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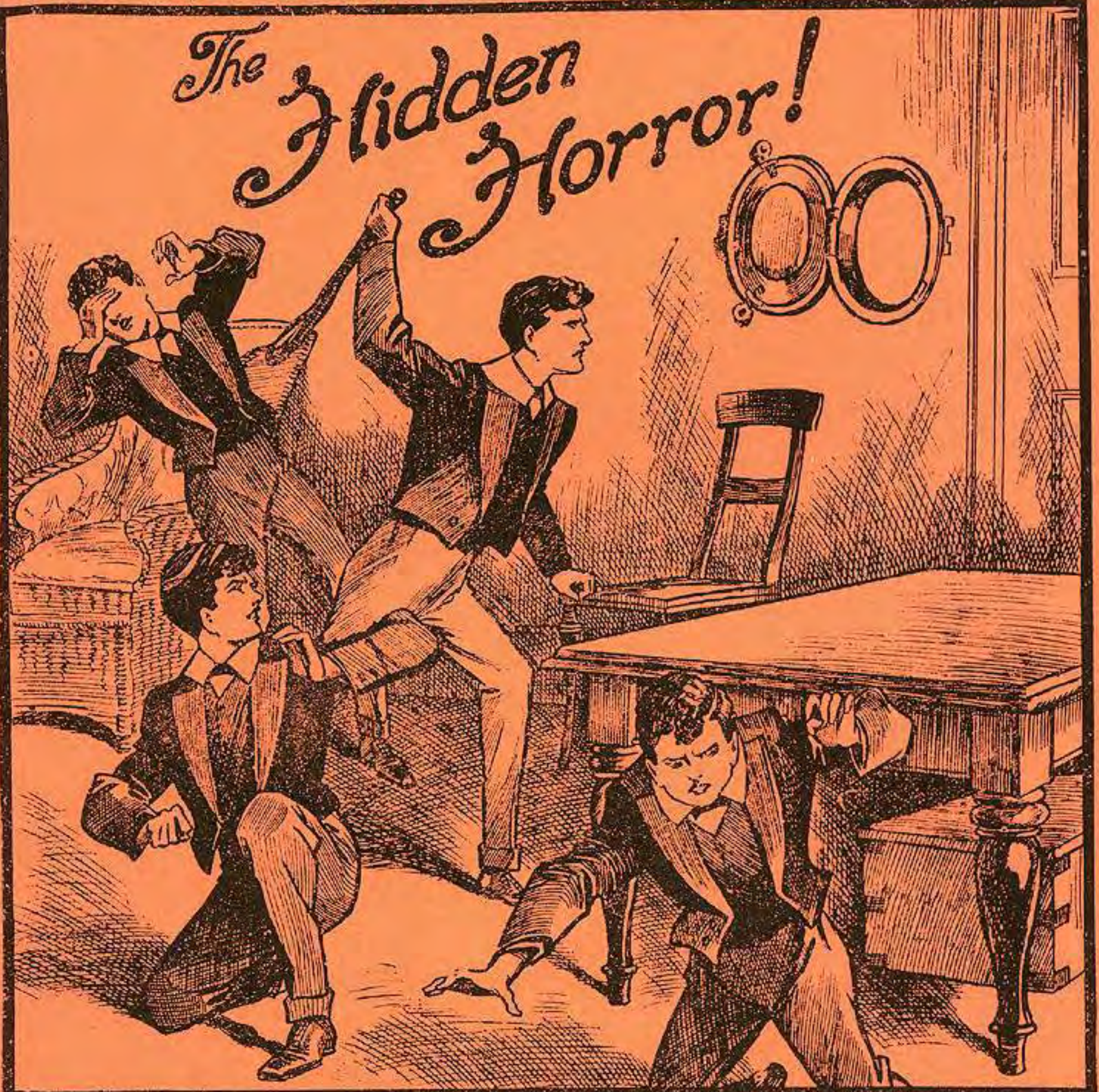
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No. 239.

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Vol. 6.



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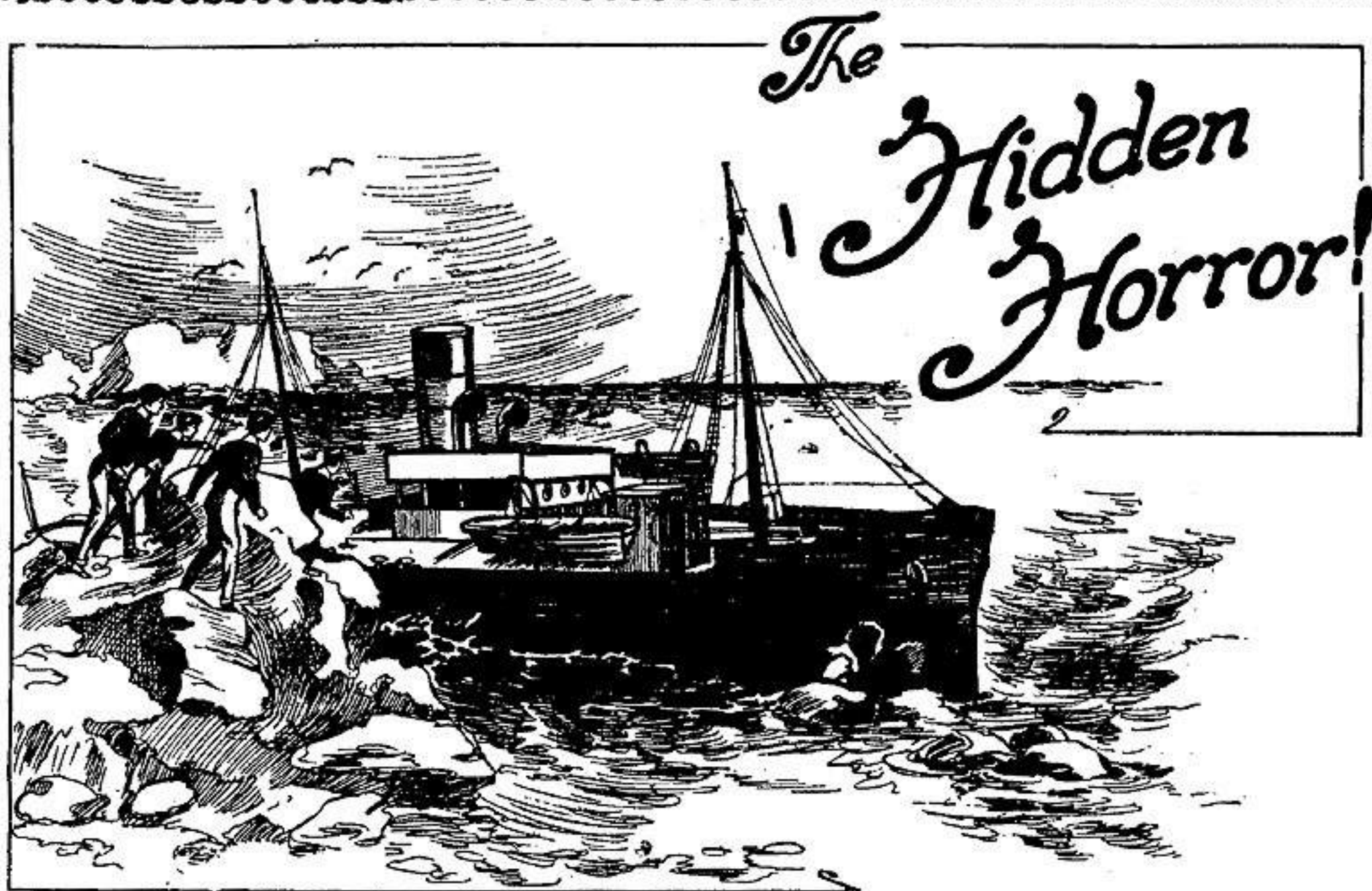
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BY FRANK RICHARDS.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.
Bob Cherry's Little Joke.

BOB CHERRY came down the Remove passage at Greyfriars with a large-sized lunch-basket in his hand. He stopped at the door of No. 1 Study, and delivered a kick upon it which sent the door flying open. That was Bob's gentle way of announcing his presence.

"You fellows ready?" he bawled.

"Yes, ass," said Harry Wharton, from within the study.

"Well, buck up. We've got a long way to go."

Harry Wharton bent down and caught hold of the handle. It was a half-holiday at Greyfriars, and a fine summer's afternoon. Wharton and Nugent stared at the big lunch-basket in Bob Cherry's hand.

