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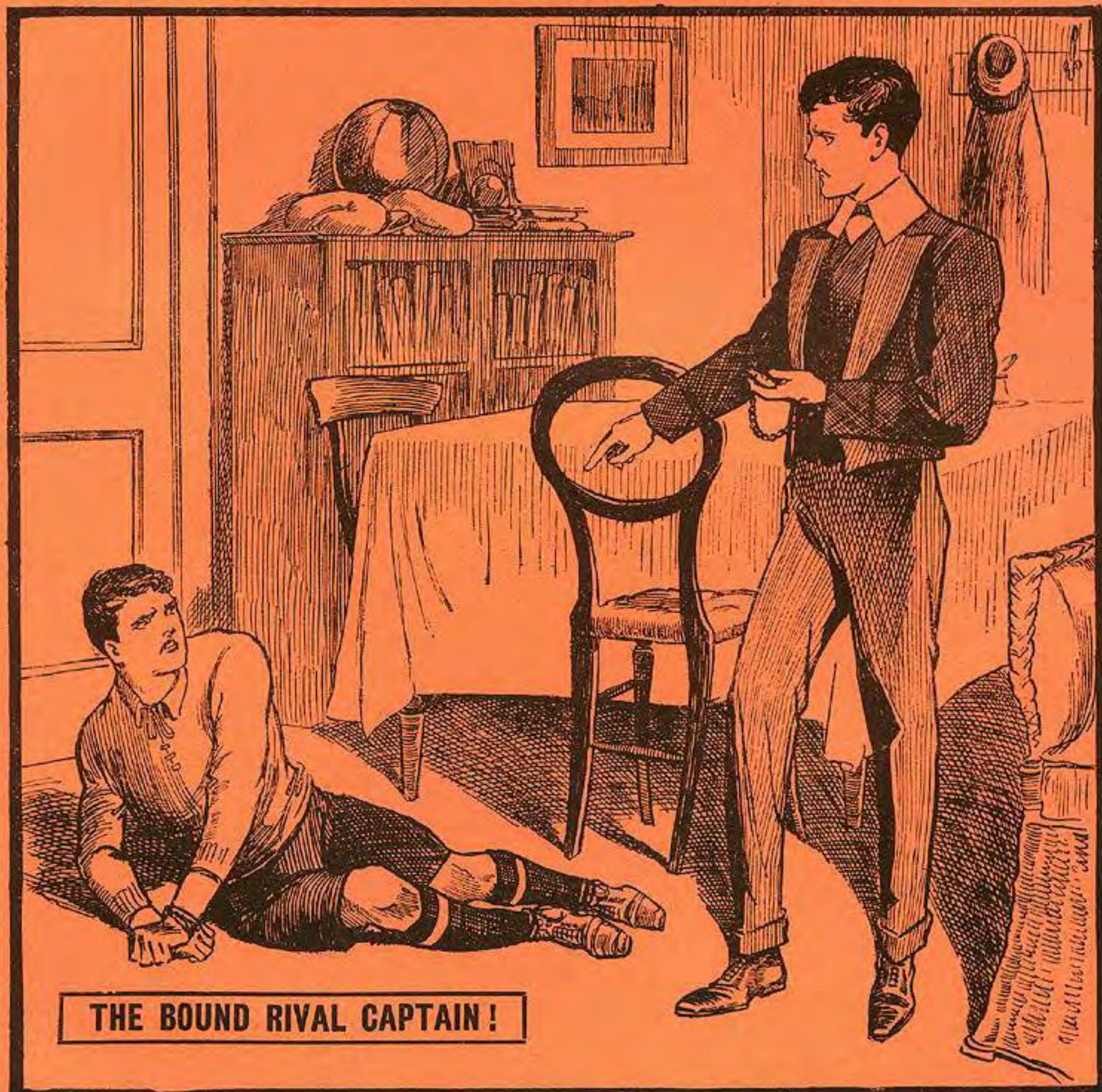
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Vernon Smith, the Bounder of
the Remove Form at
Greyfriars.

- - BY - -

FRANK RICHARDS.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Wharton Is Wanted.

"WHAT the dickens—"

Harry Wharton jumped up from the table in his study in the Remove passage at Greyfriars. A shower of blots flew from his pen, and scattered themselves over the Latin imposition he had been writing out. The door had been suddenly flung open, and a crowd of juniors had marched in, and the passage behind them was crowded with more. It seemed as if the whole of the Remove Form at Greyfriars had suddenly made up their minds to pay a visit to Harry Wharton's study, and to cram

themselves into a room that was certainly not planned to hold more than a dozen.

"What the—"

"Come in, bedad!" said Micky Desmond. "There's room for all of ye. Come in!"

"Oh, we're coming in!" said John Bull cheerfully.

"Yes, rather!"

"Wharton's here!"

"Now, then, Johnny, you're spokesman!"

Harry Wharton backed away. The juniors were crowding in, and the table was pushed aside. The study was full of the Remove—there were Frank Nugent and Bob Cherry, Wharton's special chums, and Johnny Bull, and Tom Brown,

and Leigh, and Hazeldene, and Russell, and Desmond, and Ogilvy, and a crowd more—and outside the crowd seemed still more dense.

"What on earth do you want?" demanded Harry Wharton, in not very amiable tones. "Look here, if this is a jape, the sooner you chuck it the better. I don't want the study wrecked."

"You see—"

"I see that you're shoving my table over, Ogilvy, you ass!" shouted Wharton. "Look out!"

But it was too late. The table had collided with the fender, and half a dozen fellows were pushing on it, and it toppled over into the grate. Showers of books and papers shot into the hearth, and the inkpot skated down the slope of the table-top and deposited itself in the fire. There was a terrific sputter immediately, and the study was filled with a most unpleasant scent.

"You ass!" roared Wharton.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Here, draw it mild!" said Nugent. "This is my study, too! Don't shove!"

"Sure, it's the spalpeens behind that are shoving!" said Micky Desmond.

"Order, there!"

"Rats!"

"Don't push!"

"More rats!"

"Johnny Bull, get to bizney!"

John Bull cleared his throat. He drove his elbow into Skinner's ribs to give himself more room, and tramped on Bob Cherry's toes. Then he began.

"Wharton, friends, Romans, countrymen, and Removites, lend me your ears."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Cheese that, Bull!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "Come to the point!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Open the window, and let the scent of that ink out," said Harry Wharton. "Now, Bull, if you've got anything to say, get it off your chest, and let these howling asses get out of my study."

"Ahem! We have come here—"

"I can see that for myself," said Wharton tartly. "The worry is, when will you go?"

The Removites chuckled.

"We've come here," pursued Johnny Bull serenely, "to put it to you plainly. After meeting in solemn conclave, the Remove have decided that you've got to hear reason."

"Hear, hear!"

"Founder's Day comes along this week," said Johnny Bull. "It's a whole holiday, and we are playing Highcliffe at footer in the afternoon."

"Hear, hear!"

"On such an occasion it is necessary to give Highcliffe a terrific licking—to knock them sky-high, and to give them the kybosh generally."

"Hear, hear!"

"Bravo, Bull!"

Thus encouraged, John Bull went on. Harry Wharton had a puzzled expression upon his face. He did not know what the juniors were driving at, and he was trembling for the rest of the furniture in his study. At every moment he expected to see the bookcase tumble over, or the clock and the flower-vases swept off the mantelpiece.

"Under the circumstances, especially as we hear that Highcliffe have been training hard, we want the best skipper we can get for the match."

"You've got Bulstrode," said Wharton.

"Ahem!"

"You see—"

"Bulstrode is captain of the Form, and footer captain," agreed John Bull, "but we're all pretty well agreed that we had better luck when you were skipper. Consequently, the Remove Football Club, and the Remove generally, want you to skip for the occasion of the match with Highcliffe."

"Rats!"

"You can't possibly refuse, when the whole club wants it," urged Johnny Bull. "You needn't go over old ground again. I know the Remove dropped you out of the captaincy, and elected Bulstrode instead, all of their own accord. That doesn't make any difference. Bulstrode is all right. But you go one better, and on this occasion we want you to captain the Remove team. And you can't refuse."

"Have you asked Bulstrode?"

"Ahem!"

"Does he know you've come here?"

"Ahem!"

Wharton coloured indignantly.

"He doesn't know you're here?"

"Ahem!"

"Well, I do refuse, most emphatically," said Harry Wharton. "You elected Bulstrode of your own accord, and

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now you'll have to stand by your choice. Besides, Bulstrode is all right. You can easily lick Highcliffe. And you know my decision about the matter. I'm backing up Bulstrode."

"Yes, but—"

"Look here—"

"There are no buts in the case. I wouldn't listen to the suggestion for a minute. I don't want to skipper the Remove team, and I wouldn't cut the ground from under Bulstrode's feet for anything. Buzz off!"

The juniors looked at one another.

They had intended to overwhelm their former captain, as it were, by coming in strong force, and showing him that practically the whole of the Remove had determined upon having him for football captain again.

But Harry Wharton was evidently not to be overwhelmed—not by words, at all events.

"Now, look here," exclaimed John Bull, "this won't do! About taking the captaincy back, you can please yourself, but you're going to captain the Form team for the match on Founder's Day. That's settled."

"Rats!"

"It's a big thing, I guess," urged Fisher T. Fish, the American junior. "Everybody's sisters and cousins and aunts will be coming down, you know, as it's a whole holiday, and the weather's fine. I guess we can't afford to leave anything to chance, and we all know that Highcliffe are training like mad."

"Would you mind buzzing off while I get on with my impot?" asked Harry Wharton politely. "I have to take it in to Mr. Quelch after tea."

"Look here—"

"I tell you—"

"I guess—"

"Faith, and I say—"

Harry Wharton pointed to the door. That was a little too much for the juniors, who were already excited. They made a rush.

"Rag him!" roared Tom Brown. "Rag him and wreck the blessed study, and we'll soon bring him round!"

"Hurrah!"

"Go it!"

"Hold on!" yelled Frank Nugent. "This is my study, too!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Rats!"

"Pile in!"

And in spite of Nugent's expostulations the juniors piled in. In a couple of minutes No. 1 Study in the Remove passage was a scene of terrific uproar.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Methods of Persuasion.

CRASH!
Crash!
Bump!

"Hold on!" roared Nugent.

But Nugent was pushed aside and rolled over. Nugent's objections were not likely to count. The fact that it was his study as well as Harry Wharton's did not matter in the least to the excited Removites. It wasn't their study, and that was all that they cared about.

Five or six of them had seized upon Harry Wharton. The former captain of the Remove struggled furiously.

But he was bumped over by force of numbers, and pinioned, while the juniors wrecked the study under his eyes.

Wharton writhed and struggled in vain. Wrecking a study was a very common punishment for delinquencies at Greyfriars, though it had seldom befallen Harry Wharton. But now his friends as well as his enemies were against him. Johnny Bull and Bob Cherry and Tom Brown were all chums of his, and they were all taking an active part in the proceedings. And Bolsover and Skinner and Snoop, his enemies, naturally did not let a chance like this pass. They made sure that nothing was knocked over without being broken.

Amid roars of laughter the rag proceeded.

"You dangerous lunatics!" Wharton gasped. "I'll lather you for this."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Pile in!"

"Better have the carpet up," said Snoop.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Let my carpet alone!" roared Frank Nugent, struggling in the grasp of three or four of the raggers. Nugent had been with the deputation up to a certain point—the point of seeing his own study wrecked. At that point he wanted to stop, but the others did not. Nugent was bumped over, and a group of raggers sat on him to keep him from interfering.

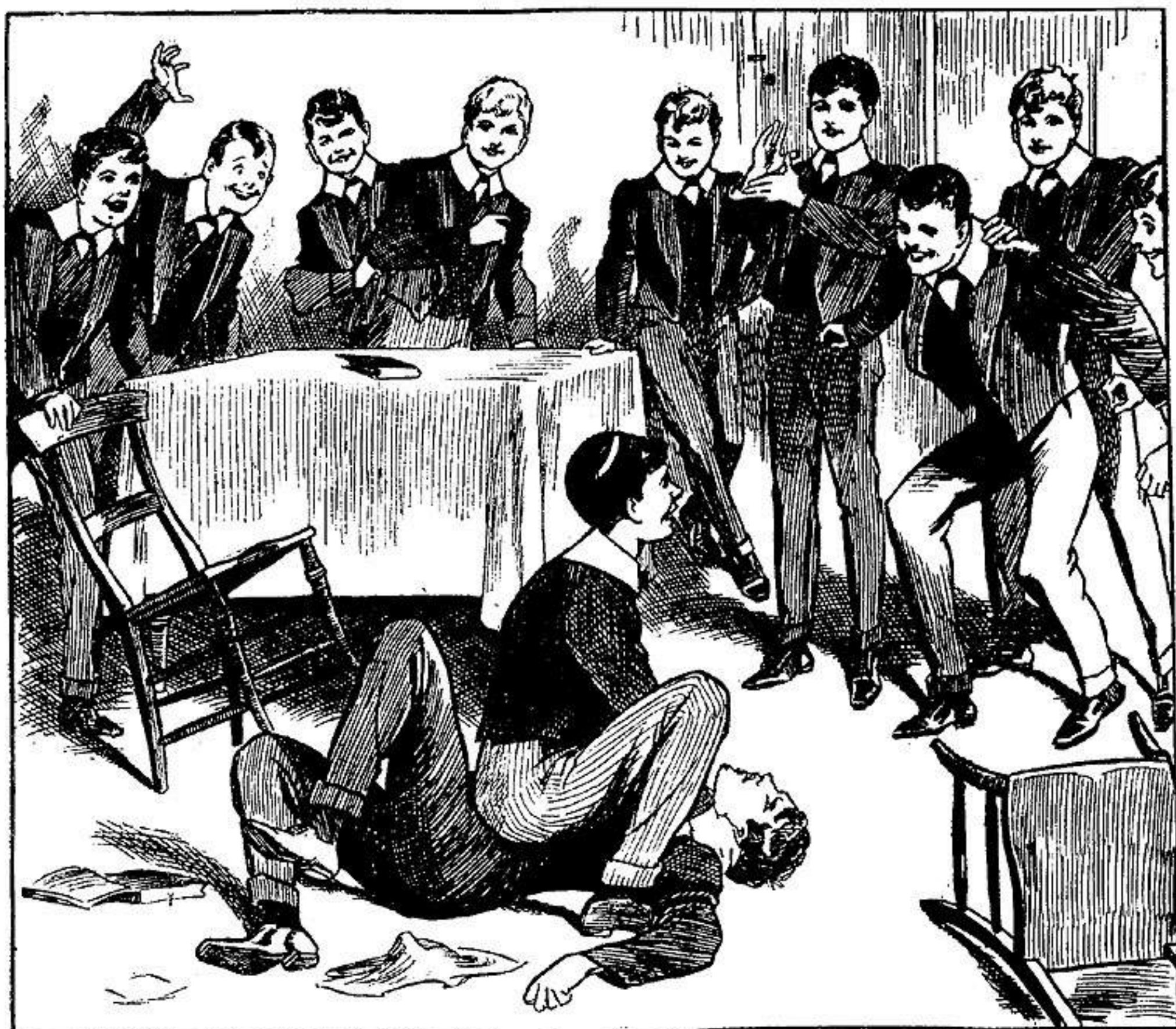
"Ha, ha, ha!"

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"Bump him!" exclaimed Bolsover. "Right-ho!" said John Bull. "We'll bump him till he says 'Yes.' You're going to be bumped, Wharton!" "Good egg," roared the Remove. (See below.)

"Are you going to captain the team on Founder's Day, Wharton?" demanded Johnny Bull.

"No!" roared Wharton.

"Then have the carpet up!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Let that carpet alone!" shrieked Wharton.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yank it up!"

There was a terrific tearing, and huge clouds of dust, as the study carpet was torn up. It had been down a long time, and in places it had been worn into holes. But there were more tears than holes in it by the time it was ripped off the floor by the raggers.

Dust flew everywhere, and some of the raggers began to sneeze.

"Now, Wharton, are you giving in?" asked Tom Brown.

"No!"

"Atchoo! Atchoo! Ow! It's dusty! Atchoo!"

"Atchoo—choo-oo-oo!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Get out of my study!" roared Wharton. "Atchoo! Gerroout! Atchoo!"

"Are you going to captain—"

"No! Atchoo! Never! Atchoo-oo!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bump him!" said Bolsover.

"Good egg!"

"Right-ho!" exclaimed Bull. "Bump him till he says yes."

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Now, then, take hold of the duffer. You're going to be bumped, Wharton."

"I'll punch your silly head——"

"Do you give in?"

"No!"

"Bump him, then!"

Bump!

It was certainly a somewhat peculiar way of persuading a fellow to captain a football team. But every other way had been tried with Harry Wharton. Since he had been dropped out of the captaincy, and George Bulstrode selected in his place, he had steadily refused to take any step that might seem like attempting to oust Bulstrode.

That was all very well; but what the Remove footer club wanted was the best skipper they could get, especially for a match with Highcliffe; and Wharton's attitude, right enough as it was, was distinctly exasperating to them.

Bump!

Wharton gasped for breath, but his determination remained unshaken.

"Now, then, what do you say?" demanded Johnny Bull.

"Rats!"

"Oh, bump him!"

Bump, bump!

"Anything to say, you obstinate bounder?" asked Bob Cherry.

"Go and eat coke!" gasped Wharton.

"Give him another!"

By FRANK RICHARDS.
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"Hear, hear!"

"Not too much row!" grinned Hazeldene. "We don't want Quelchy or a prefect coming along. Loder would be glad of a chance to drop on us."

"Quite right. Quiet, you fellows!"

Bump! Bump! Bump!

"Now, then, Wharton!"

"Yarrah!"

"What do you say?"

"Rats!"

"My hat, he wants more! Now, then!"

"Hold on!" exclaimed a sharp voice, as a burly junior came elbowing his way through the crowd of laughing juniors in the passage—"hold on! What's the row here?"

It was Bulstrode.

The uproar in the study died away. The juniors who were bumping Harry Wharton let him drop upon the floor. The whole crowd looked at George Bulstrode, and they looked very sheepish.

Bulstrode, the captain of the Remove, looked into the study in amazement.

"What's the row about?" he demanded.

No one answered.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Dogs and the Shadow!

BULSTRODE stared at the crowded juniors in Harry Wharton's study. He evidently did not know what to make of the disturbance. And no one felt very much inclined to explain to him. Bulstrode was captain of the Form—every Form at Greyfriars had its captain, and in the eyes of the Remove, the Remove captain was of more importance than all the other Form-captains put together. For was he not also football captain of the Remove club, and cricket captain in the summer; and was not Remove football, and was not Remove cricket, of all important things the most important.

The grandees of the Fifth and Sixth might smile at junior games, but the Remove knew what they were worth as footballers. But it had to be admitted that Bulstrode had not upheld the dignity of the post of Remove captain so well as Harry Wharton had done in his time. The Remove had been beaten by Highcliffe once, and Highcliffe were a team they were accustomed to walk over. True, they had beaten Highcliffe since.

But that did not alter the fact that Ponsonby & Co. of the neighbouring school had licked them, and crowed much over the conquest. Then, during Bulstrode's captaincy, the Remove had proved their right to be exempt from fagging for the Fifth and Sixth; but everybody knew that Wharton and Bob Cherry had been in the firing-line, so to speak, all the time, and Bulstrode had taken a very secondary place.

Upon the whole, Bulstrode's captaincy had not been a success, and if Wharton had been willing to resume his old place he could have it for the asking. But that Harry Wharton would not do. His opinion was that, the Remove having made their choice, they should keep to it. Bulstrode had done his best, and more could not be expected of any fellow.

The other fellows felt the same, to a certain extent. But the danger of allowing the Highcliffe "cads" to score another victory was too much. Bulstrode, or no Bulstrode, they wanted Wharton to captain them against Highcliffe. At the same time, to tell Bulstrode so was not a pleasant task for anyone. Nobody wanted to hurt his feelings; and, besides, if he lost his temper, he was likely to cut up rusty. And when George Bulstrode cut up rusty somebody was likely to get hurt, more seriously than in his feelings.

Bulstrode seemed puzzled by the general silence.

He looked at Bob Cherry, who coloured—at Nugent, who whistled—at John Bull, who looked out of the window. He looked at Tom Brown, and the New Zealand junior looked on the floor. He looked at Mark Linley, and the Lancashire lad turned pink. He looked round at all the fellows, in the silence that was growing painful.

"What's the row about?"

Still silence.

"All gone off your giddy rockers?" asked Bulstrode, his look growing a little unpleasant. "I've been trying to do some work, and I couldn't, for the frightful row you were making. What have you been ragging Wharton for?"

"Oh, we've—er—we've been ragging him!" said Skinner.

"I can see that, fathead! What have they been ragging you for, Wharton?"

"Because they're a set of silly asses!" said Harry.

"Ahem!" said John Bull.

"But what was it about?"

"It was about over when you came in," said Frank Nugent, with an attempt at humour. "Let's get out."

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"I guess——"

"What's all this giddy mystery for?" exclaimed Bulstrode angrily. "Is it something up against me, as well as Wharton? Won't you tell me what it is, Wharton?"

"Oh, they can tell you!" said Harry.

"What is it, Nugent?"

"Oh, never mind!"

"Hang it all," broke out Bob Cherry, "better be frank about it! Bulstrode's entitled to know what we think on the subject, anyway."

"Yes, rather," said Tom Brown.

"Look here, Bulstrode, it stands like this. We want Wharton to captain the Remove team for the Highcliffe match," said Bob Cherry.

Bulstrode turned crimson.

"I had an idea that I was footer captain," he said.

"So you are; but you're not up to this, and we want Wharton to take it on, for this match only, you understand, because it's a special one."

Bulstrode's face from crimson grew pale.

"And you've asked Wharton?"

"Yes."

"What did you say, Wharton?"

"I said no."

"And that's why they ragged you?"

"Well, yes. I didn't mind that, though," said Harry hastily. "That was only a game."

"Well," said Bulstrode slowly, "to go behind your skipper's back in this way is rotten. That's my opinion; it's caddish."

"Hold on," said Bob Cherry. "Draw it mild. We were going to tell you, of course."

"If Wharton accepted!" said Bulstrode bitterly. "But if he refused, I suppose I shouldn't have been told he'd been asked."

"Oh, you'd have heard of it!"

"And how do you expect me to take it?"

