in a state of nervous trepidation.

"Wingate?" he stammered.
"Yes."
"W-w-what did he want?"
"He wanted you."
"Yes; b-b-but what for?" stammered Bunter.
"He looked as if he was going to give somebody a licking," said Hazeldene. "What have you been doing, Bunter?"
"N-n-nothing."
"Then it looks as if you're going to get a licking for nothing."

"I—I—I say, you fellows, it's a—a mistake," said Bunter.
"Wharton fell under a wrong impression, and—and—"

"Rats!" said Bob Cherry.
"Oh, really, Cherry—"
"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Here comes Wingate!"
Billy Bunter cast a glance of terror round him. He had no doubt that Wharton, either by accident or design, had allowed the incident of the opening of the letter to come to Wingate's knowledge.

And under the circumstances, Billy Bunter felt a very natural reluctance to meet the stalwart captain of Greyfriars. "Here he comes!" grinned Bulstrode. "Jump out of the window, Billy!"

"Oh, really, Bulstrode—"
"Shin up the chimney, then."

Bunter cast an agonised glance round. The window was a good distance from the ground, and there was a big fire burning in the grate, and so both Bulstrode's suggestions had to be taken in a humorous spirit, though really Bunter was not feeling very humorous at that moment.

He made a rush for the table, and dived underneath it.

There was a cover on the table, but it did not conceal Bunter's fat form; but he hoped by keeping very still and quiet to escape notice.

"I—I say, you fellows, don't tell Wingate!" he breathed.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, really!"

"Shut up, you ass," said Bob Cherry good-naturedly; "he'll hear you."

Bunter shut up.

Wingate strode into the junior room. His knitted brows showed that he was in no pleasant humour. He had been looking for Bunter for quite a long time, but the Owl of the Remove had succeeded in eluding him, so far.

The captain of Greyfriars cast a quick glance round the room.

"Have you seen Bunter?" he asked.

The question was addressed to no one in particular, and no one in particular felt called upon to answer.

There was silence in the junior room.

Wingate's brows darkened. He was, as a rule, one of the best-tempered fellows at Greyfriars; but when he was angry he could be very angry indeed.

"I want Bunter," he said. "Does anyone here know where the fellow is? It's very important."

"Dear me," said Alonzo Todd, the Duffer of Greyfriars. "Are you sure it is very important, my dear Wingate?"

Wingate turned upon him sharply.

"Do you know where Bunter is, Todd?"

"I should prefer not to reply to that question, my dear Wingate. My Uncle Benjamin would not regard it as quite right and proper of me to betray the fact that Bunter is in this room, unless I were assured that you did not mean to visit him with condign punishment."

"Oh, you ass!" murmured Bob Cherry.

"My dear Cherry—"

"So he's in this room, is he?" said Wingate grimly.

"My dear Wingate—"

"Bunter!" shouted Wingate.

There was no reply.

"Bunter, show yourself at once!"

A quivering gasp came from under the table. Wingate strode towards it, bent a little, reached under the table with his foot, and kicked.

His boot came into contact with something soft and fat, and there was a yell of anguish from the Owl of the Remove.

"Yarrah!"

"Come out!"

"Oh! Wow! I'm not here!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the juniors.

"Bunter!"

"Ow!"

"Come out at once!"

"Yow!"

Wingate groped out with his foot again. Billy Bunter promptly rolled into view on the opposite side of the table. Wingate strode round the table, grasped the fat junior by the collar, and shook him angrily.

Billy Bunter gasped dismally. Every tooth in his head seemed to be rattling as the stalwart captain of Greyfriars shook him.

"Ow, ow! Leggo. Oh!"

"You fat young rascal!"

"Gerrooh!"

"Come with me."

"Yow! I won't! I can't! I'm dead! I mean, I'm fearfully injured. You have fractured the spinal column of my right leg, and—"

Wingate shook him into silence.

"I'm not going to lick you," he said. "I promised Wharton you should not be licked, you mean little rascal!"

"Oh! Why didn't you say that before?" growled Bunter, recovering from his deadly injuries with remarkable suddenness.

"Come!"

Billy Bunter followed the captain of Greyfriars from the room. Wingate halted at the end of the passage, out of hearing of the curious juniors.

"Now, Bunter!" he exclaimed. "You had a letter for me—"

"Wharton took it."

"Yes; and he gave it to me," said Wingate. "I want to know who gave you that letter?"

"I didn't read it—"

"Never mind that now. Who gave you the letter?"

"Miss Rosie."

"You are sure?" asked Wingate, looking searchingly at the fat junior.

Bunter looked surprised.

"Of course," he replied. "I was passing the gate of the Head's garden, and she called to me, and asked me to bring you the letter."

Wingate looked perplexed. It was plain that Bunter was speaking the truth this time.

"Had you previously given Miss Rosie a letter, supposed to come from me?" he asked.

"Certainly not!"

"Do you know if anyone else had?"

"Not that I know of."

"Do you know if anybody is getting up a jape on the subject?"

"N-n-no, I—I don't."

"Very well. I hope you're telling me the truth," said Wingate. "I shall find out, Bunter, and if you are lying you will suffer for it."

"Oh, really, Wingate—"

The Greyfriars captain walked away without replying. He left the School House, and went towards the Head's garden. His brows were knitted.

"I suppose I must ask Rosie," he murmured. "I don't like to mention the matter to her, but there will have to be some explanation. I'll make the cat suffer, whoever it is, that has been playing this rotten prank!"

The captain of Greyfriars entered the garden, and approached the house by the French windows. Little Molly, the Head's younger daughter, was sitting by the window, deeply engaged in the adventures of Alice in Wonderland.

"Where is your sister, Molly?" asked Wingate.

Molly looked up.

"Gone out," she said briefly.

"Gone out!" repeated Wingate.

"Yes."

The Greyfriars captain set his teeth. He had little doubt that Miss Locke had gone out in response to the letter supposed to come from him, and which he was now certain she had received.

"Do you know where she is gone, Molly?" he asked.

"No," said Molly.

"Or when she will come in?"

"No."

"Didn't she say anything to you before she went?"

"Yea. She said she would read 'Alice' to me when she came in," said Molly. "You can read it to me instead, if you like."

But Wingate declined the invitation and departed, feeling more worried and ill at ease than ever. He passed Vernon-Smith, the Bounder of Greyfriars, as he re-entered the Close. Vernon-Smith put his hand hastily behind him.

Wingate frowned, and stopped.

"Smith!" he called out sharply.

"Well?" said the Bounder.

"What have you got in your hand?"

"Nothing."

"Show me!"

The Bounder of Greyfriars held out an empty palm. Wingate caught him by the shoulder and swung him aside,

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As the trap came abreast of the juniors, Lasalle leaned over towards them, and made a savage cut at Harry Wharton with his whip. The attack was unexpected, and the long lash caught Harry round the shoulders. (See page 4.)

and close to the spot where he had been standing a cigarette lay on the ground.

Wingate's eyes gleamed, and the Bounder looked sulky. "I suspected that," said Wingate. "Yesterday, Smith, I gave you a hundred lines for smoking."

The Bounder's eyes gleamed. "And I said you'd be sorry for it," he replied.

"You will take two hundred lines this time," said Wingate, "and the next time I shall cane you. Remember that."

The Bounder did not reply, and Wingate walked away. Vernon-Smith looked after him, with a very unpleasant expression upon his face.

"I said you'd be sorry for it," he muttered. "You'll see. I think you'll be sorry, my noble Wingate. We shall see."

And the Bounder of Greyfriars strolled into the Cloisters, where he produced a fresh cigarette and began to smoke.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Not Invited.

HARRY WHARTON came in at the gates with Bull and Nugent. Three or four juniors were there to meet them, and there was a general exclamation.

"Got the grub?"

Harry Wharton shook his head.

"No," he replied. "Uncle Clegg was rusty, and we're

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going to get it at Mrs. Mimbles instead. We can carry it all the way to-morrow."

"I'll carry some of it, if you like," said Billy Bunter generously.

"How can you carry it, when you are not coming?" asked Bob Cherry.

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"Oh, Bunter means that he will carry it, and then walk away, without wanting to join in the picnic!" said Tom Brown.

Bunter blinked indignantly at the New Zealand junior. "I jolly well don't mean anything of the sort!" he exclaimed. "I'm coming to the picnic, of course."

"Your mistake, Bunter; you're not."

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"Scat! You know Marjorie and Clara can't stand you," said Bob Cherry. "If it wasn't for bothering them, we might take you. But, under the circumstances—"

"If you're going to let personal jealousy enter into the matter, I'm done," said Bunter. "You know Marjorie won't enjoy it if I don't come. You know— Oh!"

Bob Cherry's heavy hand descended upon Billy Bunter, and the fat junior sat down on the ground with a bump. The other fellows walked away towards the School House, leaving him sitting there.

Before they reached the house, however, they heard the heavy footsteps of the Owl of the Remove.

"I—I say, you fellows—"

"Buzz off, Bunter!"

"But I—I say, you know, I don't mind doing the shopping for you to-night—"

Bob Cherry raised his boot—a large size in boots—but Billy Bunter did not wait for it. He "buzzed off."

Hazeldene joined Wharton as the latter came into the house. Wharton gave him an inquiring look.

"I've heard from Marjorie," Hazeldene said.

"Good! It's all right?"

"Yea. She's coming, and so is Clara."

"Jolly good!"

"They'll be at the old priory, and meet us there," said Hazeldene. "They're going to arrive there at three."

"Then we'll be early."

"I say, you fellows—"

"Oh, shut up, Bunter!"

Billy Bunter blinked angrily after Wharton as he walked away. He caught hold of Hazeldene's sleeve as the latter was turning away.

"I say, Hazel—"

"Oh, let me alone!" said Hazeldene.

"I'm coming to the picnic to-morrow."

"You must settle that with Wharton."

"Wharton says I can't come," said Billy Bunter, with an extremely injured expression.

"Then you can't come."

"But I want to, and—"

"Oh, rats!"

Hazeldene jerked his sleeve away and strolled off. Billy Bunter looked furious. Frank Nugent came by, on his way to No. 1 Study, with a bag of eggs in his hand. Billy Bunter hastened to intercept him.

"I say, Nugent, old fellow—"

"Hello! What do you want now?"

"I want to come to the picnic."

"Can't be did."

"You might speak a word to Wharton for me," urged Bunter. "I'm willing to do the cooking and the general managing, you know, and to make the whole affair quite a success. You really can't afford to do without me, you know."

"We're going to try," said Nugent cheerfully.

"Look here, I'm willing to let bygones be bygones—"

"Rats!"

"I'm ready to forget all past offences—"

"That's because you've committed 'em all."

"Oh, really—"

"Buzz off, Tubby!"

Nugent jerked himself away and went upstairs. Bunter ran after him and grasped at him, and caught the sleeve of his jacket, giving his arm a sudden jerk.

The jerk was unexpected, and the paper bag in Nugent's hand escaped his grasp.

Squelch!

There was a fearful roar from Bunter as the bag of eggs crowned him, the eggs smashing over his head, bursting out of the bag, and running down his cheeks in streams of white and yellow.

"Ow! Yow! Yaroo!"

"You chump!" roared Nugent. "What do you mean by wasting my eggs?"

"Ow! Yah!"

"You extravagant fathead! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Grooh—ooh—ooh!"

"My only hat!" exclaimed Harry Wharton, stopping on the stairs. "What are you up to, Bunter? Eggs aren't meant to be taken externally."

"Grooh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bang goes sixpence!" shouted Nugent. "By Jove, I'll squash him! I'll—"

Billy Bunter did not wait to be squashed. He rushed off, the broken eggs clinging to his head and face, eliciting yells of laughter from everyone he passed.

The fat junior spent the next ten minutes in a bath-room, with a steaming stream of water, washing off the eggs.

He emerged at last with a face fiery red—the effect of his vigorous ablutions—and an extremely ill-tempered expression upon his face.

"I'm jolly well going to the picnic, all the same!" he murmured. "If they won't take me with them, I'll go first, and get on the ground before them. They can't make a row before the girls."

And with this noble reflection Billy Bunter consoled himself. But the consolation did not prevent him from realising that it was now long past teatime, and that tea in hall had left him with an aching void which he saw no immediate prospect of filling. Under the circumstances, he hesitated to present himself at No. 1 Study. But he remembered the Bounder of Greyfriars, and with some misgivings he made his way to Herbert Vernon-Smith's study.

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Vernon-Smith was there. The door was half open, and Bunter went in without knocking. The Bounder of Greyfriars did not immediately observe him. He was standing by the window, looking out into the dusk of the Close.

His attitude was so fixed and strained that Bunter could not help observing it. What was Vernon-Smith looking out into the dusk so anxiously for? Bunter's curiosity was aroused, and he crossed the study to look out of the window, too. His footsteps made the Bounder turn his head, and Bunter saw, to his surprise, that the cold, strongly-marked face of the Bounder was quite pale.

An angry look came over the Bounder's face as he saw Bunter.

"What do you want here?" he exclaimed harshly.

"Oh, really, Smithy—"

"What do you want?"

"I'm expecting a postal-order to-night," Bunter explained. "I was wondering whether you would care to cash it in advance—Oh—ow—yaroo!"

Bunter departed from the study very quickly, Vernon-Smith's boot aiding his departure, and the door slammed behind him. Bunter did not return.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Kidnapped:

WINGATE crossed over to the Head's house a little later, when he judged that Dr. Locke would have finished dinner. The captain of Greyfriars sometimes spent an hour in the evening in the Head's drawing-room, and on this occasion he was anxious to see the Head's elder daughter to clear up the curious mystery of the letter.

He found Dr. Locke with a very grave face, and Mrs. Locke looking worried. Little Molly was in the room, but there was no sign of Rosie.

Wingate's disappointed glance round the room did not escape the Head.

"I suppose you do not know where my daughter is, Wingate?" asked the Head.

Wingate looked at him in surprise.

"Has she not returned, sir?" he asked.

"No."

"She did not come in to dinner?"

"No, Wingate."

"But—but don't you know where she has gone, sir?" stammered the captain of Greyfriars.

"Indeed I do not; and both her mother and I are growing very anxious," said the Head. "Molly says she went out about six o'clock."

"Yes," said Molly.

"She did not mention the matter to us," said the Head—"indeed, I was busy at the time, and Mrs. Locke was out. I begin to fear that something has happened. It is very extraordinary for Rosie not to return to dinner."

Wingate changed colour.

"I thought perhaps she might have mentioned some intended visit to you," said the Head. "You might be acquainted with her intention."

"Not at all, sir."

"It is very strange."

"Under the circumstances, sir," said Wingate hesitatingly, "I—I think you had better see this letter, sir."

"What letter?"

"Miss Rosie gave it to a junior, just before going out, to bring to me. It puzzled me very much when I received it, for I had said and written nothing to her about any meeting outside the school."

The Head glanced at the letter, and handed it to Mrs. Locke.

"This is very strange," said the Head.

"It is very strange indeed, sir. I thought at first that the matter might be some joke on the part of a cheeky junior, but as Miss Locke has not returned—"

The Head rose to his feet in great agitation.

"Good heavens!" he exclaimed. "You are certain, Wingate, that you said nothing to Rosie about meeting her outside the school?"

"Quite certain, sir. You see by the tone of the letter that such a request startled her, but she decided to go. Someone has plainly written her a letter in my name."

"Oh!"

"It was quite easy, as she would be unacquainted with my handwriting," said Wingate. "She may have seen it once; not oftener. It looks to me like a trick on someone's part to entice her out of the school."

"Good heavens!"

Mrs. Locke gave a cry.

"It is Lasalle again!"

The Head started.

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"Lasalle! Impossible! He would not dare to return here!"

Wingate knitted his brows.

"I think Mrs. Locke is very probably right," he said. "The only person we know of who could have any interest in kidnapping Miss Rosie is that French villain."

"Kidnapping! Good heavens!" gasped the Head.

"Well, sir, no one would take the trouble to entice her out of the school for nothing, I suppose, and I know well that she was regarded as very valuable in the circus she once belonged to. It was not a rich concern, and I believe that Miss Rosie's performance was all that really drew the public. I have often thought that her old employers might make some effort to get her back; and you know that Felix Lasalle would stick at nothing to injure you."

"It is true, Wingate."

"And something must have happened, sir, or Miss Rosie would have returned. If there has been no accident, where is she?"

The Head groaned.

"Oh, if she is in the hands of that villain!"

"She must be found, sir."

"Yes, yes! But—"

"Telephone to the police at once, sir," said Wingate quickly. "Even if nothing has happened, and Miss Rosie has only been delayed, it will do no great harm."

"Yes, yes; you are right, Wingate!"

"If that villain has been here, the sooner the police are put on the track the better."

"Quite right! I will ring up the police-station at once, Wingate."

The Head hurried to his study to use the telephone, and Wingate left the house feeling very worried and disquieted.

Harry Wharton was waiting outside his study when the captain of Greyfriars returned to it.

"Wingate!"

The Greyfriars captain looked at him grimly

"Well?" he asked.

"I—I say! Have you found out about the letter?" asked Wharton. "I hope there is nothing wrong, Wingate?"

Wingate hesitated a moment.

"I am afraid there is something very wrong!" he exclaimed at last. "You are sure you know nothing about the letter but what you have told me, Wharton?"

"Yes."

"Something has happened—it is not a jape, as I suspected, but some harm has been done to Miss Rosie," said Wingate. "She went out after giving that letter to Bunter, and she has not yet returned."

"She has not returned?"

"No."

"And the Head?"

"He knows nothing."

"Great Scott!"

"He is telephoning to the police now," said Wingate. "The whole school will know it soon. We fear that Lasalle has been at work again."

"Oh, good heavens!"

"The rascal has not been seen, so far as I know, in the neighbourhood, but—"

Wharton gave a cry.

"But he has been seen!"

"What?"

"I have seen him."

"You?"

"Yes; only a couple of hours ago!" Wharton exclaimed excitedly. "He was driving a trap towards the village—he and Benson, the proprietor of the circus Miss Rosie belonged to."

"He slashed me with his whip," said Harry. "Then he drove on fast. I hung on the trap for a few minutes—"

"A trap!" repeated Wingate. "Good heavens! Was there anyone in it—anyone but Benson and that villainous Frenchman?"

"Oh," said Wharton, "I never thought—I never guessed! But there was a heap of canvas in the bottom of the trap, and something moved under it. I thought it would be a dog, but—"

"But—"

"But it might have been Miss Rosie. I could not see. There was plenty of room for her to be hidden there."

Wingate clenched his teeth.

"Oh, the scoundrel!" He grasped Wharton by the arm. "Come to the Head!" he exclaimed hurriedly. "Come on! The Head must know! He can tell this to the police over the 'phone! Come—quick!"

And the Greyfriars captain rushed Harry off to the Head's house. The Head listened to what Wharton had to tell him with a dazed look upon his kind old face. There seemed little doubt now as to what had happened, and in a few minutes more the telephone had made the police acquainted with as much as Wharton knew. A few minutes more, and the Frenchman would be hunted for. But would he be found?