"What on earth's that for?" demanded Harry Wharton, in surprise. "You're not thinking of taking that blessed thing for a climb up the cliffs, are you?"

"Yes, rather."

"You won't be able to carry it."

"Feel the weight!" said Bob Cherry, putting the basket on the floor. "Both hands—it's a good size."

Harry Wharton and Frank Nugent came out of No. 1. of the basket, and exerted himself to raise it. It came up like a feather, and so suddenly that Wharton staggered back and stumbled over, and sat down in the passage.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Bob Cherry.

"You—you ass!" gasped Wharton. "It's empty."

"Well, I didn't say it wasn't," grinned Bob Cherry. "I

only said it was a good size. You put on enough steam to lift a giddy ton of coals."

Harry Wharton jumped up. For a moment he seemed inclined to commit assault and battery upon his humorous chum, but he refrained.

"What on earth are you carrying an empty basket about for, you fathead?" he demanded.

"It's a little joke," Bob Cherry explained. "Billy Bunter is determined to come with us this afternoon—he won't believe that we're merely going to climb the cliff, and that we're not going to have a feed out there. He won't take my word. So I've borrowed his lunch-basket."

"What the dickens—"

"Bunter will follow this giddy lunch-basket like a blood-bound," said Bob. "He won't lose sight of it, you bet. He won't believe it's empty, any more than you did. When he runs us down at last, he will have had a lot of exercise, and I hope it will do him good and bring down some of his fat. Come on."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The chums of the Remove went down the passage to the stairs. As they disappeared, a fat face, adorned with a pair of extremely large spectacles, looked out of a study further along the passage. The fat face belonged to Billy Bunter, and his little round eyes were gleaming behind his spectacles.

"Beasts!" he murmured. "Fancy Cherry pretending that they're not going out to feed, when he's actually borrowed my lunch-basket. Beasts! They jolly well won't get rid of me so easily as that."

And the fat junior rolled down the passage in pursuit. It always seemed a perfectly indisputable thing to Billy Bunter that if there was a feed he ought to be in it. If anybody stood a feed, at any time, without asking Bunter, Bunter took it as a personal injury. Indeed, when he heard that there was a feed on he seldom troubled to wait for the formality of an invitation. And on the present occasion he had determined to keep the chums of the Remove in sight, and roll in upon them unexpectedly when they sat down for the picnic. After that, they could hardly avoid letting him have his whack.

Harry Wharton & Co. strolled out into the quad, Bob Cherry carrying the lunch-basket, and giving an occasional grunt to indicate that he found it extremely heavy. Johnny Bull of the Remove was sunning himself on the steps, and he looked at his chums as they came out.

"Coming along?" asked Wharton.

"Whither bound?"

"We're going to climb the cliffs, and get over the top of the Shoulder. It will be a bit of a climb."

"I'm on," said Johnny Bull. "What have you got in that basket?"

Bob Cherry set it down on the steps.

"See if you can lift it," he said solemnly.

"Bet I can!" said Johnny Bull, who was a very sturdy and thickset youngster, and prided himself upon his physical strength. "If you can carry it, I'm jolly sure I can lift it."

"Well, try!"

Johnny Bull grasped the basket, and put forth his strength to lift it in the air, as Harry Wharton had done in the Remove passage. The empty basket flew up from the step, and Johnny Bull sat down violently upon the upper step with a gasp.

"Ow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You—you ass!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Bob Cherry.

Johnny Bull jumped up, and made a rush at the humorous junior; but Wharton and Nugent rushed between.

"Pax!" exclaimed Wharton laughing. "I've been through it—it's only a jape!"

"The silly ass!" roared Bull. "I'm hurt."

"Never mind—take it calmly."

"I—I—"

"Come on!"

"Give us a hand with the basket," said Bob Cherry. "We'll work it on Coker."

Johnny Bull recovered his good humour immediately. He grinned, and took one handle of the basket while Bob Cherry took the other. It was a very large basket, and if packed with heavy articles it would certainly have weighed a great deal. Bob Cherry and Johnny Bull carried it across the Close, apparently staggering under the weight.

Coker of the Fifth was standing near the school gates, talking to Potter and Greene of the Form. The three Fifth-Formers grinned at the sight of the Removites.

"Hallo!" said Coker. "Why don't you hire a waggon for that?"

Bob Cherry panted artistically.

"I'd like to see you lift it, anyway," he gasped.

"Rats!" said Coker. "I'd lift it with one hand."

"Well, I'd like to see you do it."

"Put it down, and I will!" said Coker.

"Bosh!"

"Rats!"

"Look here," said Coker, getting excited. "I'm going to show you that I can lift it. Do you understand? Down with it, here, or I'll jolly well punch your head."

"Oh, all right," said Bob Cherry breathlessly. "You can try if you like. Shove it down here, Johnny."

"Righto!"

The two juniors put the basket down and stood gasping for breath, as if the mere carrying of it between them across the Close had exhausted them. Coker approached the basket and stooped over it. He felt that he had taken on a big task; but he was a big and strong fellow, and felt equal to it. But he did not mean to leave anything to chance. He knew how the Removites would yell if he failed to lift the basket after his boast. He grasped the handles with both hands, and exerted every ounce of strength in his powerful body, and lifted.

The basket simply flew into the air, and Coker fell backwards, over-balanced by the terrific force he had put into the pull. He fell upon his back with a loud bump, and a loud yell. The basket fell upon him, and he yelled again.

The Removites yelled too—with laughter.

"M-m-my hat!" gasped Coker. "You—you young rotters! There's nothing in it."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bob Cherry picked up the basket, and the chums of the Remove, yelling with laughter, scuttled out of the school gates, leaving Coker sitting on the ground in a dazed condition, gasping, and Potter and Greene chuckling.

The Famous Four walked merrily down the lane, Bob Cherry carrying the big basket with ease, now. As they reached the cross-roads, where they had to take the shady lane down to Pegg and the bay, the juniors looked back.

A fat figure was in panting pursuit, and the lenses of a pair of large spectacles glinted in the sun!

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Bob Cherry. "What did I tell you? Bunter's on the track."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"This giddy basket will draw him on like a magnet!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Don't let him know we've seen him," grinned Nugent. "Let's give him a good walk. It will do him good, and teach him not to doubt a fellow's word. Come on!"

And the chums of the Remove marched on towards the cliffs. In the distance behind the Owl of the Remove kept steadily upon the track, his fat face pouring with perspiration, and gradually assuming the colour of a freshly-boiled beetroot, as the unaccustomed exercise told upon him.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Bunter's Prize.

HARRY WHARTON & CO. tramped on steadily. They had set out for a tramp over the cliffs, and a climb to the summit of the Shoulder—the great cliff that shut in Pegg Bay on the side nearest Greyfriars. It was a difficult, and to some extent a dangerous climb; and it required the climbers to be in perfectly fit condition. The four juniors tramped up the lower slopes at a good rate, following the path that led round the cliffs to the sea; and in the distance behind them Billy Bunter panted on.

The juniors came round the seaward side of the great Shoulder, and Pegg Bay and the wide North Sea beyond burst upon their view.

Far and wide the sea lay gleaming in the sunshine, the blue waters rolling on and breaking in a line of white foam upon the sand and rocks at the foot of the great towering Shoulder.

High above the juniors' heads, round the summit of the cliff, the seagulls were flying and calling. They paused on the cliff path, and looked out to sea. Far out upon the calm

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The Owl of the Remove blinked into the open basket through his big spectacles, and his jaw dropped. The basket was empty! "Ow! Yow! The beasts!" Billy Bunter blinked in speechless indignation, hardly able to believe his eyes, while four laughing faces rose from behind the rocks. "Ha, ha, ha!" (See Chap. 8.)

waters they caught sight of a steamer. Their glances rested upon it with some curiosity, for there was no smoke escaping from the funnels, and the vessel seemed almost motionless upon the sea. But the sound of Billy Bunter scrambling over the rough path behind made them look landward again.

The fat junior came puffing into view.

"I—I say, you fellows—" he gasped.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" exclaimed Bob Cherry, in great surprise. "Where did you come from, Bunter?"

"I—I happened to walk in this direction," explained Billy Bunter, blinking at the Removites. "I—I say, are you going to have the picnic here? It's a good place—plenty of rocks to sit on, and a good view of the sea, and—"

"Good egg!" said Bob Cherry. "But we can't have a feed here."

"Why not?"

"Because we've got nothing to eat."

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"Come on, you chaps—we're not a quarter of the way yet!" said Bob Cherry.