"Take it as you like!" said Bob sharply. "You're not up to Wharton's weight as footer captain, and you know it. You wouldn't be captain of the Remove now if you hadn't egged on the fellows to drop Wharton, and played all sorts of mean tricks to get in at the election."

"Hear, hear!" murmured Nugent.

"Chuck it, you chaps!" said Wharton. "That's all ancient history now. Drop it, for goodness' sake. I haven't accepted the offer, Bulstrode, and I'm not going to. That settles it."

Bulstrode's lip curled in a sneer.

"And as you refuse, I suppose they'll come back to me as second best," he said. "Well, if they do, they'll come for nothing. I won't captain the team for the Highcliffe match, whether you do or not."

"Bulstrode!"

"I mean it!"

And the Form captain turned on his heel and strode from the study.

The juniors gazed at one another in silence for some moments. They could all see how deeply wounded Bulstrode was, and they were sorry, with one exception, perhaps. Vernon-Smith, the fellow who was known as the Bounder of Greyfriars, was lounging in the doorway. He smiled. Vernon-Smith had little interest in football questions, though he had shown that he could play footer if he liked. He was a slacker, and a great deal of a blackguard. But he had been very willing to take a hand in wrecking No. 1 Study. His quarrel with the chums of No. 1 was of old standing.

"Bulstrode's got it in the neck this time," he remarked.

And Snoop ventured upon a faint chuckle.

Bob Cherry turned upon them with a frowning brow.

"Shut up, you cads!" he exclaimed. "Bulstrode's worth fifty of you—both of you stuck together! Shut up!"

"Oh, rats!" drawled Vernon-Smith. "After all, what the fellow said was quite correct—it was mean and caddish to go behind his back like this. It would have been more manly to tell him what you meant to do."

Bob Cherry coloured uncomfortably, and so did the others. Bulstrode's reproach had hit them hard. They had not meant to act in an underhand manner—in fact, they had not thought of Bulstrode at all in doing as they had done. But now that it was put to them in plain English, they saw that Bulstrode would look at it like that.

"Blessed if I remembered the chap's existence at all," said Nugent.

"Is that the way to treat your footer skipper?" sneered the Bounder.

"Oh, ring off!" exclaimed Bob Cherry angrily. "It's no bizney of yours, anyway. What do you care about footer matches? You'd rather hang round a pub. and smoke cheap cigarettes than play a game of footer any day."

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"You buzz off!" said John Bull, and he gave the Bounder a shove that helped him to start. And the other fellows in the passage lent their aid, and Vernon-Smith was the recipient of so many shoves that he was propelled along the passage as far as the stairs, where he arrived breathless.

John Bull turned to Harry Wharton.

"I'm sorry Bulstrode's got his back up in this way," he said. "But there you are. You know what an obstinate beggar he is. He says he won't captain the team against Highcliffe now, whether you do or not, so you simply must do it."

"I dare say he'll come round."

"But if he doesn't?"

"I can't take his place. It's no good talking. I can't, and I won't! That's settled. You must do the best you can with Bulstrode."

The juniors looked at Wharton, and looked at one another. They knew Harry Wharton well; he meant what he said, and he was a fellow of his word.

It seemed that in striving to regain Wharton as their footer captain, they had not only failed, but had lost the captain that they already possessed—somewhat like the dog in the fable who, grasping after the shadow, lost the bone he had in his mouth.

"Look here," said Johnny Bull, "that won't do, you know."

"That's my answer."

"He wants some more bumping," said Skinner.

"Bumping—eh?" said a genial voice, as Wingate of the Sixth, the captain of Greyfriars, came in. "Bumping! You youngsters may not be aware that you have been making a row which has disturbed the Sixth—the Sixth Form—and reached the masters' studies. But now I tell you," went on Wingate humorously, "you will understand that it is necessary for you to do a hundred lines each, and show them to me before bed-time. And if there is so much as a whisper in the Remove passage after this I'll gate you for a half-holiday, so take care."

"Oh, Wingate!"

The captain of Greyfriars walked away laughing. And the Removites slowly dispersed. It had been Bob Cherry's idea, that demonstration in Wharton's study, and it had to be confessed that the demonstration had been a hopeless, complete, ghastly failure. The Removites told Bob Cherry as much as they quitted the wrecked study, and they put it into exceedingly plain English.

For some five minutes Bob Cherry had to listen to remarks in which such polite expressions as "fathead," "chump," "dummy," "burbler," "ass," "idiot," "duffer," figured very prominently. Then he retired to his study, and locked himself in.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Justice for Bunter.

FOUNDER'S Day was always a great day at Greyfriars, and the fellows always celebrated it. They had a whole holiday that day, and they generally made the fullest use of it. On this particular Founder's Day, the Sixth and the Fifth were both playing out matches, with opposing teams in the neighbourhood of Greyfriars, and the Shell and the Upper Fourth were playing a Form match on their own ground, and the Remove, the Lower Fourth, were playing Highcliffe juniors.

There was, therefore, plenty of football going on at Greyfriars on Founder's Day—and the most important of all, from a Remove point of view, was the Highcliffe match. If anything happened to the Highcliffe match the day would be "mucked up" for the Remove with a vengeance; and now it certainly looked as if something would happen to it.

Wharton refused to captain the team, and Bulstrode had emphatically declared that he would not do it. And the eleven had to look out for another captain.

True, they would not have had to look very far for candidates, if only the candidates had been suitable. The football committee of the Remove sat to consider the matter, and fellows came in quite numerously to offer their services. Among them was Billy Bunter, the Owl of the Remove, who came in quite cheerfully with a most ingratiating grin upon his fat face.

"I hear that Bulstrode has dropped out," he remarked.

"Yes," said Frank Nugent. "And now you've dropped in; and the sooner you follow Bulstrode's example and drop out the better!"

"Oh, really, Nugent—"

"We're talking business," explained Bob Cherry. "Please get outside."

"That's what I've come to do—talk business," said Billy Bunter, blinking at the football committee through his big spectacles. "Look here, you want a new skipper—and, upon the whole, I must remark that a little new blood in the team would do it good. The opinion of an outsider in these matters is very valuable."

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ONE
PENNY.

"Well, there's something in that," said John Bull. "Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings—"

"Oh, really, Bull—"

"What have you to propose?" asked Bob Cherry.

"I was thinking of suggesting a chap who would fill the position splendidly," said Bunter. "A better chap than either Bulstrode or Wharton—in fact, in my opinion, quite equal to the two of them put together!"

"Do you mean Mark Linley?"

"No, I don't!" snapped Bunter.

"He hasn't the time for the bizney," said Bob Cherry, "or we should stick him in at once. He studies too much to take up the duties of footer captain—though we shall have him to skipper us on Founder's Day, I suppose, if Bulstrode and Wharton keep their silly backs up."

"I'm thinking of a better chap than Linley."

"There isn't a better chap in the Form—or in the school, for that matter," said Bob Cherry. "But who is it you've got in your mind?"

"A chap there's been a lot of jealousy about," said Bunter—"a chap who's never had justice done him."

"Do you mean Cecil Leigh?"

"Rats! No!"

"Bolsover?"

"Blow Bolsover!"

"Dick Russell?"

"Pooh!"

"Then whom on earth do you mean?" demanded John Bull. "Cherry or Nugent?"

"Certainly not!"

"Not me, I suppose?"

"You? Rats!"

"Who is it, then?" roared Bob Cherry.

"Myself!"

The football committee looked at Bunter. They could not speak for some minutes. That this fat, unwieldy, clumsy, lazy, conceited "bounder" should offer himself as captain of the Form eleven was incredible at first.

Billy Bunter blinked at them cheerfully. Evidently he saw nothing extraordinary in his suggestion that he should lead the Form team against Highcliffe.

"You see," he went on, taking advantage of the silence of astonishment—"you see, I've not had much chance of showing what I can do, because there's been a lot of personal jealousy on the subject. You fellows have always kept me out, because you were afraid I should show up your rotten footer. At a time like this I think you should admit the truth, and decide upon a more manly course. Don't you think so?"

"My hat!"

"I should be pleased to undertake the duties of footer captain," said Bunter, blinking at them through his big spectacles. "I think I could guarantee licking Highcliffe. At all events, I should do the school credit."

"My aunt!"

"You've never done me justice," urged Bunter. "This is a jolly good chance, and you can do the Form a good turn at the same time. Give me what I deserve."

"Eh? You want us to give you what you deserve?" exclaimed Nugent.

"Yes, certainly!"

"But it would hurt you."

"Oh, really, Nugent—"

"You've never had justice, haven't you?" said Bob Cherry slowly. "Well, I believe in every fellow getting justice."

"That's just it!" said Billy Bunter eagerly. "Justice is what I want. And I may as well tell you that if the football committee are actuated by personal jealousy and leave me out I shall appeal to the Form."

"Oh!"

"So you'd better make up your minds to do the fair thing," said the Owl of the Remove, blinking at them warningly.

"Certainly!" said Bob Cherry, rising. "Are you fellows agreed on giving Bunter justice?"

"Hear, hear!"

"Good! There's a cricket-stump in the corner, Brown."

"Here you are."

"Thanks!" said Bob Cherry. "Now, Bunter—"

Billy Bunter, suddenly realising what kind of justice he was going to get, made a wild rush for the door. Johnny Bull caught him by the shoulder and swung him back. The Owl of the Remove burst into a roar.

"Ow! Ow! Ow! Leggo! Yah!"

"Roll him over the chair, Bull, and I'll give him justice," said Bob Cherry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yow! Yow! Yow! Yoop!"

Thwack! Thwack! Thwack!

The whacks from the cricket-stump were not really hard,

but they were sufficient to make Billy Bunter roar and wriggle. The football committee roared, too, with laughter, as Billy Bunter was done justice to at last.

"Yarrop! Leggo! Lemme alone! Yah! Blow your rotten old football! I wouldn't be skipper now if you asked me! Yarooooop! Ow! Oh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Ogilvy opened the door and looked in.

"Great Scott! What's the row?" he exclaimed. "Anybody killing a pig?"

"No. Only larruping one!" said Bob Cherry cheerfully.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bunter came in to offer his services as footer captain," John Bull explained. "We're giving him justice."

"Oh!" said Ogilvy. "Is that the way you treat candidates?"

"That's the way! By the way, what do you want, Ogilvy?"

"Oh, nothing!" said Ogilvy hastily.

He withdrew, and closed the door.

The football committee grinned at one another.

The wriggling Bunter was allowed to roll off the chair. He sat on the floor and glared furiously at the juniors.

"Beasts!" he roared.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Had enough justice?" asked Bob Cherry, taking a fresh grip on the cricket-stump. "My arm isn't tired yet, and I don't mind going on till it aches. Collar him!"

In a twinkling Bunter was on his feet and bolting through the doorway. He slammed the door after him, and his heavy footsteps rattled away down the passage. The football committee roared with laughter.

Bunter was gone, and the committee were left at leisure to consider ways and means. They were finished with Bunter's candidature, but no more likely one presented itself. The best decision they could come to was that Mark Linley should be asked to captain the Form eleven for the match on Founder's Day, and that subsequent matches could be left for the present to take care of themselves. And that was really the most sensible decision they could come to.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Ponsonby Gets Some Information!

"**P**ON my word!" said Vavasour of the Fourth Form at Highcliffe School.

Highcliffe junior captain.

"Look there!"

Four Highcliffe fellows were strolling down the lane towards Greyfriars. Ponsonby, Vavasour, Gadsby, and Monson were the leading lights of the Fourth Form at Highcliffe. They were old enemies of Harry Wharton & Co., and in the rivalry between the two schools there was little of the good-feeling which characterised the little disputes between Greyfriars and Courtfield School; for the fellows of Courtfield County Council School played the game—and that was a thing that Ponsonby & Co. of Highcliffe had never done.

It was not the way of Ponsonby & Co. to "play the game." They were ready and alert to take any small advantage, and they never dreamed of making a generous concession to a rival. They seldom entered into fistical encounters with the Greyfriars fellows unless they were two to one, and they had been known to mob a victorious team on their school-ground. For that reason, indeed, Greyfriars refused to play at Highcliffe, and they gave Ponsonby & Co. the choice of playing at Greyfriars or dropping the fixture altogether.

Contempt is said in the proverb to pierce even the shell of the tortoise, but it never had any perceptible effect upon the heroes of Highcliffe. They rejoiced rather than otherwise in their bad reputation, and prided themselves upon being exceedingly doggish and knowing and worldly-wise.

Swank was the chief characteristic of the Highcliffe fellows—and swank from fellows who never could do anything was hard to endure. And their solitary victory over Greyfriars had exalted them to the skies. Like the old Romans, they touched the stars with their sublime heads. The dozen or so of lickings were quite forgotten. They did not count. But one victory—it seemed to have established the Highcliffians on a pedestal for ever.

In fact, it had made Ponsonby & Co. more than half believe that they were real footballers, and could play. A wonderful view for them to take!

"Look!" repeated Vavasour. "On my word, you know!"

Of the Highcliffe fellows, Vavasour was probably the most brainless. Gadsby was the most caddish, Monson the most cowardly, and Ponsonby the best of the lot—which was not saying much. For the most part, the Highcliffe fellows were birds of a feather.

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The four Highcliffians paused in the lane and looked at a fellow who was sitting on a stile with a book on his knee.

It was Mark Linley of the Remove of Greyfriars. About Mark Linley—that he had worked in a factory, and had come to Greyfriars with a scholarship—the Highcliffe fellows knew all. Snobs at Greyfriars had sometimes made things uncomfortable for the Lancashire lad; but there was no snob-bishness at Greyfriars to equal the Highcliffe variety.

Ponsonby & Co. turned up their noses in the most perceptible manner as they came to the stile.

"The factory cad!" drawled Gadsby, intending Mark Linley to hear.

The Lancashire lad looked up.

"Hallo! How are the mills going on?" asked Ponsonby.

Mark flushed.

"Any strikes on at present?" asked Monson. "Father out of work and getting strike pay—hey? Family going round with the hat?"

And the Highcliffians chuckled in chorus.

Mark Linley dropped his eyes upon his book again. He did not intend to enter into a row with the snobs of Highcliffe if he could help it.

The four cads exchanged glances.

A deep ditch, full of water, flowed close by the stile, and they were strongly tempted to seize Mark Linley and hurl him in. It would spoil his clothes, and they knew that the Lancashire lad could ill afford to have them spoiled. And they were four to one, and certainly more than a match for Mark, powerful fellow as he was for his age.

But the Highcliffe fellows were en route for Greyfriars, and it was hardly safe to duck the Lancashire lad and then present themselves at the school he belonged to. They dropped the idea, and contented themselves with elevating their noses and shrugging their shoulders. Then they walked on to Greyfriars.

It was Wednesday afternoon—a half-holiday at both schools. The morrow was Founder's Day at Greyfriars, and the 'Friars were thus to have a whole holiday following a half, a fact that was very gratifying to them. As Ponsonby & Co. came sauntering in at the gates of Greyfriars, Harry Wharton and his friends were going down to the footer practice.

They greeted the Highcliffe fellows civilly enough. They were bound to be on civil terms with fellows they were going to play at football on the morrow afternoon; but otherwise they had very little civility to waste upon Highcliffe.

"Getting into form for the match, eh?" said Ponsonby.

"Oh, we don't need to get into form to play you chaps!" said Bob Cherry, with more frankness than politeness. "We could play you blindfolded."

Ponsonby laughed.

"You seem to forget that we've licked you," he remarked.

"One swallow doesn't make a summer."

"We're ready to lick you again, 'pon my word," said Vavasour.

"We've strolled over to make the final arrangements," Ponsonby said, changing the subject. "Lemme see—you're captain, I believe, Bulstrode."

Bulstrode coloured.

"I'm not captain to-morrow," he replied.

Ponsonby elevated his eyebrows.

"No?" he said. "Wharton in his old place again?"

"No," said Harry Wharton shortly.

"Oh! Who's skipper, then?"

"Linley is going to captain the team for the occasion," Bob Cherry explained.

"Linley! The factory cad?"

Bob Cherry's eyes blazed. There was nothing that irritated Bob so much as any reflection cast upon his Lancashire chum.

"The what?" he exclaimed, his fists doubling so visibly that Ponsonby felt sorry he had used the offensive word.

"The factory chap," said Ponsonby hastily. "So Linley is going to captain the team? It's all the same to us, of course."

Bob Cherry drove his hands into his pockets and turned his back. He had no more politeness to waste upon the Highcliffians. He had not wasted very much so far, it is true.

"We'll be over here at half-past two," said Ponsonby.

"That suit you?"

"Yes," said Wharton.

"Kick off at a quarter to three."

"Very well."

"Look out for a licking."

"Rats!"

The Greyfriars fellows strolled down to the footer ground. The Highcliffians stood looking about them. There was a thoughtful shade upon Ponsonby's face. He caught sight of a fat junior upon a bench under the elms, and strolled



Bob Cherry turned to Wharton, who had remained in the dormitory with him. "Run and tell Quelchy, quick!" he exclaimed. (See Chapter 7.)

over towards him. The others followed him, somewhat puzzled.

"Going to see the practice?" asked Gadsby.

"Yes; but I want to speak to Bunter."

"What do you want to speak to that fat brute for?"

"You'll see."

Ponsonby clapped the Owl of the Remove on the shoulder. Billy Bunter started out of a daydream on the subject of pork-pies and ginger-beer. He blinked round irritably at the Highcliffians.

"Oh, really, Russell—oh, is that you, Ponsonby? What do you rotten Highcliffe cads want here?"

"We thought you'd like to join us in a ginger-pop," said Ponsonby affably.

Bunter jumped up.

"Good!" he exclaimed. "I'm jolly glad to see you fellows. It's awfully nice to see you. Jolly long time since we've met. Come this way!"

And Billy Bunter rolled off in the direction of the school shop. The Highcliffe fellows followed him, three of them looking puzzled and discontented. They did not see any use in wasting money to see Bunter guzzle. But Ponsonby knew what he was about.

"There's a row of some kind on here," he said, in a low voice, as they followed the Owl of the Remove. "Wharton and Bulstrode are at it again, I expect—anyway, there's something queer in their not wanting to skipper the team to-morrow. We may find out something to our advantage."

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Bunter turned in at the doorway of the tuckshop, and waved a fat hand.

"Come right in," he said hospitably. "Mrs. Mimble, I've brought some friends of mine here. Did you say ginger-beer, Ponsonby?"

"Certainly."

Mrs. Mimble fixed a very grim expression upon William George Bunter from behind her little counter. She did not mean to trust the Owl of the Remove further than she could see him. She knew Bunter's little ways.

"You will have to pay for what you order, Master Bunter," she said.

"Oh, really, Mrs. Mimble—"

"It's all right, ma'am," said Ponsonby, throwing a half-sovereign on the counter, "I'm paying this time. Ginger-beer, please."

"Oh, really, Ponsonby, that's very handsome of you!" said Bunter, blinking at the golden coin. "I say, you fellows, there are some ripping tarts here—nice new jam tarts—"

"Pile in," said Ponsonby.

"Certainly."

Bunter would have piled into jam tarts and ginger-beer at any time. He was soon quite actively at work. Ponsonby & Co. sat on the high chairs and regarded him. They sipped their ginger-beer with aristocratic calm, while Bunter guzzled his with a noise like cattle drinking at a trough. But scornful smiles did not matter to Bunter. He was too short-

sighted to see them, for one thing; and he would not have cared, if he had seen them, so long as he had the tarts and the ginger-beer.

"I hear you're making a change in the footer team," Ponsonby asked carelessly.

Bunter grunted.

"Yes. But you fellows will be doing all right to-morrow."

"How's that?"

"Oh, I'm not playing!"

Ponsonby grinned.

"That's lucky for us," he remarked.

"Yes, isn't it? I'm kept out of the team by personal jealousy on the committee," Bunter explained. "They might have put me in when Bulstrode refused to captain the team any longer, and Wharton refused to take his place. But, bless you, they wouldn't! They don't mean to be shown up. That's what it is—personal jealousy."

"Yes, but there's a lot of it about," said Vavasour.

Bunter buried his fat face in the ginger-beer again.

"So Bulstrode has dropped out?" said Ponsonby.

"Yes. He swears he won't captain the team now, because they asked Wharton, behind his back, you see."

"And what price Wharton?"

"Oh, he won't, either! He says he's backing up Bulstrode."

"So neither of them will do it?"

"That's it! The team have chosen that factory cad, Linley, to captain them. Of course, it's rotten. I consider the thing disgraceful myself. But it's no good saying so to the beasts. They won't put me in."

"No, I suppose not," agreed Gadsby; "but—"

"Suppose Linley were crooked, I suppose Wharton or Bulstrode would take it on then," Ponsonby remarked carelessly.

Bunter shook his head.

"You don't know them, then," he said. "They're a pair of obstinate bounders. If Linley were crooked, I don't know what they'd do; but it's not likely to happen."

"No, I suppose not," agreed Ponsonby absently.

Ponsonby paid for the ginger-beer and the tarts, and the Highcliffians turned towards the door. Billy Bunter blinked after them anxiously.

"Oh, I say, you fellows, you haven't half had a feed!" he exclaimed. "Look here—"

But Ponsonby & Co. did not look. They walked out of the tuckshop, and Ponsonby led the way to the gates. Gadsby tapped him on the arm.

"Aren't you going to watch the practice, Pon?"

"Blow the practice!"

"But that's really what we came over for," urged Monson.

"But what's the game, then?"

"Mark Linley!"

"Blessed if I understand you!"

"I'll explain. You know what's at stake on this game," said Ponsonby, lowering his voice. "If we win, we stand to win a big sum; and if we lose, we stand to lose heavily—in bets. We've put money on ourselves with everybody who would take us, on the strength of licking Greyfriars once."

"Yes. Most likely we shall lick them, too."

"There's not going to be any most likely about it. What we want is a dead cert."

"But how—"

"Those two asses are quarrelling over the captaincy, and each has got his ears up and won't skipper the team. They're depending on Linley—a chap who's quite as good as either of them, in my opinion, so far as footer is concerned."

"But what about Linley?"

"If he were crooked for the match—"

"But he won't be!"

"Yes, he will!" said Ponsonby significantly.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

The Cowards.