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ONE
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THE EIGHTH CHAPTER. In the Circus.

"WHERE am I?"

Inside a tent, lighted by a smoky, swinging oil-lamp, were two men seated upon boxes, and a girl struggling back into consciousness. It was Miss Rosie, the daughter of the Head of Greyfriars, once known as "Mademoiselle Rosina, the Queen of the Ring."

She rose to her feet from the heap of sacks upon which she had been lying, and turned her startled gaze upon the two men—the fat, red-faced Signor Benson and the dark, black-moustached Frenchman, Felix Lasalle.

The Frenchman was smoking a black cigar. He did not remove it from his lips as he met the girl's frightened gaze.

Signor Benson made a soothing gesture with his fat hands.

"It's all right, Rosina!" he said. "You know me?"

"The signor!"

"Yes, the signor," said Benson. "Ain't you glad to see your old employer again, Rosina?"

"But—but—"

"Ain't you glad to get back to the circus?"

The girl cast a scared glance round her at the canvas walls of the tent, and then looked at her two captors again.

"The circus!" she repeated, in low, tremulous tones.

Lasalle burst into a laugh.

"Yes," he said; "the circus. You are back at the circus, Rosina—Benson's Circus—never to leave it again."

"But—but I—"

"You see, we couldn't spare you," said the Frenchman. "The show was no good without 'Mademoiselle Rosina, the Girl Rider.'"

"Exactly," said Benson. "And we knew, too, Rosina, that you didn't want to be cooped up at the school, and we knew you'd like to get back to the old life. So we—we arranged to help you."

Rosie panted.

"It is not true!" she exclaimed. "I wanted to stay at the school—I did not want to come back to the circus! And I will not stay here! You cannot make me stay! I will leave you at once! I will not stay here!"

She made a movement towards the exit from the tent.

Felix Lasalle interposed.

"You cannot go!" he said, taking the cigar from his mouth.

"But I must—I will go!"

"You cannot—and will not! I am the master here!" said the Frenchman, with a cold smile. "I have not taken the trouble to bring you back for nothing, Rosina!"

She watched him with scared eyes. She made no motion to leave the tent; it was evident that the Frenchman would interpose by force if she attempted it.

"Nous verrons," said Lasalle, with a disagreeable laugh. "we couldn't spare you, girl; and when you get used to the life again, you'll like it as much as you used to."

"I will never ride in your circus again, signor!"

"Then you will remain a prisoner in a caravan till you come to your senses!" said Lasalle.

"You cannot keep me a prisoner—you dare not!"

Lasalle laughed.

"You will see!" he replied briefly.

"But the police—"

He made a contemptuous gesture.

"The police cannot find you here. How will they know? And you will never stir in freedom till you have given your word to take up your old life again, and to figure in the ring as Mademoiselle Rosina, as of old."

"Never!"

"Nous verrons," said Lasalle, with a disagreeable laugh. "We shall see!"

"It was you, then, who sent me that letter, and not George Wingate?" the girl exclaimed.

He nodded.

"Exactly! With the help of a promising youth belonging to Greyfriars—a youth who will be an ornament to the criminal classes one of these days—I managed it," said the Frenchman coolly. "He provided me with a specimen of Wingate's handwriting, and I wrote the letter, with the signor's help. You came out into the wood to meet Wingate, and you met the signor and me instead."

"Yes; and you—"

"And I had a chloroform cloth ready," said Lasalle, with a grin, "and a trap at the corner of the wood. I have been watching you now, waiting for you to come to. Do you know where you are?"

"In the circus, I suppose."

"Yes; in the circus. A dozen miles from Friardale," said the Frenchman cheerfully, "and in an hour we move on—the road—and by dawn you will be another fifteen miles

away. You may as well give up the idea of ever returning to Greyfriars."

"Never—never!"

Lasalle shrugged his shoulders.

"It rests with you whether you pass your days as a prisoner in a caravan or as a rider in the circus," he said.

The girl's lips set firmly.

"I will never ride in the circus," she said. "I always hated the life, even when I believed that you were my father, and that it was my duty to obey you. Since I have learned that I am the daughter of Dr. Locke, I am determined to have nothing to do with the old life again!"

"You will have no choice in the matter."

"My father will have me searched for."

Lasalle laughed grimly.

"He had you searched for before, when you were a child, but he did not find you," he replied.

The girl's heart sank.

She turned from the hard, cynical face of the Frenchman, and fixed her gaze upon Signor Benson. The fat circus-master was looking red and uneasy. It was very clear that he had been led into the villainous enterprise by the more determined and unscrupulous Frenchman.

"Signor," exclaimed Rosie, "you will not keep me here—you will not allow him to keep me! You were always kind to me, even when he was brutal."

The signor hesitated.

"You see, we want you, Rosie," he said, "and Lasalle declares that you are his daughter."

"It is not true!"

"The circus life is jolly enough, and you always liked it well," said the signor. "You'll get used to it again in time."

"I cannot stay with you. I must return—my father and mother will be anxious," the girl exclaimed, in distress. "Oh, signor, you will not let that wicked man keep me here!"

Benson turned irresolutely to Lasalle.

"If she don't want to stay—" he began.

The Frenchman interrupted him with a fierce exclamation:

"She shall stay!"

"But—"

"That is enough!"

"You see, Rosina," said Benson feebly—"you see—"

The girl's eyes flashed.

"But I will not stay!" she exclaimed.

Lasalle smiled mockingly. Rosie made a movement to leave the tent, and the grasp of the Frenchman fastened upon her wrist. She uttered a cry of pain from the force with which the hard fingers closed upon her flesh.

"Oh! Let me go!"

"You shall not go!"

There was a footstep outside, and a rough, excited face looked into the tent.

"Guy'nor—"

"What's the matter?" exclaimed the signor, getting up hastily.

"There's a mounted policeman on the moor!"

"Mon Dieu!" exclaimed Lasalle. "It is impossible that—"

He paused, and his face changed in its colour.

The signor muttered a word between his teeth.

"You remember the kids we passed in the lane!" he exclaimed.

"They saw nothing."

"But they saw us, and they may have mentioned it, and—"

The Frenchman snapped his teeth.

"But they would never know—they could not know—"

He rushed from the tent without finishing, making a gesture towards Rosie which the signor understood. The fat circus-master remained to guard the prisoner.

Rosie came closer to him, and laid her little hand upon his arm.

"Signor," she said softly, "you will let me go? You were never so hard or so cruel as he is! You won't keep me here!"

He did not reply.

"Let me go, and I will ask my father to have nothing said about the matter!" said the girl. "But if you keep me, the police will find me, and then it will mean imprisonment for you and for Lasalle!"

"My dear kid—"

"Let me go, signor!"

Before the fat circus-master could reply Lasalle rushed into the tent.

The signor looked at him with keen anxiety. More than one incident in the fat signor's life had made him unwilling to come into close relations with the police.

"Well, what is it?" he exclaimed.

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THE NINTH CHAPTER.

The Hiding-place.

SIGNOR BENSON turned as pale as his red complexion would allow.

"The police!" he exclaimed.

"Ma foi! Yes!"

"Are you sure? It's only natural there should be a mounted constable on the moor," said the signor anxiously.

"There are four, in different directions."

"Coming here?"

"Yes."

"Then all is known?"

"It looks like it. And the telegraph has been at work," said the Frenchman savagely. "I suppose the whole county has been alarmed, as a matter of fact."

The signor groaned.

"Then we're ruined," he said. "The girl will be found here—it's prison for kidnapping, and ruin! Why did I ever let you drag me into this, you French villain!"

Lasalle sneered.

"That is like you!" he exclaimed scornfully. "You were as keen on it as I was, at first."

"That's a lie! I—"

"It is useless to bandy words now. They must never find her here!" the Frenchman exclaimed hurriedly.

"How are you going to stop them?" said the signor sullenly.

"The game's up, as far as I can see."

"Let me go!" Rosie exclaimed. "I will ask my father to forgive you."

"Hold your tongue, girl! I will not give her up to them, and they shall never find her," said Lasalle, with bitter rage.

"I would sooner hurl her into one of the pits on the moor with my own hands."

"You fool! If you are thinking of anything of the sort—"

"I am not—there is a safer way. Look you, signor—you remain here, and allow them to search the circus if they choose—"

"And you?"

"I will take her away."

"In the trap?"

"Yes."

"They will stop you on the road," said the signor anxiously. The Frenchman gritted his teeth.

"It will be a bold man who attempts to stop my horse when he is going at full speed!" he exclaimed.

"It's fearfully risky."

"Is it safe, then, to let the girl remain here?" Lasalle exclaimed savagely. "You talk like a child! Come, Rosina."

The girl shrank back.

"I will not come with you!" she exclaimed.

"You will come!" He grasped her wrist again. "Listen to me! You will promise to come quietly, and utter no sound to warn them, or I will chloroform you again! Which do you choose?"

Poor Rosie trembled in his savage grasp.

"I will come," she faltered.

"Good! Come, then."

He hurried her from the tent.

Outside, the horse and trap were waiting in readiness. The Frenchman lifted the girl into the trap, and mounted himself, taking the reins and the whip.

"Remember your promise," he said.

Rosie was silent.

The Frenchman drove away into the darkness of the night. The signor remained at the door of the tent, with deep anxiety gnawing at his heart. He wished sincerely enough that he was well out of the lawless adventure. He had allowed Lasalle to lead him into it, but while he was thinking of recovering his lost circus-rider, the Frenchman had been thinking only of revenge upon the Head of Greyfriars. The signor watched for the coming of the police—and they were not long in coming.

Two mounted men rode into the flare of the naphtha lamp outside the tent. Both of them were in uniform.

"This is Benson's Circus?" exclaimed one of them.

"Yes, sir," said the signor uneasily.

"Good. I am Inspector Bolton. I have received information that a young lady is missing from Greyfriars School, and is supposed to have been carried off by two men belonging to this circus."

The signor assumed a look of great astonishment.

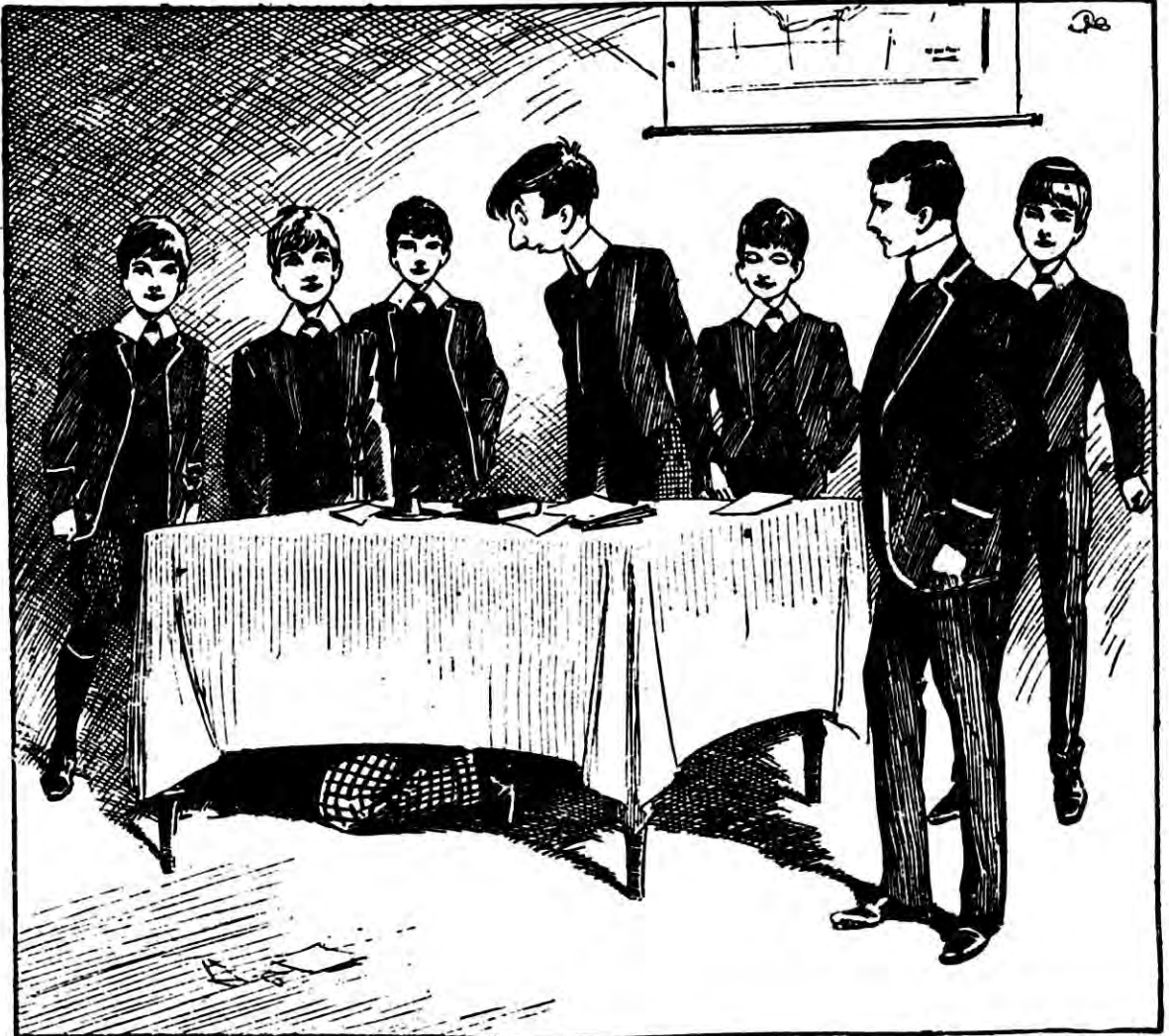
"There is some mistake!" he exclaimed.

The inspector looked at him keenly.

"Very well," he said. "We received the news by telegraph, and that is all we know. Are you willing for us to search the circus?"

"Certainly."

"You raise no objection."



The cover of the table did not conceal Billy Bunter; but he hoped by keeping very still and quiet to escape notice. "Bunter, show yourself at once!" exclaimed Wingate. "Wow! I'm not here!" came the reply.

(See page 6.)

"None whatever."

"Very well. We will search."

And the circus was thoroughly searched—needless to say, without a trace of Miss Rosie being discovered. The bird had already flown. At that very moment, the trap was half a mile away, and speeding along at a great pace in the gloom.

A figure with a glimmering helmet loomed up in the darkness beside the trap, as the vehicle rushed on.

Lasalle recognised a policeman, but he did not slacken speed.

"Stop!" shouted a voice.

Lasalle slashed savagely at the dim figure with his whip.

The constable fell back into the road, with a cry, and the trap dashed on.

Miss Rosie shuddered.

She dared not speak, hardly dared to breathe. She had always known that Felix Lasalle was a desperate man, but never had she known him quite like this before.

There was silence as he drove on through the dark lanes and shadowy, deserted roads.

Where he was taking her she could not tell.

But she knew that they had come miles from the circus—far from any likelihood of pursuit by the police who were searching the circus encampment of Deepvale Moor.

The girl spoke at last, in low, tremulous tones.

"Where are we going?"

Lasalle turned his head to look at her.

"Do you not know?" he asked.

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NEXT WEEK: "LAST MAN IN!"

"No."

"Look round you, then."

The girl obeyed, in wonder. Dim and vast, in the darkness, a great black mass rose to her right, walling against the sky. Far off blinked the lights of a fishing village, and through the silence of the night came the dull boom of the surf on a rocky shore.

"We are near the sea!" she cried.

"True."

"And that—that is the Black Pike!" exclaimed Miss Rosie, clasping her hands. "We are close to Greyfriars again. You are taking me home. Oh, thanks, thanks!"

He laughed disagreeably.

"Yes, we are near Greyfriars," he said. "But I am not taking you home, mademoiselle."

"You are not?" faltered the girl.

"Mon Dieu! It is not likely."

"Then why have you brought me here?"

Lasalle gritted his teeth.

"Because I know of only one safe hiding place in this region, and it is near the school," he replied.

"And—what is that?"

"The ruined priory in the wood."

Rosie uttered a cry of fear.

"You are not taking me there!"

"Ma foi! I am."

The girl trembled.

A Splendid Tale of Harry Wharton & Co. at Greyfriars.
By FRANK RICHARDS.

The trap dashed on in the darkness.

Lasalle descended at last, and fastened the horse to a tree just within the wood, and then stepped to the side of the trap for Rosie.

"Come!" he said harshly.

"Lasalle! Monsieur!" said the girl, in a pleading voice. "Let me go! I can walk to the school from here. I have said that I will ask my father to forgive you. Let me go! What harm have I ever done you?"

"If you have not, your father has."

"My father—"

"No words. There is no time for talk. Come."

He lifted her from the trap, and they disappeared into the wood. It was ten minutes before the Frenchman returned, and then it was to take rugs from the trap, and carry them into the wood. When he appeared again, he untethered the horse, mounted into the trap, and drove away.

The horse was panting, and flecked with foam, and Lasalle allowed him to fall into a walk. The Frenchman himself was plunged into a gloomy reverie, from which he was suddenly startled. The moon had come out over the summit of the Black Pike, and the ghostly light was glimmering upon the trees and the deep lane. A boyish figure suddenly sprang at the horse's head, and two or three others rushed at the trap. A voice shouted in the dim lane.

"It's Lasalle!"

Lasalle started up, grasping his whip. He knew the voice—the voice of Harry Wharton—Wharton of the Greyfriars' Remove!

THE TENTH CHAPTER. A Lemon Squash!

THE news that the Head's daughter was missing, and that Wharton and Nugent and Bull had seen Felix Lasalle driving a trap from the direction of the school, soon spread over Greyfriars. The romantic story of the Queen of the Ring was still in all minds there, and few had any doubt that the Frenchman had succeeded in entrapping the girl who had once been in his charge, doubtless with the view of taking her back to the circus. It was the talk of the school; and from the head of the Sixth, down to the smallest fag, all were keenly interested in the matter. There were some who held divergent views. Fisher T. Fish, the American boy, guessed that he knew all about it, and he held forth on the subject in the junior common-room.

"I guess it's all clear," he remarked, joining a group of juniors who were talking the matter over.

"What's clear?" demanded Bob Cherry.

"What's become of Miss Rosie."

"Oh, you know all about it, do you!" said Bob, a little aggressively. "Well, I suppose it's pretty clear that that villain Lasalle has kidnapped her."

The American closed one eye.

"Nope," he said.

"What do you think, then?"

"I guess I know."

"You ass!" exclaimed Harry Wharton, exasperated. "If you know, get it off your chest!"

"You think you know where she is, Fish?" asked Alonzo Todd.

"Yep."

"Then pray tell us, my dear Fish. I think we ought to go in a body and rescue her, if we can discover her whereabouts," said Todd. "I am sure that, under the peculiar circumstances of the case, that is what my Uncle Benjamin would advise."

"I guess there's no rescue wanted."

"Then what the dickens—" began Bulstrode.