"I—I say, you fellows!" gasped Bunter. "Where are you going?"

"Top of the cliff," said Nugent blandly.

"Oh, really! But—but what about the feed?"

"There isn't any feed."

"Oh, I say—"

The Famous Four walked on. Billy Bunter stood blinking after them in speechless indignation. The march was telling upon him. The Owl of the Remove never troubled to keep

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himself fit, and he was feeling the effects of it now. But the sight of the big lunch-basket in Bob Cherry's hands seemed to mesmerise him, and he started again. If Bob Cherry had vowed with tears in his eyes that there was nothing in the basket, Bunter would not have believed him—Bunter was a suspicious individual. Nothing short of looking into the basket would have satisfied him—and Bob Cherry did not intend to let him do that.

The juniors tramped on. They were following the front of the cliff, walking on ground that sloped away to the sea, and gave difficult footing. Billy Bunter nearly lost his footing more than once as he followed. The Famous Four walked on as if unconscious of pursuit. Suddenly a wild yell behind made them look back.

Billy Bunter was lying on the ground. He had slipped in a steep place, and rolled two or three yards before he landed against a rock and stopped there. He lay there groaning deeply.

"My hat!" exclaimed Bob Cherry.

He dropped the lunch-basket and ran back to Bunter. The other fellows followed him. They reached the fat junior in a few seconds.

"Hurt?" exclaimed Bob Cherry.

Bunter groaned.

"Where are you hurt?"

A deep groan.

"Humbugging, most likely!" said Johnny Bull. "We know Bunter."

"Oh, really, Bull!" said Billy Bunter faintly. "I—I think

"I'm dying. I—I think my spinal column is broken, and—and my ribs are all crushed, and both my legs are sprained."

"Rats!"

"I—I forgive you!" said Bunter faintly. "I die forgiving you all!"

"Well, that's a very good frame of mind to die in," said Bob Cherry, who could see by this time that Bunter was "spoofing" as usual. "It would be a pity to revive him, as he's in such a ripping state to kick the bucket. Good-bye, Bunter!"

Groan!

"And I hope you'll be able to get some ice where you're going," said Nugent, sympathetically. "You'll need it."

Groan!

"Come on, you chaps!" said Johnny Bull. "No need to hang round and disturb a chap's last moments. Let him die in peace."

"Good!"

And the juniors turned away. There was a yell from Billy Bunter—surprisingly loud and powerful, considering that he was dying.

"Yah! Beasts! Come back! Yah!"

"I'm afraid we can't stop to help you make your will, if that's what you want," said Bob Cherry, with a shake of the head.

"Oh, really, Cherry! I—I think I might revive if—if I had something to eat."

"Better get it over," said Bob Cherry. "Come on, you fellows!"

And the juniors walked away.

Billy Bunter glared after them; and as he saw that they were really going he ceased groaning and rose to his feet. As they clambered on up the cliff, the fat junior clambered on after them.

Bob Cherry looked back, and chuckled.

"My hat! Bunter's recovered already, unless that's his ghost."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Famous Four clambered on. They were half-way up the cliff now, and looking back they could see that Bunter had halted. Bob Cherry chuckled.

He placed the lunch-basket in a conspicuous position upon a rock, and the juniors went on.

Billy Bunter blinked at the big basket, plainly visible even to the short-sighted Owl of the Remove. It seemed clear to Bunter that the juniors had left the basket behind because it was heavy, and intended to have the feed when they came back, the same way, from their walk.

Bunter's eyes glistened.

He was wet through with perspiration; but the idea of raiding the whole feed, and not leaving a single crumb for the rightful possessors, nerved him to great efforts.

He started on again, faster than before, running and stumbling and panting along the rough slope, the perspiration running in streams down his fat face.

At every moment he was afraid that the juniors would recollect the danger the basket was in, and return for it.

But they did not appear.

They had disappeared from view among the inequalities of the cliff, and the rocks shut them out from sight. Bunter approached nearer and nearer to the coveted basket. He was panting breathlessly, but the nearness of the prey spurred him on.

Closer and closer!

He reached the rock at last upon which the lunch-basket lay, and grasped it.

"Got it!"

He did not open it immediately. There was always danger that Harry Wharton & Co. would return. He dragged it

off the rock to carry it away, and nearly rolled over with it, so surprised was he by its lightness.

"My hat!" ejaculated Bunter. "There can't be much in it."

He set the basket down among the rocks, and opened the lid.

Bending over the open basket, the Owl of the Remove blinked into the interior through his big spectacles.

Then his jaw dropped.

"Ow!"

He could scarcely believe his eyes. He groped in the basket with his fat hand.

Nothing!

The basket was empty!

"Oh!" groaned Bunter. "Ow! The beasts! Yow! Oh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bunter turned his head.

Over a neighbouring rock rose four laughing faces, and Billy Bunter blinked at them in speechless indignation. He realised that the chums of the Remove had been waiting in cover to see the capture.

"Oh! Beasts! Yah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Rotters!"

"Do you like the feed?" bawled Bob Cherry. "Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yah! Cads!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Rotters! Beasts!" yelled Bunter.

"Pile it on! Ha, ha, ha!"

"You—you—you—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Famous Four, yelling with laughter, walked away, leaving Billy Bunter the unhappy possessor of an empty lunch-basket—which he could not even abandon, as it was his own property—and a walk of three miles between him and Greyfriars. And Billy Bunter's feelings, as he took the homeward route, were too deep for words.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

The Derelict.

"HALLO, hallo, hallo!"

Bob Cherry halted on the cliff path, and stood looking out over the bay. The Greyfriars juniors were high up the cliff now, and from where they stood the bay and the coast lay stretched out to their view below. Bob Cherry's eyes were fixed on the steamer, which the juniors had noticed an hour before, drifting smokeless on the sea.

"What's the matter with you?" asked Nugent, pausing and looking round.

"Look at that steamer!"

"Phew!"

The juniors looked down at the steamer from the high point they had reached on the steep cliff. The vessel was much nearer to them now, and they could look down directly upon the deck. The steamer was drifting towards the Shoulder slowly with the motion of the sea, and evidently not under steam.

The juniors scanned the deck and bridge of the vessel in amazement.

Upon the bridge, upon the deck, there was no trace of a crew; there was no sign of smoke from the funnels, and the vessel was drifting unsteered.

Not a single man was to be seen from one end of the vessel to the other.

"By Jove," Harry Wharton exclaimed, "what's the matter with them? If they know anything of this coast, they ought to know the ship is in danger. If it gets among the sandbanks—"

"They're going ashore," said Johnny Bull.

"They!" repeated Nugent. "But where are they? The ship looks deserted."

The juniors gazed at the steamer in silence.

There was something strange, something almost uncanny, about it.

If the ship was manned, why did not crew appear? Why was there no sign of skipper or of scamen? Why was the steamer drifting upon the rocks with the tide?

The vessel was now not a quarter of a mile out, and unless it changed its course the tide would carry it upon the shore below—a wild and broken shore, where the currents raced and whirled among sunken rocks and treacherous sandbanks.

In stormy weather, many a good vessel had come to grief there; but in the calm summer's afternoon there was no danger to a ship under control.

But it was only too clear that the steamer, drifting under the eyes of the Greyfriars juniors, was utterly uncontrolled.

Wharton broke the silence at last.

"They must be all below asleep, or drunk!"

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"It's a derelict," said Johnny Bull.

Nugent shook his head.

"Look at the boats," he said.

"My hat! Yes."

The amazement of the juniors increased as they scanned the deck of the steamer in the bay below, and took in every detail.

The boats were swinging at the davits. If the steamer was deserted, the boats had not been taken; and how could the crew have left her without boats?

But if the crew were still on board, where were they?

Below—while the vessel was drifting to her doom?

"There's something mighty queer about this," said Johnny Bull. "The boats are still there, and the men must be still on board."

"They will be aground in ten minutes," said Harry Wharton.

"Give them a yell. The wind's off the shore, and they can hear it from here if there's anybody on board."

Wharton nodded.

"Good! Give them a yell. All together."

And the four juniors, uniting their voices, shouted.

"Ahoy!"

The shout rang loudly against the cliff, answered by thundering echoes from the hollow clefts and caves. The wind carried out across the bay, and if there had been an ear to hear on the strange steamer the shout must have been heard. But still there was no sign of life on board the strange craft.

"Ahoy!"

"Hallo!"

"Look out!"