MARK LINLEY glanced up from his book. The Lancashire lad was studying Xenophon, and he found it easier to study sitting in the open fields, in the fresh air, and uninterrupted by friends or foes. But a chime across the meadows from a church clock warned him that it was time to get back to Greyfriars to join in the football practice. At the same time, there was a sound of footsteps in the quiet, lonely lane, and the four Highcliffians came into sight. Mark Linley glanced at them carelessly. They halted, and exchanged a glance. Mark Linley slipped from the stile, and put his book under his arm. Ponsonby raised his cap with an air of elaborate politeness.

"May I look at the book?" he asked.

Mark looked at him in surprise.

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"Certainly," he said.

He handed the Xenophon to Ponsonby.

"The Anabasis, by Jove!" exclaimed Ponsonby. "My hat! Rather a change from the factory—reading Xenophon in the original, I should say."

"Cheek, I call it," said Gadsby.

Mark flushed.

"Give me back my book," he said.

"Fetch it," said Ponsonby.

He twirled the book in the air, and it dropped with a splash in the middle of the ditch. Mark Linley uttered an exclamation of anger, and ran towards the ditch to save the book. It was floating, but as it was soaked with water it would sink. The Lancashire lad stretched out his arm to reach the book, but it was beyond his reach.

He turned a blazing face upon the Highcliff fellows.

"You cads!" he shouted.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Mark ran towards Ponsonby.

"You'll get that book out, you cad, or you'll go in after it," he exclaimed.

"Rats!"

Mark grasped the Highcliff fellow. Ponsonby was whirled towards the ditch.

"Rescue!" he shouted, as he struggled in the strong grasp of the Lancashire lad.

Gadsby, Monson, and Vavasour rushed to the rescue at once. Singly, they would have hesitated very much about tackling the sturdy Greyfriars junior. But four to one they were brave enough. They closed upon Mark Linley, and in the grasp of the whole quartette the Lancashire lad was borne to the ground.

"Pin him!" grasped Ponsonby.

"We've got him!"

Ponsonby staggered up. He was exhausted and breathless from the struggle, brief as it had been. Mark Linley was still resisting desperately, and hitting out; but he was powerless against the three fellows who held him down.

"You cowards!" he shouted. "You cads! I'll take you two at a time, if you like."

Ponsonby laughed sneeringly.

"We don't fight with factory cads!" he said loftily.

"Rather not, my dear fellow, 'pon my word," said Vavasour.

"Cowards!"

"Pitch him into the ditch," said Ponsonby.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Mark Linley struggled anew, and it cost the Highcliffians great efforts to drag him to the ditch. But they had him there at last, panting, breathless, his clothes torn and his hair wild, his face blazing with exertion and rage.

"In with him."

"Shove the cad in!"

Splash!

Mark Linley plunged heavily into the muddy water.

The ditch was deep, and the water closed over his head. There was a bubbling on the surface as he went down. His head came up again, smothered with mud, and he tried to drag himself upon the bank.

"Kick him!" said Monson.

"Oh!" gasped Mark. "You cowards!"

He drew his hands away as the Highcliffians kicked at them. The water was running swiftly, and it nearly carried him off his feet. When he stood upright it flowed round his neck. The Highcliffians grinned at him from the road. They did not mean to let him get out of the ditch, and on the other side was a thick hedge, which it would be very difficult for him to scramble through.

Mark Linley cast a look down the lane, in the faint hope of seeing a Greyfriars cap in the distance, but the lane was

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deserted. The Greyfriars fellows were mostly on the foot-ground at that time. There was no help at hand, or the Highcliffians would never have made their cowardly attack. The Lancashire lad turned to the hedge on the other side of the ditch, and tried to scramble out. He cut his hands upon thorns, and for a long time he could not succeed in breaking through the hedge. The Highcliffe juniors watched him with grinning faces. Mark scrambled out of the ditch at last, and drove his way through the hedge, and sank exhausted upon the other side, in the field.

"Wet?" asked Monson.

And that humorous question was greeted with a howl of laughter by the other Highcliffe fellows.

Mark Linley made no reply. He could not. He was too utterly exhausted to speak. He lay on the hard ground, panting, pools of water forming round him as he lay. The Highcliffians laughed loud and long, and walked on towards Highcliffe. Looking back from a rise in the road a little later, they saw a drenched figure limping towards Greyfriars. Ponsonby grinned.

"I rather think that Mark Linley won't be very fit for the footer match to-morrow," he remarked.

And the others agreed with him.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Crocked!

BOB CHERRY put the ball through the goal-posts, and then looked round him. The Remove team were at practice, but as yet Mark Linley had not put in an appearance. The fellows had been practising passing, kicking, and dribbling for the last half-hour, but Linley, who was to captain the team on the morrow, had not come in. Bob Cherry was surprised, and a little exasperated. It was not like Mark to miss the footer practice in this way, especially when it was so important for him to take the lead, and get into the way of it, before the Highcliffe match. The juniors were filling up the time with dribbling and kicking, intending to play a practice match with full numbers as soon as Linley came. But Mark Linley did not come.

"Where on earth can Marky be?" Bob Cherry exclaimed impatiently.

"Blessed if I know," said Nugent. "He can't have got his head into some rotten Greek book, and forgotten all about the game, surely."

"Of course not!"

"Well, where is he, then?" said Harry Wharton.

"He went out with a blessed book under his arm, some time ago," John Bull remarked. "Does anybody know if he's come in?"

Vernon-Smith, who had just strolled down, burst into a chuckle as he heard the remark. The footballers turned round to stare at him.

"What's the matter with you?" Bob Cherry demanded, not very politely.

"Linley's come in, that's all."

"Where is he?"

"Gone into the house."

"Well, what are you cackling at?" demanded Bob Cherry crossly. "Is there anything the matter with Linley?"

"Ha, ha, ha! Yes. I imagine that he's fallen in with the Courfield cads, or else that he's had some trouble with the Highcliffe fellows who were here," grinned Vernon-Smith. "He looked rather the worse for wear when I saw him come in."

"The Highcliffians!" muttered Bob Cherry. "Oh, the cads! Just like them, to set on a chap four to one. Poor old Marky!"

Bob Cherry, forgetting all about the football, dashed off across the Close towards the School House. The other fellows, staying only to throw on overcoats over their footer things, followed him almost as fast.

"Where's Linley?" asked Bob Cherry, grasping Bunter, the first person he met, by the shoulder as he entered the School House.

Billy Bunter chuckled.

"He, he, he! Ow, ow, yow! D-d-don't shake me like that, Cherry, or my glasses will fall off!"

"Where's Linley?" roared Bob Cherry.

"And if they get broken you'll have to pay for them."

"Where's Linley?"

"Ow! He's gone upstairs. Yow! He's soaked to the skin! Yah! Ow!"

Bunter gasped out the last ejaculation as Bob Cherry hurled him into a corner, where he sat in a dazed state for fully five minutes. Bob dashed upstairs, and ran into the Remove dormitory. Mark Linley was there. The Lancashire lad, who was looking very white, was towelling himself down.

"Marky, old man, have those cads hurt you?"

Mark coughed.

"Not very much, Bob. They ducked me in the ditch, and kept me in the water a long time, that's all. I think I'm all right."

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"A SCHOOLBOY'S SACRIFICE!"

By FRANK RICHARDS.
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EVERY
TUESDAY,

The "Magnet"
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ONE
PENNY.

"It was the Highcliffe cads, of course?"

"Yes. Ponsonby & Co.!"

"The rotters!" Bob Cherry clenched his fists. "I wish I had been there. My hat! You're looking feverish, Marky! I suppose you gave them a fight?"

Mark smiled faintly.

"Yes, rather. I did my best."

"It's jolly dangerous to plunge into cold water when you're hot all over, as you must have been after a tussle with four of them," said Bob anxiously. "You'd better tumble into bed, Marky, and I'll pile some blankets on you. You can't run any risks, with the Highcliffe match coming off to-morrow. Those cads would chuckle no end if they thought that they had crooked you for the match."

Mark Linley hesitated.

"I don't want to lay up," he objected. "I expect I shall feel all right presently. I'm rather rotten now, but it's nothing."

Bob Cherry pointed to the bed.

"Get in!" he said concisely.

"But——"

"Get in!" roared Bob.

"Yes, rather," said Harry Wharton, coming into the dormitory. "Get in, and don't play the giddy goat, Linley. Fellows have caught pneumonia by doing less than you've done. Get into bed, and one of us will stay with you, and if you get at all queer we'll send for a doctor, too."

"Oh, rats," said Mark, laughing. "You're jolly well not going to make an invalid of me. I'm all right."

"Will you get in, or shall we chuck you in?" asked John Bull.

Linley got in. The juniors covered him up with blankets from the other beds. As a matter of fact, the Lancashire lad had been through a very dangerous experience, and it would be a wonder if he escaped without an illness. He was certainly not to escape unscathed, as Bob Cherry soon saw.

His face was flushing and paling alternately, and there was a peculiar brightness in his eyes. The sudden plunge into cold water, when he was glowing with heat from the struggle with the Highcliffe juniors—the length of time he had remained in the water—and then the tramp home to Greyfriars in his wet clothes—altogether, it would have put a constitution of iron to a very severe test.

"Marky, old man!" said Bob Cherry anxiously, leaning over the bed.

Mark looked at him strangely.

"Who—who's that?" he muttered.

"Marky!"

"Father!"

Bob Cherry felt a strange shock. Mark did not know him! The hectic flush in the junior's cheek told of rising fever. Bob Cherry turned to Wharton, who had remained in the dormitory with him.

"Run and tell Quelch!" he exclaimed.

Wharton nodded, and left the dormitory. It was clear now that the Lancashire lad would require a doctor. Mark passed his hand across his brow, as if seeking to clear the mists away, and fixed his eyes upon Bob Cherry.

"Bob, old man, I—I had a curious fancy. I thought I saw my father here. Hang it all, Bob, I believe I'm going to be ill, after all."

"Marky, old man!" muttered Bob huskily.

"It's rotten, Bob, with the match on to-morrow, too."

"Oh, never mind the match."

Mark Linley closed his eyes.

Mr. Quelch, the master of the Remove Form, entered the dormitory with Harry Wharton. He came quickly to the Lancashire lad's bedside.

"Linley, my lad."

Mark opened his eyes.

"Yes, sir. I'm afraid I'm going to be a bit seedy, sir."

"Wharton has told me what has happened," said Mr. Quelch. "Who has used you in this cruel and wicked way, Linley?"

The junior was silent.

"Did you hear me, Linley?"

"I—I'd rather not say, sir. I don't want to get them into a row. There's trouble enough between the two schools now, without my adding to it by complaining."

"H'm! We shall see. I will not press you upon the subject now, at all events," said Mr. Quelch. "How do you feel, Linley?"

"Hot and cold in turns, sir."

Mr. Quelch looked very grave.

"Remain with him, Cherry," he said. "He must not leave his bed. Come with me, Wharton."

"Very well, sir."

Harry followed the Form-master from the dormitory. Mr. Quelch closed the door.

"Get your bicycle, and ride to Dr. Short's in Friardale as fast as you can, Wharton," said Mr. Quelch, in a low voice. Wharton caught his breath.

"You think he is going to be ill, sir?"

"He is going to have a very bad cold, at all events," said Mr. Quelch, "and he may have worse. I hope not, but he must have medical care at once. Hurry!"

"I'll fly, sir."

And Harry Wharton did fly. He did not wait to reply to any of the questions that were showered upon him as he came downstairs. He ran to the bike shed, and wheeled out his machine, and mounted it, and scorched away towards Friardale at top speed.

He covered the ground in record time, and arrived red and panting at Dr. Short's house. In a few minutes the doctor's gig was dashing towards Greyfriars, with Wharton pedalling, now at a more leisurely pace, behind it. The juniors looked serious enough as they saw Dr. Short arrive.

"My hat!" said Bulstrode. "That means that Linley's laid up!"

"Poor old Linley!"

The juniors waited in considerable anxiety for the medical man's verdict. When they heard it, it was with feelings of mingled relief and exasperation. Relief, because Mark Linley was pronounced to be in no danger; exasperation, because Dr. Short had ordered him to be immediately removed to the school sanatorium, there to remain till he was well, which would not be under a week.

Mark Linley was "crooked" with a vengeance. The Highcliffe fellows had succeeded in their object—and they had come dangerously near to succeeding only too well, which would have meant very serious trouble for Ponsonby & Co. But they had succeeded, and one of the best players in the Remove team was hopelessly "crooked" for the match on Founder's Day.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

The Bounder Makes Terms.

VERNON-SMITH, the Bounder of Greyfriars, was sitting in his study. There was a scent of tobacco in the room, proceeding from the cigarette that the Bounder was smoking. It was an inveterate habit with Vernon-Smith now, and in the privacy of his study he was seldom without a cigarette, and he had a great deal of trouble to keep the tell-tale stains from his fingers. For if his Form-master or the Head had discovered his little ways, a short and sharp way would have been taken with the Bounder. But Mr. Quelch never paid surprise visits to his boys' studies, as some masters do; and the Head seldom found himself in the Remove passage at all.

Vernon-Smith was safe enough from discovery, unless any of his Form-fellows should betray him, and that was not likely to happen. The fellows who most despised the ways of the Bounder were those who were least likely to say anything that would get him into trouble with the masters.

The Bounder was alone. Lately he had shared the study with Bob Cherry's cousin, Cyril Vane; but Vane was in Russell's study now. The Bounder had the room to himself, and he liked it better. He was seated in an armchair, with his feet on the fender, and the blue smoke from his cigarette curled up to the ceiling. There was a tap on the door, and it opened, but the Bounder did not turn his head. It might have been a prefect or a master, and in that case the Bounder would have found himself in trouble, but Vernon-Smith prided himself upon his nerve. He blew out a little cloud of smoke as the footsteps sounded upon the threshold of his study.

Fortunately for him, it was neither a master nor a prefect. Two fellows entered, and they were Wharton and Bulstrode of the Remove. Wharton gave an angry sniff at the sight of the cigarette. Bulstrode set his lips.

"I want to speak to you, Smithy," said the Remove captain.

Vernon-Smith turned his head.

"Go ahead!" he remarked carelessly.

"It's about the match to-morrow," said Bulstrode. "As you know, one of the best players in the Remove is crooked."

"Mark Linley?"

"Yes. He's laid up with a bad cold, and it will be a week or more before he comes out of the sanatorium. Under the circumstances, I'm willing to offer you his place in the team for the Highcliffe match."

"I understood that you were not captain now."

Bulstrode flushed.

"I'm not going to captain the team to-morrow," he said. "I've said that, and I stick to it. But I'm going to play, and the team will select another captain now that Linley is crooked. But I'm making all other arrangements."

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"And you want me to play?"

"Yes," said Bulstrode abruptly. "I'm not going to beg of you, by any means, but I do want you to play. You've shown that you can play first-class footer if you like, the same as you can cricket, and I don't see why you shouldn't exert yourself for once, for the credit of the school. Wingate suggested it to me, and I'm asking you to play."

"And Wharton—?"

"I say the same," said Harry.

The Bounder laughed.

"You said once—or, rather, a good many times—that you'd never play me unless I dropped smoking—and some other things," he remarked.

Harry Wharton coloured angrily.

"If I were skipper you shouldn't, either," he said. "I came here with Bulstrode simply to show you that I'm not against your playing this time, that's all."

"Oh, I see!" said the Bounder, with an unpleasant look. "After all, I don't care what you think, one way or the other. Bulstrode said the same at one time. You appear to have changed your mind about my little sins, Bulstrode."

The Remove captain coloured uncomfortably.

"Not exactly," he said. "I'm asking you to play in this match because it's an important one—not to become a regular member of the team."

Vernon-Smith's lip curled.

"Oh! You don't want me for good?"

"We want you for good if you will behave yourself," said Bulstrode sharply. "But if you always play for the Remove, you will have to turn out for practice at regular times, and obey orders, and drop filthy habits like smoking in your study. That's understood. You know it ruins the wind for footer as well as I do."

"Yet you are asking me to play to-morrow."

"Because Linley is crooked."

"And if he were well, you wouldn't want me?"

"No!" said Bulstrode directly.

"I suppose it's an honour to be chosen because that factory cad is crooked?" said Vernon-Smith sarcastically.

"Well, I'll play, on one condition."

"What's that?"

"That I'm made a regular member of the team for the rest of the term. You know perfectly well that, smoker or not, I can play half your present team off their legs. I'm quite willing to take up footer for the season, and I'll play in the Form team in every match if you like."

"And give up smoking?"

"No!"

Bulstrode shook his head.

"Then you won't come in the team," he said. "It's not only the harm you do yourself, it's the bad example for the others. There will be an end of order if fellows are allowed to do as they like, when they like, what is against the rules. I gave up that sort of thing myself, Smithy, when I was elected captain of the Remove."

"So might I if I were made Form captain," said Vernon-Smith lazily. "But it's not good enough, thank you."

"You won't play to-morrow?"

"Not unless I'm made a regular playing member of the eleven."

"Very well," said Bulstrode, taking his jacket off. "Stand up!"

Vernon-Smith eyed him in surprise.

"What for?" he asked.

"I'm going to lick you."

"Oh!" said the Bounder. "You're going to lick me, are you? May I ask what for?"

"Because I'm Form captain, and you won't back up the Form," said Bulstrode, pushing back his cuffs. "I've had enough of your confounded insolence, and I'm going to put a stop to it. Stand up!"

Vernon-Smith did not move.

"You've come here, two to one, to bully me—eh?" he said. "Getting your old habits back again, are you, Bulstrode?"

"I've come to see fair play," said Harry Wharton quietly. "We're all fed up with your cheek, Smith. Bob Cherry had to pitch into you the other day, because he couldn't stand it any longer. I suppose a chap has a right to be unpleasant if he likes, but there's a limit, and you've passed it."

"I'm not going to fight you, Bulstrode. I don't feel up to it just now," said the Bounder, with a yawn.

"Wind bad, I suppose?" suggested the captain of the Remove.

Vernon-Smith laughed.

"But whether you feel fit or not, you're going to do it," said Bulstrode. "I'm fed up with your nerve. Put up your hands."

"Rats!"

"Will you put them up?"

"No!"



The gorilla did not take the same size in hats, evidently, as the swell of St. Jim's, for he did not get the topper to fit to his satisfaction. He tried it on the right way, and then turned it round, and tried it on backwards, and then put it on upside down. But he did not seem satisfied. "My word! You might take him for D'Arcy's twin brother trying on a new topper!" murmured Monty Lowther. (An amusing incident from the grand, long, complete tale of Tom Merry & Co., entitled "Tom Merry's Slave," by Martin Clifford, contained in this week's number of our companion paper, the "Gem" Library. Out on Thursday. Price One Penny.

Smaack!

Bulstrode's open palm came with a sounding smack on the back of Vernon-Smith's head, and the Bouncer pitched forward in his chair. His boots rang on the fender, and he gave a gasping yell as the cigarette crammed into his open mouth. He yelled again, and spat it out furiously.

"You rotter!" he roared.

Bulstrode put his hands up.

"Are you ready?" he asked.

"Yes. Hang you—yes!"

"Come on, then. Shut the door, Wharton, and don't let anybody come in."

"Right you are!"

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Harry Wharton put his foot against the door. Bulstrode and Vernon-Smith were fighting fiercely the next moment. The Bouncer, with all his rascally ways, was full of courage, and he had a savage temper when it was roused.

He attacked Bulstrode furiously, and even the burly captain of the Remove was driven back, and there was a spurt of red from his nose.

But Bulstrode recovered himself at once.

He held his ground, and retaliated with heavy blows that drove the Bouncer round his study.

Vernon-Smith was soon gasping. The cigarette, and the others that had preceded it, were "taking it out" of him.

He had "bellows to mend" with a vengeance, and after

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a few minutes he could only defend himself feebly from Bulstrode's overwhelming attack.

Bulstrode grinned as Vernon-Smith's furious attack died away, and the Bounder of Greyfriars gasped with a sound like that of air escaping from a badly-punctured tyre.

"Better have left the smokes alone," he remarked.

"Hang you!" gasped the Bounder. "Oh, hang you!"

"Save your breath; you'll want it," said Bulstrode, with grim significance.

He was right; Vernon-Smith did want it. Gasping and utterly exhausted, the Bounder of Greyfriars was driven into a corner, and there a powerful right-hander from the captain of the Remove felled him. He slid down against the wall in a sitting posture, and sat there helplessly, unable to rise.

Bulstrode stood looking down at him, his fists still clenched.

"That's a lesson for you," he said. "If you can't stand up for your Form and for your school you ought to be kicked out of Greyfriars! And, anyway, you're not going to swank about with your blackguardly ways under our noses. I can tell you, Vernon-Smith, we're getting fed up with you!"

And Bulstrode turned away. Harry Wharton had stood looking on, and he quitted the study with the Remove captain. Outside, in the passage, they could still hear Vernon-Smith's painful gasps as they walked away.

Bulstrode turned a rather uneasy look upon his companion as they reached the end of the passage.

"Do you think I was rather rough on him?" he asked hesitatingly.

Harry Wharton smiled.

"It's rather late in the day to ask that now," he replied.

"Well, I suppose it is," said Bulstrode ruefully. "I lost my temper with the brute. But—but—well, I don't want to play the bully. There was enough of that—once. I want to do the decent thing. I hope I wasn't too rough with the cad."

"He deserved all he got, and more," said Wharton. "Only a first-class rotter would refuse to play for his Form, especially on a special occasion. You didn't give him a bit too much; you can be quite easy about that."

But Bulstrode still looked and felt rather uneasy. He knew only too well that he was over-ready to hit out, and his former reputation as bully of the Remove still clung to him. But undoubtedly it was too late in the day to think about it now. The Bounder of Greyfriars had had his licking.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

Friends in Need!

THE next morning dawned clear and bright, and somewhat cold, and it promised to be an ideal day for football. Under ordinary circumstances, the Remove would have looked forward to the afternoon's match with cool confidence. Highcliffe were an enemy they despised, and one they were accustomed to beat. But the rift in the lute at home made the players uneasy; the question of who should be captain was not decided. And the loss of Mark Linley from the team was a heavy loss. Mark was one of the fastest forwards, one of the most reliable wingers in the eleven, and his loss made a very great difference. And the Removites knew that the Highcliffians had been straining every nerve to get their eleven into good form for the match. They had heard reports of fellows who had seen Highcliffe juniors at practice, and the reports showed that Ponsonby & Co. had reached an unusual state of fitness. It was not sportsmanship, or love of the game, that urged the Highcliffians on; it was not even, to a great extent, the desire to score over their old enemies of Greyfriars. It was the fact that the Highcliffe leaders had money bets on the game, and wanted to win. Ponsonby & Co. were quite old hands at that sort of thing, and more than once they had been hard hit when backing themselves to beat Greyfriars. This time it was clear that Ponsonby meant to leave nothing to chance.