"You see, Miss Rosie used to be the star of the giddy circus," Fish explained. "Well, you know, things must have been quiet here after the ring and the spangles. I guess Miss Rosie has simply got tired of it, and gone back to the sawdust."

There was a general snort of disbelief from the juniors.

"Rats!"

"Bosh!"

"Rubbish!"

"I guess it's so," said Fisher T. Fish. "You watch out, that's all! I guess I could take you to the circus where she is if I tried. Some!"

"Ass!"

"Fathead!"

The American junior grinned, and strolled away. It was clear that the idea was fixed in his mind, and would not be easily removed. The other fellows discussed the matter keenly. All of them felt eager to do something to help in the rescue of Miss Rosie; no one had the slightest doubt that she was in the hands of Lasalle and Benson. But there was clearly nothing they could do. They did not know in what

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direction to look for Felix Lasalle, even if they had been allowed to leave the school.

"We three have got a pass out," Frank Nugent remarked to Wharton and Bull. "If there was a ghost of a chance of getting on the track of Lasalle we'd have a shot at it, but we don't know where the brute's gone."

Harry Wharton shook his head.

"I suppose they've taken Miss Rosie back to the circus," he said; "but we don't know where the circus is, and the chances are that it's a dozen miles away. We shouldn't have a chance of finding it. Hallo, here's Wingate! Let's see if there's any news."

They caught Wingate in the passage. He had just come from the Head's house, and there was a less gloomy expression upon his face than it had worn lately.

"Any news, Wingate?" Wharton asked.

The Greyfriars captain nodded.

"Yes. The Head's been rung up from the police-station. They've been wiring round the county, and they've learned that Benson's Circus is camped at Deepvale, and the police there are going to visit it and search for Miss Rosie."

"Oh, good!"

"She is certainly with Lasalle," said Wingate, "but he may be cunning enough to hide her somewhere where she cannot be found. But we shall see."

And he gave the juniors a nod and walked on.

"It's a jolly long way from here to Deepvale," said Nugent—"too far to think of getting there ourselves. I hope the bobbies will find her. Bobbies have their uses, you see, after all."

"I say, Wharton!"

It was a sudden and disagreeable voice, as Vernon-Smith, the Bounder of Greyfriars, joined the juniors in the passage. They looked at him in surprise. The Bounder's face was pale, and there was a deep wrinkle in his brows. It looked as if the Bounder of Greyfriars had some unusual trouble upon his mind.

"Yes," said Wharton.

"What's all this I hear about Miss Rosie being kidnapped?" the Bounder exclaimed, in an abrupt, harsh voice. "Is it a joke?"

"It's not likely to be a joke, I should think."

"You believe that Frenchman has taken her away?"

"I believe so."

"What for?"

"To get her back to the circus, I suppose."

The Bounder bit his lips.

"But—but he won't hurt her," he stammered. "I—I never expected—I mean, I never— Look here, is it quite certain that he has kidnapped her?"

Wharton looked hard at the Bounder.

"There doesn't seem to be much doubt about it," he said.

"But what do you know about it, Vernon-Smith?"

The Bounder started.

"I? Nothing!"

"It's too late to say that," said Wharton coldly. "What do you know about it?"

"Nothing, I tell you!"

"Someone took Miss Rosie a note, supposed to come from Wingate," said Harry. "Was it you?"

The Bounder flushed.

"It wasn't!" he said sullenly.

"It will come out, anyway, when Miss Rosie returns," said Frank Nugent.

The Bounder sneered.

"Nothing will come out to hurt me, anyway," he said. "As for the chap who delivered the note to Miss Rosie, he thought it was only a lark up against Wingate, and never dreamed of anything like this—I mean, I think so. Of course, I don't know anything about it."

And he walked away without another word.

The chums of the Remove looked at one another.

"My hat!" said Wharton, after a long pause. "It was Vernon-Smith, then, who took Miss Rosie the note that led her to leave Greyfriars."

Frank Nugent nodded thoughtfully.

"It looks like it, at any rate," he said.

"Not much doubt about it," said John Bull. "The cad! But I suppose he thought it was only a jape—one of the caddish japes he would think all right."

"The Head ought to know."

"We can't give Smith away, and, after all, the Head knows that Miss Rosie has been taken away by Lasalle, and that's really all there is about it."

"I say, you fellows—"

"Oh, buzz off, Bunter!"

"But I say, you know, I hear that you haven't done the shopping."

The chums stared at the Owl of the Remove.

"The shopping?" repeated Wharton.

Bunter blinked at him.
"I suppose you haven't forgotten the picnic for to-morrow afternoon in the old priory?" he exclaimed.

"My hat! I'd forgotten all about it!"
"Well, of all the silly asses——"
"Blessed if I feel much in a humour for a picnic now," said Nugent. "I don't like the idea while Miss Rosie is away."

Wharton knitted his brows thoughtfully.
"You see, the Cliff House girls are coming," he said. "They're going to meet us at the priory, and we can't disappoint them. We must have the picnic, and there will very likely be news of Miss Rosie to-morrow, too. We'd better get along to Mrs. Mimbles and do the shopping."

"I say, you fellows, I'll come——"
"No, you won't!"
"You'll need expert advice about the grub——"
"Oh, buzz off!"

Bunter blinked indignantly at the chums, and followed them into the tuckshop. He blinked round on Mrs. Mimbles stock with the manner of a connoisseur.

"I say, you fellows, I should like a lemon-squash——"
"Certainly!" said Bob Cherry. "Here you are!"
He picked up a lemon, grasped Bunter by the back of the neck, and squeezed the lemon over his face and hair. The fat junior roared furiously.

"Ow! Groo! Ow! Leggo! Yah!"
"It's all right! I'm squashing the lemon for you——"
"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bunter did not wait for the rest of the lemon-squash. He tore himself away and fled, and the chums of the Remove completed their shopping without any assistance from Billy Bunter.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

Fish Guesses He Knows.

"I GUESS so!"
"You know where Miss Locke is?"
"I guess so!"
"Ass!"

"Blessed lunatic!" said Bob Cherry, echoing Harry Wharton's sentiments.

Fisher T. Fish looked from one to the other as if he considered them village idiots.

"You can't be really serious, Fish?" said Harry Wharton incredulously.

"Why not, Wharton? How's this?"
And the American youth tapped with his finger a handbill he had just taken from his pocket.

Harry Wharton and Bob Cherry saw it was one of the usual handbills that the circus at Courtfield distributed. There was nothing unusual in it, surely? Clearly, Fisher T. Fish was either going mad or trying to take a rise out of them.

"Oh, chuck it, Fish!" said Harry Wharton. "It isn't a subject for one of your rotten japes!"

"Your mistake, Wharton. Jever get left? Why don't you read the bill?"

Harry Wharton took the handbill from Fish. The American junior tapped the headline of it as he did so.

"Guess I've found her!" he said.

"By Jove!" exclaimed Harry Wharton. "They're advertising a new girl rider!"

"Guess so!"

"The greatest bare-back rider that has ever appeared in public," went on Harry Wharton, reading from the bill.

"I like that, Wharton," said Fish patronisingly. "Shows you're not all asleep over here. Snooper's must have been to the States——"

"Oh, chuck it!" said John Bull. "What's that got to do with Miss Rosie?"

Fisher T. Fish looked at the sturdy Removite as if he thought he had come across a rare find in lunatics.

"Guess it has everything to do with it, Bull," he said.

"Miss Rosie got tired of home-life. I've heard the governor say circus people couldn't stand home for long. Guess she's going through the hoops now—getting ready for the evening show."

"Rats!"

"There's the bill, anyhow."

"But it doesn't mention her, Fish," said Harry Wharton.

"As if they're going to give her name away just after they've got her back!" said Fish. "But I guess I've found her. It's a trick we have over there. Whenever we lose anything worth having we get out sky-signs and things to say we've got better goods than ever to follow. Sometimes it's the same 'hoss,' but guess pop never answers inquiries. You bet!"

The juniors stared at Fisher T. Fish in amazement. Yet there was some reason in his argument.

"Guess this would be the ruin of Snooper's menagerie if pop were here," he continued.

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NEXT WEEK: "LAST MAN IN!"

A Splendid Tale of Harry Wharton & Co. at Greyfriars.

By FRANK RICHARDS.

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"Perhaps if you explained it in English we could understand you better," said Harry Wharton.

"Surely!" agreed Fisher T. Fish, not in the least put out by Wharton's sarcasm. "Guess there isn't a block on the line anywhere. Miss Rosie has been unable to resist the attractions of her former life. I lay she's gone back to the circus."

"Rats!" said John Bull emphatically.

"Guess I don't want your pedigree now, Bull——"

"You cheeky bounder!" roared John Bull, making as if to grab the American by the collar.

"All right, Johnny!" said Harry Wharton, quickly intervening. "You can settle that with Fish afterwards. Miss Rosie must come first——"

"You are not going to take any notice of his cock-and-bull story, surely, Wharton?" asked John Bull, calming down a little.

"Yep! That's what he's going to do," said Fisher T. Fish, as coolly as ever. "Young lady missing. Used to be in circus. Circus comes to town. I get handbill. Finest bare-back rider in the world is going to appear at circus. I guess the find over there would be—circus people said, 'Won't you come home, Bill Bailey?' and she has. Jever get left?"

Harry Wharton did not know whether to laugh or frown at the American. John Bull had no such doubts. He clearly thought Fisher T. Fish a fool. The chums stared from the handbill to Fisher T. Fish. His confidence was still unabated.

"I guess I've found her!" he said, for about the twelfth time.

"One thing is certain," said Harry Wharton—"Miss Rosie's missing. But, really, Fish, I can't think she'd go back to the rotten circus——"

"You're mistaken, Wharton. Try. Guess it's not far to Courtfield."

"Very well, Fish, we will. You'll come, Nugent and Bull, of course?"

John Bull and Nugent nodded.

"He'd better look out if it's one of his wheezes," said Bull.

"Nope! Guess I'm drumming you straight goods. Do we start now?"

"The sooner the better," said Harry Wharton.

And the four took the road to Courtfield at once. Bob Cherry would have liked to come. But he had no pass out, and it was out of the question.

Harry Wharton and Nugent and John Bull said nothing. The latter was sure that Fisher T. Fish's idea would turn out a fiasco. Harry Wharton was very "fed up" with Fish's talk.

"It's her, a cert.!" went on the American youth, catching sight of another poster as they went. "The most beautiful and daring rider in the universe. Gee whizz! That ought to fetch 'em. Guess a girl would tire of home when she can see herself shouted up like that!"

"Rats!" said his companions. "Are they like that over there?"

"Why not? Didn't your Shakespeare chap say all the world's a circus——"

"No, he didn't!" said Harry Wharton promptly. "And if your detective ideas are no better than your knowledge of Shakespeare, we're not likely to find Miss Locke to-day."

"I'll lay anything you've got bats in your belfry, Wharton," said Fisher T. Fish. "It's as clear as moonlight that Miss Rosie left the circus because the boss wouldn't pan out the proper checks. She's gone back, I guess, because he's agreed to a deal. Guess I've found her!"

And Fisher T. Fish strode along determinedly, as if the matter was settled. Harry Wharton did not know what to think. He was hoping against hope that Fisher T. Fish was right, with the difference, of course, that Miss Locke had decidedly not gone back for more money, but had been kidnapped. There was Felix Lasalle to think of, too. If he saw them, assuming that Miss Locke was at the circus, he would be sure to get her out of the way at once.

Soon the braying din of a fair-ground broke on their ears.

"Guess this is where we come in!" said Fisher T. Fish gaily.

Nugent, Bull and Wharton nodded. They did not agree with the American, but they were willing to do anything to stop him talking. They put on speed, and in a very few minutes reached the fringe of side-shows that surrounded the one and only Snooper's Hippodrome. That it was a very popular show was evident from the huge crowd of people in attendance.

"Here you are, sir!" bawled a hoarse-voiced man at a cocoa-nut stall. "Greyfriars never, miss! Three a penny, an' every nut a sound 'un! Pitch in, Greyfriars!"

"Jever get left!" shouted Fisher T. Fish, making straight for the circus-tent.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Whatever his idea, Fisher T. Fish was not to be put off from his business. Bull and Wharton, and Frank Nugent followed the unperturbed American junior.

Arrived outside the main entrance, their ears were deafened by the brass band. The din was awful, for the circus musicians were compelled to maintain, night and day, a perpetual duel with a powerful merry-go-round organ on their right. The result was that what went in at each ear could not pass out on the other, and Harry Wharton, Nugent, and John Bull felt their heads to be whirling already. Not so Fisher T. Fish. Right up to a burly giant at the foot of the main steps he went.

"This way, gentlemen!" said the huge one. "Sixpence, an' you can take it from me that it's the cheapest sixpenn'orth you'll ever get in your lives!"

"Surely!" replied Fish. "But I guess I want to see the finest bare-back rider in the universe, privately!"

The doorkeeper was rather taken aback. Then he looked down on Fisher T. Fish as if he were going to swallow him. A crowd collected.

"Oh, do yer!" said the big man. "Then yer'd better go back and grow up a bit, and don't stand here stoppin' them as wants to come in from comin' in!"

"Couldn't we go in in the usual way, Fish?" asked Harry Wharton.

"Nope!" said the American junior. "Guess I'm going to see her! Jever get left, old boss!" he cried, in a parting salute to the big man.

And off he went to find other means of entrance. This was more speedily forthcoming than the chums could have hoped for. Fisher T. Fish espied a fellow lounging about near some horses belonging to the circus. He guessed rightly that the man was a circus-hand.

"Say, cocky," he said, "I want to see the boss lady rider, anyhow! Can you do it?"

Harry Wharton, Nugent, and John Bull stared at the coolness of Fisher T. Fish. He had the confidence of an experienced business man.

The circus-hand took his pipe out of his mouth and eyed Fisher T. Fish calmly.

"Ye're in a hurry, young 'un," he said. "But Yankess have to pay at the door at our show, same as anybody else."

"Why don't you explain to him at once, Fish," said Harry Wharton. "We ought to see her at the earliest possible moment."

"All serene, Wharton," replied Fisher T. Fish, imperturbably. "Say, cocky," he continued to the man, "I suppose there's no objection to paying to go in this way?"

And Fisher T. Fish pointed to a hole in the canvas wall, which he had already observed was the stage-door of the circus.

"Well, I hope I should never be unreasonable, sir," said the man. "I thin—I think I could manage to put you where you—"

Fisher T. Fish interrupted him by dropping half-a-crown into his hand.

"It's only natural, sir," said the man, touching his cap. "Everyone admires her. You leave it to me. I'll be back in a minute."

And he disappeared through the stage-door.

"Guess I've found her!" said Fisher T. Fish. "This is the way we do things over there!"

Harry Wharton said nothing. He was trembling with excitement. Suppose, after all, that Miss Rosie was there! The circus people would be sure to resist their taking her away.

"Sleepy old lot, aren't you," said Fisher T. Fish, "not to think of this! But it doesn't matter as long as we get her, does it?"

"N-no," said Harry Wharton. "But—"

"But what, sonny?" asked the American junior, in a manner that had grown extremely patronizing. Fisher T. Fish evidently regarded his success as assured, and was already beginning to swank.

"Suppose she is here—"

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"She's here, surely!"

"The circus people won't let us take her away."

"I guess we'll work the rifice!"

"But—"

"I guess I'll pitch it to her about grey-headed father and grey hairs coming down in sorrow to the crematorium!" said Fisher T. Fish. "I'll make her come, you bet!"

"But the circus people—"

"If they interfere we'll knock them out!"

The juniors grinned. There were enough circus hands round Snooper's Show to eat them, if so inclined. But they were not afraid. After all, if they found Miss Rosie at the circus, and she was willing to leave with them, it would be easy to call in the aid of the Courtfield police.

But was she there?

Fisher T. Fish's confidence was complete, and confidence is infectious. The chums of the Remove could not help feeling that the American junior was possibly right.

They waited eagerly to see the lady rider.

The circus-hand emerged from the tent, and made a mysterious sign to the juniors.

"I guess she'll see us?" said Fisher T. Fish.

"Yes, sir."

"Good! I guess I said so, kids!"

"This way, sir."

"Right you are! Lead on, old boss!"

The juniors followed the man into the tent, and through a canvas passage, into a dressing-room that had canvas walls, and was lighted by a smoky lamp.

Before a little, cracked glass a fat and red-faced lady, in extremely untidy attire, was daubing her plump cheeks with paint.

The juniors gazed at her. There was a smell of rum in the room, and a bottle of rum stood beside the lady's dressing-table.

"My hat!" ejaculated Harry Wharton involuntarily.

The fat lady turned and grinned at them.

"It's a—a mistake!" said Fisher T. Fish feebly. "We came here to see the Girl Rider!"

"That's the Girl Rider, sir," said the circus-man, and he disappeared.

And the juniors were left staring at the Girl Rider.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

An Unexpected Meeting.

HARRY WHARTON & Co. did not know very much of circuses. They had taken all their ideas of girl riders from Miss Rosie, when she was Mademoiselle Rosina, the Queen of the

Ring. But this lady was not much like Mademoiselle Rosina. She was fat, and untidy, and approaching middle age. She was fond of rum, evidently, and her fat hand trembled considerably as she dabbed her face with paint for the show.

But she was evidently a good-tempered soul, and the grin she gave the juniors was kind enough.

"So you wanted to see me, kiddies!" she exclaimed.

"Ye-es," stammered Nugent.

"I—g-g-guess so!"

"Well, here I am!" said the Girl Rider.

"Thank you so much!" said Harry Wharton, recovering himself a little. "It's so kind of you to let us see you before the show, madam!"

"Awfully kind!" murmured John Bull.

"And you are the famous Girl Rider?" asked Nugent, determined that there should be no mistake in the matter.