Again and again the juniors shouted. But there came no sign of life on the steamer, and all the time it was drifting closer to the rocks.

Panting with their exertions, the juniors fell into silence, and watched the drifting vessel with a fascinated gaze. Not more than two hundred yards separated the steamer from the curling line of foam at the rocky base of the great Shoulder.

"They must be mad!" muttered Nugent, his face going white. "They can't be saved now! Look! They're in the current!"

"Good heavens!"

The steamer had made a sudden swerving motion. It had been caught in the current that raced at the foot of the cliff, and now it was drifting faster, right upon the rocks and sandbanks of the shore.

On it came, bow foremost, drifting to doom, and the juniors watched it in breathless silence, with beating hearts.

It was a matter of minutes now. And still no sign of life appeared upon the doomed ship. Silent, deathly in its quiet, under the calm sunshine, the steamer drifted on, closer and closer to the rocks.

"She's aground!" muttered Wharton.

Crash!

The concussion, as the steamer struck, sounded up the cliff, and plainly reached the ears of the breathless juniors.

The steamer smote heavily upon the rocks and recoiled from the shock, and lurched drunkenly, and then drifted on again. Missing the rock upon which she had crashed first, the vessel plunged on heavily into a deep sandbank between two points of rock. Her bows plunged deeply into the soft, yielding sand, and she lay there jammed and embedded, with the current racing past her stern, and white foam breaking round her.

The juniors waited in a strange tense anxiety for the crew to appear at last. For if there was a man on board the shock of the vessel striking could not fail to rouse him. But still no one was seen—there was no sign of life—no movement on the grounded vessel, save the swinging of the boats at the davits.

"Come on!" muttered Harry Wharton.

The juniors were thinking no longer of climbing the cliff. Anxiety and curiosity combined to draw them to the mysterious vessel. Harry Wharton ran down the steep slope of the cliff, making for the shore where the steamer lay aground. And Nugent and Bull and Bob Cherry followed him fast.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

A Mystery of the Sea!

THE steamer lay jammed in the sand. It was jammed hard, and the billows that broke round the rocks had no power to move it. Until stormy weather came the steamer was safe, as safe as if in an anchorage. The juniors, red and breathless with running, came racing and tumbling down the steep path, and reached the shore, and dashed along the sand towards the steamer.

The vessel lay almost level, with the white foam curling round her. The Greyfriars juniors reached her, and still there was no sound, no movement on board. Close by the port side of the vessel was the big rock that the steamer had struck, and then missed, and the juniors, clambering upon it, were on a level with her deck. They stood looking down

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upon the deck, which was slightly slanting. The boats on the port side hung a little out from the davits; on the starboard side they swung in a little over the deck. The door of the charthouse was open, and the juniors could see into it. It was, so far as they could see, deserted. No sign of life—no sound!

The juniors were silent with a strange awe.

It was a mystery of the sea that was before them, a strange mystery they could not fathom. If the boats had been gone, they could have supposed that the vessel had been deserted by the crew, after springing a leak. But the boats were there. If the crew had gone, how had they gone?

But if they had not gone, how was it that they were below, and had given no sign even when the vessel struck?

"There's something queer about this!" Frank Nugent muttered. "Blessed if I like to get on board, you fellows."

He voiced the feelings of the others. The eerie strangeness of it all had a peculiar effect on their nerves. For some minutes they remained upon the big rock, looking over the slanting deck, without approaching nearer.

The boats had been swinging with the shock; but they were now still again. Dead silence and stillness reigned upon the steamer.

Derelicts at sea, deserted by their crews, were not uncommon, and once at least one had drifted into the bay at Pegg, and had been salvaged by the fishermen. On that occasion the vessel had sprung a leak, and had been deserted by her crew; the leak had afterwards ceased, and the vessel had remained afloat. But it was evident that nothing of the kind had happened to this vessel. She was plainly not waterlogged in the least; and the boats, plain evidence that the crew had not deserted her, remained there. But where were the crew?

Harry Wharton drew a deep breath.

"I'm going on board," he said.

"Hold on a minute," said Nugent. "This is horribly queer. Suppose—suppose—" He paused.

"Suppose what, Frank?"

"There can't be anybody living on board."

"Looks like it."

"But—but they've not gone; there are the boats, so—so that means that they're dead," said Nugent. "There must have been plague or something on the ship."

"By Jove!"

It was a new thought to the juniors; but it was probable.

If the ship were from an eastern port, and had brought the plague with her, it was conceivable that the whole crew had perished, and that the fore-castle and the cabins below were choked up with dead bodies.

It was a fearful thought, and it blanched the faces of the juniors, and instinctively they drew back further from the ship's side.

"It would be dangerous to go on board if there's plague there," said Bull. "But—"

Wharton shook his head.

"There's no smell," he said.

"No; but—"

"If the crew were dead on board, and of a horrible disease, there would be a fearful smell," said Harry. "I've read about plague ships. This isn't one."

"Then what—what—"

"I don't know, but I'm going to see!"

And Wharton stepped towards the ship, and clambered over the rail, and dropped upon the deck. The other fellows followed him at once.

Their boots rang upon the planks, but still no sound came from below. Wharton mounted upon the bridge and looked into the charthouse.

The door was open, and inside, upon the floor, lay a cap. Harry Wharton, with a hand that shook a little, in spite of himself, picked it up. It was a mate's cap, as he knew at once. It had been dropped there. When—how—why?

Near at hand stood a glass, still half-full of whisky-and-water. The shock of the ship drifting ashore had not upset it. There was every sign in the charthouse of recent occupation. But of occupants—none.

The juniors stepped out again, breathing quickly, a strange feeling of dread in their breasts.

"The Aspasia!" said Bob Cherry, reading the name from one of the lifebelts on the rail. "Look! The lifebelts are all in their places, as well as the boats!"

"Good heavens! What does it mean?"

"Let's get below."

For a moment the chums hesitated.

But Harry Wharton led the way, and they followed him. The extent of cabin accommodation showed that the steamer had carried passengers as well as cargo. But the state-rooms were silent and deserted; the footsteps of the juniors awoke strange echoes.

Nowhere a sign of life.

There were bunks, with every sign of having been recently occupied; there were clothes and other articles, all telling of the recent presence of men.

But no living being.

The juniors visited each of the state-rooms in turn.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" exclaimed Bob Cherry suddenly. "Look here!"

He had stepped into the state-room on the port side. Through the porthole loomed up the big rock from which the juniors had climbed upon the ship, and the rays of the setting sun glimmered through it into the cabin. Upon the floor, near the table, lay a camera—open, as if for use, and evidently dropped there, and left where it fell. It was a valuable camera, and Nugent picked it up carefully, and placed it upon the table. In one corner of the state-room was a space curtained off with thick hangings, and Harry Wharton pulled the hangings aside. Within he found a small bench, a red lamp such as is used by photographers in the dark-room, and other appliances for developing photographs.

"That's been used as a dark-room," said Wharton, in a low voice. "The chap who was in this cabin was a photographer."

"Looks like it."

"But—but where is he? There's the dark-room, and the dishes and the stuff are all there. Look! There's a jar with prints in it to wash. But—but where is the man?"

"Heaven knows!"

The juniors looked round the cabin with keen attention.

There were several books on the little table near the porthole, and all of them were scientific works. Harry Wharton opened each volume in turn, and in each he found the same name written upon the flyleaf—J. East. And one of the volumes—a treatise upon the flora of the South Sea Islands—bore upon the title-page in print "By Professor East." That volume had evidently been written by the occupant of the cabin—the man who had owned the camera—evidently a Professor East.

But where was he?

"Professor East!" said Wharton. "That's the name of the chap who had this cabin. He must have been a passenger. I suppose there were six or seven passengers, from what I have seen. But—but where are they?"

"They must be—dead!"

"But where are the bodies, then?"

"Not aboard this ship!" said Bob Cherry, with a shudder. "It's a horrible mystery. I—I say, let's get out. This place gives me the creeps!"

"Let's finish searching, while we're about it," said Harry. "We haven't looked into the fore-castle yet."

"Right!"

The juniors made their way forward. There were several steps down into the fore-castle, and the place smelt musty and stuffy. Wharton looked in at the open doorway; there was no occupant. The juniors entered. There were clothes lying on some of the bunks; there was a clasp-knife on the floor, near a fragment of cheese and a crust. Wharton picked up the fragment of crust and cheese. They had evidently been dropped there by someone who had partly eaten. A hasty meal had been interrupted. How—why?