In the difficulties that beset the Remove, they had offers of help from several quarters. Billy Bunter was not the only Removite who was willing to take the vacant place of captain. Other fellows, more or less qualified, offered themselves, and were promptly rejected.

It was pretty generally agreed that Bob Cherry was the best man, both Wharton and Bulstrode standing out; though Bob Cherry was not regarded as an ideal football skipper. He was a splendid half, but he was not in the same street with the other two at leading a team, and he admitted it himself. But he was willing to do his best, and so long as the eleven backed him up loyally things would probably go well.

Most of the fellows had expected that Bulstrode would

"come round," but that the Remove captain showed no signs of doing. He was on his dignity with a vengeance. He had said that he would not captain the team for the Highcliffe match, and he meant it. Temple, of the Upper Fourth, dropped in to give the Remove some valuable advice during the morning.

It being a whole holiday, the juniors had turned out after breakfast for an hour and a half's practice at the goals, and when it was over, and they were rubbing themselves down, Temple, Dabney, & Co., of the Upper Fourth, happened along.

"I hear you're in difficulties about a skipper for the match this afternoon," Temple remarked.

"Yes," said Bob Cherry.

"Haven't a man who's any good, I suppose?" said Fry of the Fourth sympathetically.

"Rats!"

"Well, look here," said Temple. "The Highcliffe team play all fellows below the Fifth; they have Fourth and Shell chaps in their team."

"I know that."

"Well, you're not barred from doing the same," Temple suggested.

"Oh, yes, we are," said Frank Nugent.

"How do you mean?"

"Why, we want to win," said Nugent sweetly. "That bars us."

And the Removites chuckled, and Temple, Dabney, & Co. looked cross.

"Oh, don't be funny!" said Temple. "Look here, I'll tell you what. There's no reason why you shouldn't play a Fourth-Form chap if you choose."

"Oh, rather!" said Dabney.

"I'm willing to captain the team for you, if you like," said Temple generously. "We had a practice match on for this afternoon, but I'm willing to let that go, to enable you to beat Highcliffe."

"You're too kind," said Johnny Bull sarcastically.

"Well, I like to help a lame dog over a stile," said Temple loftily.

"We couldn't think of letting you out your practice match," said Nugent. "You see, you Fourth-Form chaps need practice so much."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I shouldn't mind—" began Temple.

"But we should," said Harry Wharton. "You see, if we were playing Highcliffe at marbles, or hop-scotch, we'd accept your help with pleasure. But the game happens to be footer, and so you wouldn't be any use. Thanks, all the same."

Temple turned very red.

"You cheeky young asses—"

"But I'll tell you what," said Bob Cherry, adopting Temple's tone. "You shall come and look on, and pick up some points about good footer."

The Remove roared with laughter at the sight of Temple's face, as Bob Cherry made that suggestion. Temple, in great disgust, marched off, with his nose very high in the air, leaving the Removites still laughing.

"Cheeky young sweeps!" growled Temple.

"Oh, rather!"

"I jolly well won't play for them now, if they ask me."

"No, I wouldn't," said Fry.

And Temple didn't.

The Removites strolled off the footer ground. They could not practise all the morning, and they had some time to kill till dinner. As the weather was very fine, some of them pedalled out on their bicycles. Wharton and Bob Cherry went into the sanatorium to sit for an hour with Mark Linley, a considerable solace to the Lancashire lad.

Bulstrode and John Bull chatted on the steps of the School House, and they were discussing the pros and cons of the coming match, when Coker of the Fifth came up. Coker of the Fifth had a very genial smile upon his face, and appeared to be in an excellent temper with himself and everybody else. He gave the juniors a very kind nod as he stopped on the school steps.

"Hallo!" he remarked. "I was looking for you, Bulstrode. I'm going to do you a favour."

Bulstrode looked at him in surprise. As a rule, Coker was very stand-offish and high-handed with the juniors. He had only lately passed into the Fifth from the Shell, and he was, as Skinner had expressed it, more Fifth-Formy than the Fifth themselves.

ANSWERS

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"Thanks!" said Bulstrode. "What is it?"
 "I believe you're captain of the Remove, ain't you?"
 Bulstrode sniffed. Coker knew perfectly well that Bulstrode was captain of the Remove; but it suited him to appear quite ignorant of what went on below the Fifth Form.

"Yes," said Bulstrode, "I'm captain of the Remove. By the way, are you Coker of the Fifth, or another silly ass of the same name?"

Coker reddened.
 "I'm going to do you a favour," he remarked, more emphatically. "You want a captain for your team in a match this afternoon. I believe you're playing a match."

"Yes, I believe we are," agreed Bulstrode.
 "With Highcliffe, I think?"
 "Yes, I think so."

John Bull burst into a chuckle. Bulstrode, though not usually very good at repartee, was certainly giving Coker of the Fifth as good as he sent. Coker was looking a little less genial now.

"Well," said Coker, "this is what I'm going to do. I'm going to skipper the team for you against Highcliffe."

Coker said this as if he expected the two Removites to fall upon his breast, and weep with gratitude. If he expected that, he must have experienced a shock of disappointment, for they did nothing of the kind. Instead of that, they burst into a chuckle.

"Another of 'em!" grinned John Bull.
 "Another! What do you mean?" demanded Coker.

"Lots of other duffers have made the same offer," Bulstrode explained.

"Duffers!" roared Coker. "What do you mean? Look here, I'm going to captain your eleven, and it's a big favour, I can tell you."

"We're not doing you any favours at present," said Bulstrode.

"I mean it's a big favour to you!" Coker shouted.

"Oh, I see; my mistake!"

"Ain't the Fifth playing this afternoon?" asked John Bull innocently.

Coker turned red again.

"Yes, they're playing an out match," he said.

"You're not going to leave them in the lurch, surely?" said Bull. Bull knew perfectly well that the Fifth would not have played Coker in the Form eleven for his weight in gold. But if Coker could be ignorant of Remove affairs, Bull could be equally ignorant of Fifth-Form matters; that was only fair.

"Look here," said Coker truculently. "I haven't come here to jaw. Do you want me to captain you this afternoon, or don't you? Yes, or no?"

"No!" said both juniors together.

"Why, you cheeky young scoundrels!" exclaimed Coker.

"I suppose you're joking!"

"Not at all!"

"You don't want me to skipper you?"

"No fear!"

"Then I'll jolly well knock your heads together for your confounded cheek!" roared Coker.

And he made a grasp at the Removites. John Bull lowered his head, and butted the burly Fifth-Former on the chest, and Coker's arms swept the air, and he sat down. Unfortunately for him, he was standing on the top step when he sat—and there was nothing for him to sit upon.

He gave a wild yell as he sat in space, and rolled down the steps. Bulstrode and Bull burst into a roar.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Coker scrambled up.

"You young sweeps!" he roared. "I—I'll—I'll——"

He charged up the steps. But the Removites were gone. They had retreated immediately Coker rolled down the steps; and Coker of the Fifth was left to expend his wrath upon the desert air. And Coker did not captain the Remove team that afternoon.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

Ponsonby's Little Game.

WHARTON and Cherry came down from Mark Linley's bedside, and breathed deeply as they came out into the Close. Mark was getting on as well as could be expected, though he was still very ill. He had said nothing to betray those who had played the cruel jape upon him; and in that Wharton and Bob were quite agreed with him. It was not in accordance with their ideas to give the Highcliffe cads away, and perhaps cause a complaint to be made to their headmaster. The Greyfriars Removites would be able to find an opportunity of administering punishment themselves. Meanwhile, the football match was coming on, and vengeance had to be postponed till after that was over. It would be some satisfaction to give Ponsonby & Co. a sound drubbing on the footer field.

"Poor old Marky!" said Bob Cherry, as he breathed more freely in the keen air. "It's rotten to be shut up indoors

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like this—a whole holiday, too. How jolly patient he is about it, too."

"We'll make those cads sit up for it, some time," said Harry Wharton, setting his lips. "They know jolly well they've got a better chance if Linley is crocked. It seems rotten to suspect anybody of such beastly meanness, but I can't help thinking they had some idea of the sort in their minds."

"I shouldn't wonder."
 "Let's go out for a spin on the bikes; there's lots of time before dinner."

"Right you are!"
 Bob Cherry and Wharton wheeled their bicycles out. They pedalled down the lane at a moderate speed; they only wanted a little run, and did not intend to exert themselves.

Two pretty hats and charming faces came into view in the lane, and the chums of the Remove jumped off their bicycles to speak to Marjorie Hazeldene and Clara Trevelyn, of Cliff House. Marjorie and Clara were coming over in the afternoon to see the match.

"We are going down to Friardale to do some shopping for Miss Primrose," Marjorie explained.

"We'll come with you, if we may," said Bob Cherry.

"But your machines——"

"Oh, we can wheel the jiggers——"

Marjorie laughed.

"Just as you like," she said.

And the juniors, wheeling their bicycles, walked into the village with Marjorie and Clara. Three fellows, in Highcliffe caps, were lounging outside Uncle Clegg's tuckshop. They were Ponsonby, Gadsby, and Vavasour. It was a whole holiday at Highcliffe as well as at Greyfriars, and there were a good many of the Highcliffe fellows in the village. The Greyfriars chums frowned at the sight of the cads of Highcliffe, and there would probably have been some high words on the spot but for the presence of the Cliff House girls.

Ponsonby & Co. exchanged looks, and came towards the chums.

Ponsonby raised his cap very gracefully to the girls, and the others did the same. Cads as they were, the Highcliffe fellows prided themselves upon their manners; and they never could really understand how it was that the Cliff House girls did not take to them.

"Excuse me," said Ponsonby, very politely. "May I speak to you for a minute, Wharton?"

"You can if you like," said Harry.

"About Linley."

"The less you say about that the better, I should think."

"We hope he wasn't hurt yesterday," said Ponsonby blandly. "We japed him, you know—he cut up rusty and we japed him—but afterwards we felt it was a bit too rough, and we're very sorry about it. I hope he's not feeling bad to-day?"

"He's ill in bed," said Wharton curtly.

"Oh, I'm sorry!"

"Awfully sorry," said Gadsby.

"Oh, absolutely!" chimed in Vavasour.

"Very well," said Wharton quietly. "I hope you're telling the truth, that's all, and not merely trying to find out whether he's crocked for the match. Good-bye!"

And they walked on.

Ponsonby watched them out of sight, and then he grinned as he turned to his companions.

"The girls are going shopping, and those chaps are going with them," he said. "When they leave the girls, they'll be going back to Greyfriars——"

"We can't go for them," said Vavasour uneasily.

"They're only two or three, I know; but they are both sloggers. That beast Cherry is as strong as a horse! As a matter of fact, Pon, between ourselves, he could knock-out any two of us."

"I know that, Vav."

"Then what's the idea? I can see that you've got some scheme in your head."

"Come this way!" said Ponsonby abruptly.

And, after looking round, the three Highcliffe juniors entered the lane that ran down beside the Cross Keys Inn—a house with a very evil reputation in the district. It was a place well known to the "doggish" fellows among the Highcliffians, and where they frequently met Vernon-Smith, the Bounder of Greyfriars.

Ponsonby & Co. entered by the verandah at the back, and a few minutes later were in close confabulation with Mr. Cobb, the landlord of the Cross Keys—a stout gentleman with bleared, red eyes and a strong smell of gin, brandy, and other spirituous liquors about him.

Mr. Cobb looked surprised at first, but he burst into a chuckle as Ponsonby proceeded to explain the scheme he had in his mind.

"Oh, you young gents!" gasped Mr. Cobb, in an excess of merriment. "You young gents! You take the cake, you do! You ought to be welshers on a racecourse, you ought!"

"Oh, cheese that!" said Ponsonby, rather sharply. Mr. Cobb's compliment did not exactly please the heroes of Highcliffe. "Will you help us?"

"Sartinly, young gents. Two of the stable-hands will do what you want for a few bob apiece."

"Then call them in!" said Ponsonby.

"Sartinly!"

Mr. Cobb quitted his little parlour. The three Highcliffe fellows waited there, in the close, stuffy room, yet haunted by the fumes of the previous evening's potations among Mr. Cobb and his friends. As they stood there idly, the doorway was darkened, and they looked round. Vernon-Smith, of the Greyfriars Remove, stepped in.

He stared at the Highcliffe fellows, and they at him.

"Hallo!" said the Bounder. "You haven't come here for a little game so early in the day, surely?"

"We're here on business," said Ponsonby.

"So am I," said the Bounder. "I've run out of smokes. Where's Cobb?"

"Out, I think."

The Bounder looked at Ponsonby suspiciously.

"I'll swear I heard his voice here as I came through the garden," he said.

"You can see he's not here."

"I'll wait for him, then," said the Bounder carelessly.

Ponsonby coloured angrily.

"Look here, you can get out!" he exclaimed. "We have business to talk with Mr. Cobb, and we don't want you present!"

"Oh, you're coming down to the facts now, are you?" said the Bounder. "Well, I'm going to stay here! What's the little game—something up against me—eh?"

"It's nothing to do with you!"

"Then I— Hallo! Here's Cobb!"

Mr. Cobb opened the parlour door. Two extremely tough-looking stablemen were following him in the passage. The landlord of the Cross Keys did not see Vernon-Smith for the moment.

"'Ere you are, Master Ponsonby!" he said. "'Ere's Mike and Sam Smith! They'll do—"

"Shut up!" muttered Gadsby fiercely.

"Oh, I didn't see you, Master Vernon-Smith!" said Mr. Cobb, taken aback. "Ow do you do? Unexpected pleasure to see you this mornin'!"

"I want some cigarèttes," said the Bounder coolly. "I don't want to interfere in your jaw with your aristocratic friend Ponsonby! Pile 'in!"

And the Bounder followed Mr. Cobb, leaving the Highcliffe fellows alone with Mike and Sam Smith, the stablemen of the Cross Keys. The Bounder wondered a little what the Highcliffe fellows could want with them, but he dismissed the matter from his mind, in the engrossing task of selecting cigarèttes from Mr. Cobb's stock.

From the parlour came a low murmur of voices, and it was followed by the clink of money.

When Ponsonby & Co. quitted the Cross Keys they were looking very well satisfied with themselves.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

Kidnapped.

HARRY WHARTON and Bob Cherry quitted the Cliff House girls at the gate of Cliff House, and mounted their bicycles to ride back to Greyfriars. It was getting near time for the midday dinner at the school. They pedalled along the lonely lane, and through the village, and then along Friardale Lane towards the school. Bob Cherry was a little in advance, and just after passing the cross-roads he uttered a sudden cry as his bicycle buckled round and he was hurled into the dust.

"Look out, Wharton!"

But the warning came too late. Wharton jammed on his brakes, but his machine ran right into the rope that was stretched across the road, and he rolled over beside Bob Cherry.

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The machines clanged down into the road, and the two juniors lay in the dust, dazed and breathless. Bob Cherry sat up blankly.

"What idiot could have played a trick like that?" he exclaimed. "There's a rope across the road. If we'd been going at full speed we might have broken our necks!"

"The rascals! The— Hallo! Look out!"

Two burly men ran out of the hedge.

Each of them had his face blackened with soot, so that he was quite unrecognisable, though the smell of their clothes hinted of the stable. They grasped the two juniors, and dragged them into the wood in a twinkling.

Wharton and Bob Cherry were too surprised by the sudden and unexpected attack to think of resistance for the moment. But as the men dragged them into the wood, they began to struggle.

"Better be quiet!" growled one of the ruffians, and he made a menacing movement with a heavy cudgel. "Better chuck it."

"Look here, what do you mean?" exclaimed Wharton hotly. "If you want to rob us, you'll get precious little for your pains."

The ruffians chuckled.

"We ain't going to rob you, young master."

"What do you want, then?" demanded Bob Cherry.

"Only your company."

"Look here—"

"You've got to come with us."

"What for?"

"You'll see."

"Well, we jolly well won't!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "We—"

The ruffian raised the cudgel again.

"You can come as you are, or you can get a crack on the 'cad apiece first," he said. "Take your choice."

The two juniors exchanged glances of dismay. They were nothing like a match for the two powerful ruffians, and the cudgels looked dangerous enough. Resistance was clearly worse than useless.

"I suppose we must come, as we're in your hands," said Harry savagely. "But you shall suffer for this, you confounded blackguards!"

"Tie their 'ands together!" said the man with the cudgel.

The other ruffian tied the juniors' wrists with a cord he produced from the pocket of his leather breeches. Then the juniors were led into the wood. The man with the cudgel returned to the road, picked up the bicycles, and lifted them among the trees, depositing them in a bed of bracken where they would be out of sight. Then he rejoined his companion, and both of them hurried with the juniors into the heart of the wood.

Harry Wharton and Bob Cherry were in a state of utter amazement.

That the men meant to rob them did not seem likely, as there was no need to take them into the wood for that purpose. But what else did they want? What was the object of the extraordinary attack?

Their captors said nothing; they chuckled at intervals, as if enjoying a joke of some sort between themselves, but they did not address the chums of the Remove.

They tramped into the heart of the wood, and stopped at last at a ruined hut, a tumble-down old cabin that had once been inhabited by a woodman.

The place was well known to the Greyfriars juniors, and they knew that it was the furthest possible spot from any of the roads and lanes that passed by the wood. A prisoner there might shout himself hoarse without the slightest chance of being heard by a passer-by.

"You'll get in there!" said the man with the cudgel.

"Look here—"

"Go in!"

The two juniors were pushed roughly into the hut.

Only the walls, and part of the roof, still existed; the windows were empty apertures, and the door had long fallen in. In the walls were great gaps, overgrown with green creepers, and creepers and foliage came in at the

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"In with the cad!" shouted the Highcliffe Juniors. Splash! Mark Linley sailed through the air, and plunged heavily into the muddy waters of the ditch. (See chapter 6.)

gaps in the roof. There was a dim light in the interior of the hut. Old condensed-milk tins and ginger-beer bottles lay about, telling that picnic parties had been there at other times during the summer.

The ruffian with the cudgel pointed to a bed of fern in a corner of the hut.

"Sit down!" he said.

"But what—"

"Sit down, I tell yer!"

The juniors sat down. Then the ruffians whispered together for a moment, and one of them produced a coil of strong cord, and tied the juniors to the stoutest post in the framework of the hut. With their hands tied, and the strong cord securing them to the post, there was not much likelihood of their getting away.

The chums of the Remove were utterly amazed.

That they were to be kept prisoners in the hut was evident. But why—for what reason—they had not the faintest idea. It could hardly be a jape, for their captors were full-grown men, and evidently could not be Highcliffe fellows or Courtfield fellows in disguise.

What did it mean?

The man with the cudgel sat down upon a fallen log, and produced a pipe, deliberately filled it, and lighted it. The scent of strong tobacco filled the hut. The other man disappeared among the trees, going in the direction of the river.

He did not return.

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It was soon clear that he was gone for good, and that the ruffian who remained was there to guard the prisoners, and see that they did not escape.

The juniors felt their senses almost in a whirl. It seemed incredible, inexplicable—but here they were, bound prisoners in the old hut in the wood, guarded by a ruffian with blackened face, helpless to escape.

What could it all mean?

The ruffian kept his back partly turned to them, that they could not study his features. It was clear that he had no wish to be recognised. He smoked without a pause, and the atmosphere of the hut was soon thickly laden with tobacco fumes, which made the two prisoners cough, and brought the water to their eyes.

An hour passed.

One!

The stroke boomed out from the clock of Friardale Church, and echoed faintly over the woods.

Harry Wharton gave a start. The fellows would be having dinner now at Greyfriars, and Wharton was beginning to feel very hungry.

"Look here, my man," he broke out. "I don't know whether this is a joke or not, but if it is one, it's gone far enough. It's time we were back at the school to dinner."

The man smoked on, and did not reply.

"Do you hear?" shouted Bob Cherry.

No answer.

"Will you let us go?"

Silence!

"You've been put up to this!" Wharton exclaimed angrily. "Look here, I suppose you've been paid by some japing idiot to play this trick. We'll give you five bob to let us loose, and say nothing about it afterwards."

The man chuckled over his pipe. He gave no other acknowledgment of having heard the Greyfriars' junior's remark.

"Will you let us go?"

Another chuckle.

"You hound!" roared Bob Cherry. "You cowardly rotter! Oh, I wish I had my hands loose! I'd hammer you!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You cackling cad! Br-r-r-r!"

The man rose, stretched his legs, and went to the doorway of the hut, and leaned against the post to ease himself by a change of position. He was probably as tired of the confinement of the solitary hut as the juniors were. But he did not utter a word in reply to them.

The juniors chafed and raged. It would have exasperated the sweetest tempers to be fastened up there, hungry and cramped, and watched over by a ruffian who refused to speak a word in reply to what they said. And the mystery of it all exasperated them, too.

What did it all mean?

Two!

Two o'clock boomed out.

A startling thought came into Harry Wharton's mind. He turned a quick look upon Bob Cherry.

"Bob, the Highcliffe team will be over at Greyfriars at a quarter to three."

"My hat!"

"If we don't get away, we're out of the match, and you're wanted to skipper the team!"

"Great Scott!" burst out Bob Cherry furiously. "I see it all now! This is a Highcliffe dodge to keep us from playing!"

"Phew!"

The juniors stared at one another grimly. They wondered that they had not thought of it sooner. There was only one purpose that could possibly be served by keeping them prisoners in the wood in this manner, and that was to keep them from playing in the football match of the afternoon. And it was a trick that the Highcliffe fellows were quite capable of playing; they had been guilty of something of the sort before, in fact, in connection with a cricket fixture with Greyfriars.

"Oh, the cads!" muttered Bob Cherry.

"There can't be any doubt about it, Bob."

"Not at all."

"It's a Highcliffe trick."

"Yes, rather."

The man with the pipe looked towards them. Wharton fixed his eyes upon the blackened face, shaded by a slouched hat.

"Look here, my man," said Wharton, speaking as calmly as he could, "I know you've been paid for this, and I'm willing to pay you twice as much—I don't care how much it is—to let us go. We've got a footer match on this afternoon that we don't want to miss. I'm willing to make it a sovereign."

The ruffian chuckled over his pipe.

"Two pounds," said Harry. "if you let us go at once!"