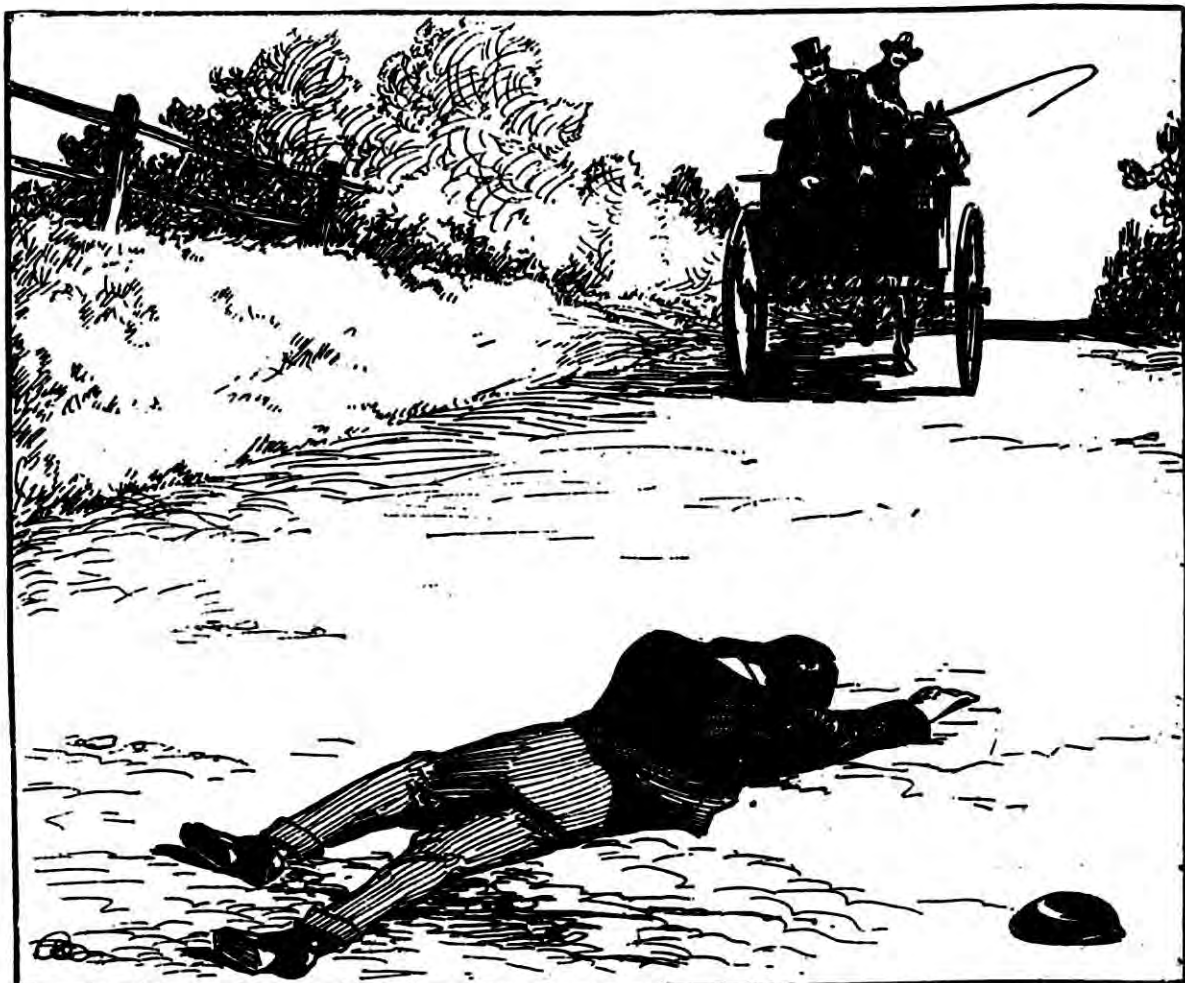
The stout lady nodded.

"Yes, I am," she said. "And I fancy my show knocks 'em! What do you think?"

"I'm sure it does," said Wharton. "There is no other girl rider in the circus company, is there, madam?"

"I'm the only one—and enough, I fancy."

"Thank you so much for letting us see you, madam! We shall never forget it!" said Harry Wharton.



The lash descended upon Harry Wharton's face, leaving a deep red mark across it, and with a cry he dropped back into the road where he lay gasping and dazed. (See page 4.)

And the juniors withdrew hurriedly.

Outside the tent Wharton, and Nugent, and John Bull stared at the American. Fisher T. Fish was looking dismayed. Even his boundless American swank was a little taken down by this ghastly failure.

"Well?" said the three juniors grimly.

"W-w-well?" stammered Fish.

"What sort of an idiot do you call yourself?"

"Eh?"

"How many sorts of raving lunatics do you consider you are?"

"You—you see——"

"You ass!"

"I guess——"

"You fathead!"

"I—I——"

"You chump!"

"I—I guess——"

"Oh, bump him!" exclaimed John Bull, exasperated. "Give him a jolly good bumping, and keep him quiet!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Here, I say—hold on—I—I mean leggo——"

"Collar the chump!"

"I guess—Yow!"

The exasperated juniors collared Fisher T. Fish. They bumped him on the hard, cold ground once, twice, thrice. The American junior yelled, eliciting another roar of laughter from the crowd that was pouring into the circus tent.

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"There," panted Wharton, "that's for giving us a silly long walk, and making us look a set of silly asses at the end of it."

"Ow!"

"Next time you swank——"

"Yow!"

"We'll bump you harder! Come on, you chaps, or we shall be locked out of Greyfriars!"

And the juniors took the homeward route. Fisher T. Fish staggered to his feet and followed them, grunting as he went. There was an ache in Fisher T. Fish's bones, and most of the breath had been bumped out of him. He looked warily at the chums as he joined them, but there were no more hostilities. Fisher T. Fish had had his punishment, and that was an end of it.

The juniors tramped on in silence for some time. They were disappointed with the result of their visit to Courtfield, though only Fisher T. Fish had really expected anything to come of it.

But the ludicrous denouement made them smile, in spite of themselves, as they thought of it. As Fish saw the smiles on their faces he started again.

"I guess it was a good wheeze, all the same. And I'm going to have another try to fidd Miss Rosie, I reckon."

"Oh, ring off!" said Wharton. "You've made a giddy ass of yourself once, and that's enough."

"I guess——"

"Shut up!" roared the juniors. "You're not going to talk! We've had enough!"

"Surely——"

"Shut up!"

"I guess—"

Wharton and Bull and Nugent made a simultaneous movement towards the American junior.

Fisher T. Fish put up his hand with a grin.

"It's all O.K.!" he exclaimed. "I guess I'll ring off!"

"Mind you do, you fathead!"

And the voice of the American was silent as the juniors walked back to Greyfriars, and the chums of the Remove were spared any description of what "they" would do "over there," if anything of the kind occurred in that delectable country known as the States.

The sound of wheels on the road caught the juniors' ears, as they emerged from a footpath into the Friardale Lane.

The moon was gleaming over the wood, and Harry Wharton caught sight of a trap coming down the road from the direction of the Priory Wood.

There was something momentarily familiar about the vehicle, the horse, and the dim form of the driver, and Wharton uttered a sudden sharp exclamation.

"My hat!"

"What is it, Harry?"

"I'm almost certain—yes—good heavens! It's Lasalle!"

The words had hardly left Wharton's lips when the trap came abreast of them, and Harry, without stopping for a moment to think, leaped out into the moonlight, and grasped at the horse's head.

The hoofs clattered to a standstill as the junior clung on.

Bull and Nugent and Fish ran at the trap.

There was no doubt now that it was Lasalle in the trap—they recognised his sallow face in the moonlight, and his sinuous figure.

He stood up in the trap, a furious exclamation breaking from his lips.

"Let go my horse!"

"You scoundrel!"

"Wharton! A thousand maledictions!"

"Collar him, kids."

"Hurray!"

"I guess we—ow!"

Lasalle had clubbed the whip, and was striking furiously at the juniors as they strove to clamber into the trap. Fisher T. Fish went rolling back into the road; but John Bull and Nugent came fiercely on, and they grasped the Frenchman. Struggling fiercely, he was dragged from the trap, and fell heavily into the road, with the juniors still clinging to him.

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

Before the Head!

MON Dieu! Release me! Ah!"

"Hold him!"

"I guess—"

"Collar the cad!"

Harry Wharton, abandoning his hold upon the horse, ran to the aid of the other fellows. The horse, unheld, frightened by the noise and the struggling, dashed away down the road, the reins trailing, and the trap bumping from side to side as it rolled away. Horse and vehicle disappeared into the gloom of the long road, as the Frenchman struggled on the ground in the grasp of the juniors.

The four Removites of Greyfriars piled upon the circus-rider desperately.

They had seen that Miss Rosie was not in the trap, but they had no doubt that the French circus-rider knew where she was, and they meant to make him a prisoner.

Lasalle struggled fiercely; but he was no match for the four sturdy juniors. They had him down, and they meant to keep him there.

The Frenchman thrust his hand into his breast, and Harry Wharton, guessing what the action meant, grasped his wrist.

"You scoundrel! No, you don't!"

Lasalle wrenched his wrist away fiercely, and his hand came out of his coat, and something was in it that glittered and flashed in the moonlight.

"Look out!" yelled Nugent. "He's got a knife!"

The juniors released the Frenchman and sprang away. They had no chance against a deadly weapon. Felix Lasalle stood free, panting, his face white with rage. He grasped the weapon hard in his hand, as if tempted to spring upon the juniors and use it; but he changed his mind, and dashed down the road in the direction the runaway horse had taken.

Harry Wharton made a movement to follow, and then paused.

"It's no good," he said, halting. "The fellow's got a knife, and he'd use it, too. We can't tackle a thing like that. I believe he would murder us as soon as look at us; and we have no weapons. If we had a cricket-stump apiece—"

"He's gone," said Nugent. "Miss Rosie wasn't in the trap. What is Lasalle doing in this district at all? I should have thought he would have got as far as possible away from Greyfriars."

"He may have been scared away from Benson's Circus by the visit of the police."

"Yes; but why should he come back in this direction?"

Wharton shook his head.

"Blessed if I know," he said. "I give it up."

John Bull wrinkled his brows thoughtfully.

"Is it possible that Miss Rosie has been hidden in this neighbourhood?" he asked. "Lasalle mayn't have taken her to the circus, or he may have left when the police came. She might be hidden in the neighbourhood of the school. Lasalle might think that was the last place the police would look in."

"He would be right, too."

"My hat," exclaimed Nugent, "we'd better buck up and get to Greyfriars, and let the Head know that we've seen Lasalle! He will know what to do."

"I guess you're right, sonny."

The juniors hurried on to the school. Gosling, the porter, opened the gates, and grumbled audibly at the sight of the juniors.

"Wot I says is this 'ere," growled Gosling. "Boys who stay out so late ought to be shut hout! That's wot I say. You're to come to the 'Ead!"

"We've got a pass, Gossy."

"Pass up to 'arf-past height," said Gosling. "It's past nine now. You're to come erlong to the 'Ead."

The juniors grinned at one another. As they had intended to go to the Head to tell him of their meeting with Felix Lasalle, Gosling's grim sentence did not alarm them very much.

"Gossy, old son," said Nugent tremulously, "are you really going to take us before the Head?"

"Yes, I ham!" said Gosling emphatically.

"Think of our tender youth," urged Nugent. "Think of it, Gosling, and relent! Think of how we have always loved and respected you, Gossy!"

"Always!" said Wharton solemnly.

Gosling snorted.

"Come hon!" he said.

"Start hoff, then," said Nugent.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look 'ere," said Gosling, "you come hon! Young rips, I call you, stayin' hout till nine gone. You come hon. The 'Ead will make you sit up."

"More likely to send us to bed," said Nugent.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Gosling snorted, and marched off with the juniors. In the schoolhouse, Monsieur Charpentier, the French master, met them, and he shook his head at them seriously.

"It is zat you stay out viz yourselves," he said. "It is ferry bad, mes garçons. I zink zat you get ze cane, n'est-ce-pas?"

"I think the Head will excuse us this time, mossoo," said Harry Wharton. "We really aren't to blame for being late."

"I zink I hope so, Vharton."

"You come hon," said Gosling.

He marched the four juniors into the Head's study. Dr. Locke looked at them very severely. The Head was already worried by the disappearance of Miss Rosie, and in no humour to be troubled by the delinquencies of juniors.

"You have stayed out late!" he exclaimed.

"We are sorry, sir."

"Where have you been?"

"To Courtfield, sir."

"Nice goings hon," murmured Gosling, sotto voce.

The Head turned to him.

"You may go, Gosling."

The school porter left the room.

"Now, Wharton, what did you go to Courtfield for?"

"We had an idea that Miss Rosie might be there, sir, and we went to look for her," said Harry Wharton frankly.

The Head's look softened somewhat.

"I suppose you did not get any news?" he asked.

"I am sorry, sir, no."

"I guess—"

"But as we came back, sir, we met Felix Lasalle driving his trap in the lane," went on Wharton. "That's really what made us so late, sir. We tried to collar him."

The Head started.

"Lasalle! Near here?"

"Not a quarter of a mile from the school, sir."

"Good heavens!" exclaimed the Head. "What is he doing here? I imagined him to be as far away as he could get. I have learned by wire that Benson's Circus has been searched by the Deepvale police, and no trace of my daughter has been discovered there. I imagined that Lasalle had taken her far away. Yet you have seen him here."

"Not ten minutes ago, sir."

"You are certain of the man?"

"Quite, sir. We dragged him out of the trap, and tried to make him a prisoner," said Wharton. "He drew a knife, and we had to let him go."

"My dear boys," exclaimed the Head anxiously, "you

should not have run such risks. I am only too glad that you are not injured. The man is wicked and desperate enough for anything. But this is important news. If the man is still in the neighbourhood, my daughter may not have been taken far away, and he may be arrested if he is pursued quickly enough."

"The horse ran away, sir, and it was going at such a speed that I don't think Lasalle will be able to catch it," said Wharton.

"I guess he would have to hustle pretty lively, anyhow," remarked Fisher T. Fish.

"Very good," said the Head, taking up the telephone receiver, "I will inform the Friardale police of it at once. In what direction was the trap going when the horse ran away?"

"Towards Courtfield, sir."

"And Lasalle ran after it?"

"Yes, sir; that was the last we saw of him."

"Thank you, my boys. You may go."

The juniors went, leaving the Head ringing up the police-station in Friardale. As they entered the junior common-room, a dozen fellows gathered round them for news.

"Well," demanded Bob Cherry, "have you found her?"

"No," said Wharton. "Ask Fish."

"I guess we ran up against a snag this time," said Fisher T. Fish. "All the same, I guess if anybody finds Miss Rosie, it will be a galoot about my size. You hear me?"

Bob Cherry snorted.

"Yes," he said, "I hear you, you ass. I hear you swank! You couldn't find a lost umbrella, you ass!"

"I guess—"

"If that's a sample of the way they do things over there," said Bulstrode, "the sooner you learn the way we do them over here, the better."

"I reckon—"

"Rats!"

"I tell you I guess—"

"Oh, cheese it, Fish!"

And Fisher T. Fish "cheesed it," looking what he would have described in his peculiar language as "considerably wrathly."

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.

A Chance for Todd.

"GOOD GRACIOUS!" said Alonzo Todd. "Are you quite sure, my dear Bulstrode?"

"Sure! I'll prove it to you if you like!" answered Bulstrode, in an aggrieved tone.

"Oh, I'm so sorry, Bulstrode! I did not mean to doubt your word. But it's such a strange story, isn't it. Surely you have been deceived—"

"Oh, I say, Todd, that's too bad, you know!" said Snoop, chiming in. "Bulstrode's offered to prove it. What more do you want?"

"But, my dear Snoop—"

"Come along to mossos's study, then!" snapped Bulstrode.

"Then you can see for yourself."

"But—" began Alonzo again.

"I'd rather you came, though, Todd," went on the bully of the Remove, in a more aggrieved tone than before. "I know he's in his study now. Come on!"

Alonzo Todd looked wistfully at Bulstrode. He thought the burly Removite was really hurt. But his Uncle Benjamin had impressed him to be cautious, and Alonzo thought he was acting for the best—as, indeed, he was.

"You must admit that one cannot be too cautious in a matter of this sort, my dear Bulstrode," said Alonzo, preparing to follow.

"And you are perfectly right in adhering strictly to the tenets of your Uncle Benjamin, Todd," said Snoop grandiloquently; "but I'm sure the old gentleman would approve of your helping us, Todd, all the same."

And Snoop coughed as if he would like Bulstrode to look back and approve. Bulstrode did look back. His look seemed to say he was in doubt whether Snoop was in his right mind. But Alonzo beamed on Snoop. To establish for all time the sterling worth of his Uncle Benjamin was the life's work of Alonzo Todd.

During this the three juniors were moving slowly along the passage. Bulstrode appeared to be very much hurt at Alonzo's hesitancy. The Duffer of Greyfriars, for once, had sufficient penetration to see it. He hastened to make matters well.

"What a wicked man Monsieur Charpentier must be, Bulstrode," he began.

Snoop groaned. He had not meant it for anything in particular. Alonzo, however, interpreted it to mean that they thought he was afraid. Bulstrode saw his chance, and took it.

"Of course, if you'd rather stand out of this, Todd—" he began.

"Oh, no, my dear Bulstrode!" said Alonzo, instantly swallowing the bait. "My Uncle Benjamin would not ap—"

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NEXT WEEK: "LAST MAN IN!"

A Splendid Tale of Harry Wharton & Co. at Greyfriars. By FRANK RICHARDS.

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prove of me deserting a young lady in distress, I am sure. I will come."

"It's simply imperative, you know," said Snoop.

Bulstrode shrugged his shoulders. Alonzo followed behind as if he were a condemned criminal. He was really much put out about Bulstrode.

"I'm so sorry, my dear Bulstrode—"

Bulstrode stopped Alonzo with a gesture. He slipped his arm affectionately through Alonzo's:

"Never mind, Todd. It was only natural to be cautious, after all. But it's all right now you're going to help us. Think of the danger the Head's daughter is in—"

"Pray let us hurry, my dear Bulstrode!" interrupted Alonzo.

"What would you say if he's killed her while you've been delaying us?"

"Oh, my dear Snoop!" cried Alonzo, in genuine alarm.

"Surely that is not possible."

"Come on!" said Bulstrode, in a fearfully tragic voice.

"The minutes are going."

"My dear Bulstrode! I shall never forgive myself—"

"Sh, Todd! We're getting near his den—I mean study."

Alonzo obeyed the whispered injunction of Bulstrode like a lamb. He was convinced that he had committed some sort of crime. On tip-toe they approached Monsieur Charpentier's study. The door was half open, and there was a strong odour of tobacco.

"Better let me go first," whispered Bulstrode.

Snoop nodded wisely to Alonzo. The Duffer of Greyfriars was too agitated to say or do anything. Bulstrode crept cautiously to the door. After just glancing in he came back to Snoop and Alonzo with a very grave face.

"He's a hard-hearted villain, Todd," whispered Bulstrode.

"He's actually smoking a cigar as if nothing had happened."

Alonzo went red with indignation. Snoop sighed—rather too loudly Bulstrode thought, for he looked at Snoop as if he would eat him.

"I suppose you have no objection to my taking a look at him, my dear Bulstrode?"

Bulstrode shook his head.

"I said I would prove it, Todd," he said; "but be careful, won't you? I'll stand behind you."

"Yes—"

Alonzo crept up to the door, and popped his head in. Bulstrode craned his neck, and peered over Alonzo's shoulder. The French master was seated in the middle of the room, smoking a cigar, and resting his feet on a large wooden box in front of him.

"She's in that box," whispered Bulstrode.

M. Charpentier started. He had evidently caught the sound, and looked round to see what it was. Alonzo bobbed his head back with a jerk.

Crack!

Bulstrode smothered a howl.

"Quick!" whispered Snoop.

And as Bulstrode held his handkerchief to the nose that Alonzo had nearly flattened, they fled quietly away.

"Oh, I'm so sorry, my dear Bulstrode!" said Alonzo, when they reached the comparative safety of Bulstrode's study.