Those questions hammered in the minds of the juniors, but they could find no answers to them.

They returned to the deck, and breathed more freely in the open sunshine. The shadows were lengthening over the bay now; the red sun was hidden behind the Shoulder.

In spite of their courage, of which they had plenty, the juniors were feeling strangely uncomfortable in the midst of their eerie surroundings.

What had happened to the crew of the derelict? What fearful mystery of the sea had they chanced upon, all unexpectedly, in their half-holiday excursion?

"Let's get out!" said Bob Cherry.

Wharton shook his head.

"We stick here!" he replied.

"What for?"

"Salvage!"

"What?"

"That's the law of the sea," said Harry Wharton quietly. "The ship is a derelict, deserted by her crew, and she belongs to the first man aboard her. That's the salvage law. Do you understand? This ship is ours!"

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Salvage.

"OURS!"

The juniors simply gasped out the word. Harry Wharton nodded. His eyes were gleaming, and there was a flush of excitement in his cheeks now.

He had stated the fact.

The derelict belonged to the first aboard, and the Famous Four of the Greyfriars Remove were—in law and in fact—the owners of the *Aspasia*.

But it took the juniors some minutes to realise it.

"Ours!" murmured Nugent. "This ship—ours!"

"Entirely ours!"

"My hat!"

"But—but it must be worth thousands of pounds!" said John Bull dazedly.

"Fully that!"

"And it's ours!"

"Ours—alone!"

"Great Scott!"

There was no doubt about it, and the juniors realised it. They were the salvers—the ship was theirs. So long as they remained on board of it, no other had a right to enter into possession. They were the first-comers, and to the first-comers the derelict belonged.

The uncanny feeling that had crept over the juniors gave way now to other feelings. The crew of the derelict were vanished; captain and crew and passengers had vanished, they did not know how. But their line was clear—it was to keep possession of the ship. It was theirs to keep.

"My hat!" said Bob Cherry, with a deep breath. "We'll stick here, rather! If we get off, and somebody else get on, we might find it hard to prove that we came first."

"Possession's nine points of the law," said Harry Wharton, with a shrug of the shoulders. "The ship's ours, and we're going to keep it. Until the matter's settled, some of us have got to stay on board."

"All night?"

"We can't leave it for a minute. I don't suppose the steamer can be seen from Pegg, but as soon as she's seen there will be boats round. Nobody will miss a chance of salvaging a fine vessel like this. If some of the rough fellows from Pegg get round here, there may be trouble. But they jolly well won't get on board."

"No fear!"

"But—but can we stay here?" said Nugent doubtfully. "We've got to get back for calling-over, you know."

"Blow calling-over!"

"But—"

"We'll get permission from the Head to stay aboard all night," said Harry, his eyes a-gleam with excitement. "One of you fellows can go up to the school and explain to him. You can explain that the ship's quite safe, and that it's worth thousands of pounds to us to stay on board for the night. The Head won't stand in our way. And you can bring back some grub—we shall need it—and we'll make a night of it. You'd better go, Franky; you've got the most persuasive tongue."

Nugent grinned.

"I'll go," he said. "But if the Head won't allow—"

Wharton's jaw set grimly.

"We're jolly well going to stay here," he said. "The Head can come and see that it's all safe, if he likes. Make him come, if you can, or send a prefect. But we're jolly well going to make a night of it, anyway."

"Hear, hear!"

"Buzz off, Franky! It's getting near time for calling over now, and the sooner the quicker, you know."

"Right-ho!" said Nugent.

And he clambered over the side of the big rock, and dropped upon the sand, and started by the shore path to reach Greyfriars.

"It will be all right," said Harry Wharton confidently. "When Franky explains, the Head will let us stay here. Let's get our quarters ready."

And the juniors returned below.

The excitement of camping out for the night had banished for the moment the strange feeling of uneasiness with which the silence and desertion of the steamer had inspired them.

They were the masters of the ship.

The position of the vessel, jammed among the rocks under the great Shoulder, rendered it invisible from the town of Pegg across the bay. The drifting steamer had probably not been observed from the fishing village. But there were boats out at sea, coming back towards nightfall, and Harry Wharton realised that the grounded steamer might be seen, and that there might be rival seekers of salvage. The juniors were the first-comers, and they had a right to what they had found. But Wharton knew that it would be

ANSWERS

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"Come on!" shouted Peter Keeley, desperately, "go for 'em!" The longshoremen made a savage rush for the steamer, but the juniors were ready for them, and they were sent reeling back to the rocks, one after another. "Hurray!" roared Bob Cherry. "Come and have some more!" (See chap. 6.)

necessary to keep watch. While Bob Cherry and Johnny Bull were making the preparations for camping, Harry Wharton remained on deck, keeping a look-out.

Several boats had passed in the distance, without observing the grounded *Aspasia*, and Wharton had been careful to do nothing to attract their attention. But later on he caught sight of a boat pulling directly towards the steamer. There were three men in it, and two of them were pulling, while the third was standing up, and looking towards the grounded vessel.

As the boat came nearer, Wharton recognised the man standing up as one of the roughest characters in the coast village. The man's eyes were fixed upon the steamer.

"Salvage, by gum!" Wharton heard him say. "She's deserted!"

"Good luck for us, Peter!" said one of the rowers.

"By gum, yes!"

Wharton leaned over the rail and waved his hand to the boat.

"Keep back, there!" he called out.

Peter Keeley started violently.

"Thunder! There's somebody aboard!"

"Keep back! You're not allowed on board here," said Harry Wharton quietly. "We've found this vessel, and we're claiming the salvage."

"Wot?"

"Keep off! Do you hear?"

The rowers rested on their oars, and the boat floated gently

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by the stern of the *Aspasia*. Though the bows of the steamer were deep in sand, the water was deep round her stern, and it was possible for the boat to come quite near. Wharton looked down upon the three men from the rail.

"By gum!" said Keeley. "It's one of the kids from the school!"

He stared at Harry Wharton.

"Look 'ere," he exclaimed, "you run away to school, Master Wharton! 'Ow did you get on to that ship?"

"Stepped on!" said Harry.

"Was there anybody on board?"

"Nobody."

"Then it's salvage," said Keeley. "You run away, and we'll take possession. When it comes to paying out, we won't forget you."

Harry Wharton laughed.

"Thank you! I can look after myself!" he said.

"We're coming aboard!"

"You're not!"

"Who's going to stop us?" demanded Keeley, with a sneer.

"We are!"

"Oh! You're not alone, then?"

"There are three of us here," said Harry, "and one's gone to Greyfriars, and is coming back. You see, you're too late, and you'd better buzz off!"

Keeley and his companions muttered together for a few minutes. Their looks were decidedly unpleasant. Harry Wharton, watching their faces keenly, could realise quite

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easily that, had they found him alone there, without much chance of discovery afterwards, they would have been quite capable of ending his claim to the salvage by tossing him into the sea. That, however, was hardly feasible now. But the looks of the three longshoremen were evidently hostile. After muttering together, Keeley looked up again at Wharton.

"Look here, Master Wharton, we're comin' aboard!" he said.

"You can't!"

"We want to satisfy ourselves as wot you say is correct."

"You can take my word for it."

"Wot's the 'arm of our coming aboard?" demanded Keeley angrily.

"We don't want your company!" said Wharton coolly.

"Besides, do you think I'm a duffer? You want to shove us off, and claim to be the first on board. Do you take me for a silly ass?"

"I swear—"

"Oh, rats!"

"Well, we're coming aboard," said Keeley savagely.

"You'll get hurt if you try it!" said Wharton grimly.

"Mind, we mean business. We don't allow anybody to set foot on this ship!"

"I'll soon show yer about that!" growled Keeley.

The boat backed water, and disappeared round the rocks. It was impossible for the three longshoremen to climb over the stern from the water side, and they evidently meant to land, and board the steamer by the bows—quite an easy task, unless they were stopped by force.

"Johnny! Bob!" shouted Wharton.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!"

"Tumble up, quick!"

Bob Cherry and Johnny Bull ran on deck.

"What's the row?" asked Bull breathlessly.

"The enemy!"

"The—the what?"

"Three rotten longshore loafers from Pegg!" said Harry Wharton hurriedly. "They're coming aboard if we don't stop them. They want to shift us off and claim the vessel. They're not going to board us!"

"No fear!" said Bob Cherry emphatically.

"Get something to handle them with; we've got to fight!"

"Good egg!"