The man did not speak. Bob Cherry gave a groan.

"It's no good, Harry. I dare say he dare not do it. He daren't offend his employers. We're done in!"

"You scoundrel!" shouted Harry. "Let us loose! You can be arrested for this, and you jolly well shall be, too!"

The man chuckled and smoked. He did not vouchsafe any further reply, even by way of a chuckle, and the juniors relapsed into silence at last. In simmering, helpless rage, they heard the quarters strike from the distant church, and counted the minutes that passed on towards the hour fixed for the football match—the match in which they were not to play!

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

Missing!

"WHERE is Wharton and Cherry?"

Mr. Quelch, the master of the Remove, asked that question at the dinner-table. Two places were empty at the table, as well as Mark Linley's. But no one could reply to the Remove-master's question.

"They went out on their bikes, sir," said Bulstrode.

"Have they not returned?"

"I think not, sir."

Mr. Quelch compressed his lips.

"Very well," he said.

A whole holiday did not give the boys liberty to take them-

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selves out of the sight of the masters for a whole day unless they had special permission. Mr. Quelch made no further remark, but his expression showed that there were lines in store for Wharton and Bob Cherry when they did return.

But the Remove were not yet anxious about them; there was, so far, ample time before the match. After dinner, a brake carried off Wingate and his merry men to play a Sixth-Form match out, and soon after them the Fifth-Form eleven left. Later, the Shell and the Upper Fourth teams went down to their ground for a Form match. At two o'clock, Bulstrode began to make inquiries as to whether anyone had seen Wharton and Cherry.

No one had!

"The silly asses!" said Bulstrode crossly. "If they don't buck up, they'll be too late for the match when they do come in."

"I wonder if they've had any dinner?"

Bulstrode snorted.

"Oh, yes, they've had dinner right enough. They're staying out somewhere on the road, and I suppose they'll come scorching in at the last moment, too fagged out to play footer."

"That's not like them," said John Bull.

"Well, where are they, then?"

"Blessed if I know."

"I suppose nothing can have happened to them?" Hazel-dene remarked.

Bulstrode shrugged his shoulders.

"What could have happened?"

"Well, it's queer."

Vernon-Smith had listened to the talk with a somewhat peculiar expression on his face. He broke in now.

"Wharton and Bob Cherry not come in yet?" he asked.

"No!" snapped Bulstrode.

"And the Highcliffe fellows will be here in half an hour," the Bounder remarked, glancing up at the school clock.

"Yes, hang them!"

"Have you seen Wharton since he went out this morning?" asked Frank Nugent, looking at the Bounder.

Vernon-Smith nodded.

"Yes. I went down to the village to—to fetch something, and I saw them both. They were wheeling their bikes, and Marjorie Hazeldene and Clara were with them."

Bulstrode uttered an exclamation.

"They couldn't have been idiots enough to go over to Cliff House, could they, and forget about the match?"

"Impossible!"

"The girls may know what has become of them, though?" said John Bull. "It looks to me as if there's something wrong. Shall one of us scorch over to Cliff House and ask. It could be done in twenty minutes, top speed."

"I'll go," said Hazeldene.

Bulstrode nodded.

"Yes. I don't want a member of the team to fag himself out. You can scorch across, Hazel, fast as you can, and ask if they know anything about Wharton and Cherry."

"Right you are."

Hazeldene pedalled away. Vernon-Smith stood on the School House steps, a very thoughtful expression upon his face, and his hands thrust deep into his trousers' pockets. The Bounder was very keen, and he remembered the strange meeting with the Highcliffe fellows at the Cross Keys, and the confusion Ponsonby & Co. had displayed at meeting him. The Bounder began to think things out.

Bulstrode and the rest waited anxiously for Hazeldene's return. Meanwhile, the two missing juniors did not put in an appearance. It was twenty minutes to three when Hazeldene, crimson and perspiring, dashed into the Close, and jumped off his bike.

The juniors surrounded him at once.

"Well?" demanded Bulstrode.

"They're not there."

"Anything known of them?"

"They walked as far as Cliff House with Marjorie and Clara, and left them at the gate. They said they were going back to Greyfriars for dinner. That was about twelve."

"Twelve! Two hours and a half ago!" exclaimed Nugent.

"Yes."

"Great Scott!"

"I guess something's happened," remarked Fisher T. Fish. "There's been an accident. If things were O.K., they'd have been here to dinner."

Bulstrode knitted his brows anxiously.

"What can have happened?"

"Goodness knows!"

"If they're not back for the match, the team will have to play without them," said Bulstrode. "Three of the best left out—Linley, Wharton, Cherry. We shall have a rotten side to put up against Highcliffe, and they're in specially good form."

Nugent compressed his lips.

"Is it possible that this is a Highcliffe trick?" he exclaimed.
 "What do you mean?"
 "You remember the time we played them at cricket on their own ground, and they shut up one of our men in a shed, and—"

"Phew!"

"By Jove!"

Bulstrode nodded.

"It's quite possible," he said. "The Highcliffe fellows are howling cads, and I should never be surprised at anything they might do. But whether they've done it or not, we haven't an atom of proof, and we couldn't accuse them and refuse to play on account of something that happened last summer."

"I suppose not."

"Besides, that was on their own ground, and this—well, this is different. But if the two duffers don't come in, I don't know what kind of a team we shall be able to put up against Highcliffe. Hang it all!"

"Let's search for them," suggested Frank Nugent.

"Too late! The Highcliffe fellows may be here any time now."

"The kick-off's not till three," said Russell. "Besides, you can ask for a delay."

Bulstrode shook his head.

"Highcliffe wouldn't agree to that, especially if they have some caddish game on. They'd make excuses about the light failing."

"Well, we've got a quarter of an hour, anyway."

"Have a look round, if you like," said Bulstrode. "Only don't be late for the match, that's all."

"Right you are."

The juniors scattered to look for the missing players. Bulstrode did not go. He had to wait to receive the Highcliffe fellows when they came.

As a rule, Ponsonby & Co. were a little late. It was part and parcel of their system of swank, as Bob Cherry called it. But on this occasion they were very prompt to time. The Highcliffe brake drove up before the school clock indicated the quarter to three. Ponsonby & Co. alighted, looking unusually fit, and in very good spirits.

Ponsonby shook hands with Bulstrode in the most affable manner in the world.

"Glorious afternoon for a match," he remarked. "Feeling fit, eh?"

"I'm fit enough," said Bulstrode.

Ponsonby laughed.

"Well, you don't look very cheerful," he said.

"I'm all right."

"Ready for the match?"

"Of course—at three o'clock."

"Oh, good! As the afternoons are drawing in we might as well start, as we're here," the Highcliffe captain suggested.

"We'll kick off at the time arranged," said Bulstrode.

"Of course, if you prefer it."

"I do."

"Very well," said Ponsonby, biting his lip. "Stick to the arrangement. Only—"

"It's light enough to play up to half-past five, for that matter," said Bulstrode, "or even six o'clock."

"I don't think so," said Ponsonby, with a great deal of emphasis. "We'll stick to the time arranged, if you don't mind."

"I was thinking of suggesting a delay, as some of my men haven't turned up," Bulstrode remarked, watching Ponsonby's face.

But if he expected to learn anything there he was disappointed. Ponsonby was quite prepared for that, and his features betrayed nothing.

"Haven't turned up?" he repeated. "You don't mean to say that some of your team have gone out and forgotten the match?"

"Not exactly. They've gone out, and haven't come in."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I don't see anything to cackle at," said Bulstrode, with lowering brows.

"Well, it's funny," said Ponsonby.

"Absolutely!" said Vavasour.

"Looks as if they knew they were in for a licking, and preferred to stay off the field," Gadsby suggested.

"Oh, rot!"

"Thanks; you're very polite," drawled Gadsby. "But I've noticed that you Greyfriars fellows always are particularly polite to guests."

"We don't mob a winning team on our ground," said John Bull, very pointedly.

And Gadsby was silenced.

Ponsonby glanced towards the clock in the tower, and then at his watch.

"I think I shall have to insist upon playing at the time arranged," he said. "Most of us have some other engagements for this afternoon, you see. We can't spend the afternoon hanging about waiting for your players to turn up."

"Very well," said Bulstrode quietly; "we'll be ready for you at three o'clock."

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PENNY.

"All serene."

"But what if your men don't turn up?" asked Vavasour.

"We have reserves to play."

"Oh, good!"

The Highcliffe fellows walked into their dressing-room to change. Vernon-Smith, the Bounder of Greyfriars, followed them in. One of the things that exasperated the Removeites most with Vernon-Smith was his friendship with the Highcliffe fellows, although their exasperation did not make the least difference to the Bounder. He went on the way he chose, regardless of the Form's opinion.

Dark looks followed him as he joined the Highcliffe fellows.

"There goes the cad to jaw with the enemy," said Hazeldene.

"The rotter!" said Bulstrode.

But they were unjust to the Bounder this time.

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

Ponsonby Does Not Understand.

PONSONBY chuckled as he drew on his football jersey. The Highcliffe fellows were in the greatest of spirits. They had taken three of the best players out of the Greyfriars team, and the treachery of the methods they had used did not weigh on their consciences in the least. Ponsonby & Co. had very tough consciences, which could stand a great deal.

With Wharton, Bob Cherry, and Mark Linley out of the Remove eleven, it would be so weakened that a much weaker team than Highcliffe would have a good chance against it. Bulstrode, of course, could easily fill the empty places. But he could not fill them with players anything like so good. Wharton, Cherry, and Linley were three of the best—if not the three best—in the Form eleven.

"I rather think this will be a walk-over for us," Gadsby remarked.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Jolly lucky thing for us Linley happening to get that ducking yesterday," Vavasour remarked.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And then Wharton and Cherry being mysteriously missing this afternoon—"

The Highcliffians roared.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Shut up!" said Ponsonby hastily. "Here's somebody—Hullo, Smithy!"

Vernon-Smith nodded coolly enough to the Highcliffe fellows. He came into the dressing-room as if it belonged to him.

"Hullo, you fellows!" he said. "I want to have a jaw with you, Pon."

"What about?"

"Come up to my study, and I'll tell you."

"Can't! The match begins in six minutes now."

"Heaps of time."

"Look here, Vernon-Smith," Ponsonby exclaimed abruptly, "what is it you want? You can explain here before the fellows. I've got no secrets from them."

"Rather not," chimed in Gadsby.

"Absolutely," said Vavasour.

The Bounder of Greyfriars shrugged his shoulders.

"You'd better come," he said. "I want to speak to you about your little game this morning—at the Cross Keys, you know. Savvy?"

Ponsonby, in spite of his nerve, changed colour.

"What do you mean?" he exclaimed hotly.

"Do you prefer to come to my study and talk it over, or shall I step out and tell the Remove chaps what I mean?" asked Vernon-Smith.

Ponsonby hesitated.

"I'll come if you like," he said. "Of course, what you are hinting at is all rot, and I deny it from beginning to end."

"From start to finish," said Monson emphatically.

Vernon-Smith laughed mockingly.

"You are in rather a hurry to deny it, if you don't know what it is," he remarked. "But I'll talk it over with you, Pon. I dare say we shall be able to come to terms."

"Oh, very well," said Ponsonby; "I'll join you fellows in a few minutes."

"Good! Don't be long."

Ponsonby followed the Bounder of Greyfriars. He was in a very uneasy frame of mind. He could see clearly enough that Vernon-Smith suspected something; but, after all, he could have no proof. And an accusation without a particle of proof to back it up could be laughed to scorn, even if true. That was only a question of nerve; and of that kind of nerve the Highcliffe fellows had enough and to spare.

Vernon-Smith led the way into his study. He waved his hand towards a chair, but Ponsonby stood up, with his hand resting on the table.

"Look here, what do you want?" he demanded.

"A few words."

"Buck up, then. We don't want the match to be late."

"Why not? There would be heaps of light for it if you started half an hour after time," said Vernon-Smith.

"I don't think so. Besides—"

"Besides, you're afraid of Wharton and Bob Cherry getting away, and coming back in time for the match," grinned the Bounder.

Ponsonby was silent.

"You may as well own up," said Vernon-Smith. "When I saw you confabbing with Sam Smith and Mike, the stablemen of the Cross Keys, I was surprised. But when I found that Bob Cherry and Wharton had disappeared on their way back to Greyfriars, I remembered a little game you played once before, and I tumbled."

"I don't know what you mean."

"I remembered the trick you played yesterday, too—getting Mark Linley crooked for the match," said Vernon-Smith coolly.

Ponsonby sneered.

"You'd find it hard to prove that," he said.

"Oh, I know you chaps don't leave much room for proofs to be found," said the Bounder, with a grin. "But I know the little game, all the same. I don't want any proofs; I'm not thinking of showing you up."

Ponsonby drew a deep breath.

"What do you want, then?" he asked. "If it's money, we can stand a few quids. But you always seem to be rolling in money."

Vernon-Smith shrugged his shoulders.

"I don't want your money," he said. "I can have all the money I want if I choose to ask my father. You know it's not that."

"Then what is it?" said Ponsonby. "Look here, you don't want the Remove to win. You're pretty well sent to Coventry by all the Form, as it is. They wouldn't play you in the Form team at any price."

"Bulstrode asked me to play only yesterday."

Ponsonby started.

"Did you agree?"

"No."

The Highcliffe captain drew a breath of relief. He had counted upon the Bounder not being in the team, owing to the bad blood between him and the rest of the players. He knew what a formidable opponent Vernon-Smith could be when he chose.

"Well, if you're not playing, what's the trouble?" he asked. "You don't want a team to win if you don't belong to it."

"Bulstrode hammered me yesterday for refusing to play," said the Bounder.

Ponsonby grinned.

"I should think that would settle it for you," he remarked.

"It did settle it."

"You want them to lose?"

"No," said the Bounder. "I want them to win!"

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.

The Bounder Means Business.

VERNON-SMITH spoke quietly.

Ponsonby looked at him sharply, angrily. He could not understand the Bounder at all. The fellow had always been a puzzle to him.

Sometimes the worst qualities in the Bounder's curious nature were to the fore, and at such times he was on excellent terms with the Highcliffe fellows. At other times, he developed unexpected scruples that puzzled and annoyed them. In some matters he was as mean and as cruel as the worst of the Highcliffe cads, and in other matters, without any reason, so far as Ponsonby could see, he showed a steady principle there was no accounting for. The fact was that Vernon-Smith, like most other people, was composed of good and bad. The bad in his composition decidedly predominated, yet he had much good in him, and it was often the case that baseness which he might have been guilty of himself disgusted him when he saw it in others. It was never safe for friend or foe to rely upon the Bounder; at the most unexpected times he might develop the most unexpected qualities, good or bad.

Ponsonby did not understand him, and he had set him down as being a thorough blackguard, with a strong admixture of hypocrisy in him. But in that he was quite wrong. The Bounder had many faults, but hypocrisy was not one of them.

When he was decent he was sincere, though his associates could never be brought to believe in his sincerity at such times.

He was sincere now. His glance was steady, his lips set firmly. Ponsonby looked at him savagely, keenly, wondering

how he could make terms with him, and not realising yet that Vernon-Smith was not in a mood to make terms at all.

"You want them to win!" said Ponsonby at last.

"I've said so."

"Why?"

Vernon-Smith shrugged his shoulders.

"Oh, because," he said, "they're my school, and my Form—and I want them to win!"

"And Bulstrode licked you yesterday!"

The Bounder nodded.

"And still you back him up?"

"Yes."

"You're humbugging!"

"I'm not humbugging!" said Vernon-Smith. "I mean every word I say! I want the Remove to win—and I'm going to help them. I'm going to see that Wharton and Cherry are in the team; and as Linley cannot play I'm going to take his place."

"Hang you!"

"I thought it over after I had that row with Bulstrode," the Bounder explained. "That's what I'm going to do."

"And what's your motive?"

"You'd laugh if I told you," said the Bounder scornfully. "You don't understand a fellow backing up his school."

"I don't understand it in you. I know you lent assistance once to make your Form lose when there were bets on the game."

"Possibly! But there aren't any bets on this game, so far as I'm concerned," said the Bounder coolly. "I don't say what I might do if there were. But there are not."

"We stand to lose fifty if we lose the match."

"That's rough on you—because you're going to lose it."

Ponsonby gritted his teeth.

"We shall see," he replied. "We are going to do our best. Play if you like, you cad—at all events, there are two places in the team you can't fill."

"Wharton and Bob Cherry will fill them."

"If they return!" sneered Ponsonby.

"They will return."

"Very well," said Ponsonby, turning towards the door, "let them. I don't know anything about the matter, and I've jawed with you long enough, you howling cad! I'm going!"

The Bounder stepped quickly between his visitor and the door.

"You're not going yet," he said quietly. "We're going to talk this over! Where are Harry Wharton and Bob Cherry?"

Ponsonby looked him in the face.

"I haven't the faintest idea," he said.

"You won't tell me?"

"I can't when I don't know."

"You haven't done anything with them?"

"Certainly not!"

"Nor employed anybody else to do anything to them?"

"Not at all."

"In a word, you're as innocent as a baby," said Vernon-Smith sarcastically. "Innocence doesn't suit you, my dear Ponsonby. I fear the Greeks when they bring gifts in their hands, you know; and I don't believe in Highcliffe innocence. Ponsonby, old man, you're going to tell me where Wharton and Cherry are."

"I'm going out of this study," said Ponsonby; "and I don't want to speak to you again either, Smith. I'll drop your acquaintance, and you'll be kind enough to drop mine."

"Certainly, if you like!" said the Bounder calmly. "When I want to go on the razzle there are plenty of other blackguards to razzle with; I'm not hung up for any special bounder."

Ponsonby turned red with rage.

"You cad! Let me pass!"

The Bounder stood very firm.

"You're not going to pass," he said deliberately. "You're not going out of this study, my boy, till you've told me where Bob Cherry and Harry Wharton are."

"You—you—you're going to keep me here?" ejaculated Ponsonby.

"Yes, rather!"

"You—you can't! Why, you bound, let me pass, or I'll knock you through the door!" roared Ponsonby furiously.

"Come on, then!"

The Bounder put up his hands. He looked so businesslike about it, too, that Ponsonby, on second thoughts, hesitated to come on.

"You—you can't keep me here!" he exclaimed. "The other fellows will stop you! Why, I've only to shout to bring a prefect here!"

"It's a holiday," said the Bounder calmly; "the House is perfectly empty. You can yell for the next three hours and nobody will hear, unless you hang out of the window—and I sha'n't let you do that."

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"I jolly well will!"
Ponsonby made a bound for the window. Vernon-Smith sprang to intercept him, and in a second they had closed, and were struggling fiercely.

"Let me go—let me go! You hound!"

"No fear!"

Ponsonby almost reached the window, but the Bounder dragged him back. They reeled against the wall and went with a crash to the floor.

Ponsonby was underneath.

He still struggled fiercely, and tried to shout; but a hand was smacked over his mouth, and the back of his head came in violent contact with the floor.

He gave a gasp of pain.

"Better be quiet!" said the Bounder.

"Oh, oh, oh!"

"I'm stronger than you are," went on the Bounder, with perfect coolness, as he planted a knee upon Ponsonby's chest and pinned him down. "If I hadn't been I shouldn't have tackled you alone like this. You're a weedy rotter, Ponsonby, and I can do as I like with you. Keep quiet!"

"Oh!"

"If you shout I'll jam your head against the floor!" said Vernon-Smith. "Now then, Ponsonby, where are Wharton and Cherry?"

"I don't know."

"Will you tell me?"

"No!" spluttered Ponsonby.

"I'll make you, I think."

Keeping the Highcliffe fellow pinned down, Vernon-Smith drew a cord from his pocket. He dragged Ponsonby's wrists together, in spite of his resistance, looped the cord round them, and knotted it. Then, as Ponsonby writhed helplessly, he drew a fresh length of cord round the Highcliffe's ankles and knotted it also.

Then he rose to his feet, breathing a little hard after his exertions, but by no means exhausted.

The Highcliffe fellow lay on his back, looking up at him with wild eyes of rage and fear. He did not know what the Bounder intended to do next; he had had some experience of that hard, remorseless nature, and he knew that the Bounder of Greyfriars was capable of almost anything.

"Now then," said Vernon-Smith, "will you tell me what you have done with Wharton and Bob Cherry?"

"No!" yelled Ponsonby. "Help! Groo!"

The Bounder stuffed a handkerchief into his mouth.

"Enough of that," he said coolly. "Now then, Ponsonby, you are going to tell me where those two fellows are! Do you understand?"

Ponsonby stared at him in speechless rage. That the Bounder should dare to do this was amazing, astounding. And there was no one to stop him! And what was he going to do now? What mad scheme had he in his mind?

"Will you tell me, Ponsonby? Nod your head if you mean 'yes.'"

Ponsonby's head did not move.

"You won't tell me? Very well, I shall make you." Vernon-Smith's eyes met Ponsonby's, and read a mute question in them. "I'm going to put you to the torture, Ponsonby."

THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER.

Ponsonby Speaks!

PONSONBY stared at the Bounder of Greyfriars with wide-open, startled eyes.

Was it possible that the Bounder meant what he said?

His face was perfectly cold and calm; the face of a grand inquisitor of the old days could not have been more so.

The Bounder was in earnest!

He stood looking down upon the bound Highcliffe junior, and his eyes were hard and remorseless.

"Do you understand me, Ponsonby?" he said.

Ponsonby gasped inarticulately.

"You are going to tell me where Wharton and Cherry are! You are going to stop in this study while they are released from the place where you've had them shut up, wherever it is. And the sooner you make up your mind about it the better it will be for you."

Again Ponsonby seemed to choke. But he could utter no word.

Vernon-Smith crossed to the door, and locked it. Then he glanced from the window.

He could see the football-ground, and he could see the Highcliffe fellows standing there, in white and blue, though they were too far off for him to see the expression upon their faces. But it was easy enough to guess that they were puzzled and amazed by the prolonged absence of their leader.

Without their captain they could not, of course, begin the match. And Bulstrode was only too pleased by the unexpected absence of Ponsonby. Every minute that passed was a minute gained, and increased the chance that Wharton and Bob Cherry would return in time for the match.

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The Bounder turned back to Ponsonby, a hard and steely light in his eyes.

"Now you know what it is," he said. "I'm for Greyfriars now, tooth and nail. I'm going to know what you've done with our players. Where are they?"

Ponsonby made no sign.

"Look out for squalls, then!"