"Let me get you some ointment from my study."

"But what about her?" said Bulstrode. "You were a clumsy ass, Todd. But this is a small matter compared with the safety of the Head's daughter."

"Rather!" echoed Snoop. "I say, what's to be done!"

Alonzo looked at them blankly. He had not the faintest idea, although he was willing enough.

"Someone ought to break that box open," said Bulstrode decisively.

"Poor thing! How she must have suffered! Packed away in that thing like a sardine!"

Alonzo's tender heart was deeply touched. He could not speak. But he managed to open his mouth several times, looking very much like a landed fish.

"Doesn't matter at all what that may be like. The rotten box ought to be smashed open at once. That's what ought to be done," went on Bulstrode. "But who's to do it?"

"I would, with pleasure," said Snoop; "but I'm swotting up like anything just now—"

"And I've got an appointment," said Bulstrode quickly.

"And we can't take it on, you see," said the two, in a breath, but taking good care not to address themselves to Alonzo.

That unfortunate youth was evidently struggling with his conscience. Twice he essayed utterance, and failed. But a third time proved successful.

"I am sure my Uncle Benjamin would never forgive me for deserting the cause of the distressed fair, you fellows," he said, with much emotion. "And I beg to offer you my services. I will release her!"

Alonzo Todd's face beamed with the very light of heroism

as he said the words. Bulstrode and Snoop gurgled with suppressed laughter.

"Can you tell me where I shall find an implement?"

"Oh, really, Todd! You don't mean it," said Bulstrode, stepping forward. "We cannot let you. Really, the risk is too great!"

Alonzo took the bait again. He was determined on the release of the Head's daughter at any cost, as the two plotters had intended he should be.

"My dear Bulstrode, surely there is no time to lose! You said as much, I think. Where shall I find something to open the box with?" asked Alonzo.

"Well, Gosling usually leaves his wood-chopper in the wood-shed," suggested Snoop.

"Thank you, my dear Snoop!" said the Duffer of Greyfriars firmly. "She shall be released from durance vile at the earliest possible moment."

"But you can't walk into Monsieur Charpentier's study, and begin chopping up that box whilst he's there," said Snoop.

"That is exactly what I intend to do, nevertheless," said Alonzo, as he went out. "This is a serious business, Snoop, and I'm sure my Uncle Benjamin would advise me to act at once."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Bulstrode and his accomplice, when Alonzo was out of earshot. "Isn't he good? Good old Uncle Benjamin!" And they waited for Alonzo to return.

Alonzo would have to pass the study on his way to M. Charpentier's. Needless to say, Bulstrode and Snoop were waiting for him. Alonzo had Gosling's chopper in his hand.

"Better put that under your coat, Todd," said Bulstrode, struggling hard not to laugh.

"Oh, thank you so much, my dear Bulstrode. If you're time, I should be much obliged if you would kindly stand at the end of the passage until I have gained access to Monsieur Charpentier's study."

"Certainly!" said Bulstrode and Snoop, thinking they might risk that much.

"And I go to restore a much abused child to its fond parents," said Alonzo, determinedly, rolling up his sleeves.

In two or three minutes they were at the end of the passage in which the French master's study was. Half a minute later, Alonzo disappeared through the door, chopper in hand.

Bulstrode and Snoop hastened away, choking with merriment.

M. Charpentier was still smoking his cigar, as Alonzo entered. The Frenchman stared in amazement at Todd. What could this mean? A junior entering his study in this fashion!

Alonzo fixed him with a steady glare. He was all too convinced of M. Charpentier's villainy.

The French master hastily arose, and placed the chair between them. Alonzo, still glaring at him, followed him round. Monsieur backed away until he was between the large box and the window. Alonzo was apparently satisfied with this for the moment. He gave his sleeve a final roll. Then he raised the chopper.

"You are a monster, Monsieur Charpentier!" he said slowly.

And as he spoke he brought the chopper down on the large box.

"Ciel! Mon Dieu!" exclaimed the French master, darting forward to save his property.

Alonzo raised the chopper, and the Frenchman darted back quicker than he came.

"You're a monster, I repeat, sir!" said Alonzo, as solemnly as an owl.

And down came the chopper again with added force. Monsieur Charpentier danced with excitement. Alonzo began to chop as if he were Horatio helping to hew down the bridge.

"Ciel!" screamed the Frenchman. "Assez, monsieur! Assez! Eet ees zat you stop what you call zo cheep-chop treeck! Enough! Assez!"

Alonzo pointed at Monsieur Charpentier with the chopper.

"It's no use you trying to put me off with your jokes, sir," he said. "I am convinced that you are a very wicked man. I shall go on with my duty!"

And the study resounded once more with Alonzo's Titanic blows. Very soon the box began to splinter. M. Charpentier screamed and raved, but he could not apparently save his property.

He was mortally afraid of the chopper. Clearly he believed that Alonzo had gone insane.

"Eet ees zat you deeseest!" he screamed, prancing about like an excited cat.

Alonzo, in his turn, was rather alarmed. He paused, fixing M. Charpentier with that steady glare again. M. Charpentier blushed. He had read a lot about lunatics. He was recognising all the symptoms in Alonzo.

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"You shall be brought to judgment for your wicked doings," said Alonzo, in an awed voice.

"Ah! Mad! What you call up ze pole eet ees! I veel go!" shouted M. Charpentier.

And, suiting the action to the word, he put his leg over the window-sill, and let himself drop into the Close. The drop was luckily only a short one, so M. Charpentier was not hurt. Alonzo resumed his chopping as if nothing had happened. Bang, bang, bang! went the chopper. The blows could not fail to attract attention. Very soon approaching footsteps were heard, but Alonzo heard them not. He was rescuing the Head's daughter!

"My only hat! What's the matter with Todd?"

But Alonzo went on hewing and smiting, all heedless of the throng that was gathering outside.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the juniors. "What a lark! Won't mossos be pleased!"

Alonzo smashed away at the box, but an extra loud roar of laughter made him turn to look at last. He was apparently very surprised to find he had an audience.

"This is not a laughing matter, you fellows," he said reproachfully. "The safety, nay the life, of a fellow human being is at stake. Surely you must know I'm releasing the Head's daughter!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Alonzo took no further heed, and plied his chopper with renewed vigour.

"Mad!" said Skinner, with mock pathos.

"Mad as a hatter!"

Crash! Bang! Sogg! Sloss! Biff!

"Mind, or you'll chop her, Todd!" said Ogilvy.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

As the Scotch junior spoke, the lid of the box crashed in.

Splinter! Crash!

"Mind her head, Todd!" shrieked Snoop, from behind the crowd. "Mind you don't brain her! Ha, ha, ha!"

Todd paused in his labours for a moment, resting the chopper on the splintered box, and fixed a reproachful glance upon Snoop.

"My dear Snoop——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"This is no laughing matter, my dear Snoop. The Head's daughter——"

Snoop staggered away almost in hysterics. Alonzo Todd raised the chopper again.

Crash! Crash!

"My hat!"

"He's mad!"

"What are you doing, Todd?" shouted Harry Wharton.

"I am rescuing Miss Rosie."

"What!"

"I have received information, my dear Wharton, that Miss Rosie is imprisoned in this box, by the wicked French master, who is doubtless a relation of the Frenchman Lasalie."

"My only Aunt Matilda!"

"I am rescuing her——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Crash! Crash!

The lid of the box was in fragments at last. Todd was about to drag away the wreck, to look in, when there was a scattering of the juniors in the passage, and an awe-inspiring figure appeared. It was the Head! Behind him came little Monsieur Charpentier, still trembling with his fright, and exceedingly nervous about getting anywhere near the Duffer of Greyfriars.

Crash!

"Todd!"

Alonzo swung round. But the deep, stern voice of the Head struck no terror to the soul of the Duffer of Greyfriars. He had the proud consciousness of a difficult duty well done, and that sustained him at that trying moment.

"Yes, sir?" he said cheerfully.

THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER.

The Terrible Truth.

DR. LOCKE gazed at the shattered chest, and then at Alonzo Todd, leaning breathlessly upon his chopper, as if he could scarcely believe his eyes. The sight was indeed an extraordinary one.

Monsieur Charpentier plucked at the Head's gown.

"Do not go near him, my dear doctor!" he exclaimed.

"He is mad, and he is dangerous viz zat chopper."

Todd looked sternly at the French master.

"Wicked man!" he exclaimed.

"Ciel!"

"My Uncle Benjamin would be shocked at you—nay, disgusted."

"Vat!"

"Todd," thundered the Head, "what does this mean? If you are not indeed insane, what do you mean by battering

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Monsieur Charpentier's property in this manner, and addressing your master in such insolent terms?"

"You do not know the terrible truth, sir."

"The—what?"

"The terrible truth, sir," repeated Alonzo firmly.

"Dear me! The boy is extraordinary! What do you mean, Todd?"

"Your daughter has been abducted, sir."

"Todd!"

"Kidnapped by a desperate French villain, sir."

"What has that to do—"

Todd pointed with the chopper at Monsieur Charpentier. As he raised the chopper, the little Frenchman dodged behind the more bulky form of the Head.

"Help!" he gasped.

"Todd, what do you mean?"

"Behold the villain, sir!"

"Todd!"

"Behold him, sir—the confederate of the other Frenchman, sir—the kidnapper of Miss Rosie!" exclaimed Todd.

"The boy must be mad!" gasped Dr. Locke. "Do you dare to accuse Monsieur Charpentier of being a confederate of the kidnappers?"

"Oh, certainly, sir!"

"Todd, how dare you! Do you mean to say that Monsieur Charpentier knows where my daughter is?" the Head exclaimed, in amazement.

"Yes, sir; and I know, too."

"You!"

"Undoubtedly, sir."

"Then where is she?"

Todd pointed to the box.

"In that chest, sir."

"What!"

"I am rescuing her, sir," said Todd. "I received information that the French master was a party to the kidnapping, and that he kept Miss Rosie a prisoner in this large chest in his study, sir. The fellows who knew about it did not care to venture here to the chest, but I knew that my Uncle Benjamin would counsel me to take the risk, and I took it. Had Monsieur Charpentier resisted, I should have overcome him by force, sir. But he fled, and I—"

"In that chest!" gasped the Head.

"Yes, sir. I have broken it open to release her, as Monsieur Charpentier has the key, and it is locked."

The Head seemed about to faint. He had had some surprises from Alonzo Todd before, but nothing to equal this. The juniors were gathering in the passage again behind the Head, and they could not repress their merriment.

"I will not insult you, Monsieur Charpentier, by asking if there is any truth in Todd's monstrous accusation," said Dr. Locke. "I know it is utterly absurd and without foundation—such an idea as could never enter a better-regulated mind than that absurd boy's."

"Oh, zack you, said!" said Moscoe.

"As for a kidnapped young lady being in that box, it is absurd. Cannot you see, Todd, that the box is not large enough?"

Todd started. He had not considered that very obvious fact.

"Well, sir, she might be packed in close, like—like a sardine, sir," he said.

"You utterly absurd boy!"

"But I received information, sir—"

"Nonsense!"

Todd grasped the splintered lid of the box, and dragged it off. He thought it best to prove the matter to the Head by ocular demonstration.

As he looked into the box, he gave a start of dismay.

Heaps of linen and other garments belonging to the French master were disclosed, but there was no trace of a kidnapped young lady.

"Dear me!" ejaculated Todd.

"Well?" said the Head grimly.

"She—she is not here, sir!" gasped Todd.

"And you expected to find her there, Todd?"

"Oh, certainly, sir!"

"I believe you are the most extraordinary boy at Greyfriars," said the Head. "I have no doubt that you received this absurd information from some other boy in your Form, who was making a fool of you."

"Oh, sir!"

"No one but you would have believed such an absurdity," the Head exclaimed. "If this act were committed by any other boy, Todd, I should cane him severely."

"Oh, sir!"

"As it is, you will take five hundred lines for this unprecedented outrage, and the bill for the damage you have done will be sent to your guardian."

"Oh, sir!" said Todd feebly.

"And if Monsieur Charpentier does not consider you sufficiently punished, I leave it to him to cane you," said the Head; and he sailed away.

"Oh!" gasped poor Alonzo.

Monsieur Charpentier came into the study. He knew now THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 167.

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that Todd was not mad, but he still kept a wary eye upon the chopper.

"A-are you going to cane me, sir?" faltered Alonzo. "Under the circumstances, I can see that I was a little hasty, and I withdraw all the opprobrious expressions I used with regard to you, sir. I am so sorry."

"I zink zat you are a ferry queer boy, Todd," said the little French master. "But I zink zat you have been vat you call shaped, and I pardon you, if ze damage is paid for."

"Oh, I am sure my Uncle Benjamin will pay the damage, sir, when I explain the peculiar circumstances of the case to him."

"Zen zat is all right. You may go."

And Todd went. Monsieur Charpentier called him back to take the chopper, and he took his departure once more, chopper in hand. A shrieking throng of juniors met him in the passage, and the loudest of all was Bulstrode.

Todd blinked reproachfully at the burly Removite.

"My dear Bulstrode—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You have told me an untruth."

Bulstrode roared.

"My Uncle Benjamin would be shocked at you—nay, disgusted."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"My dear fellows—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And Alonzo's voice was drowned with roars of laughter.

THE SIXTEENTH CHAPTER.

The Picnic.

NO news had been received of the kidnapped girl by the time the juniors went to bed. The only attempt made to rescue her had been made by Alonzo Todd; and though it had had destructive results to the French master's property, it had effected no other purpose.

The Remove had yelled over Todd's rush to the rescue till they were hoarse, but they were still chuckling about it when the Form went up to bed.

Late that night Dr. Locke and Mrs. Locke were waiting up, sleepless, for news, by the dying fire, and Wingate, the captain of Greyfriars, kept them company. Wingate could not sleep.

All through the long night Wingate waited and watched, or looked from the windows, or stood at the telephone.

But no news came.

It was not till morning was creeping in grey light in at the windows that the telephone-bell rang, and Wingate started joyously. Was it news at last? The Head signed to him to take the receiver. Mrs. Locke, who had fallen asleep in an armchair, sat up eagerly.

"It's the police-station, sir," said Wingate, taking the receiver.

The message came through, and Wingate repeated it to the Head.

"A runaway horse and trap were stopped in Courtfield late last night, sir, and detained," he said. "This morning a Frenchman was arrested near Deepvale, and by the description the police are sure it is Felix Lasalle."

The Head clasped his hands.

"And my daughter?"

Wingate's face clouded over.

"There is no news of her. The Frenchman denies any knowledge of her, and declares that he has heard nothing even of her disappearance; but he is being detained by the police for inquiries."

The Head knitted his brows.

"Is it possible, Wingate, that it was not Lasalle?"

The Greyfriars captain shook his head.

"I am sure it was he, sir."

"But—then where is Rosie?"

"He may have hidden her somewhere, sir. She cannot be at Benson's Circus, as the police have searched it. She is not with Lasalle; but she may be in some hiding-place, perhaps being looked after by some accomplice of his."

The Head looked greatly distressed.

"But I am sure the Frenchman will tell the truth when he is questioned in prison," the Greyfriars captain added.

But Wingate was wrong in that.

Soon after dawn there arrived a detective at Greyfriars with the information that it was certainly Lasalle who had been arrested, and asking the Head to go over and identify him. Dr. Locke was missing from Greyfriars that morning. The morning classes had been dismissed by the time he returned, and crowds of boys in the old Close saw the Head drive up, and noted the careworn expression upon his face.

The Head descended from his dogcart, and some of the fellows gave a faint cheer. The doctor nodded his head slightly, and passed into the house.

Wingate was waiting for him. Wingate had not attended

leaves that morning. He had slept, brokenly, part of the time; but he was awake now, and feverishly anxious.

He almost sprang to meet the Head.

"What news, sir?"

The Head's face was deeply lined.

"I have seen the prisoner," he said. "It is certainly Felix Lasalle, and as soon as I saw him he admitted his identity. Benson has also been arrested on suspicion. Both persist, however, in denying any knowledge of Rosie. They say they have not been near Greyfriars, that they know nothing of Rosie, and that they did not even know that she had disappeared."

Wingate set his teeth.

"They are lying, sir!" he said.

Dr. Locke nodded.

"I am sure they are, Wingate; but so long as they persist in this, I do not know what is to be done. The police are still scouring the country for Rosie. If she is not found the two scoundrels will have to be released after a few days. They cannot be held longer than that."

"Then they can be watched, sir, and perhaps——"

The Head gave a groan.

"But meanwhile, what may my poor child be suffering?" he said, bowing his head upon his hands. "My poor little Rosie!"

And Wingate could speak no words of comfort.

Where was the missing girl? The men who were believed, almost known, to be her kidnappers had been arrested, and could be detained upon suspicion. But where was Rosie? That was the question.

It was a question that agitated Greyfriars from end to end. The juniors discussed it as they ate their dinner, and as they gathered in groups in the Close afterwards. The fellows who had arranged the picnic at the old priory did not feel greatly inclined to go on with it. But, after all, there was nothing they could do to help in the finding of the kidnapped girl, and the arrangement made with the Cliff House girls could not be broken. There was one fellow who was thinking wholly of the picnic, and that was Bunter. He came into Wharton's study, where the chums of the Remove were packing the basket they were to carry their provisions in.

"I suppose you fellows will want me to lend a hand with that basket?" he remarked, blinking at the juniors.

"Not at all," said Frank Nugent.

"I don't mind helping, you know."

"How can you help carry the basket, when you're not coming?" asked Bob Cherry.

"Oh, really, Cherry——"

"I think that will do," said Harry Wharton, fastening up the basket. "Buzz off, Bunter! Go and eat coke!"

"I say, you fellows, I'm really mowing, you know."

"Rats!"

"There will have to be tea made, and you know I can make tea better than any other chap in the Remove."

"More rats!"

"Oh, really——"

"And many of 'em!"

"Besides, think how disappointed Marjorie will be if I don't come. Oh!"

Bunter dodged out of the study just in time to escape Bob Cherry's big boot. He paused in the passage to howl back "Beasts!" and then went disconsolately downstairs. But his little round eyes were gleaming with determination behind his big spectacles.

"Beasts!" he murmured. "I'm jolly well going, all the same. They're not going to keep me out. I'll be on the ground first. Beasts!"

And Bunter lost no time. He quitted the school at once, and trotted away in the direction of the ruined priory as fast as his fat little legs would carry him.

Meanwhile, the chums of the Remove were more leisurely. They did not need to arrive at the scene of the picnic before three o'clock, when the girls from Cliff House would be there to meet them.

"I guess I'm coming with you," said Fisher T. Fish, joining the chums of the Lower Fourth as they came downstairs. "Aren't you going to teach the chaps how to play cricket?" asked Bob Cherry.

The American junior shook his head.

"I guess not! I was going to give them some tips, but the general opinion seems to be that it would be rotten to play any games at the school this afternoon while the Head's upset in this way."

"Quite right!" said Harry Wharton. "Come on, by all means!"