The three juniors easily found weapons. Johnny Bull picked up an iron bar, Bob Cherry a heavy malacca cane from the professor's state-room below, and Harry Wharton a boathook. Then they posted themselves ready to meet the enemy. They could hear the sound of a boat scraping on the sand beyond the big rocks, but for the moment the longshoremen were out of sight.

"Who are they?" asked Bob Cherry breathlessly. "Do you know them?"

"Yes. Peter Keeley, the rough who was sent to prison for robbery with violence on the Friardale road, and two of his pals. One of them is named Bill Walker. I don't know the other, but he's the same kind of rotter."

Bob Cherry whistled.

"Three of the worst ruffians in the place," he said. "We shall have trouble."

"Here they come!"

The three longshoremen appeared in sight from the rocks. They scrambled upon the big rock close by the port side of the grounded steamer, and advanced towards the juniors.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Repelling Boarders!

HARRY WHARTON & Co. looked down upon the three longshoremen from the rail at the steamer's side, and stood ready. Peter Keeley and his comrades hesitated as they saw the three juniors standing, weapon in hand, ready to repel their advances. Keeley resorted to words again as his comrades hung back.

"Look 'ere, Master Wharton," he said—"look 'ere, we only asks for a share in the salvage. That's fair enuff."

"Fair as a die!" said Bill Walker solemnly.

"Why the dickens should we give you a share in the salvage?" demanded Harry Wharton. "You can cut off!"

"Jest let us aboard to 'ave a look round—"

"You can look round as much as you like—from where you are!"

"But, I says—"

"But you're not coming aboard this vessel!" said Harry Wharton firmly. "Not a step, my man. I know you, you see!"

Keeley scowled savagely.

"Look 'ere—"

"Oh, rats! Buzz off!"

"Yes, travel along, and don't bother!" said Bob Cherry.

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"You're not coming aboard, and you're wasting time. Get out!"

"You're goin' to stop us—hey?" said Keeley.

"Yes, rather!" said Johnny Bull emphatically.

"You'll get 'urt!"

"I fancy you'll get hurt, if you try to climb on board, with us here to stop you!" said Harry Wharton. "You can try if you like!"

The three longshoremen exchanged glances. They did not like the look of the juniors, but the prize was too tempting. Even if they could not make out their claim to the salvage, they could see that the vessel must contain loot enough to reward them for a search. To fill their pockets with valuables, and have a claim at least on the salvage, was worth a struggle, and was quite as honest as the various ways and means Peter Keeley generally followed of getting a living.

"Come on!" said Keeley desperately. "Go for 'em!"

"We're arter you, Peter!"

Keeley dashed towards the steamer over the rock, and made a spring. He caught the rail with his hands, and clambered up. In a moment more he would have come plunging over upon the slanting deck, but Bob Cherry was ready for him. The heavy malacca slashed through the air, and descended upon the longshoreman's head, and he fell backwards with a fearful yell.

Crash!

Back on the rock went the leader of the longshoremen, and he lay there dazed and groaning.

The other two ruffians were clambering savagely on; but their fate was no better. Bill Walker received a slash from Wharton's boathook, and he reeled off and fell, and did not come on again. The third man jumped back as Johnny Bull lashed at him, and avoided the blow, missing his footing at the same time, and rolling over the uneven rock. Unable to save himself, he rolled over it on the seaward side, and there was a loud splash as he disappeared into the water.

"Hurray!" roared Bob Cherry. "Come and have some more!"

The juniors lined the slanting rail, ready for another attack.

Peter Keeley sat up, and rubbed his head and groaned.

"Yow!"

"Groo!" groaned Walker.

Keeley looked round dazedly.

"Where's Dick Doggett?" he asked.

"Ow! In the water!"

"You'd better pull your pal out," said Harry Wharton. "Do you want him to be drowned?"

Neither Keeley nor Walker moved. But Doggett dragged himself out and came clambering up the rock again, dripping with water, and leaving a wet trail behind him. He sank down exhausted by his comrades.

The aspect of the longshoremen was so pitiable that the chums of Greyfriars burst into a roar of laughter.

Keeley blinked at them, still rubbing his head.

"You murderous young 'ounds!" he said. "You might 'ave brained me."

"No danger of that!" said Bob Cherry consolingly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We're comin' on that steamer."

"All right; come on."

The longshoremen exchanged glances. They wanted to get aboard, but they did not want to face the Greyfriars juniors again. Keeley staggered to his feet.

"You jest look out," he said. "You'll see us again!"

"Yes; we'll turn up to see you tried, next time you're sent to chokey," said Bob Cherry.

The longshoreman ground his teeth.

"You jest look out, that's all," he said.

And the longshoremen turned away. They moved slowly down the rock to the sand beyond; and Keeley suddenly stumbled and fell.

"Mind the step!" shouted Bob Cherry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The ruffian rose again, a savage gleam in his eyes, and a jagged chunk of rock in his hand. His stumble had been a feint to deceive the juniors. He swung round, and the missile flew with a sudden whiz.

"Look out!" yelled Wharton.

Crash!

The chunk of rock crashed on the rail, and glanced off on the deck. It was the rail that saved Wharton from receiving it. Keeley, sure of his aim, came rushing back across the rock, to spring on board while the juniors were in confusion. But the missile had not touched Wharton, and he was ready.

The longshoreman threw himself headlong over the rail, and received a lash from the boathook and the malacca without stopping. But he fell on the deck, half-stunned, and the juniors threw themselves upon him.

Keeley struggled fiercely; and Wharton, his eyes gleaming,

brought down his boathook upon the ruffian's right arm, paralyzing it for the moment.

"Pitch him overboard!" he shouted.

"Yes, rather!"

"Keep watch here, Johnny!"

"Righto!"

Johnny Bull guarded the rail, in case Walker and Doggett should make a rush, while his chums dragged Keeley away to the stern. The longshoreman, heavy as he was, was pitched headlong over the side where the water flowed round the stern of the steamer, and he disappeared into the sea with a resounding splash.

Wharton panted.

"The scoundrel! He might have killed one of us with that stone!"

Keeley's head rose above the water. He glared up at the juniors for a moment, and then swam away to where the boat had been left among the rocks. Doggett and Walker retreated to join him, and the three of them disappeared from view.

It was evident that the salvage seekers had had enough for the present.

"By Jove!" said Bob Cherry. "That was quite warm while it lasted! We shall have to keep a good look-out to-night, you chaps. They'll come back after dark!"

"Most likely!"

"They're going now!" said Johnny Bull.

The sound of oars came to the juniors' ears. From behind the rocks the boat emerged, and Keeley and company pulled away across the bay. Keeley shook his fist at the steamer, and Bob Cherry kissed his hand in response.

The boat disappeared into the shadows that were deepening over the bay. But Harry Wharton & Co. felt pretty certain that they had not seen the last of the longshoremen, and they knew they would have to keep watch and ward that night upon the stranded steamer.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Camping-Out!

FRANK NUGENT returned as the dusk was deepening over the bay, and Wingate of the Sixth came with him. Harry Wharton and his comrades looked rather grimly at Wingate as he came on board the steamer. Their first thought was that the captain of Greyfriars had been sent to take them back to the school. But Nugent soon relieved their minds.

"It's all right," he announced, "I've explained to the Head, and he says we can camp out here to-night if it's safe. Wingate's come to see that it's safe."

"Oh, good!"

"Safe as houses," said Bob Cherry, confidently. "You can see that the steamer can't float off, Wingate. She's jammed fast."

Wingate nodded.

"Looks safe enough," he remarked, "so long as the weather's good, at all events."

Wharton gave his comrade a warning glance, as a hint to say nothing about the attack of Peter Keeley and his gang. If the Greyfriars captain had known of that little incident, he would probably not have thought it so safe for the juniors to remain on board the steamer for the night. As it was, it did not cross Wingate's mind.

"I've brought some grub," said Nugent. "We'll camp out on deck, and have a feed up here. You can stay and have a feed with us, Wingate."

"Righto!" said Wingate.

While the juniors were preparing the feed, the Greyfriars captain looked over the vessel. The state of the steamer amazed him as much as it had the juniors. A derelict with all the boats and life-belts intact, and every sign of recent occupation, was a mystery which excited the imagination, and if the juniors had been superstitious they might have fancied that supernatural causes had been at work.

Wingate rejoined the juniors on the deck, amazed.

"It's extraordinary," he said. "There's simply no accounting for it. What can have happened to the crew?"

Wharton shook his head.

"It's a giddy mystery!" he said.

"You kids are not afraid to stay here?" asked Wingate.