Vernon-Smith cleared the table with slow and deliberate motions and inverted it, placing the top upside-down upon the bound junior.

Then upon the inverted table he piled a sofa and several chairs, and then books and cushions and other articles, the heaviest he could find.

The weight, as it was added to, began to tell upon the Highcliffe fellow.

Only his face, as he lay on his back, showed past the edge of the table, and his face was growing crimson as the pressure upon him increased.

The Bounder paused, lighted a cigarette, and smoked it calmly. Ponsonby writhed under the weight that was upon him. Vernon-Smith held to a leg of the inverted table and steadied it. The weight could not be shifted.

Ponsonby made frantic efforts to get rid of the gagging handkerchief. He ejected it from his mouth at last, and uttered a hoarse cry:

"Help!"

"Will you answer me now?"

"Oh! Help!"

Vernon-Smith jammed the gag into its place again.

Ponsonby choked into silence, his eyes burning furiously.

Vernon-Smith brought a heap of books out of the book-case and piled them upon the table. Ponsonby was gasping painfully now.

The Bounder took out his watch.

"I give you three minutes," he said, in a cold, clear voice.

"If you do not decide to answer by then I shall add my own weight."

Ponsonby's eyes almost started from his head.

If Vernon-Smith added his own weight the boy under the table-top would be suffocated by slow degrees, there was no doubt about that. He was already suffering pains in every limb.

Terror grew in Ponsonby's eyes.

Vernon-Smith watched the hand as it turned on the dial.

"One minute!" he said coldly.

Ponsonby gasped painfully.

"Two minutes!"

A helpless struggle under the table. Ponsonby was very nearly at the end of his resistance now.

"Three minutes!" said the Bounder.

He returned the watch to his pocket.

He placed his foot upon the books, and took hold of the upright legs of the table to balance himself. He looked down mercilessly at the Highcliffe junior.

"Will you tell me where they are? Nod your head if you mean yes."

Ponsonby nodded his head.

Vernon-Smith smiled grimly.

He stooped down, and removed the handkerchief from Ponsonby's mouth.

"Where are they?" he asked.

The Highcliffe junior licked his dry lips.

"Oh, hang you!" he muttered. "Hang you! I'll make you suffer for this, Vernon-Smith, you coward—you hound!"

Vernon-Smith shrugged his shoulders.

"That's not an answer," he said. "Where are they?"

"I—I—"

"Will you speak out, or shall I give you some more?" the Bounder demanded sharply.

"Hold on! I—I'll tell you!" panted Ponsonby.

"Quick, then!"

"They—they're in the old hut in Friardale Wood," muttered Ponsonby.

"Prisoners, of course."

"Ye-es."

"The stablemen of the Cross Keys took them there, I suppose—Mike and Sam Smith," said the Bounder. "That's what you were talking over with them this morning?"

"Yes," muttered Ponsonby.

"Are they there alone, or are they guarded?"

Ponsonby hesitated.

"Better tell me the truth," said the Bounder quietly.

"You're going to stay tied up in this study till they are back at Greyfriars."

"Mike is standing with them to watch them," said Ponsonby sullenly.

"Only Mike, by himself?"

"Yes."

"Very good. What have you paid him?"

"A sovereign."

"He will have earned it by the time he's done with," said the Bounder, with a grin.

He removed the table and the weighty pile from the Highcliffe fellow. Ponsonby gasped for breath.

"Oh, I'll make you wriggle for this, yet!" he muttered.

"Possibly. At present you'll stay where you are, and I'll tie you to the legs of the table to make sure of you," said the Bounder cheerfully. "I shall have to stuff your mouth again, to keep you quiet. But you needn't grumble—I suppose Wharton and Bob Cherry are being treated in much the same way, ain't they?"

"Hang you! I don't know."

"I suppose you've given Mike orders to keep them safely, and use whatever methods he thinks best," grinned the Bounder.

"Yes."

"And I don't suppose he would err on the side of being too gentle," remarked Vernon-Smith. "Well, here you are; I'm sorry to have to handle you like this, but as you've brought it on yourself, I don't see how you can complain."

"I—I— Oh!"

Ponsonby choked into silence as Vernon-Smith jammed the handkerchief into his mouth again. This time the Bounder fastened it there with a length of twine.

Then he corded Ponsonby's ankles to the legs of the table, and the Highcliffe junior was a helpless prisoner. The Bounder took a last glance round the study, and removed the key from the inside of the door. He looked out of the window. On the football-field the Highcliffe juniors were standing in an excited group, and some of them were pointing towards the house.

The Bounder chuckled softly.

Gadsby and the rest were getting uneasy, amazed, at Ponsonby's prolonged absence. They did not know in the least what to make of it. Neither did Bulstrode, for that matter, but Bulstrode was glad of it. The fellows who had gone out to look for Wharton and Bob Cherry had not all returned yet, and if the match had been played immediately Bulstrode's team would have been a very poor one indeed.

Ponsonby wriggled as Vernon-Smith closed and fastened the window, and crossed towards the door. The Bounder looked at him.

"You want to say something?"

Ponsonby nodded.

"Going to promise not to leave the study if I'll let you loose?" the Bounder suggested, with a grin.

Another nod.

"I thought so! But, you see, I can't trust you—not any further than I can see you, at all events," said the Bounder. "You're only in the same fix that Wharton and Nugent are in; in fact, I expect Mike has handled them less gently than I have you. You'll stay like that till I come back, my son, and if you want something to occupy your mind you can reflect upon your sins, you know."

And the Bounder of Greyfriars quitted the study and locked the door on the outside, placing the key in his pocket. Then, whistling carelessly, he sauntered out into the Close.

THE SIXTEENTH CHAPTER.

The Bounder to the Rescue!

BULSTRODE glanced at the Bounder as the latter came sauntering upon the football-field. The Highcliffe fellows looked at him, too, wondering what had become of Ponsonby. The Highcliffe players were in a state of uneasiness, mingled with alarm. That something had gone wrong they felt certain, though they could not guess what it was. But conscience makes cowards of us all, and the knowledge that they had been guilty of treachery towards their opponents made the Highcliffians uneasy and suspicious. But Vernon-Smith appeared not to notice their anxious looks directed towards himself. He nodded cheerfully to Bulstrode.

"They haven't come in yet?" he asked.

"No," said Bulstrode shortly.

"You asked me to play for the Form Eleven yesterday," said the Bounder.

"Well?"

"I'll play if you like."

Bulstrode stared at him. In his present predicament, the offer of the Bounder came like a gleam of light in darkness. The addition of the Bounder to the side would make a great difference, and help to compensate for the absence of Wharton and Nugent, and the loss of Mark Linley. Not that Bulstrode felt inclined, even then, to yield a single point in the conditions he had laid down.

"I shall be glad to have you," he said, "but only on the

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terms I stated yesterday—you play without making any conditions."

The Bounder nodded.

"That's all right," he said.

"I say, this is—this is very decent of you," said Bulstrode, "especially after—"

"Especially after our little row yesterday," said the Bounder, with a grin. "Well, that makes no difference to me."

"You're a queer beggar, Vernon-Smith, and no mistake!" said Bulstrode. "Blessed if I can ever make you out. But I'll play you with pleasure; and you know as well as I do that you will be jolly useful. I only wish Wharton and Cherry would come in!"

"They will come in."

"How do you know?"

"I know where they are," said Vernon-Smith, "and I'm going to fetch them."

"My hat!" ejaculated Bulstrode. "But how do you know? Are you a blessed wizard?"

"No; but I've found out. Will a couple of you chaps come with me and help me—I may need help?"

"Yes, rather!" said John Bull. "But I suppose you're not pulling our leg, eh? It's not a jape?"

"Of course it isn't! I can find Wharton and Cherry, and can have them here in half an hour," said Vernon-Smith quietly.

"Then the sooner you start the better," said Bulstrode. "That is, of course, if the Highcliffe fellows are willing to wait."

"We're jolly well not!" said Gadsby hotly. "Why, we shouldn't be finished before dark, or anything like it. We're not going to wait. As soon as Ponsonby comes we're going to play."

"That knocks it on the head," said Nugent.

"It doesn't," said the Bounder. "Ponsonby has agreed to wait till we come back with Bob Cherry and Wharton."

"Phew!"

"That's jolly decent of him!" said Bulstrode. "And I must say that I never expected it of Ponsonby, either."

"Oh, you never know what to expect," said Vernon-Smith carelessly. "Ponsonby himself didn't know what to expect when he came here. But he's going to wait—"

"It's a lie!" broke in Gadsby furiously. "He hasn't agreed to wait. There's some trick in this."

"Absolutely," said Vavasour.

Vernon-Smith looked at them coolly.

"Are you going to make a fuss about it?" he asked.

"Yes, we are," exclaimed Monson angrily. "Ponsonby is being kept away somehow. He never meant to stay away more than a few minutes."

Bulstrode gave the Bounder an uneasy look. Only too well he knew the hard, reckless nature of the black sheep of the Remove.

"You haven't been up to any tricks, have you, Smithy?" he asked. "We can't have any Highcliffe trickery here, you know. We draw a line at that."

"What's sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander, I guess," said Fisher T. Fish.

Bulstrode shook his head.

"We're going to give fair play, if we don't get it," he said. "Look here, Vernon-Smith, if there is any little game on, you'd better explain what it is."

The Bounder shrugged his shoulders.

"It's all plain sailing," he said. "Ponsonby's in my study, and he's agreed to wait there till I come back with Wharton and Nugent. If these fellows don't like the idea, I'll fetch Ponsonby down at once, and we'll have it all out."

Gadsby changed colour.

He realised that if Vernon-Smith really knew where Wharton and Nugent were, he must have learned it from Ponsonby; and, in that case, the truth was out.

What would happen if the Bounder brought it all out into the light; and the Remove crowd, already exasperated, learned that the Highcliffe fellows had kidnapped two of their players, in order to win the match by treachery?

Gadsby turned cold all over at the thought. Instead of a footer match, the Highcliffe team would most likely get the ragging of their lives.

Vernon-Smith looked mockingly at the Highcliffe fellows. He had them in the hollow of his hand, and they were beginning to realise it.

"Look here," muttered Gadsby, "I—I don't understand this! Come here—I've something to say to you, Smith."

"Very well!"

Vernon-Smith followed Gadsby into the Highcliffe dressing-room. There, the Highcliffe fellow turned upon him fiercely.

"What have you done with Ponsonby?" he demanded.

"He's locked up in my study."

"You hound! And you think you're going to keep him

there until you bring your precious Wharton and Cherry back, eh?"

"Exactly."

"You—you— Do you think we shall stand it?" roared Gadsby.

"Yes, I think you will, because, if you take it quietly, I'm going to say nothing about the game you've played," said Vernon-Smith quietly; "but if you make a fuss, and insist upon having Ponsonby out—you can have him—and I shall explain to the fellows what you have done! You know what will happen then."

Gadsby clenched his hands.

"You rotter! We've done nothing."

"You've hired a couple of roughs to kidnap Wharton and Cherry, and keep them in the old hut in the wood till after the match," said Vernon-Smith steadily.

"It's a lie."

"Ponsonby has confessed it."

"You—you— What did you do to him to make him tell you?"

"Put him to the torture!"

Gadsby staggered back.

"Wh-what?"

"I twisted it out of him!" explained the Bounder, with perfect coolness. "Now, you can take your choice—wait for us to be ready, or have it all out in public! It's not a savoury story. If you like to keep it dark, I'll say nothing. But, in that case, the match will be put off till Wharton and Cherry are here."

Gadsby gritted his teeth.

"Oh, hang you—hang you!" he exclaimed.

Vernon-Smith laughed. The fury of the baffled plotter did not trouble him in the least, nor the prospect of the vengeance of the Highcliffe fellows. The Bounder of Greyfriars had a nerve of iron.

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Greyfriars. Bull and Nugent were very curious and very puzzled, but the Bounder did not seem inclined to vouchsafe much information.

"You know where they are?" Nugent asked, as the three juniors tramped down the lane towards Friardale Wood.

"Yes."

"Where, then?" asked John Bull.

"In the old woodman's hut."

"How do you know?"

"I found out."

"You mean that Ponsonby told you?" exclaimed Nugent.

"I've nothing more to say!" said Vernon-Smith. "I'm doing this to do the Form a good turn, but I don't feel inclined to explain. That's all."

Nugent snorted.

"You are an exasperating beast!" he exclaimed. "But I suppose you will have to have your way. If we get the chaps back to Greyfriars in time for the match it will be all serene, anyway. They have been kidnapped, I suppose?"

"Just so."

"And they are being guarded, or else we shouldn't be looking for a fight?" said Bull.

"Yes."

"How many chaps shall we have to tackle?"

"Only one, but he's a big rough, and we shall have to be careful." Vernon-Smith turned into the wood at the stile.

"This way, and better be quiet now; we don't want to alarm him. Follow me!"

And the juniors tramped on through the wood, the cricket-stumps grasped in their hands, and their eyes gleaming.

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"Is that all you have to say?" he asked.

"Hang you!"

"Then I'll be going. Mind, not a word from you, and I am mum; but if there's a fuss, the whole truth comes out!" said the Bounder. "And the chaps are about fed-up with your rotten, mean tricks, I can tell you! You will be ragged bald-headed if they know the truth. Take your choice."

"Hang you!"

The Bounder shrugged his shoulders, and walked out. Gadsby followed him, his face pale with rage, and his eyes gleaming under his contracted brows. He was helpless; he knew that. The whole game was in the hands of the Bounder. And Gadsby realised with savage anger that it had always been so, when the Highcliffe fellows had entered the lists against that inscrutable junior.

"It's all right," said Gadsby, with an effort, in reply to the questioning looks of his fellow-players. "It appears that Ponsonby has agreed to wait, and so there's nothing more to be said."

"Then buzz off, Smithy, and get Wharton and Bob Cherry here!" said Bulstrode. "You can explain afterwards. Take Nugent and Bull, if you want help."

"Good! May as well take a cricket-stump apiece," said the Bounder.

"Do you mean there may be a fight?" asked Bulstrode, in wonder.

"Yes."

"But how? But never mind, you can explain later—time's going now. Buzz off!"

Vernon-Smith and John Bull and Frank Nugent, with a cricket-stump apiece under their arms, quitted the gates of THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 192.

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THE SEVENTEENTH CHAPTER.

"Rescue, Remove!"

BOOM! Boom! Boom!

"Three o'clock," said Harry Wharton.

Bob Cherry grunted.

"They'll be starting," he said.

The two juniors cast vengeful looks towards the man with the sooty face who was sitting upon the log now just inside the hut, and refilling his pipe. The juniors were growing cramped and tormented with sharp pains from the bonds that confined their limbs. Their tempers were at boiling point, and they had spent some time in telling their guard what they thought of him. But it did not seem to have any effect upon the man with the cudgel. Sometimes he grinned, and sometimes he chuckled, but, as a rule, he puffed at his pipe, and took no notice. The juniors, savage and exhausted, cramped and uncomfortable, lay on the straw and waited.

They had no hope of rescue. They more than suspected the Highcliffe fellows of having planned this kidnapping, but even if the other Greyfriars fellows suspected it, too, they had no clue to the whereabouts of the kidnapped juniors. Wharton and Bob Cherry did not look for rescue; they were waiting only till the time for the football match to have passed, and their kidnapper should no longer have any motive for keeping them prisoners.

The quarter struck.

"Quarter-past three!" groaned Bob Cherry. "I wonder which side kicked off? I suppose the Highcliffe cads are scoring!"

"I suppose so! Hang them!"

"I wish we could!"

"And we sha'n't be able to prove this against them," said Wharton, gritting his teeth.

"We can hammer them for it without proof," said Bob Cherry.

"But if they beat the Remove, they'll count a victory against us."

"And win their filthy bets! And that's what they want," said Bob. "Oh, we ought to have suspected something of this sort, and taken more care. If we got away now, it would be too late—Bulstrode must be playing substitutes."

"Yes. I wonder who's captaining the team?"

"Goodness knows!"

The half-hour sounded.

The juniors lay and twisted on their uncomfortable couch. They had strained at their bonds till their arms ached; they could not get loose.

A quarter to four!

"First half's over!" groaned Bob Cherry. "Two goals to Highcliffe, I expect, and nothing to Greyfriars! Oh, blow!"

"Three-quarters of an hour more of this!" said Wharton. "I'll make somebody wriggle for it, somehow!"

"Hang the brutes!"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" muttered Bob Cherry. "What's the matter with that rascal? Look at him!"

Wharton glanced quickly at the guard. The ruffian had risen to his feet, and was peering out into the green depths of the wood, with a startled and anxious expression showing upon his sooty face.

"Somebody's coming this way!" Wharton muttered breathlessly.

"Oh, good!"

"Let's shout; they may hear!"

And the two juniors, before the man with the cudgel could make a movement to stop them, burst into a shout:

"Help!"

The man turned round furiously, grasping his cudgel.

"Old yer row," he muttered, "or——"

There was a crash in the underwoods.

"Here's the place!" shouted a voice.

Harry Wharton gasped in amazement.

"The Bounder!"

From where they were lying, the two juniors could see through the open doorway of the hut into the green wood. From the thickets they suddenly saw the well-known form of the Bounder emerge, with a cricket-stump in his hand.

He ran directly towards the hut, and after him, bursting from the thickets, came two more juniors—Nugent and Bull.

"Help!" yelled Wharton.

"We're coming!"

"Rescue, Remove!"

The ruffian turned from the boys again, and blocked up the door of the hut with his bulky form, the cudgel grasped in his hand.

"Keep back from 'ere!" he exclaimed threateningly.

Vernon-Smith laughed mockingly.

"You'd better clear off, Mike!" he exclaimed. "We're three to one, and we're going to have those two fellows out!"

"There ain't nobody——"

"Rescue!" roared Bob Cherry.

"Ha, ha, ha! I rather think we can hear that there is somebody!" grinned the Bounder. "Get out of the way, my man!"

"You ain't comin' in 'ere!"

"Will you clear off?"

"No; 'ang you, I won't!"

"Don't waste time in jaw!" exclaimed John Bull impatiently. "Come on!"

The sturdy junior ran at the ruffian. Nugent and Vernon-Smith followed him fast. Mike raised his heavy cudgel.

Clatter, clatter!

Cudgel and cricket-stumps came crashing together, and the ruffian's weapon whirled out of his hand, and flew and circled through the air, dropping among the bushes. Then crash, crash! came the cricket-stumps upon him.

He staggered back with a roar of pain.

The juniors followed him up, raining blows upon him. It was no time for half measures.

The ruffian dodged away, and made a leap from the window of the hut. He was thinking only of escape now. He plunged head foremost through the open window, but it was too small for his bulk, and he stuck, struggling, half-way through, his long legs thrashing wildly behind him.

John Bull lashed at him with the stump. The ruffian was in a favourable position for flogging, for he could neither get through the little window, nor get back into the room; and the dust rose in clouds from his leathern trousers as John Bull lashed him.

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"Ow!" he roared. "'Elp! Stop it! I give in! Yow! Oh! Yah! Yoop!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Groo! 'Elp! Yow!"

Frank Nugent and Vernon-Smith released the two bound juniors. They rose and stretched their cramped limbs.

"Thanks!" gasped Wharton. "Give it him well, Bull! Lay it on! The brute has kept us tied up here for hours!"

"Lather him!" said Bob Cherry vengefully. "Lather the rotter! Here, lend me your stump, Franky, and I'll give him some! It will be a bit of exercise for me!"

Thwack, thwack, thwack!

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yow! Yaroo! Yoop! 'Elp! Murder! Ow! Oh!" roared the ruffian, struggling desperately to escape.

He succeeded at last, bursting out through the window, and carrying a considerable portion of the old rotten window-frame with him.

He rolled on the ground outside, and gasped for breath. John Bull leaned out of the smashed window, lashing with the stump, and the ruffian picked himself up, and dashed into the wood. He had evidently had quite enough.

Bob Cherry gasped with exertion and laughter.

"I think that bounder's been through it pretty well," he remarked. "He's given us a pretty bad time, but I think he got as good as he gave."

"Yes, rather!" said Harry Wharton. "But how on earth did you fellows come to know that we were here?"

"Vernon-Smith found it out," said Nugent.

"Vernon-Smith!"

The Bounder smiled in his sardonic way.

"Yes, it was I," he said.

"Then I'm very much obliged to you," said Harry frankly. "It was jolly decent of you to do it; especially as we're on bad terms. How has the match gone, Nugent? How is it you're not playing?"

"It's not started yet."

Wharton stared.

"Not started! How——"

"Ponsonby's agreed to wait till we get back with you chaps."

"Phew!"

"My hat!" said Bob Cherry. "Then we were wrong; it can't have been the Highcliffe fellows who had us kidnapped and brought here, Harry."

Wharton looked puzzled.

"Blessed if I understand it, then," he said. "I don't want to be unjust; but if they didn't do it, who did?"

"I'm pretty certain they did," said John Bull. "Vernon-Smith has got it out of Ponsonby somehow, and made him agree to wait—how, I don't know! But here we are—and the sooner we get to Greyfriars the better. We don't want the match unfinished at dark."

"By Jove, no!"

The juniors quitted the old hut. There was no sign of the man with the blackened face. He had evidently made himself scarce. Of the party, only Vernon-Smith knew who the man was; and he did not say a word on the subject.

The juniors hurried through the wood, Wharton and Bob Cherry picking up their bicycles in passing, and wheeling them back to the school with them. There was a shout in the Close as the party were seen.

"Here they are!"

"They've got 'em!"

"Hurrah!"

THE EIGHTEENTH CHAPTER.

Ready for the Match.

VERNON-SMITH went up to his study and unlocked the door. He looked in with a grin upon his face, and met the furious eyes of Ponsonby. The Highcliffe captain was exactly as Vernon-Smith had left him. He was twisting in his bonds, as Wharton and Bob Cherry had twisted in theirs; it was a kind of poetical justice, and Vernon-Smith grinned at the thought of it. It struck him as amusing that he should be the instrument of justice and fair play. It was a new role for the blackguard of the Remove. And he found something satisfactory in it, too.

He stooped over Ponsonby and released him.

The Highcliffe fellow rose painfully to his feet. He was in such a rage that he could hardly speak.

"So—so you've come back!" he gasped out at last.

The Bounder nodded agreeably.

"Yes, I've come back," he said.

"And you've brought Wharton and Cherry?"

"Yes; I've brought Wharton and Cherry."