"And I'll come," remarked Tom Brown, with a grin. "I'll call in on Mrs. Mumble, and get a contribution to the grub."

"Rot!" said Harry. "You'll come now. There's plenty of tommy. Are you coming, too, Linley?"

Mark Linley nodded, with a smile.

"With pleasure!" he said. "You're very kind."

"Rats!" said Harry cheerfully.

And quite a party set out from Greyfriars for the picnic. At the school things were very quiet. The fellows respected the grief and anxiety of the Head, and they moved about the passages on tiptoe, as if there were sickness in the house. And the faces of the picnickers were not so merry as usual. In spite of the bright, cheery spring sunshine, they shared in the shadow that lay upon Greyfriars.

THE SEVENTEENTH CHAPTER

Bunter Runs For It.

"BEASTS! Well, I'm here!"

Billy Bunter gasped as he sat down on a moss-grown mass of masonry in the ruined priory in the heart of the quiet old wood. The sun was falling brightly upon the old broken walls and shattered casements, and the spring green was thickening everywhere, but the aspect of the place was silent and lonely. The old priory lay far from the beaten tracks, and the reputation it had of being haunted kept wayfarers far from it as a rule. It was a favourite spot for picnics among the Greyfriars and High-cliffe fellows, those cheerful youths not allowing themselves to be very much influenced by ghost stories. Besides, even if the ghosts had any existence outside the imaginations of the countryfolk, they were really not likely to walk out in the open of an afternoon.

Broad day as it was, however, Billy Bunter glanced round him rather uneasily as he sat, panting for breath, on the moss-grown ruin.

Round him the old walls and fragments of buildings were lonely, deserted, echoing to the slightest sound. The faint sound of a rabbit skipping out of the wood made the fat junior start. Billy Bunter was not of the stuff of which heroes are made.

"I—I think I've come a bit too early," he exclaimed, looking at his watch. "Ten to three. Oh dear! The girls won't be here for ten minutes, and most likely they'll be late."

Bunter rose, and kept his eyes well about him. He remembered a story of a man being shut up in one of the priory vaults by a lunatic, and kept a prisoner there for quite a long time, and Bunter shivered at the thought that there might be another lunatic, perhaps, wandering around that lonely spot.

Then there was the ghost, too—the awesome being that was supposed to haunt the vaults and the underground passages, and shriek with strange cries. No doubt the wind whistling through the crevices of the old ruins had given rise to the story; but it did not seem so absurd to Bunter now—now that he was alone in the ruins and far from any aid if he should need it.

"Of course, it's all rot!" he murmured. "I'm not afraid to go down into the vaults if—I wanted to. B-b-but I wish the fellows would come."

He glanced at the stone steps that led down into the shadowy regions below the ruins of the old priory.

Suddenly the fat junior gave a violent start.

A sound had broken the silence of the ruins—a peculiar sound, faint and far, that seemed to proceed from the depths of the gloomy opening.

It was a cry.

Bunter stood, trembling in every limb and listening intently. The sound was repeated. It was faint, and rumbled with many echoes in the depths of the vaults, and Bunter could not recognise a word. But it was a cry; he knew that.

"Oh dear!" he gasped.

The thought of the ghost rushed into his mind, and his fat knees knocked together.

The strange sound was repeated.

"I—I think I'll go and meet the fellows," murmured Bunter.

Again the strange cry!

This time Bunter thought he could distinguish the word "Help!" but he was not sure. He paused.

"Beasts!" he murmured. "It's one of the chaps hiding in the ruins, of course, and yelling to scare me. I'll jolly well show him that I can't be frightened away. I'm jolly well going to be present at the picnic, or I'll know the reason why."

And the Owl of the Remove stood his ground.

ANSWERS

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The strange, faint cry came again from the subterranean depths.

"I know you're there," shouted Bunter. "I know it's a rotten trick, and I'm jolly well not going. See!"

His voice echoed in the excavations.

There came no reply to it.

But a couple of minutes later the strange, faint cry sounded once more, and this time it set all Bunter's nerves jarring.

"It's—it's not a chap playing a trick," he muttered, his flesh creeping. "W-w-what on earth is it? It can't be the wind."

The cry was repeated more faintly.

Billy Bunter waited for no more. He turned from the entrance to the vaults and bolted out of the ruins, his fat little legs going like clockwork as he dashed away.

Out of the ruined priory and into the track under the trees dashed the fat junior, and he did not see two graceful figures that were approaching by the path.

He dashed right into them, and there was a shriek.

"Oh dear!"

Bunter stopped.

Marjorie and Clara, of Cliff House School, looked at him with almost speechless indignation. He had knocked Miss Clara's parasol down, and trodden on it with his heavy foot—with disastrous results to the parasol.

"Oh dear!" gasped Bunter.

"Bunter!"

"How dare you?" shrieked Clara.

"You bad, rough boy!" said Marjorie indignantly.

Bunter blinked at them in dismay through his big spectacles.

"I—I'm sincerely sorry!" he gasped. "I—I didn't see you, you know. I—I was in rather a hurry, you know."

Miss Clara sniffed.

"You are a clumsy ass!" she exclaimed.

"Oh, Clara!"

"So he is," said Miss Clara deliberately, "and a silly fathead!"

"Look here——" began Bunter.

"And a chump," said Miss Clara, with the freedom of speech she had picked up from the Greyfriars boys, in all probability, "and a dummy!"

"I—I——"

"What were you running away like that for?" demanded Miss Clara caustically, as she gathered up the wreck of her pretty parasol. "Was some little fellow about half your size running after you?"

Marjorie laughed.

Billy Bunter blinked angrily.

"It was the ghost!" he stammered.

"The what?" exclaimed both girls together.

"Well, there's something howling horribly in the ruins!" said Bunter. "It was a fearful yell—something like a Red Indian and something like an ogre!"

"Have you ever heard a Red Indian yell?" asked Miss Clara.

"Well, no——"

"Or an ogre?"

"No," admitted Bunter. "But it was just like that—an awful yell! Then I saw a fearful-looking figure, groaning and waving its skeleton arms!"

"Goodness gracious!" exclaimed Marjorie.

"And the rattling of the chains," went on Bunter, mounted now upon the Pegasus of his imagination, "was fearful to hear!"

"Oh dear!"

"Then the fearful figure sprang at me——"

"My goodness!" said Clara.

"I struck it to the earth——"

"I believe you are telling stories," said Miss Clara.

"Eh?"

"I am sure you are telling stories! If you saw anything of the sort, it was somebody playing a joke; but I don't believe you did!"

"Oh, really, Miss Clara——"

"We'll go and see," said Marjorie. "Come, Clara!"

"You—you're not going to the ruins, after what I've told you?" gasped Billy Bunter, aghast.

"Yes, we are! You can come and protect us, if you like," said Clara sarcastically.

Bunter did not accept the invitation. As the girls approached the ruins, he hesitated, and then walked away in another direction. Out of sight of Bunter, the girls hesitated, too.

"I—I suppose it is all right to go on?" Marjorie said doubtfully.

"Ye-es!" said Clara.

"Suppose we wait for the boys?"

"Yes; that's a good idea!"

"Here are the boys!" said a cheerful voice.

And Harry Wharton & Co. came through the trees.

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NEXT WEEK: "LAST MAN IN!"

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THE EIGHTEENTH CHAPTER.

Harry Wharton & Co. to the Rescue.

MARJORIE HAZELDENE turned to the Greyfriars juniors with a great deal of relief. Harry Wharton noticed at once the startled expression upon the faces of the girls.

"Nothing wrong, is there?" he asked, as he shook hands with Marjorie.

"No; we have just met Bunter——"

"Bunter here!"

"He was here," said Miss Clara; "but he has run away now!"

"The young bouncer!" said Wharton wrathfully. "I suppose he came to the picnic? But what has he run away for?"

"He says he saw a ghost!"

"My hat! Imbroad daylight!"

"He said so—a fearful creature with waving arms and clanking chains——"

"One of the Highcliffe or the Courtfield fellows japing him, I expect," said Bob Cherry; "or perhaps he saw a rabbit, and his imagination did the rest!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Very likely!"

"The likelihood is terrific," murmured Hurree Jamsel Ram Singh. "But where did the honourable Bunter see the august and esteemed ghost?"

"In the ruins."

"Let's go and see if it's still there!" Nugent suggested.

"Good egg! Come on!"

"Of course, there isn't anything of the sort!" Marjorie remarked, as they entered the ruins of the old priory. "Bunter is dreadfully untruthful. Perhaps he heard the wind in the crevices, and was frightened."

Harry Wharton laughed.

"That's a great deal more likely!" he exclaimed.

The juniors crowded into the ruined priory.

The big basket was set down, and John Bull unpacked it, while the other fellows spread through the ruins, looking for the ghost.

Wharton and Marjorie looked down the steps of the vaults, but did not descend; and the vaults were quite silent now. Bob Cherry joined them there.

"No luck!" he announced. "There isn't a ghost to be found!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"He may be below," Tom Brown remarked.

"Let's go down and see!"

"Let's shout!" said Wharton. "If there's anybody there japing, I expect that will fetch him out."

"Good!"

"Give 'em a Remove yell!" said Nugent.

And the juniors did.

They gathered their breath, and sent a mighty shout into the subterranean depths under the old priory.

"Yah!"

Deep, heavy echoes reverberated for several minutes afterwards, and finally died away in mutterings in the underground passages.

"No one there," said Hazeldene.

Marjorie suddenly held up her hand.

"Listen!" she exclaimed breathlessly.

"What is it?"

"Oh, listen!"

Faint, eerie, ghostly, the cry that Bunter had heard came floating from the dim depths of the priory vaults.

Marjorie turned pale.

"That was not an echo," she said, in a low voice.

Wharton shook his head.

"It certainly wasn't!" he exclaimed.

"There's somebody down there!" exclaimed Mark Linley.

"It can't be anybody playing a trick; it sounded like a cry of someone in distress!"

The juniors looked at one another in alarm. Their nerves were in a better state than Billy Bunter's, and they did not think for a moment that it was a ghost. But who was it that had sent back that faint, echoing cry from the depths of the priory vaults?

"It doesn't seem like a jape," Frank Nugent murmured.

"But who can it be?"

"Blessed if I know."

"The blessedness is terrific!" murmured Hurree Jamsel Ram Singh. "The searchfulness would be the proper caper, my esteemed chums!"

"Let's go down!" said Harry Wharton resolutely. "Somebody's down there, and seems to be in trouble. Listen! There it is again!"

The cry came more loudly from the depths of the vaults.

This time it seemed clearer, more articulate; and Wharton thought he could make out a word

"Help!"

"That was a cry for help!" said Marjorie, through her trembling lips. "It means that somebody is hurt. Oh dear!"

"Somebody may have fallen down the steps, and broken a leg, perhaps," Tom Brown suggested.

Wharton shook his head.

"The cry was too far away for that," he said; "and I think it came from behind a wall, too. Somebody has been shut up here, more likely!"

"But how?"

"Might be some chap exploring the place, and he's got himself shut up," said Harry. "You remember that revolving stone that leads into the underground passage to Greyfriars? It may be something of the sort here."

"Let's look, anyway!" said Bob Cherry.

"We shall want a light."

"There's the methylated spirit stove. We can light that, and take it along as a torch," said John Bull. "Then we've got matches."

There was nothing better to be done, and the spirit-stove was lighted, and the juniors descended into the dim depths of the stairs, Bull carrying the stove. Wharton looked back at the girls.

"Are you coming, Marjorie?" he asked.

"Yes, indeed!"

"What-ho!" said Miss Clara.

"Keep with us," said Harry. "You don't know what may happen here. You go ahead with the light, Bull; and look out for pitfalls!"

"Right you are!"

The juniors had reached the bottom of the stone stairs. Round them were the gloomy vaults, where of old the monks had kept their stores; now for long centuries disused. Darkness was round the juniors now; into these depths the sun's rays never penetrated.

"Look out, you chaps! Listen!"

There was deep silence in the vaults.

"Give them a yell!" suggested Bob Cherry. "Then he—or she—or they—will know that there's somebody coming, and call out again."

"Good!"

"All together, kids!"

The juniors shouted again, together.

"Hallo! Hallo! Hallo!"

The shout rang with deafening echoes through the vaults. As the echoes died away, the answering cry came, and now it was clearer and more distinct, evidently closer at hand, now the juniors were in the vaults.

"Help!"

"That's plain enough," said Wharton, setting his teeth. "It's somebody wants help—either hurt or shut up here somewhere. Very likely in one of the old cells that the monks used to keep their prisoners in."

"Come on!"

The juniors advanced in the direction of the cry, lighted on their way by the fluttering, flickering spirit-stove, and by matches struck every few moments. They were, fortunately, well supplied with matches.

The cry was repeated again and again now. The prisoner of the priory, whoever it was, evidently realised that rescue was coming.

"Help! Help!"

"My goodness!" Clara exclaimed suddenly. "It is a woman's voice!"

Marjorie nodded.

"I thought so," she said, in a low voice.

"Come on, quick, you fellows!" said Wharton hastily.

"Help!"

The cry was behind the juniors now. They halted. It was clear that they had passed the place where the one who called for help was a prisoner.

"It's one of the monks' cells!" said Frank Nugent. "I know this place like a book. The cells are in a row along this wall. Here!"

He stopped, and rapped on the stone wall.

There was a sharp cry from behind the stone, which looked like a solid wall, and would have deceived anyone who did not know the secrets of the old priory.

"Help!"

"She's here!" cried Frank.

"Help!"

"Where are you?" called out Wharton.

"In a stone cell!" came the faint answer. "Oh, help me!"

"My hat! I know that voice!" Wharton trembled with excitement. "Who is it that calls?"

"I am Rosie Locke—the daughter of the head-master of Greyfriars!"

THE NINETEENTH CHAPTER.

Rescued.

"MISS ROSIE!"

The name broke from the juniors in an excited exclamation.

It was Miss Rosie!

The prisoner of the priory was the Head's daughter!

For a moment amazement held them dumb. Then they rushed at the stone wall, seeking an opening, groping up and down the cold stone for the hidden door. It was Frank Nugent who found it. A wedge of stone was removed, and the great slab rolled open.

The light flickered and glimmered into the stone cell.

Miss Rosie was there!

She staggered towards them with a cry.

In the cell were several carriage rugs, and a coat—evidently all the girl had had to protect her from the cold. She was deadly pale, and trembling, and her eyes strangely large and dark.

Marjorie's gentle arm glided round her to offer her support, and Rosie leaned upon the girl.

"Oh, thank Heaven you have come!" she exclaimed. "I have been calling for help—I do not know how often or how long—it seems like days!"

Wharton's eyes burned.

"Did that villain shut you up here?" he exclaimed.

"Felix Lasalle—yes!"

"Let's get her up to the daylight," said John Bull. "Come on, Miss Rosie! You're all right now—safe as houses! This way!"

The Head's daughter was assisted up the steps from the vault, and sank down upon a stone, in the blaze of the sunshine. The bright sun seemed to revive her. But she was evidently in a fainting and worn-out condition.

"Make some tea, quick!" said Wharton. Wharton did not know very much about girls, but he had an idea that a cup of tea was regarded as a panacea for most evils by the feminine sex.

And indeed, when Miss Rosie had drunk a cup of hot steaming tea, she looked and felt very much better. The colour came back into her cheeks.

Marjorie and Clara were still supporting her, with kind sympathy, and the distressed and terrified girl was gradually recovering herself.

"You must be hungry," said Wharton.

Miss Rosie smiled faintly.

"Yes, indeed, I am!" she said.

"Have you been in that place all night?"

"Yes. Lasalle took me there, when he found that the police were coming to search Benson's Circus."

Wharton uttered an exclamation.

"Then that is how we met the villain—he was coming away from here! If we had only known!"

Miss Rosie ate as the juniors waited upon her. Frank Nugent cut off to Friardale to fetch a trap to take the girl to the college, and while he was gone, Miss Rosie made a meal upon the best the juniors could provide. They had forgotten all about the picnic now. The discovery and rescue of Miss Rosie were better than many picnics.

The girl was looking much more her old self when Nugent dashed up breathless, to announce that the trap was as near the priory as the trees allowed.

Miss Rosie rose to her feet.

"My poor father!" she exclaimed. "How anxious he must have been! Let us get back to the school at once!"

"What-ho!" said Wharton. "You don't mind giving up the picnic?" he added, to Marjorie and Clara. "We'll have it at Greyfriars instead."

"Why, of course," said Marjorie.

And the two girls tenderly helped Rosie to the trap. They entered it with her, and with Wharton and Nugent and John Bull, all the vehicle would hold. The other fellows followed on foot, as the trap dashed off towards Greyfriars.

Harry Wharton & Co. were in high good-humour. The thought of the surprise they had in store for the good old doctor made them triumphant.

How the kind old face would light up when the trap drove in at the gates of Greyfriars with Miss Rosie sitting in it among the juniors.

Greyfriars came in sight at last.

A junior near the gates was the first to catch sight of Miss Rosie, and he started off at a run to tell everybody, and when the trap drove in there was a yelling, cheering crowd to greet the return of the Head's daughter.

It was quite a triumphal progress across the quad. The shouts of the juniors and seniors alike brought the Head to his window, and woke up Wingate, who had fallen into a sleep of exhaustion in his study.

"Hurrah!"

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 167

READ "THE BROTHERHOOD OF IRON,"

the Amazing
Adventure Tale in the

"GEM" LIBRARY.

Price 1d.
Now on Sale.

"Miss Rosie! Hurrah!"

"Bravo, Wharton!"

"Hurrah!"

Dr. Locke rubbed his eyes as he saw the trap stop before the house, with his lost daughter sitting there with Marjorie and Clara and the juniors. He ran downstairs with flying gown, forgetful of his dignity as Head of Greyfriars.

Wingate was already in the hall, so was Mrs. Locke. Rosie, as she was lifted from the trap, ran into her mother's arms. Wingate pressed her hand once before she was carried away by her mother.

And Harry Wharton & Co., needless to say, were the heroes of Greyfriars that afternoon.

Later the Head sent for the juniors, and warmly thanked them for what they had done.

Harry Wharton & Co. claimed no credit for it; but the Head insisted upon giving them credit, and he shook Wharton by the hand warmly several times. It was a day of rejoicing at Greyfriars.

Miss Rosie explained the circumstances of the kidnapping. The note she had received was in a handwriting like Wingate's.

and she still had it; but who had brought it she did not know. It had been thrown to her in the Head's garden, and she had never doubted that it was from George Wingate, till she kept the treacherous appointment, and met Lasalle and Benson instead of the captain of Greyfriars. The evidence against the kidnappers was complete, now that Rosie could appear against them.

Whether Lasalle would have allowed the girl to perish in the vault; rather than have given the information to restore her to her father, was doubtful; but certainly the rascal had not spoken up to the time when the Head's daughter was rescued by the juniors. All was well that ended well; but it did not end well for the kidnappers.