"Afraid! What is there to be afraid of?"

"Well, sailormen might say the ship was haunted."

Harry Wharton laughed.

"We'll risk that!" he remarked.

"Yes, rather."

"It's awfully queer about the steamer being deserted," said Nugent thoughtfully. "But even if anything has happened to the crew, I don't see how anything can happen to us. There's nobody on board but ourselves."

Wingate nodded.

"No, I don't see that there's any risk," he remarked. "I'll report that to the Head. But I'd like to know what's happened on this steamer before she ran aground."

They discussed the mystery as they had their tea on deck.

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but it was impossible to make even a surmise to explain the strange circumstances.

But that there was no danger to the juniors, whatever had happened to the crew, seemed clear enough.

With nobody but themselves on board the steamer, what could possibly happen to them? If, indeed, supernatural agencies had been at work, the case was different—but the Greyfriars fellows were not superstitious.

The sun had long disappeared behind the cliffs, and the darkness was thickening over the sea.

One by one the stars came out in the sky; it was a beautiful summer's night, with only a light breeze stirring.

The tide was coming in, and the water grew deeper round the grounded steamer. The sand in which her bows were jammed was now under water, and only the big rock on the port side remained above the tide. But that the shock of striking had not damaged the hull seriously was clear, as there was no sign of a leak, and no trace of water inside the ship.

After the feed on deck, Wingate rose to go.

"Well, take care of yourselves, you kids," he said. "If you've changed your minds, you can come back to Greyfriars with me now."

"No fear!"

Wingate smiled.

"Well, good-night!"

"Good-night, Wingate."

The captain of Greyfriars stepped over the rail, upon the big rock, and made his way to the shore. The tide was flowing round the rock, and there was a stream of water on the land side of the big rock now. Wingate jumped across it, and disappeared into the darkness of the beach. The juniors heard him whistling cheerily as he walked away, till the sound died away in the distance.

"Well, here we are, monarchs of all we survey!" grinned Bob Cherry.

"Hurrah for us!"

"The tide is getting deeper there," said Wharton, looking towards the beach. "All the better; it won't be so easy for Keeley & Co. to come back to-night."

Nugent stared.

"What's that?" he asked.

Wharton laughed.

"We've had visitors while you've been gone," he said. "A gang of longshoremen from Pegg, who tried to capture the giddy steamer."

"My hat!"

"We beat them off," said Bob Cherry. "But it was no good telling Wingate about it. He might have made a fuss about our stopping here."

Nugent chuckled.

"I'll bet he would have," he said. "My hat! We may have some excitement to-night, if they come back. We shall have to keep watch."

"It's going to be a fine night," said Harry. "We can sleep on deck. We can bring up blankets and pillows out of the bunks in the passengers' cabins."

"Good egg!"

"And one of us can stay awake all the time."

"Might have had some more of the fellows with us," said Nugent. "Lots of them wanted to come back with me; but, of course, the Head wouldn't let the whole giddy coll. camp out. Coker offered to come and take command if we liked."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There's enough of us to hold the ship," said Harry. "They can only get at us across that rock on the port side, and we can stop them from getting over the rail. So long as one of us keeps awake to watch, we shall be all serene."

"Right as rain!" said Bob Cherry.

"Let's get up the blankets ready."

The juniors soon had the requisites for camping-out on deck. Camping on deck was a scheme that agreed with their feelings. The fall of night had brought back the feeling of strangeness with which the deserted ship had inspired them on their first coming aboard. They did not say so openly, but they did not wish to pass the hours of darkness below.

There was no danger! They were sure of that; and they were not afraid. But, at the same time, they preferred being in the open air to being shut up in the interior of the mysterious ship.

It was a feeling natural under the peculiar circumstances, and had nothing to do with fear.

While the Co. were taking up the blankets and rugs, Harry Wharton went into the state-room which had been occupied by Professor East.

The room looked very dim and ghostly in the faint starlight that glimmered through the porthole.

Wharton felt a peculiar thrill as he entered the room.

The dimness of the interior was eerie and ghostly, thinking

as he was of the strange and unaccountable vanishing of the man who had occupied that cabin while the steamer was upon her voyage.

Wharton struck a match quickly and lighted the swinging lamp.

The eerie feeling passed away as he found himself in the light, and he smiled at his own nervousness.

Bob Cherry, laden with blankets, looked in at the door.

"What are you up to?" he asked.

Wharton had taken up the camera from the table.

"I'm going to look into this," he said. "I've got an idea."

"What's the idea?"

Wharton held up the camera.

"We found this on the floor," he said. "It looks to me as if the man this room belonged to had it in his hands just before—" He paused.

"Before what?"

"Goodness knows! Before whatever it was that happened to the crew of the ship," said Harry, with a shiver he could not repress. "You see, it's opened out ready for use, and it stands to reason that it couldn't have been put away like that. Professor East—if it was he—had this camera in his hands, and was going to use it; and something caused him to drop it on the floor."

"And then?"

"Well, it remained on the floor just where he had dropped it," said Wharton slowly. "That means, that whatever happened to Professor East, happened at that moment. That something happened to him is quite certain; otherwise, where is he?"

"True enough!"

"Something happened; something awful, I should say," said Wharton. "He must be dead, or where is he? It happened at the moment he had this camera in his hands, ready for use—so I figure it out."

"I shouldn't wonder. But—"

"Well, then, it's possible that he had taken a photograph," said Harry quietly. "If there is a used plate inside this camera it may show us what happened."

Bob Cherry drew a deep breath.

"My hat! It's possible. But what—what—"

"No good asking me. But it's barely possible that there is some record on the plate inside this camera—and I'm going to see."

"Good egg! Wait a bit, and let's all see the development."

"Call the chaps here, then."

Wharton went into the little partitioned dark-room in the corner of the cabin. The appliances were all ready to his hand there. The professor had evidently taken many photographs during his voyage. There were many finished prints in the cabin. Harry Wharton lighted the red lamp, and prepared his developer.

Nugent and Bob Cherry and Johnny Bull came into the cabin. There was not much room for them in the little dark-room, but they crowded close together inside the dark hangings. The light in the cabin was turned out, in order that no ray might reach through the hangings and perhaps spoil the effect.

Crammed together in the little space, with only the red light from the photographer's lamp shining upon them, the juniors waited for the development.

Wharton was an amateur photographer, and he was well acquainted with the process. Having seen that the hangings shut out every glimmer of starlight from the cabin, he opened the camera.

The juniors looked on with bated breath.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

The Face in the Negative.

HARRY WHARTON'S face was full of suppressed excitement as he removed the plates from the camera.

The idea had been growing in his mind that the camera, dropped apparently by the owner in the very moment of use, might contain some pictured record of what had happened in the professor's cabin.

If the photographer had been making an exposure at the moment he dropped the camera, the exposure, of course, would cease the moment the camera left his hand.

There should, in that case, be some record left on the plate.

True, the probability was that, as the camera was found in the cabin, its owner had been going to take some snap from the porthole—perhaps a passing ship. In that case, all he could expect to find upon the plate would be a sea-view with some distant craft in it. But if the professor had been at the porthole, looking out—something had happened to make him drop the camera—and then he had vanished. That

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"something" must have happened in the ship—therefore the man must have turned from the porthole, and if he had turned the camera with him, without shutting it off, it was quite probable that there was a picture of whatever it was that had entered the cabin—the unknown, unexplainable enemy that had come there!

The thought of it made the juniors shiver.

Somebody, or something, had entered the cabin when the professor had the camera in his hand.

That much seemed clear.

What was it?

The thought that they were in the same cabin, where the man had disappeared so strangely—on board the ship where the whole crew had disappeared—caused their hearts to beat faster.

What was the meaning of that inexplicable mystery? What had happened to their predecessors in that cabin—might it happen to them?

"Buck up!" murmured Bob Cherry.

Wharton had taken out the first plate.

He plunged it into the developing fluid.

Then the four juniors watched for the image to flash up.

They watched with bated breath, their hearts beating almost painfully.

Wharton clicked his teeth suddenly.

An image appeared upon the plate—flashing up clearly. Pictured before them was an open cabin doorway—the doorway of the state-room in which they now stood. They knew it at once. And in the doorway—

A human face!

Clearly it came up in the negative. A face—the face of a man who was rushing past the open doorway—a face distorted with fear.

So stunned were the juniors by the fearful picture that had suddenly flashed upon them from the developing dish, that they stood paralysed, hardly breathing.

Wharton remembered himself in time.