"You hound!"

"I rather think that name applies more to you than to

me, under the circumstances," said the Bounder, with a grin. "But you can blow steam off, if you like—I don't mind. You haven't been through half so much as Wharton and Bob Cherry. They were tied up in the hut ever since twelve o'clock."

"Hang you!"

Ponsonby rubbed his aching wrists and ankles. He would have given a great deal to rush at the Bounder, and thump him right and left. But he knew that it would be no use. If he attacked that exceedingly tough youth he was likely to get most of the thumping himself. And he did not feel up to it.

He swung savagely out of the study.

The Bounder followed him, with a grin upon his face. Ponsonby was looking as black as thunder when he reached the football field.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Bulstrode. "You've been keeping us waiting a jolly long time, Ponsonby. I hope we shall have time to finish the match before dark."

Ponsonby did not reply.

He could not complain of his own treatment without bringing the whole story to light, and that was the last thing he wished to do.

He stamped into the visitors' dressing-room.

There the Highcliffe fellows gave him a piece of their minds. They had all agreed upon the cowardly scheme by which the Remove team was to be broken up, and placed at their mercy. But now that the whole scheme had gone wrong, they cared only to remember that it had originated with Ponsonby, and they left him the whole responsibility.

"You utter ass!" said Gadsby. "A splendid mess you've made of the affair, haven't you? Oh, you fathead!"

"You chump!" said Monson.

"You idiot!" said Merton. "You ought to be ragged to a shadow."

"Absolutely!" said Vavasour.

Ponsonby glared savagely at them. He was rubbing his wrists and ankles with Elliman's. The Bounder had tied him up tightly enough, and he was feeling the effects of it. He was likely to feel the effects for some time.

"Oh, shut up!" he growled. "I couldn't help that cad Smith taking a hand in the game in the way he has."

"You couldn't help it!" mimicked Gadsby. "Why couldn't you let the matter alone, if you couldn't work it better than this?"

"Yes, you ass!"

"You utter duffer!"

"You frabjous chump!"

Ponsonby rubbed away sulkily. The Highcliffe fellows were not generous, to friend or foe; and now that their leader had failed they did not mean to let him down lightly.

"What made you tell Smith where to find those two rotters?" demanded Vavasour.

"He tied me up, and—"

"And you let him do it!"

"How could I help it?" demanded Ponsonby.

"How! Oh, rats! You ought to be scragged!" said Monson savagely. "Now the whole game's up. The only chap we've got rid of out of the Greyfriars team is Mark Linley, and they're going to play Smith in his place."

"And Smith is more dangerous than that factory cad, any day," said Gadsby.

"Ponsonby has made matters worse, instead of better, with his silly rot," said Merton. "We've no chance at all against Greyfriars now."

"Absolutely none," said Vavasour.

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PENNY.

"Oh, go and eat coke!" snapped Ponsonby. "I've done my best, and you were all backing me up so long as it was going well; and now you've turned on me because it hasn't worked out as we expected."

"As you expected, you mean," sneered Monson. "I never expected that anything would come of it."

"This is the first time I've heard you say so."

"Oh, it's no good arguing with you! You've messed up everything. I wonder what we shall do to raise the money to settle when we've lost the match."

"Oh, you idiot, Ponsonby!"

"We may win yet," said Ponsonby. "After all, it's man to man, and we're in specially good form just now."

"We'll try," said Gadsby. "But—"

"It would have been a cert., but for that cad Smith. But we can try hard, and I dare say we shall pull it off," said Ponsonby. "Anyhow, it's no good ragging me—it wasn't my fault."

"Oh, rot!"

"You messed it up!"

"You've spoiled everything."

Br-r-r-r!

There was a tap at the door.

"You fellows ready?" sang out Bulstrode.

Ponsonby gritted his teeth.

"Yes; in a minute."

"Right-ho! We're waiting, that's all."

The Remove players were waiting, in high spirits. Bulstrode had his complete team now, and there was not the slightest doubt in his mind that his team was miles ahead of the Highcliffe eleven in form.

Wharton and Bob Cherry had been through a trying time, but they seemed fit enough. They had eaten a sandwich apiece immediately on reaching Greyfriars, and had a rub down, and they looked quite in form.

And what they had suffered had made them determined to lick the Highcliffians up hill and down dale, and their grim determination made up for any ill-effects of their imprisonment in the old hut.

They had changed hastily, and were ready for the match before Ponsonby felt fit to come out and begin.

The Greyfriars fellows had a pretty accurate idea of what had happened, although the Bounder refused to explain; though they did not suspect what means Vernon-Smith had used to extract the information from Ponsonby.

And as the matter had turned out so well, the 'Friars were inclined to take it in good temper, thoroughly enjoying the prospect of seeing the Highcliffe cads licked after all their efforts to snatch an unfair victory.

Quite a crowd of the Remove had gathered round the ground to watch the match, as well as a crowd of fags and some Shell fellows and Fifth-Formers. Coker of the Fifth was there, with a very superior smile upon his face. The rude refusal of the Remove to accept him as captain for the occasion rankled in Coker's breast, and he was prepared to look on with a supercilious smile and see the Remove licked.

Ponsonby and Co. came out at last, and an ironical cheer from the crowd greeted them.

Bulstrode tapped Vernon-Smith on the arm. The Bounder was in his football clothes now, and he certainly looked very fit.

"I want you to captain the team, Smithy," said Bulstrode, abruptly.

The Bounder stared at him.

"Captain the team!" he said.

"Yes. Wharton refuses, and I have refused. Mark Linley is in the sanatorium, and you—"

"I'm fourth best," grinned the Bounder.

"Yes," said Bulstrode. "It's between you and Bob Cherry! But Bob Cherry thinks you will manage better than he could—and I'm of the same opinion. Will you take it on?"

The Bounder drew a deep breath.

"You're not merely saying this because I've been of some use?" he asked.

"I'm saying it because I mean it."

"Righto, then," said the Bounder, "I'll captain with pleasure, and if we don't beat the Highcliffe team hollow, you can use my head for a football."

And the Bounder held his head very high as he went off the field. He tossed with Ponsonby for choice of goals, and the Highcliffe captain gave him a very dark look. Highcliffe won the toss and kicked off.

THE NINETEENTH CHAPTER.

Vernon-Smith's Victory.

VERNON-SMITH, captain of the Remove eleven! There was a buzz among the crowd as they heard it.

Vernon-Smith, the blacksheep of the Remove—the most unpopular fellow in the Form—captaining the football team!

It was a surprise with a vengeance.

But the fellows all admitted that it was a wise choice. The Bounder, if he chose, could play splendidly, and that he was a born leader all knew. And there was little doubt that he would do his best on this occasion.

Marjorie Hazeldene and Miss Clara had arrived, and they were seated before the pavilion, looking on—with a crowd of attentive juniors round them to point out the points of the game—though, as a matter of fact, they knew very nearly as much as they could be told. Vernon-Smith glanced towards Marjorie, and slightly raised his cap. He was as keen as better fellows to shine in the eyes of Miss Hazeldene.

The teams faced one another, and Hobson of the Shell, who was referee, blew his whistle. And then the Remove waded in.

The home team was at its full strength, and all its members were filled with a grim determination to make this a record licking for Highcliffe. The Highcliffians were very much demoralised already. To be guilty of cowardly treachery, and to be found out and baffled, was not likely to improve the tone of any team. And their discontent with their captain did not make for success. And Ponsonby himself was in a vile temper, and that is not the temper in which to win matches.

The Remove players drove their opponents before them from the start.

Within ten minutes of the whistle, Bob Cherry sent the ball into the Highcliffe net, beating Merton, the goalkeeper, easily.

It was first blood to Greyfriars, and the crowd cheered.

"Goal! Hurray!"

"Bravo, Bob Cherry!"

Marjorie clapped her hands, and the applause was more to Bob Cherry than all the shouts of his Form-fellows.

"Line up!" said the Bounder, cheerfully, "This looks like being a giddy walk-over."

And the Remove players laughed and lined up.

The Highcliffe side tried hard to get away. But it was in vain. Every attempt they made to get through the home defence was baffled. Bob Cherry, Tom Brown, and Bulstrode, the halves, were a tower of strength, and the Highcliffians could not get past them. And the forwards were always dangerous. Vernon-Smith, at inside-right, played a splendid game. He did not try to keep the ball to himself, as most of the fellows imagined he would, but kept his centre well supplied, and seemed to think of nothing but the success of the side, quite apart from his own glorification.

That was the way to win.

But when a chance came to the Bounder he took it, and made the most of it. He dropped in a long shot from the wing that beat Merton hollow, and the ball plumped into the net.

The crowd roared.

"Bravo, Smithy!"

"Goal! Goal!"

"What price that, Ponsonby?"

Ponsonby ground his teeth.

His side seemed to be going to pieces, and, try as he would, he could not buck up the Highcliffe players.

The Remove were warning to their work now.

Before the whistle sounded for half-time they had added another goal to their score, Russell being responsible for it. They retired for the interval with a score of three to nil.

"I guess this game is all over bar shouting," Fisher T. Fish remarked to Marjorie.

And Marjorie smiled and nodded. The same thought was in her mind. But the Highcliffe fellows were not finished yet. Ponsonby spoke to them in the interval, in concentrated tones of rage.

"You'll have to buck up," he exclaimed. "You know what there is at stake. You've got to buck up, or face the music afterwards. If you can't beat them at footer, you can beat them somehow. Go for them—and especially that cad Smith. We owe it all to him! Pile on him—smash him! If he's cleared off the field we may wipe the others out."

"Good egg!" said Gadsby.

"Absolutely!" agreed Vavasour.

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And the Highcliffe fellows lined up for the second half with the intention of adopting those noble tactics.

At the first rush the visitors neglected the ball, and allowed Wharton and Nugent to get clear with it. They piled on Vernon-Smith.

Gadsby charged him over, and Vavasour fell upon him, and Ponsonby fell on Vavasour; and the Bounder gasped under their weight.

But the Bounder was not an easy fellow to tackle in this way. He felt, rather than saw, Gadsby's elbow coming for his ribs; and he crashed his own forearm into Gadsby's face, sending the Highcliffe winger rolling back half stunned. Then his foot crashed on Ponsonby's shin, and Ponsonby fell off him faster than he had fallen on. Vernon-Smith drove his elbow into Vavasour's neck, and Vavasour rolled away gasping with pain. The Bounder leaped to his feet.

Hobson had blown the whistle, the foul being quite apparent. But the referee's interference was not needed. The player fouled was not hurt; but the fellows fouling him had suffered considerably.

They could hardly complain of being hurt, as they had fallen on Vernon-Smith. It was not his fault, certainly, that they had fallen on him. The Remove players could not help grinning. And after that experience the Highcliffians did not try to foul the Bounder again. It was a little too dangerous.

More than once, as the game went on, the visitors tried rough tactics with the other players, but the Remove did not retaliate in kind. They contented themselves with scoring goals.

Two in the second half, against nil, put the Remove so far ahead that they had no need to exert themselves further.

Then they indulged in little pleasantries, playing with their hands in their pockets, or walking gently after the ball, much to the amusement of the crowd, and to the fury of the Highcliffians.

Ponsonby and Co., exerting themselves, scored once, and the crowd cheered sarcastically as the ball lodged in the net. They would never have had that goal if their opponents had been playing hard instead of "funning."

And it was only a flash in the pan; it raised the Highcliffe hopes for a moment but it was not followed by more. The Highcliffians were played almost to a standstill by this time, and some of them were standing about gasping, instead of running, because they had not a run left in them.

Harry Wharton sent the ball in for a sixth and last time; and then the whistle went, and the visiting team were put out of their misery.

They retired from the field defeated by six goals to one, and in a state of rage and chagrin that they made no attempt to conceal.

The Remove players came off in great spirits.

Bulstrode walked up to Ponsonby as the latter came out after changing. The Highcliffe brake was waiting.

"You've been licked," said Bulstrode, "and you deserved it. I don't know exactly the rights of the matter, but I'm pretty certain that you fellows were at the bottom of Wharton and Cherry being kidnapped. You are a cad, Ponsonby, and we've done with you now. Any other matches we've got on with you will be scratched; we don't want to have anything more to do with you, or with Highcliffe."

Ponsonby gritted his teeth.

He turned away without a word, and entered the brake with his companions. Vernon-Smith stood among the crowd to see them off, and he raised his cap with a grin as the Highcliffians looked at him with black, threatening brows.

"You'll see us again, at all events," Ponsonby muttered. "We'll make you squirm for all you've done, you cad."

The Bounder laughed.

The brake drove away, amid laughter from the Greyfriars crowd, and disappeared. Ponsonby & Co. were gone—licked! Doubtless they occupied themselves on their way home by calculating how much money they had lost in losing the match, and how they were to meet their bets.

But all was satisfaction at Greyfriars. Founder's Day had been celebrated, in a manner worthy of the occasion, by a football match and a big licking inflicted upon the Remove's football foes. And the Remove rejoiced accordingly.

THE END.

("A Schoolboy's Sacrifice!" is the title of next week's long complete tale of Harry Wharton & Co. at Greyfriars. Please order your copy of "The MAGNET" Library in advance. Price 1d.)

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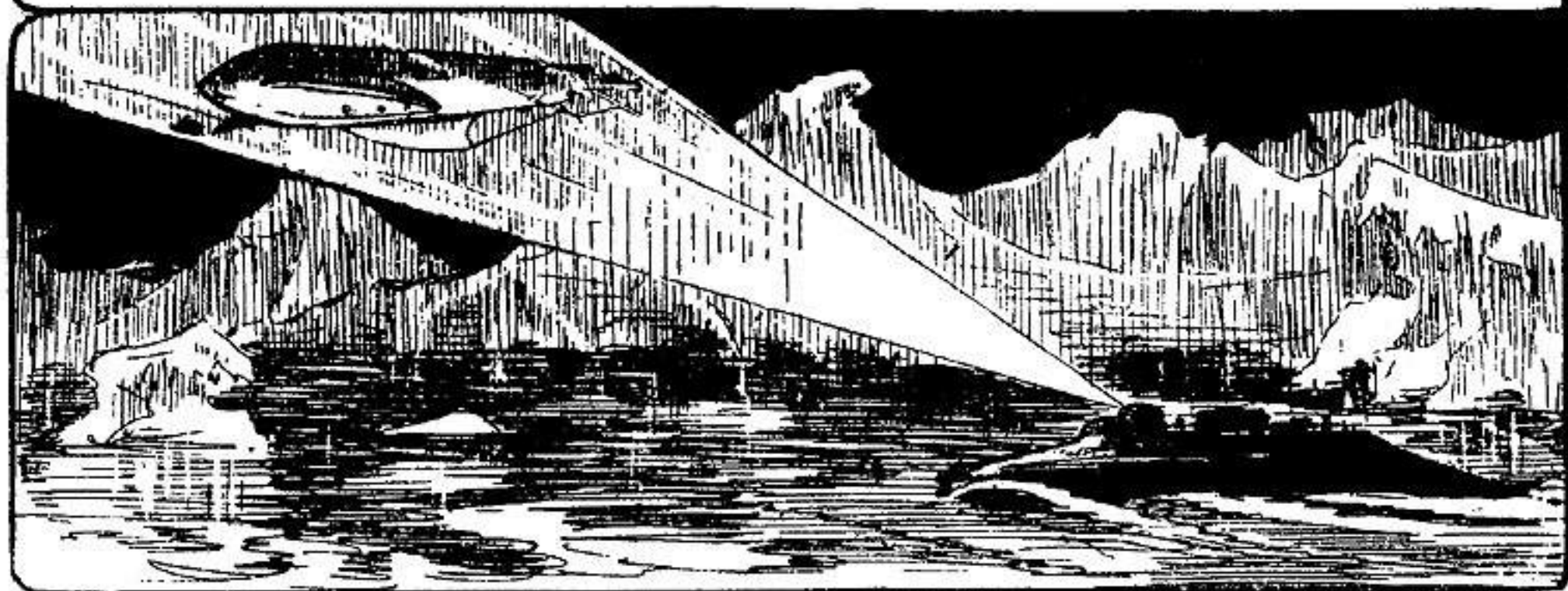
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When Professor Hugley, the renowned American scientist, startles the world by announcing that he is off to find the North Pole in his wonderful air-craft, the Cloud King, there is only one man who dares to enter the lists against him on behalf of Great Britain, and that man is Ferrers Lord, the famous millionaire and inventor. Lord pits his wonderful submarine, the Lord of the Deep, against the Cloud King in the most amazing race the world has ever seen; the goal is the North Pole, and the prize a million pounds!

The preliminaries are soon settled, a judge is appointed to accompany each of the competitors, and the great race commences.

With Ferrers Lord are Ching-Lung, Rupert Thurston, and Gan-Waga, an Eskimo, while Hugley is accompanied by Paraira, a Cuban, and Estebian Gacchio, a huge negro. These latter soon show themselves in their true colours, and the Cloud King no sooner reaches the region of ice than Hugley, and such of the crew as are loyal to him, are murdered, and Paraira and Gacchio assume control of the airship.

In the meantime Ferrers Lord and Thurston, at the head of a party, are exploring a mysterious chain of caves, which seem to offer a means of gaining the Pole. By touching a secret spring in the rock Lord finds his way into the wonderful treasure-house of some ancient race. He and Thurston are examining its wonders when the rock door shuts to, owing to the breaking of its mechanism, and the two adventurers are entombed in the cavern. Ching-Lung, in charge of the Lord of the Deep, is surprised by a visit from Gacchio, the giant negro, who has missed his way after having landed on the ice from the pirate airship. The prince and the negro come to blows; but Prout joins in the fray and fells Gacchio, who is then taken to a cabin. Ching-Lung, having recovered his customary calmness, proceeds to give Gan-Waga some instruction in the art of making pancakes.

(Now go on with the story.)

Gacchio Escapes!

When one side was brown Ching-Lung flung the pancake into the air, caught it in the pan, and in a few seconds it was ready. Gan-Waga sniffed the delicious odour hungrily. "Hele, gettee up, silly!" said Ching-Lung. "You sitting on de plates."

Gan-Waga was dumbfounded to find that this was the fact. Slowly the delicious pile grew higher, and the batter in the basin began to dwindle away.

"Butterful!" gurgled the Eskimo. "When we start eat?"

"Light awayee. Dey glandee. We staltel now!"

It was the first time in his life that Gan-Waga had tasted a pancake. An expression of utter rapture appeared on his oily face. He patted himself after every mouthful.

"Butterful, butterful, butterful!" he murmured.

"What a lubly deatheee to die, eating pancakes!" coked Ching-Lung. "We must save a couple for Thomas."

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A look of sorrow and gloom overspread Gan-Waga's face.

"We eat dese two, and make more."

"Can't!" said Ching-Lung. "You sayee 'Wum-wum,' and spoilee it. No mole eggsee now. Dey not comee."

The Eskimo thrust out his hand, drew it back reluctantly, and sighed. There were two pancakes left, and the temptation was too great. He seized one, and devoured it.

"Oh, you gleedy shark! What ole Thomas do nowee?" said Ching-Lung.

"Make some more 'nother day."

Ching-Lung grew thoughtful.

"P'laps if I notee make dem, you can?" he said. "De spell bloke by saying 'Wum-wum'; but if you sayee 'Snoodle-goodle,' p'laps more stuff comee in de basin."

"Not in my eye?" asked Gan-Waga. "Bad 'nough. Not like 'em in my eye."

"Oh, no!" answered the prince hastily. "You sayee it!"

"Snoodle-goodle!" gurgled Gan-Waga.

Ching-Lung glanced into the bowl, and gave a shout of triumph. It was half filled with flaky yellow powder that looked and smelled suspiciously like mustard. In fact, mustard is exactly what it was. Gan-Waga grinned his delight.

"You see, the stuff will come for you, and not for me," said the prince, speaking proper English once again. "That shows that the spirits of the air are under your command just for a short time. Pour in a little water, and mix the stuff up. You've got to do it. I've lost my power over the spirits, so you must do everything. If I did it, the pancakes wouldn't be fit to eat."

There was a good deal of truth in what he said, for pancakes made of mustard are not considered nice.

"All right," said the innocent Eskimo. "I'll cook 'em."

He quickly stirred the mustard into a paste, and the batter left in the basin made it stiff enough. The first pancake was of a glorious golden hue, and looked tempting enough to set before a king. The second, third, and fourth were marvels of cookery, and Gan-Waga gloated over his handiwork.

"Why, you're a born cook," said Ching-Lung. "Wen't Thomas pat you on the back. Take 'em away."

The pancakes were put on a plate, and a second plate placed over them to keep them warm in transit, and Gan-Waga, highly delighted with himself, went to find the steersman.

And then Gan-Waga was seized by a terrible temptation.

There were four pancakes, he argued. They all belonged to him. He had made them with his own hands, and it was a hard thing not to taste his own cookery. Tom Prout did not know whether there were three or four, and so he would never miss one—just one. He took a peep at them, and then it was all over, bar shouting—which came later on.

Gan-Waga paused, and removed the top plate. The pancakes seemed to smile at him, and beg to be eaten. They were the colour of very rich butter, and butter was a thing the Eskimo never could resist. He placed one of the cakes on a locker, covering it with a piece of paper, and intended to eat it on his return. Then, guiltily, he walked on.

Prout and Joe were playing cribbage in the deckhouse.

The Eskimo rolled up the steps, and deposited the plate on the little round table. Joe shuffled the cards.

"Hallo!" growled Prout. "What have you got there, blubberbiter?"

"Pancakes—butterful pancakes!"

"Eh?" said Joe.

"Pancakes!" cried the Eskimo, displaying the gift. "They're for Thomas."

He did not wait for any thanks; he was too eager to get his teeth into the one he had stolen.

"By hokey, they are pancakes, too!" gasped Prout. "He's been making love to the cook."

"And it was mighty kind of him to remember us," said Joe.

"So it was," answered the steersman. "In course, they was intended for me, you see; but—"

"Then why did he bring two plates?"

Prout answered by slicing the dainties across with his jack-knife, and dividing them in two.

"They look a picture," said Joe.

"A bootiful boil-painting," said Prout. "It seems a shame to eat them. There ain't a better cook afloat nor Bilster. I believe he could make a stew out of a wooden leg, if he tried."

Then Prout took a huge semi-circular bite, and so did Joe. They gazed at each other in stony horror for exactly the one hundred and forty-ninth of a second, by Greenwich time.