Signor Benson went to hard labour, and Felix Lasalle to penal servitude for a long term—a punishment he richly deserved. And Miss Rosie was soon herself again, and ere many days had passed, as bright and happy as ever, little harmed by her terrible experience as a prisoner in the old priory.

THE END.

Another splendid long, complete story of Harry Wharton & Co. next week, entitled, "Last Man In!" by Frank Richards. Order your copy of the MAGNET in advance. Price One Penny.)

(Our Readers are informed that the characters in the following Serial Story are purely imaginary, and it contains no references or allusions to any living person. Actual names may be unintentionally mentioned, but the Editor wishes it to be distinctly understood that no adverse personal reflection is intended.)

OUR THRILLING ADVENTURE SERIAL!

Wolves of the Deep.

The Story of a Great Conspiracy, Introducing Ferrers Lord and Ching-Lung.

By SIDNEY DREW.

READ THIS FIRST.

Ferrers Lord is the possessor of a wonderful submarine, called The Lord of the Deep. One night the model is stolen from him by Michael Scaroff, a Russian. Ferrers Lord, accompanied by his friend, Rupert Thurston, sets out on the track of the Russian on board the Lord of the Deep. They go on shore at Brindisi and hear puzzling news concerning Scaroff's movements. Meanwhile the sailor left in charge of the launch which is used to convey them to and from the submarine is overpowered by a strange man, who takes his place unknown to Lord. "I think there is something queer about the captain, Trethvick, sir," remarks Horton, the diver, when Lord and Thurston reach the Lord of the Deep.

(Now go on with the story.)

The Ape is Unchained—The Hidden Danger—On the Brink—Revenge!

"I'll tell you, sir," said Horton. "I heard a horrible noise, and looked in. I never had such a shock in my life. I thought at first Trethvick was fighting with the devil, for the light was bad; and then I saw it was only an ape. They were wrestling with each other like mad, and Trethvick was naked to the waist. The brute floored him several times, and then he'd yell: 'Bravo, Lucifer, my beauty!' He must be mighty strong, for he got the beast down at last, and then cursed it like mad for being beaten, and lashed it cruelly with a great, heavy whip. That man's not in his right senses. Good-night to you, sir! Christopher, it's mighty queer—mighty queer indeed!"

Left alone, Rupert pondered over the diver's story. Was Nathan Trethvick a maniac? Surely no sane man would act in such a way, or keep such a ferocious beast in his cabin? The sound of someone turning the handle of the door made him start. The door opened, and Trethvick himself appeared.

"Where's No. 9?" he asked roughly.

"No. 9?" said Thurston, puzzled. "What do you mean? I don't understand you."

"Don't you?" snarled the dwarf. "Then it's time you were beginning to get some idea of how things are done here."

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NEXT

WEEK: "LAST MAN IN!"

A Splendid Tale of Harry Wharton & Co. at Greyfriars
By FRANK RICHARDS.

A man doesn't have a name, but a number. Ha, ha! It's something like a convict-prison, ain't it? Your number is 39, and No. 9 is the man who went with you on the launch. Where is he? If he's skulking, I'll slay him alive!"

"I have not seen him," said Rupert. "You would hardly expect to find him in the saloon."

Thurston spoke quietly, but he saw the blood rush into the dwarf's face.

"Don't give me any back answers," he growled, "but keep a civil tongue in your head. I'm captain here, Mr. Thurston, and if you're a wise man you won't forget it." He waddled away, and a moment later Rupert heard the ape snarling outside. "Mr. Thurston," called the dwarf, again thrusting in his head, "if you're not on duty you'd better go to bed. No. 9 is skulking somewhere, though I've ransacked the place to find him. I've had words with him before, and I'll murder him when I do find him! Go to bed, sir, and lock your door. I'm going to unchain the ape."

Thurston shivered.

"Unchain the ape? What are you going to do that for, in Heaven's name?"

"To find No. 9, the skulking lubber!" cried the dwarf. "No bloodhound could ever scent a man like my bonnie Lucifer. Ha, ha, ha! I sha'n't be far away—just near enough to keep the beauty from tearing his heart out. Lock your door. Good-night, sir! Ha, ha, ha!"

Thurston crept to his cabin, shivering. For a moment he thought of rousing Ferrers Lord, and of telling him what Trethvick was going to do, but to reach the millionaire he had to pass the captain's cabin. For a time the horrible vision of the luckless sailor in the clutches of the monster drove the sleep from his eyes; and when at last he did fall asleep it was only to dream the same horror again and again.

Silence came, and all was still, except for the lap of the waves round the vessel's hull, and a hushed murmur of voices in the conning-towers, where a few men were working. Only one solitary light burned below, outside Trethvick's cabin, dimly illuminating the low corridor.

Hanging to a chain below the diving-board of the swimming-bath, chin-deep in the icy water, was the murderer of

No. 9. His teeth were chattering, his limbs were numbed with cold. Men had passed and repassed him, calling in vain for the man he had killed, but none had thought of peering under the shadow of the board.

His time had come at last; and, letting go his hold, he swam softly towards the steps, hardly making a ripple in the dark water. The gloom was intense, but his eyes had become accustomed to it, and from Scaroff's plan of the vessel he felt that he could easily find his way.

He shook himself as he emerged from the water, and swung his arm vigorously to set his chilled blood circulating.

"Death of my soul!" he muttered. "Fortune is with me. I have but to set the fuse now, and make a dash for it. The way is open, and once overboard I am safe. Bah! I am frozen. I must get the flask."

He wiped his hands upon the cocoanut-matting that edged the bath, and, crossing the room, drew a flask and a revolver from behind one of the Maxim guns. He gulped down the brandy, and chuckled.

"Bah! I will do things well, for I have plenty of time. Death of my soul, there is no hurry!"

He found his coat where he had hidden it, and, drying his hands again, he rolled and lighted a cigarette. He had discarded the beard, for it was useless now that it had served its purpose. When the flask was empty, and the last whiff of smoke drawn from the cigarette, he moved to the door, carrying the deadly cartridges with him.

Where must he place the explosive? Not there, for he might lose his way, and share in the hideous death he meditated for others. It must be somewhere close to the companion-way, so that he could rush upon deck and plunge overboard. The fuse was timed to burn five minutes—ample time to escape in. He stole on, making no sound, and leaving a trail of water behind him.

He shrank back as he saw the light, and peered eagerly ahead. The dwarf came out of his cabin, croaking out his everlasting song about the Sally Howe:

"Oh, I've hung the skipper, and the mate he's dead!

'Up with the black flag, boys,' I said.

'To kill and burn—'

The words died away into silence as he waddled up the ladder. Hardly daring to breathe, the man crouched there, a wicked grin of triumphant malice on his lips.

"Death of my soul!" he muttered. "But that is a good song. You will be singing it to Davy Jones ere long. Come, I must get it over! I can smell the salt air. Good! The way is open!"

Again the sound of footsteps, and the dwarf appeared at the head of the ladder. Muttering a string of Italian oaths, Scaroff's hireling dropped back into his hiding-place. There was a snarl as Nathan Trethvick passed into his cabin.

The spy's heart leapt into his throat. A shaggy monster dashed through the open door. He saw the glare of its red eyes and the flash of its white fangs. Trethvick's whip cracked, and the brute crept, fawning, to his side.

"Stand up, my bonnie beauty!" croaked the dwarf. "Stand up, my gentle lamb! Ha, ha! You know I love you—eh? You're free to-night, Lucifer. There's a skulking lubber hiding from me, Lucifer. Search him out, and cut the throat out of him! I've left you the run of the place, my lamb! Search—search!"

The ape snarled and gnashed his teeth. He seemed to understand.

"Toar his heart out!" chuckled the dwarf. "Ha, ha, ha! Don't spare him, Lucifer!"

The murderer's blood turned to ice. The ape raised itself to its full height, and he saw the flat nostrils dilate as he sniffed the air.

"Death of my soul!" thought the man, in horror. "I have left the revolver behind!"

Fascinated, his eyes dilating, he watched the shaggy monster. The ape leapt up, and, catching a beam, swung himself to and fro. Then he dropped down on all fours, and waddled away towards the furnace-room.

The Italian breathed again, but his face was deadly white. All the courage had oozed out of him, but he set his teeth. Then he slowly unwound the coil of fuse, and laid the two cartridges on one of the iron girders. A couple of clips held them in position. His hands were shaking, as he threaded the fuse.

"Death of my soul!" he muttered. "A thousand millions would not tempt me again!"

He dragged the fuse behind the heavy locker, crawling on hands and knees. It was not an easy task, for it twisted and curled stubbornly; but he succeeded at last, and fumbled for the matches. The first match went out, and so did the second, for his hands trembled.

The third match burned steadily, and a little thread of sparks hissed from the fuse. Then there was a fiendish howl, and a wild cry of agonised fear. The ape was upon him, the

terrible, shaggy arms squeezing out his life, the flashing fangs at his throat, the sickening breath scorching his cheeks. He crashed back upon the hissing fuse, his wild scream ringing through the sleeping ship.

The ape was uppermost.

In the Clutch of the Ape—A Plucky Deed—Scaroff Again.

At the sound of that cry Rupert Thurston sprang from his bed. For an instant he thought it was a dream, for he had dreamed odd things that night. Then he remembered the ape and No. 9.

Like a madman, he wrenched open the door and rushed into the darkness. A dull sound of hammering came from the conning-tower. No one else seemed to have heard. Was he mistaken, after all?

He dashed into the light, and then recoiled in horror and dread. The huge ape stood before him erect, carrying the body of a man in its arms, the body swaying limply.

Rupert staggered back against the wall, frozen with horror. Chuckling and gibbering, the monster raised the body high over its head, and then threw it to the ground. Again it snatched up its prey, and Rupert found his voice:

"Help, help, help!"

His cry went echoing through the ship. He saw the quivering body raised once more, and, defenceless as he was, with one arm almost helpless, he hurled himself at the ape. The brute swept him aside with one push of its shaggy arm, but Thurston sprang forward again.

"Help, help!"

The huge hand seized him by the throat, and his brain swam. Faintly and dazedly he heard shouts and running footsteps. The choking pressure relaxed, and he fell back in the arms of Ferrers Lord. Then Trethvick's cruel whip cracked like a pistol-shot.

"Back, Lucifer!" he croaked. "So you've got him, my pretty beauty, have you? By Jupiter, you've mauled him, too! Ha, ha, ha! That'll teach him how I treat skulkers, eh?"

The ape quailed before him. He buckled the strap to its waist and turned the key in the heavy padlock. Ferrers Lord laid Thurston down, and faced the captain.

"What does this mean, Trethvick?" he asked, his voice strangely cold.

Trethvick's ferret eyes quailed before the millionaire's look.

"It's like this," he stammered. "You see, No. 9 was sulky. I'd spoken to him before about idleness, and when I wanted him he couldn't be found, though I searched high and low. I thought, perhaps, he was trying to desert, for we've seen a boat hanging about. I knew Lucifer would scent him out, and so—"

"And so," said the millionaire grimly, "you gave that monster the run of the ship. It was a mad thing to do. I might have left my cabin, and what would have happened then? This will not do, Trethvick. Keep the brute under control, or I will shoot him, I swear. Is poor No. 9 badly hurt?"

Two of the startled sailors lifted the body. One of them uttered a shout.

"Why, it's not No. 9; it's not one of our men at all!"

"Switch on the light!" cried Ferrers Lord.

Hardly believing his eyes, he looked at the bloodstained face. Horror was stamped upon it. The men gathered round.

"This is indeed a mystery!" muttered the millionaire.

"The poor wretch is alive, but only just alive. Take Mr. Thurston to the saloon, and go back to your work or to bed, as the case may be. Carry the man to my cabin, and I will attend him. Pick out a couple of men to search the ship, Trethvick."

He was perfectly calm and collected, but his shaggy eyebrows were knitted. They obeyed him silently.

Thurston quickly revived, and saw the millionaire bending over him.

"You seem always in the wars, my poor friend," said the millionaire. "What has happened?"

Thurston gasped out what he had seen, but said nothing of what he had done.

"And so," said Ferrers Lord, smiling, "you went for the brute weaponless, and with only one arm fit for service? You have the bulldog in you, Rupert! Were you afraid?"

Thurston laughed weakly.

"Yes," he answered, "in the bluest of blue funks. I don't think I was ever so frightened before. Is poor No. 9 dead? If he is, Trethvick ought to be shot."

Ferrers Lord paced the room.

"The man is alive," he said quietly, "but, I fear, past hope. Take my advice, Rupert, and air no opinions concerning Nathan Trethvick. He is a brute and a bully, but he is a good servant. Perhaps his action has saved our lives to-night."

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Come to London
To See the Coronation.

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See this week's number of
"THE BOYS' HERALD," id.

"Saved our lives?"

"Yes, saved our lives. I cannot tell yet. The man you tried to rescue was not one of the crew, but a stranger. No. 9 has vanished. It seems clear that he was a traitor, and that he snuggled this man on board the launch. Well, Trethvick?"

The dwarf waddled in, and flung something upon the table—two cartridges and a coil of charred fuse. Petrified, the two men stared at the grim relics.

"Ha, ha!" croaked the dwarf. "There's a sight to gladden your eyes! Found 'em behind the big locker. By Jupiter, the old ape knows his business! Lucifer, my boy, you'll have double grog for this."

Ferrers Lord met Thurston's gaze.

"What does it mean?" gasped the young man.

The millionaire laughed harshly.

"Michael Scaroff!" he answered.

Rumours of Michael Scaroff's Boat—Thurston and Nathan Trethvick Come to Blows.

The golden June evening was fading as a trim little launch churned into the Old Swan Pier at London Bridge. Ferrers Lord, looking strangely pale, stepped out, followed by Rupert Thurston.

As they mounted the steps, the millionaire gripped his companion's arm, and pointed to a newspaper poster carried by a man who was shrieking out the news. Thurston read:

"LONDON 'EVENING NEWS.'"

Startling Story from Dover.

Submarine Boat in the Channel.

Disappearance of Cape Liner.

Strange Rumours of Foul Play."

The papers were selling like wildfire. Ferrers Lord summoned a passing hansom.

"Russian Embassy," he said, "and drive quickly!"

The cab rattled away, and the millionaire settled himself comfortably.

"My friend," he said, "I spend tremendous sums in paying spies, and yet the news of Scaroff's boat is known in London only a few hours later than we know it ourselves. Hang the man, how cleverly he has fooled us! While we have been on a wild-goose chase watching the Russian ports, he has calmly built his vessel in England. More than that, he has carried off my niece to hold as hostage. I love my niece, Rupert, but I love my vengeance better. Let them threaten what they like, I will not budge a single inch. Were she to die to-morrow, unless I renounced my hopes of revenge, I would say 'No!'"

Thurston shuddered as he looked at the millionaire. The white face was like marble, the dark eyes glowed with hate.

He thought of the beautiful girl who had sat opposite him in the lordly house in Park Lane. She was in the clutches of Michael Scaroff! It chilled his blood to think of it.

"I am not heartless, Rupert," went on Ferrers Lord, "nor am I mad. I love Violet, and I will move heaven and earth to free her from the Russian's grasp. But she must take her chance for a time. They dare not harm her."

Thurston made no reply, and they drove on in silence until they reached the Embassy.

"Wait in the cab," said Ferrers Lord; "I'll not keep you for long."

In a quarter of an hour he returned, looking grave and white. Thurston did not question him as the hansom wormed its way through the traffic. The twilight had given place to darkness when they arrived at the pier. The little launch dropped swiftly down the river among the crowded shipping below the Tower Bridge.

Like a statue the millionaire sat at the helm, guiding the launch through a floating city of ships. The black, swirling water reflected the lights of a hundred vessels.

"What a wonderful place London is!" said Thurston, at last breaking the silence. "What fabulous wealth rides here on old Father Thames! There is no place like it in the world!"

"You are right," said Ferrers Lord. "Do you know, Rupert, I love this beautiful, wicked, mysterious river. What tales of horror and misery it could tell! It fascinates me at times. I owe it a debt of gratitude, too, for the river brought you to me. Take the helm a minute."

He put the motor at half speed. A row of decayed, rotten buildings covered the southern bank. The launch stopped beside an oozy jetty, and Ferrers Lord made her fast. All was dark and dismal, and a dozen rats ran squeaking away as Ferrers Lord mounted the creaking wooden steps.

"Come carefully, Rupert," he said, "and pick your steps. This is a queer place."

A huge, shaggy dog rushed out of the darkness, baying savagely.

"Come back, you brute!" cried a croaking voice that Thurston knew well.

"Down, Satan, down!"

The cur slunk away, and a stunted figure waddled forward, carrying a lantern. It was Nathan Trethvick.

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EVERY
TUESDAY,

The "Magnet"

ONE
PENNY.

"Ha, ha," he croaked, "you're late! I've been waiting nearly an hour. Pleased to see you, Mr. Thurston! Come into my princely mansion. It's a lovely spot, sir—ha, ha!—a most beautiful spot!"

A light glimmered through the dusty window of the miserable shed. Trethvick flung open the door, and they went in. A candle stuck in the neck of an empty rum-bottle guttered and flared, and the only furniture was a filthy table, a rough stool, and a bundle of blankets piled in a corner. A wood-fire burned half-heartedly on an open hearth, and a little of its smoke escaped through a hole in the roof, but very little.

"Ha, ha!" croaked the dwarf. "This is a sweet spot, Mr. Thurston, eh? It surprises and dazzles you, does it? This is where I live when I'm ashore. Don't be astonished at anything Nathan Trethvick does. Perhaps you think I'm a miser; but I'm not. Here's wine of the best—four guineas a bottle it cost me—and here are cigars at a guinea each. We'll crack a bottle."

He opened a cupboard, and produced a bottle of champagne, cigars, and glasses. He opened the wine, filled the glasses, and, squatting on the table like a squirrel, leered at Rupert as he sucked at his cigar.

"Taste that wine," he said, "and you'll swear that you never tasted such liquid gold before. You wouldn't expect to find wine like that here, eh? Ha, ha! You'd like to ask me why I live here, eh? Don't do it, Mr. Thurston—don't do it!"

Ferrers Lord was pacing the room thoughtfully. He turned.

"Silence, Trethvick!" he said. "And let the drink alone. You have had enough already."

Trethvick lowered the glass. It was clear that he had been drinking heavily, for his ferret eyes were bloodshot, and his cheeks flushed.

"Bah!" he snarled. "I will drink if I like. Am I a dog, and you my master?" He pointed his crooked, hairy fingers at Thurston. "I hate this cub of yours. I hate—"

Ferrers Lord's eyes flashed fire, and his hands clenched.

"Silence!" he thundered. "Be careful what you say, Trethvick. I have borne much from you."

Trethvick gritted his teeth, but he quailed before that look.

"I am sorry," he said suddenly. "You must forgive me, Mr. Thurston. Ha, ha! What do you think of my wine? Isn't it gold—priceless, molten gold?"

Thurston's forehead was knitted angrily, but he swallowed his rage.

"So you hate me, Mr. Trethvick," he answered quietly, "and you are not afraid of saying so? Then, listen to me, and we will have an understanding. You are my superior, and so long as we are on board the Lord of the Deep I will obey you, and endeavour to treat you with respect. Here we are man to man. There is your wine, that would choke me if I tried to drink it!"

He dashed the champagne into the dwarf's face, and flung the glass away. Before Ferrers Lord could interfere, Thurston and Trethvick were grappling together. Thurston reeled back under the dwarf's weight, and the crash of their fall shook the rickety building.

"Satan!" roared the dwarf. "Help, Satan! Here, boy, here!"

The dog was outside, and it bayed wildly as it heard its master's voice, and scratched at the door. Ferrers Lord leaned against the cupboard, and watched the struggling men with a strange look upon his face. He lighted a cigar at the guttering candle, and, drawing up the chair, sat down.

Thurston was underneath, gripping the dwarf's wrists to keep the iron fingers from his throat. The broken arm had set well, for Rupert was in excellent training, but his strength was like a child's compared with the strength of Nathan Trethvick. By a mighty effort, he spun the dwarf over, still clutching the hairy wrists, and knelt on the man's chest.

"Satan! Satan!" bellowed Trethvick. "Hang the dog! Satan! Satan!"

There was a crash of glass, and a flash of tawny yellow. Out and bleeding, the fierce dog bounded through the window.

There was a crash and a flash, and it lay a lifeless heap.

"Play fair," said Ferrers Lord grimly, "and man to man."

He took the empty cartridge from the revolver and tossed it into the fire.

The revolver he knew how to use so well vanished up his sleeve. He pulled up the stool and sat down to watch the light.

The drink had told upon Nathan Trethvick, as drink must tell upon every man. Had he been sober, Rupert would have had little chance; as it was, he held his own.

They lay there glaring at each other, and panting heavily. Suddenly Thurston freed his right hand, and his clenched fist crashed down upon the dwarf's face with sickening force. It rose and fell again—twice, three times. Then the millionaire's cold voice cried:

"Enough!"

Thurston reeled to his feet, covered with dust. His collar had been torn off, and his knuckles were bleeding.

Ferrers Lord sipped his wine with a smile upon his lips.

The dwarf lay stunned and silent.

"A wash would improve you, Rupert," said Ferrers Lord. "I noticed a bucket of water and a towel under the table. Don't glare at me like that, man! What have I done to you?"

Thurston crossed the room and faced him.

"I want to say something to you!" he answered hotly. "There is Nathan Trethvick, your minion. I do not forget that you saved my life, but you cannot expect me to stand tamely by and be openly insulted in your presence by a misshapen cur like that. Ever since I met him on board your vessel he has sneered and jeered at me. I am fond of you, Lord, and I ought to respect you, but I find it hard to do so when I hear Nathan Trethvick speak to you as he spoke just now. I do not seek to learn your secrets; I only warn you. This human cur has some strange power over you, and if you are wise you will break that power at once. I tell you, Lord, sooner or later, he will play you false. Take my warning!"

Ferrers Lord laughed nervously.

"I am sorry this has happened," he answered—"terribly sorry! You have guessed the truth, Rupert, and I will not deny it. Some day you will hear the story and understand, but not yet. Perhaps you will pity me then more than you will blame me. I am glad you beat him, and brute though he is, he will bear you no ill-will for that. That is the way with Trethvick—he admires strength. Try and forget this, Rupert, for my sake."

"That is all very well," said Thurston; "but you forget that I am to be cooped up on the same boat with this beast. You ask a hard thing. I shall always be longing to fly at his throat."

The millionaire took up the candle and relighted the cigar, which had gone out. The dwarf groaned.

"Rupert," said Ferrers Lord, in a whisper, "I would give half my wealth to keep you with me; but I would not keep you against your will. I want your help and your company. I am a millionaire, but money does not make friends. I am a lonely man, and you have brought happiness into a lonely life. I am beginning to look upon you as a son, almost. Do not ask me what I have in common with that hound yet, for I will tell you in good time. I cannot shake him off. Will an apology satisfy you? You have punished him pretty well, as it is."

Good-natured, good-tempered Thurston had cooled down, and his passion had vanished. There was a pleading note in the millionaire's voice that touched him. He laughed.

"I don't want any apology, old man," he answered. "I suppose he was drunk, and didn't know what he was saying. Sorry I lost my temper like I did. Say no more about it."

"As you wish. You are a good fellow, Rupert. Depend upon it, I will not forget you for this."

He pulled the bucket from under the table, and, beckoning Thurston to stand aside, dashed the contents over the dwarf. It was a drastic remedy, but it answered. The dwarf sat up. The first thing his eyes rested upon was the stiffening body of the dog.

"Come," said Ferrers Lord roughly. "Am I to wait for you all night? Pull yourself together. I have killed your dog, and unless you reform, Trethvick, you will begin to wish you were as dead as it is. Stand up, and steady yourself. You have insulted Mr. Thurston. Apologise to him at once!"

The dwarf staggered to his feet, his clothes streaming with water, and his ugly face covered with blood. For a moment he stood still, biting his lips. Then he croaked:

"I'm a sailor, sir, and I know how to obey orders. It was a fair fight, and I don't bear Mr. Thurston no ill-will. Oh, yes, I'll apologise! There's my hand on it, sir!"

His hand felt as cold and limp as the fin of a fish when Thurston took it. There was no sincerity in the dwarf's croaking voice; but Rupert did not notice that. Ferrers Lord rose.

"Let us go," he said. "You had better pitch that dog into the river. I hardly think anybody would think of robbing this place."

"Ha, ha! It's not very likely—eh?" tittered the dwarf. "Poor old Satan? You weren't a bad sort o' dog, and if I'd not made a fool of myself you'd have been alive now. Well, you're only fit to bury. By your leave, sir. This is my graveyard, Mr. Thurston. I have one on the premises, you see."

He jerked away the rickety table, and opened a trapdoor. A black pit yawned in the floor of the room, and from its gloomy depths came the hiss and gurgle of restless water. Trethvick dragged the dog to the edge of the pit, and kicked it over. There was a sullen splash.

"Poor old Satan! That's the end of him. He's off to sea now to make food for fishes. I'm ready, sir."

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Ferrers Lord was already in the launch, and he called impatiently. Trethvick shook himself, and locked the door.

"I might just as well leave it open," he said, "for anybody could get through the window. Let 'em try in the dark, that's all. I've left the woe open, Mr. Thurston. Ha, ha, ha!"

The launch dropped swiftly down the river, and in an hour they were on board the Lord of the Deep. The vessel sank immediately, and made for the open sea.

Dinner was served late in the saloon. Ned Horton did not dine with them now, for he had taken his proper place among the hands. Ferrers Lord spoke little until the Chinese servant placed a silver dish of fruits and nuts before him.

"You will, no doubt, be curious to know what I have found out," he said, cracking a filbert. "I have learned two rather important things—that Michael Scaroff's brother Ivan kidnapped my niece, and that Scaroff's boat was built on the Clyde, presumably for a Frenchman. At the Embassy they could give me no news of either of the Russians, but there was a letter for me. Shall I read it?"

"Please do!"

The millionaire took the letter from his pocket, and read lazily.

"My Dear Ferrers Lord,—Personally, I am not responsible for the terms offered in this note, for they were drawn up by my brother. We are both a little frightened of you, and, as the proverb says, the man who sups with the devil needs a long spoon. The charming lady who has decided—against her will—to visit us in Russia is surely worth consideration. Give us your word not to molest us in any way now, or at any future time, and she will be restored to you. If you refuse, I cannot be answerable for anything my brother will do. A message sent through my bankers will find me.—I. S."

"A strange letter," said Thurston thoughtfully. "I hardly grasp its meaning. I know enough of Scaroff to be aware that he is a bitter foe to have, but surely he dare not hurt her ladyship. Are the police aware of this affair?"

Ferrers Lord laughed, and stirred his coffee.

"Of course, there was a hue-and-cry in the morning," he answered, "when the maid found that Violet's bed had not been slept in; and, naturally enough, in the panic that followed, they called in the police. I settled that the moment I heard the news at Brindisi, by getting one of my Brussels agents to wire that her ladyship was there. But about what Scaroff will do, and how far he will dare to go, I cannot say. Let the fiend as much as hurt a single hair of her head, and I will make him curse the day he was born! I have more to say to you about Nathan Trethvick. It will be better for all parties to have you separated for a time, so I intend to send him to Russia in pursuit of Ivan Scaroff. We are making for the Baltic now."

"I intend to put Trethvick ashore to-morrow. He speaks Russian fluently, and knows all the big towns well. In the morning I will take full command, and tell you what you have to do. Scaroff may be building other vessels, for all I know, and we must not be behindhand. I am building another myself."

"In England?" asked Thurston.

"No; I have a regular engineering works on the island of Helbergen. It is a tiny little river off the Norwegian coast, and not marked on any ordinary map. You will see it ere long. Good-night, Rupert."

"Good-night, if you are going to bed so early."

Shooting with Lightning—Thurston has His First Stroll Below Water.

The millionaire and Ned Horton were splashing like a pair of seals in the swimming-bath when Thurston appeared, towel on arm. The water was deliciously cool and refreshing. Ferrers Lord swam up as Rupert reappeared after his dive.

"Hallo!" he said gaily. "What a sluggard you are! I have been up hours, and so has Horton, and everybody else."

"You're all welcome to get up in the middle of the night, if you like," answered Rupert, with a smile; "but I prefer my downy couch. By the way, where are we, and why are the engines stopped?"

"We are at the bottom of the sea, my friend, the sea in question being the Baltic. The engines are stopped through a slight breakdown, and while they are being repaired I intend to take you for a walk. We will breakfast first, of course."

The thought of walking at the bottom of the sea fascinated Rupert. He had already tried one of the diving-dresses in the swimming-bath under Horton's directions, and was getting used to the queer sensation of moving and breathing under water.

"Come into the billiard-room," said the millionaire, "and I will show you something."

Thurston followed him. The millionaire took a long tube of polished steel from beneath the billiard-table. To Thurston

(Continued on page 28.)

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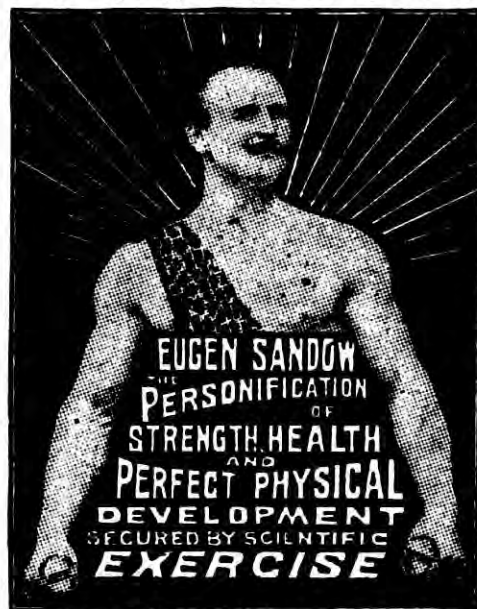
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MAGNET, 29, 1/11.

it looked like a long Eastern gun, such as Arabs use. Ferrers Lord swung it over his shoulder with an effort.

"This is rather a heavy weapon to carry about in the air," he said; "but in water it is only a featherweight. To the bath-room, now, Rupert, and please bring that bucket with you."

A good deal astonished, Thurston lifted the bucket. It was full of water, and covered at the top with a net.

"What have you got in here?" he asked, as he heard a splashing. "Are they fish?"

"Don't be inquisitive. Bring them along!"

The millionaire emptied the bucket into the tank, and Thurston saw the fish dart away. Ned Horton came forward with a diving-suit, and helped the millionaire to dress.

"What on earth are you going to do?" asked Rupert. "You promised me a walk. Surely you didn't mean only a walk in the tank?"

"Patience, my dear fellow, and you will have your stroll. I am just going into the tank to try my gun. I have altered it and improved it. Watch, and you will see something interesting. Give me the helmet, Horton. No more questions, Rupert, please."

The nozzle was screwed on, and, taking the long steel tube, Ferrers Lord flung it into the tank. Horton steadied him down the steps.

The water was pure as crystal, and Thurston could see perfectly. Ferrers Lord picked up the tube, and, raising his helmeted head, looked round him. He was in a good twelve feet of water, and Thurston saw a fish dart past him. It hovered near him, and the tube went up. The fish turned over, showing its white belly, and slowly floated to the surface.

"Christopher!" said the diver. "That's queer game to shoot, sir!"

"A queer gun to shoot with, you mean, Ned! There's another! Fish that one out for me!"

The diver lay down, and, splashing with his fingers, gradually brought the dead fish within reach. Both men examined it attentively. There was no wound upon it. Before they had flung it away Ferrers Lord had clambered up the steps. Horton unscrewed the nozzle of the helmet.

"Well," he said, "what do you think of my invention, Rupert?"

"Wonderful! Amazing!" answered Thurston, examining the damp steel tube. "You must use some terribly strong explosive, for I know that water will turn and flatten a rifle-bullet fired with either gunpowder, cordite, or dynamite. What do you shoot from it? There was no sign of wound on the fish."

"No, of course not. He was killed by lightning."

Thurston laughed, but not sceptically.

"I am beginning to understand," he said. "You mean he was killed by an electric shock, as they put criminals to death in America? Electrocutation, I think they call it."

"Exactly, my dear fellow, with the difference that, instead of sending the current along wires, I aim it direct at my target. How I keep it from scattering, and strike the target I am at, could only be understood by a skilled electrician, so I will not attempt to explain. As a matter of fact, to put it simply, I fire a flash of lightning from that gun."

He paused for a moment, and, taking an enormously long cigarette-holder containing a cigarette from the table, he pushed the tube through the nozzle of the helmet, and beckoned to Horton for a light.

He looked a queer figure with the smoke oozing from the open valve and nozzle as he went on:

"You see, the density of water is too great to use a weapon firing a solid projectile such as we use in the air. As an example, a good diver can dive from a great height into six or seven feet of water without striking the bottom. Electricity, if pro-

perly controlled, is just as deadly as any bullet, and I can make it travel with enormous velocity. I merely shoot a flash of lightning at anything I choose to kill, and I can regulate the power of the flash to any extent. For instance, it would be folly to shoot a shark with a charge like the one I used to kill those herrings there."

Rupert handled the gun with something like awe. He felt that Ferrers Lord was more than a clever man—he was a genius.

"May I try the weapon some time or other?" he asked.

"Certainly!" answered the millionaire; "but not yet. I must give it a thorough testing before I allow it out of my hands, for electricity is a dangerous fluid. When I am satisfied I will have half a dozen others made. Perhaps we will explore some of the strange submarine forests then, and do battle with these strange monsters."

"Then there are forests under the sea?"

"Yes, my friend; forests that cover hundreds and thousands of miles, full of strange beasts that mankind has never dreamed of. When people read about the sea-serpent in the 'silly' season they laugh, but I do not. What do they know about the mighty wilderness of waters three times greater than the land? Not many years ago people denied the existence of gorillas and the pigmies of Central Africa. What do they know of the fathomless ocean depths, and of the wonders hidden from every eye? But come, Rupert, and put on your armour. Call someone to help you, Horton."

Aided by a couple of sailors, they donned their diving-suit and passed into the dark, iron-walled room.

The door was closed and barred behind them, and the valve opened. As the water gushed higher they felt as if a ponderous weight had been lifted from them.

They lighted their lamps, and Ferrers Lord unbarred the outer door.

Thurston uttered a cry of amaze and delight, that his brzen helmet rang back in his ears.

The searchlights of the Lord of the Deep were flashing upon a forest of giant weeds of every colour, from murky black to brilliant crimson.

The millionaire walked briskly forward and plunged into an avenue of the strange forest, the others following close at his heels.

The path at their feet was golden sand littered with brilliant shells. Gorgeous fish flitted around and above them, like birds through the branches of a wood.

Where the shadows lay, dark, weird goggle eyes peered out at them in wonder.

But all was silent—horribly, uncannily silent—as they strode on.

In an open glade Ferrers Lord paused, and sat down on a barnacle rock. A huge lobster waddled away, half walking, half swimming, and a conger eel, a good twenty pounds in weight, wormed like a water-snake into shelter.

The millionaire swung the gun from his shoulder and flashed his lamp upward through the glassy water.

They watched him excitedly. Above the tops of the tall weeds appeared a shadow, and the lantern flashed upon something white.

"By Jove," thought Rupert uneasily, "it's a shark!"

Horton understood this, too, but his experience of diving in many seas kept him from evincing any nervousness.

To an ordinary diver, who obtains his air through tubes from the surface, a battle with a shark is a terrible thing, for to sever the tubes means death. But now there were no tubes to be severed, and even a shark's fierce teeth could make little impression on a tough diving-suit.

The shark came rearing, and hovered about them like a monstrous bird. Ferrers Lord propped the gun against the rock, and took a heavy knife from his belt. The huge fish dropped lower still, and swam slowly round the three men, while Horton also unsheathed his knife.

(Another long instalment of this thrilling serial story next week.)



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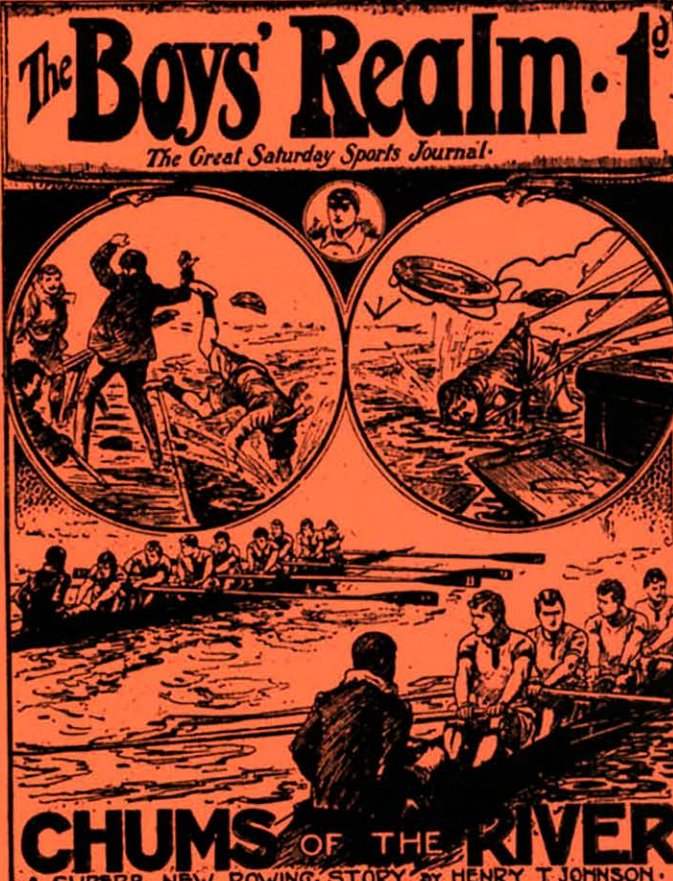
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