Perhaps they would have looked longer, but the water that sprang in their eyes made it impossible.

Two awful howls rang through the deckhouse, the steersman and carpenter danced a wild dance, accompanied by a wilder song, whose chorus seemed to be "Yow-ow-oo!"

Those pancakes were as hot as cayenne pepper.

"I'm—ow!—burned alive!" howled Joe.

"I'm scorched to a cinder!" yelled Prout. "Yow—ow!—oo!"

"Yow—ow!—oo!" yelled the carpenter. "Warrer! warrer!"

They fell over each other down the companion. There was a tank with a tap there, and a chained pannikin. Prout got there first, and, like Jill in the nursery rhyme, Joe came tumbling after. At that precise moment another yell, louder and more agonised than any of their own, was bellowed through the ship. Wild-eyed and gasping, his face as red as a ripe tomato, Gan-Waga came flying to the tank. The pancake he had stolen was the hottest of them all.

He grabbed the pannikin from Prout just as he was going to drink. Prout thought the action rude and impertinent, and smote the Eskimo a blow with his open hand that made him sit down hastily, because he could not help it.

If he had sat down on the floor it would have saved trouble; but he did not. Joe was lying under the tap, yelling, "Warrer, warrer, warrer!" and Gan-Waga sat on his head. The tap was running at the time, and both Gan-Waga and Joe had enough "warrer" squirted over them to keep a Greenland whale comfortable for a month.

The yells, kicks, and splashes brought half the crew running to the scene of action. Though they had not a ghost of an idea what it was about, it was so atrociously funny that they held their sides and shrieked. Lugard had been feeding his grey Australian parrot when the uproar started. The parrot, whose name was Chug, arrived first, and, perching on the tanks, screamed with joy.

"Ha, ha, ha!" it screamed. "Hit him again! Go it, my beauties! Punch him! Jump on him! Ha, ha, aha!"

"Warrer, warrer!" yelled Joe, as if he wasn't getting plenty of that liquid. "Ow, warrer, warrer, warrer!"

"I'm pizened!" groaned Prout.

"Me mouf on fire!" roared Gan-Waga.

And the parrot laughed again, and remarked:

"What-ho! Ha, ha, ha! Here's a treat! Polly likes it! Yah-ah-ah! Give him sugar!"

Twenty voices inquired what was the matter. Prout felt slightly cooled as far as tongue and palate were concerned, but his bad temper warmed up to the temperature of molten lead. He had fixed two angry eyes on the back of Gan-Waga's head, and ten fingers on the back of that same gentleman's neck.

"You villain! You blackguard! You rogue! You yaller-faced hypocrite!" gasped Prout. "You blubber-eating son o' a blue-nosed baboon! You—"

"Hooray!" roared the parrot, as the steersman paused for breath. "Ain't we enjoying it—eh? Ha, ha! Haa—ah!"

"What's he done, Tom?" asked Lugard.

"Pizened us!" yelled Joe. "Warrer, warrer! I'll kill him!"

Like Prout, he flung himself upon the unhappy Eskimo. They rolled over in a wriggly heap, while the water gushed from the tank. The grinning men did not interfere, for Gan-Waga was quite capable of taking care of himself; and they knew that neither Prout nor the carpenter would hurt him seriously. As a matter of fact, so mixed up were they that

Prout and Joe hit each other twice as much as they hit the Eskimo. And that parrot, whose name was Chug, stuck every feather erect, and laughed like a cage of jackasses.

Lugard—a quite steady fellow—thought it time to interfere; but he stepped back, saluting at the sight of Ching-Lung. The prince stared in shocked astonishment at the writhing mass.

"Prout!" he cried.

Prout was too busy then to take any notice.

"Gan-Waga!" cried the prince. "What in the name of goodness does this mean?"

"Rats!" said the parrot. "Ha, ha, ha! Oh, Jerusalem, what a treat! Polly likes it. It's sugar. Ha, ha, ha!"

Ching-Lung fumbled in one of his bulky pockets. He pulled out a three-foot length of rope, and quietly turned up his wide sleeve. Then he spat on his right hand as if he meant business, and set to work.

Down came the rope's-end with a swish, and every swish elicited a howl. Ching-Lung did not pick and choose, but struck the body that happened to be uppermost. The human knot untied itself suddenly, for there was a knot in the rope that did not feel quite like a feather. Gan-Waga fled to the swimming-bath, and, diving in, floated there, quaking, and swearing never to steal a pancake again—or, rather, never to eat one without first placing it in a bucket of water, to make sure it was not red hot.

Ching-Lung seized Prout and Joe each by the ear, and led them to the state-room. The parrot almost went into hysterics, and the crew grinned their enjoyment.

Prout and the carpenter went like lambs. Their faces were as long as fiddles when they came out, for Ching-Lung, like the hypocrite he was, had given them a severe lecture on discipline.

"He rubbed it in, didn't he?" sighed Joe.

"He did wi' the rope, anyhow," said Prout sadly. "I'm as sore as forty toothaches!"

"I'll strangle the candle-biter!" said the carpenter, limping on. "I'll cremate him for this!"

Prout shook his head.

"You won't, Joe. By hokey, you won't!"

"Why not?"

"Because," said Prout, in a whisper, "he was a victim like us. I know 'is 'ighness better nor I knows twice one are two. It's one of his tricks, Joe. I could see it in his eye, bless yer, all the time he was talking to us about setting hexamples to the others. It wor a fake, Joe—a put-up job. But I can't get angry wi' Ching. His 'eart's gold, an' he's been a good 'un to me. And he'll make it up, you bet; he allus does."

Chug, the parrot, attracted his attention. He seldom got out of his cage, and when he did it took an enormous amount of energy and coaxing to get him back again. He was flapping up and down, followed by his panting master, who brandished a large butterfly-net—the instrument he generally used for catching Chug.

The parrot laughed him to scorn, and called him all kinds of insulting names, advising him to get his hair cut, wash his neck, go home and die, kiss his mother, boil his head for broth. Here and there it flapped defying the net; and, forgetting their pains, Prout and Joe sat down on a packing-case and encouraged it in its wickedness.

"Chug's got your number, mate!" chuckled Joe. "What do yer think of him, Poll?"

"Rats!" screamed the parrot. "Wash yer neck!"

"Well," grinned Prout, "hark at that! Chug seems to know all about it. I often wondered why Lugard wore such high collars. Dear me! What's that, Chug?"

"Pudding-face!" remarked the bird, perching on the half-open door of Rupert's cabin.

Lugard made a sweep at it with the net. It flew into the cabin.

"Got you now!" cried Lugard, pushing open the door to its full extent.

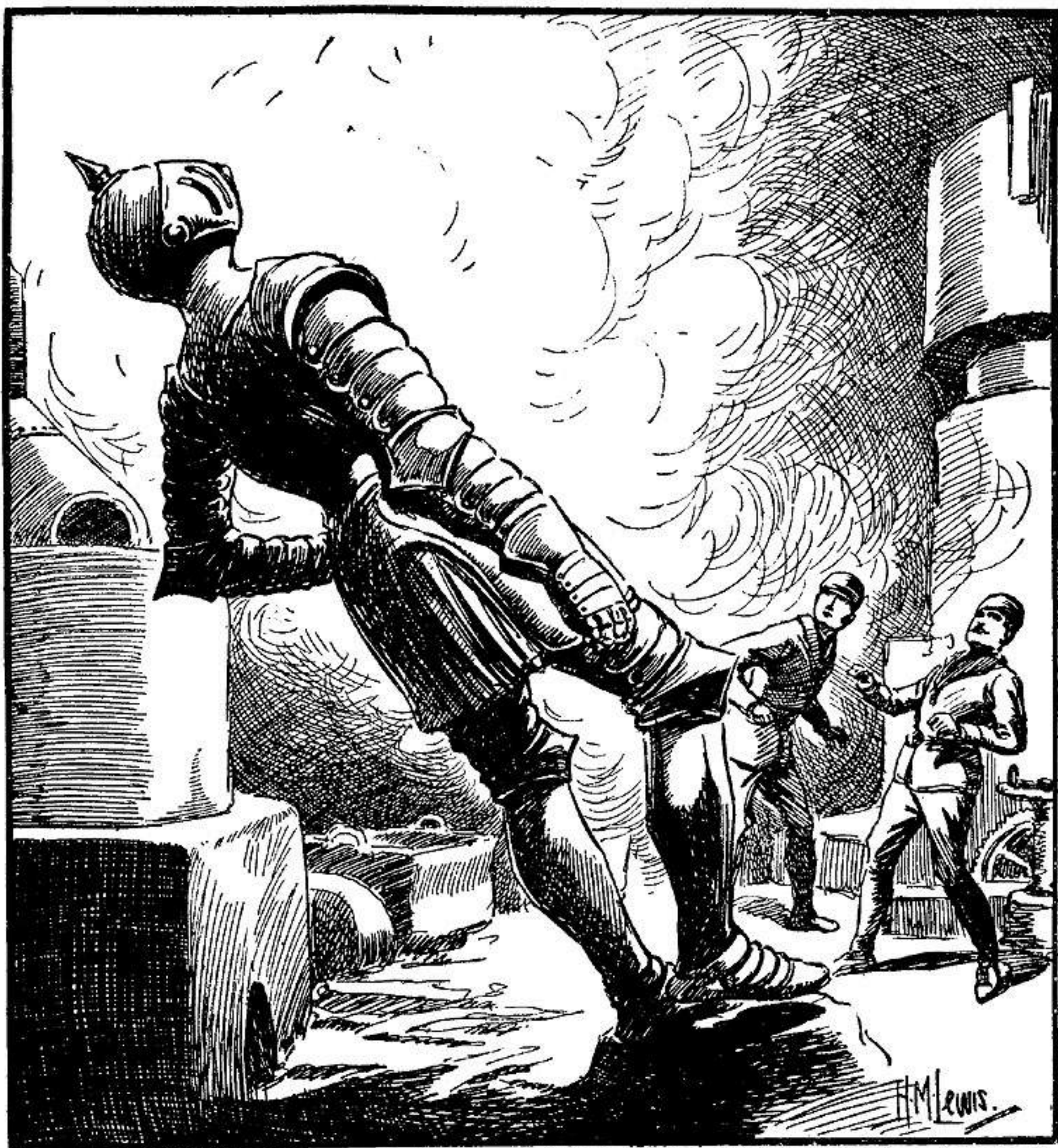
He never spoke again. There was a flash, a deafening roar, a thud. Lugard rolled sideways—stone dead!

White-faced men gathered in the passage, gripping their weapons, but afraid to enter. It took four of them to hold Ching-Lung back. He was like a maniac.

Only one person could have fired that dastardly shot—Gacchio. The parrot was laughing and chattering in the cabin, and yet no one dared to show himself. It would mean death, for at such a short distance the negro could not miss.

Prout, gnashing his teeth, ran up on deck, and leaned over the port rail. The porthole of the cabin was closed, and the toughened glass, built to withstand terrific pressures at great depths, would flatten a rifle bullet. Prout swung himself down, and, hanging by his hand, peered into the cabin.

There was no place for a man to hide himself in. He could see the whole cabin. The wardrobe was closed. The



The silvery walls of the cavern flung back the glare of the wonderful electric light until the eyes of Ferrers Lord and Thurston smarted. Then the adventurers heard the dull boom of an explosion, and the silver image tottered and fell with a crash. (See page 28.)

parrot stood on the dressing-table, leering at itself in the mirror. On the bed was a leather portmanteau marked "H.R.H. Ching-Lung." It contained a camera, which the prince had been showing to Thurston, who, like Van Witter, had been bitten with the photographic craze. But no one was there.

"He's escaped, and swum ashore," thought Prout, wild with anger.

He clambered to the deck again, and raced below, and darted into the cabin, shouldering the raging men aside.

And then he understood it all.

Strapped to the bedpost, its muzzle pointed to the door, was Thurston's rifle, a string tied to its trigger, which had been fastened to the ring of the key in the lock of the wardrobe, and fastened to the knob of the door. When the unhappy engineer, who now lay stark and stiff, had pushed the door open the strain had tightened the string,

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 192.

A Grand New School
Tale Next Tuesday:

snapping down the trigger. The strap itself had been taken from the camera-case.

Ching-Lung staggered in. The look on his face frightened them all.

Quicker of brain than any of them, he saw at a glance what they did not see. Esteban Gacchio had intended the bullet for him. He had recovered and crept away in Lugard's absence. The name on the camera had led him to think that the cabin belonged to Ching-Lung, and it was to kill Ching-Lung that he had set his deadly trap.

He swept his hand across his forehead.

"My lads," he said hoarsely, "search the ship! I suppose he has escaped us. But I will find him if I have to walk the earth barefoot to do it—the murderer! Wager or no wager, if ever we get within gunshot of the Cloud King we'll fire on her unless she gives up that black! A thousand pounds to the man who shoots him down! Oh,

"A SCHOOLBOY'S SACRIFICE!"

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Tom, Tom, why did you stop me to-day? Search—search!"

But they searched in vain.

It was snowing still. The dinghy that had been tethered as a stern was missing, and it told its own story.

And as the men of the Lord of the Deep reverently lifted the body of their murdered comrade they swore a bitter vendetta of vengeance against Esteban Gacchio.

Outside the Silver Cavern and Within—The Explosion.

Owing to the thickness of the walls, shout as they would, it was impossible to make Maddock understand. He could hear the voices of the imprisoned men faintly, but he could not catch what was said. But he saw at once that to rescue his friends he must act immediately.

"Only powder'll shift that," he said coolly, "and powder it's got to be."

"That's all right, bo'sun," put in one of the men. "But how are we going to bore the rock for the charge?"

Maddock looked round him despairingly.

"Got it!" he said triumphantly. "I know there's a file in the locker."

With infinite labour a length of the steel rail of the launch was filed through. All worked their best. A fire was built of the wood of the locker, and into this the bar was thrust, and withdrawn red-hot. A stone formed an anvil, the back of the axe a hammer. The bar was roughly formed into a drill, reheated, and tempered by plunging into water.

It was a poor tool, but rock rich in silver ore is not hard. Slowly, twisted by powerful hands, it began to eat its way in.

"Stick to it, lads!" cried Maddock cheerily. "Drive six more inches, and then we'll rest for a spell for grog!"

The drill sank deeper, and Maddock served out an allowance of grog.

Tap, tap, tap, tap! Someone was hammering on the other side.

"They're all right so far," said Maddock. "They must know we're mining, and I hope they'll have the sense to stand from under when we get the charge fixed."

"Don't you think we had better make two or three charges of it, bo'sun?" inquired a grizzled old sailor.

"You mean blow the rock away in slices?"

"I guess I do. A boring explosion might bring down the roof on us. It's safer to go slow."

The advice was excellent, and Maddock proceeded to profit by it. There were plenty of cartridges for blasting on board the launch, brought purposely by Ferrers Lord to get rid of any jutting rock that might impede their course. The absence of the rock-drill was due to some blunder.

Maddock inserted the charge, and unwound a long coil of fuse. The end of the fuse was thrust in, and the hole tightly hammered in with clay—a substance which can bear an enormous recoil.

"Into the boat, lads!"

He lighted the hissing fuse and sprang after them. The launch shot away at full speed.

Boom!

A great red glare flashed up, topped by black smoke. Masses of rock came crashing down. Dust filled the cavern.

The dust settled at last, and they landed to look at the result. The explosion had torn a hollow in the rock two feet deep by nearly five feet square. They cleared away the debris, and again set to work with the drill.

Tap, tap-tap, tap!

The noise from the other side seemed to say, "All's well, and we understand what you are doing."

The prisoners were taking matters pretty easily. Thurston sat on one of the

feet of the silver statue, smoking his pipe. Ferrers Lord was arranging his camera and flashlight apparatus to take a photograph.

"Would you like to render yourself immortal, Rupert?" he drawled.

Thurston stood up against the statue, his head just above the massive silver knee. The light flashed, and the photo was taken. There was nothing to make them uneasy, for their captivity would not last long.

"We'll look round to pass away the time," said Ferrers Lord.

The signs of human labour were everywhere. The rock was honeycombed with tunnels where the long-dead miners had driven their shafts. They noticed that the seams of grey metal seemed to be of more importance than the silver.

"By Jove!" cried Ferrers Lord. "Here are the smelting furnaces! Ah, here are the moulds, with the metal ingots still lying where they were cast. I am tremendously interested in all this. What puzzles me is where they obtained their light to carry on their work."

"Perhaps there was a jet of petroleum-gas then?" said Thurston.

"Maybe so. Is that water?"

They listened. There was no mistaking the gurgling sound. They hurried forward and paused in amaze.

The water poured through the roof into a mighty sloping aqueduct of granite. Close to the ground the aqueduct turned at right angles, and shot the torrent into a black pit.

They stared up at a drum of hollow metal. Its base rested on a hollow cut out of the rock. For what purpose had it been used? It rang clear as a bell as the millionaire struck it. The unknown metal defied time. The drum was as strong and sound as it had been when built.

"Mystery upon mystery!" drawled Ferrers Lord. "Ah, a ladder! I must examine this."

Ferrers Lord mounted the ladder, and peered down, flashing his lamp in the darkness. He saw a mass of polished shafts and big-toothed wheels.

"By Jove! It's a kind of turbine!" he cried. "I can see where the water should enter."

He scrambled down excitedly. Thurston had made another discovery. A screw handle protruded from the ground under the sloping aqueduct. He gave it a twist.

Crumbling, groaning, the bent end of the aqueduct moved into a straight line with the rest. The water hissed into the great drum. Slowly the masses began to turn. Then its pace increased until it was thundering round and round.

They reeled back, their eyes dazzled. A great, aching light was blazing in the roof of the cavern.

"Electricity!" gasped Ferrers Lord. "Is there anything new on earth?"

"And that thing is a dynamo and motive power in one?"

"Exactly," said the millionaire. "By Jove! Those fellows knew more about electricity a thousand years ago than we do to-day! We are only just waking up to the fact that electric fluid can be guided without wires. Marconi and a dozen others have proved that. And what a wonderful light! It must be a million candle power. Fancy, electricity!"

The silver walls flung back the glare until their eyes smarted. Then they heard the dull boom of an explosion. The silver image tottered, and fell with a crash.

Boom!

A third explosion shook the air. Maddock had fired two charges in quick succession. The millionaire caught Thurston by the shoulder. Far away down a dark tunnel a speck of light shone through the gloom.

(This thrilling adventure story will be continued in next week's number of "The Magnet" Library. Order early. Price 1d. "The Ghost Ship," by Sidney Drew, now appearing in the "Boys' Friend," 1d., should be read by all readers interested in "Beyond the Eternal Ice!")



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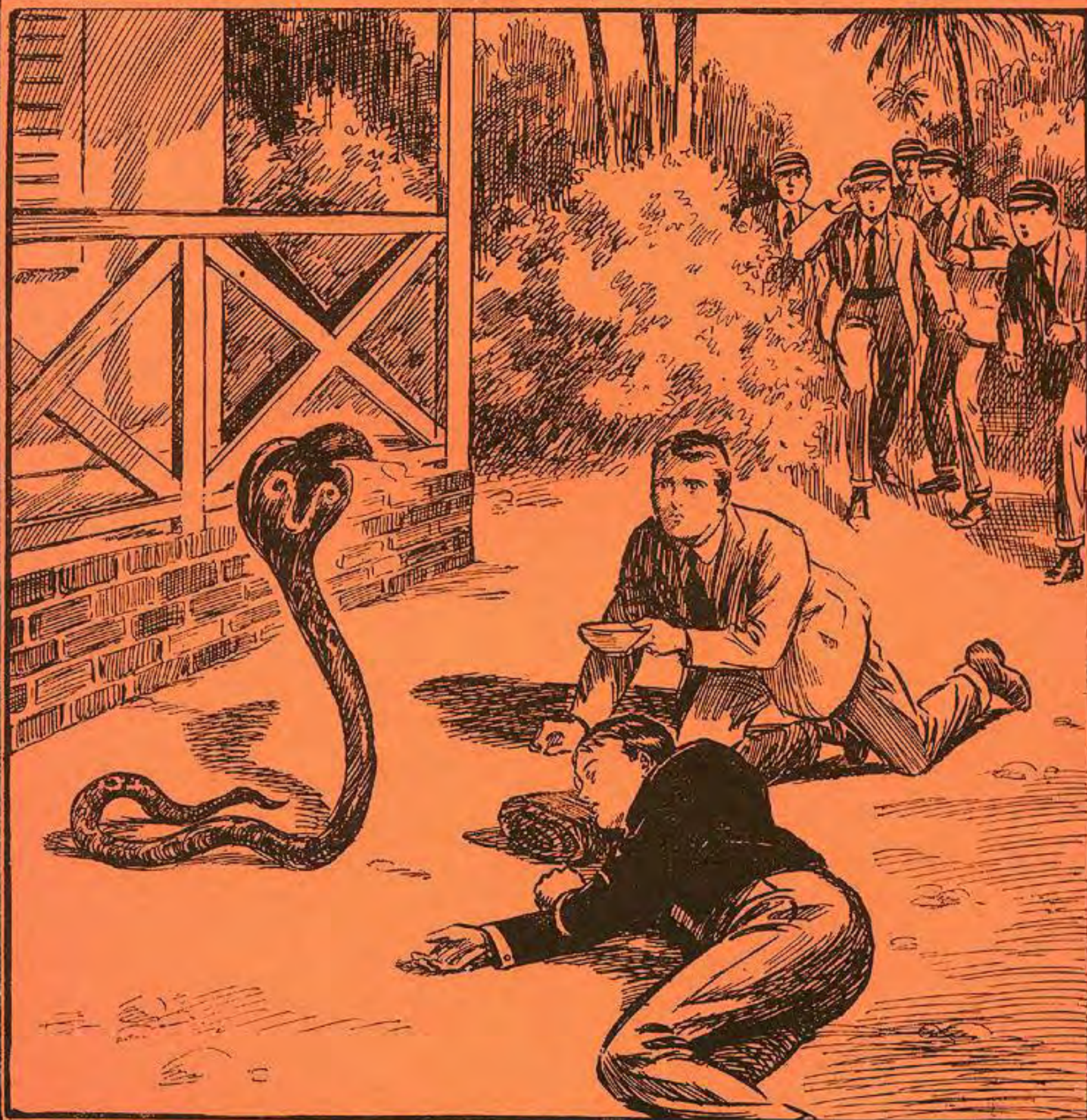
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