He caught the plate from the developer in time to save it from being over-developed and ruined.

"Good heavens!" muttered Bob Cherry, the perspiration thick upon his brow. "Let's get out of this, for mercy's sake!"

"Come on—come on!"

"Wait a minute," muttered Wharton. "I must get this fixed, or it's done for."

"Buck up!"

Wharton washed the plate, and plunged it into the fixing solution.

Then Nugent dragged the hangings aside, and they stepped out of the dark-room into the cabin.

"Light the lamp, for goodness' sake!" muttered Nugent thickly.

Bob Cherry struck a match.

The swinging lamp in the cabin was relighted, and the juniors gasped with relief. They looked round the state-room with startled glances, hardly knowing what they expected to see.

But they saw nothing.

Save for themselves, the room was empty; save for their panting breathing, it was silent.

They stood, breathing irregularly, staring towards the doorway.

That was the doorway pictured in the negative—the doorway past which a man had rushed, with deadly fear and horror in his face, at the moment the camera chanced to be turned in that direction.

Why?

For what had that man, with distorted face, rushed down the alley-way in wild terror?

What fearful enemy had been on his track?

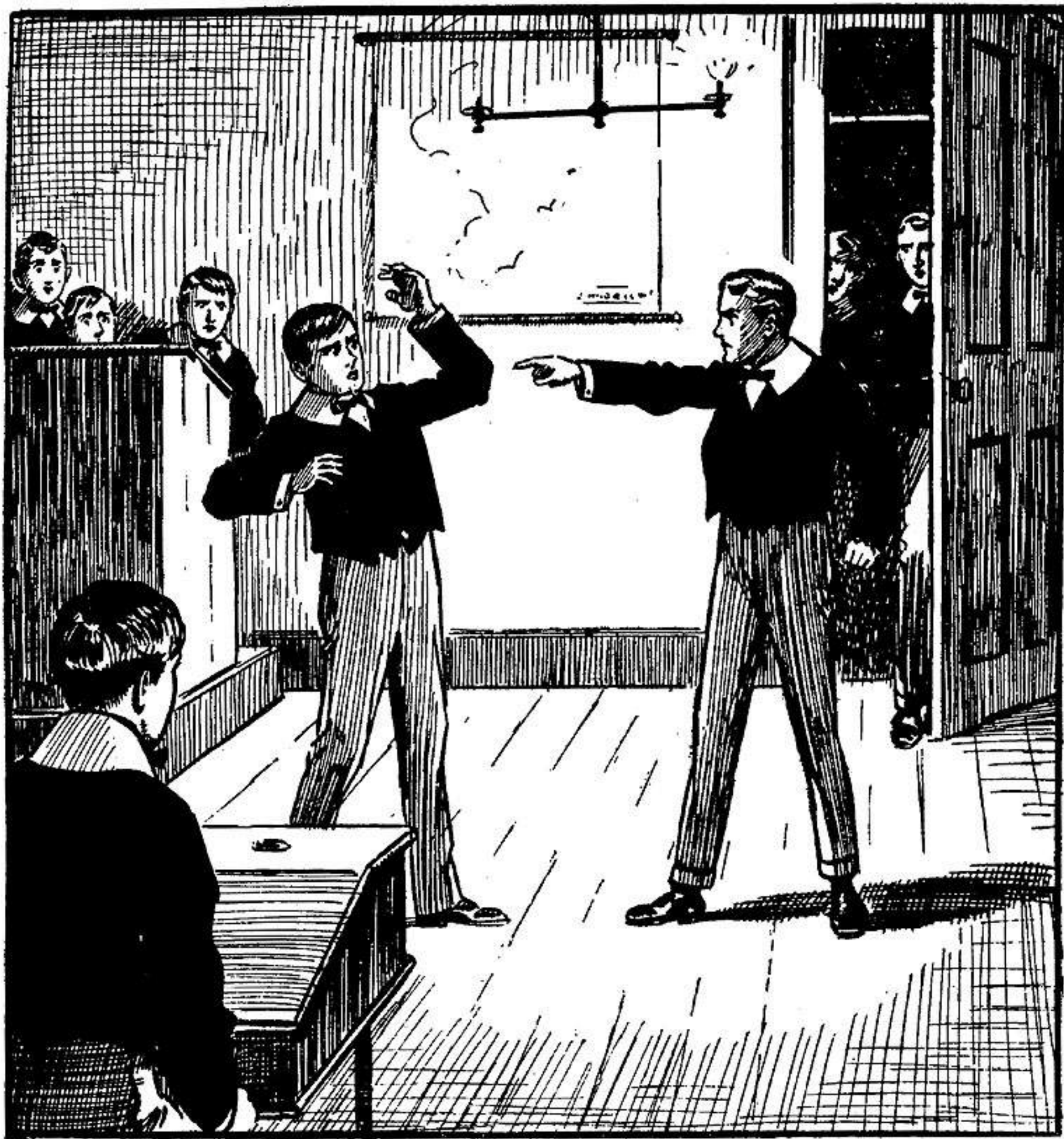
"Good heavens!" muttered Nugent. "I—I hardly like to—to—"

Ho broke off.

But the other fellows knew what he meant. Nugent did not like the idea of going out into the alley-way. How long was it since that photograph had been taken—since that terrified man had rushed past the door—that man who had since vanished from the ship, with all his comrades?

How long?

Perhaps that very day—surely that very day, for the deserted steamer could not have been drifting long on the sea without being discovered. Many vessels passed in sight of Pegg Bay, going north or south between the East Coast ports, and the fact that the steamer was deserted and unguided—must have been clear to any sailorman who had sighted her at sea. That was certain, and, therefore, if the steamer had been afloat long in that deserted condition she would have been boarded from some passing vessel. Any passing skipper would have been glad of the chance of salving the derelict. Whatever had happened had happened



"Gentlemen," called out Wally, grimly, "kindly step into view, and behold our respected friend Mellish trying to bribe and corrupt a respectable youth!" Mellish gave a yell of terror, for at Wally's words the door of the wall-cupboard was flung open, and the concealed juniors rushed out; and Tom Merry & Co. rose into view from behind the Form-Master's desk. (See Chapter 15.)

(For the above incident see the grand, long, complete tale of Tom Merry & Co. at St. Jim's, entitled: "THE SPY OF THE SCHOOL," by Martin Clifford, which is contained in our popular companion paper, The "Gem" Library. Out on Thursday. Price One Penny.)

recently—perhaps only a few hours before the juniors had boarded the steamer!

That thought was borne in upon their minds as they stood in the state-room, looking at one another with blanched faces.

"Hang it all," muttered Harry Wharton resolutely, "we shall be getting cowardly if this goes on! Buck up!"

"But—but what happened?" muttered Nugent, his teeth clicking together. "What made that chap we've just seen in the negative—what made him bolt like that?"

"Goodness knows!"

"He was afraid for his life—you could see that in his face," said Bull, in a hushed voice. "Somebody was after him, to kill him!"

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"It must have been so."

"Somebody—or something," said Bob Cherry with a shudder. "If it was a murderer—say even a dangerous lunatic—where is he? We found nobody on board."

"One man couldn't have murdered a whole crew," said Wharton. "If it was a mutiny, where are the mutineers?"

No one answered.

The horrible mystery oppressed them with a sense of night mare.

The strange and fearful thought was borne in upon their minds as they stood there that it was by no human agency that the ship had been deprived of her crew and her passengers—that it was some fearful and unnatural enemy that

"THE SPY OF THE SCHOOL!" In the "Gem" Library, 1d. Out on Thursday, **By MARTIN CLIFFORD.**

had caused that unfortunate man to rush by with terror-stricken face.

"We—we may see more in the picture when we get a print in the morning," said Bob Cherry. "Let's get on deck now, for goodness' sake!"

"Wait till I've finished the negative," said Harry. "I can leave it to wash then. We want to be careful with it."

And the juniors waited in the state-room, with uneasy glances fixed upon the open doorway.

Wharton disappeared into the dark-room again, and his comrades waited for him. Their ears involuntarily were strained to listen.

Outside the tide was beating against the hull of the grounded ship, and hollow echoes came from the interior.

In the faint sounds the juniors seemed to hear again the sounds that must have been heard when that photograph was taken—the hurried rush of footsteps along the passage—the cry of fear that had doubtless rung out as the fugitive dashed by.

What had become of that man?

What had become of the man who, seeing him, had dropped the camera, and had then vanished from all human knowledge?

The juniors felt their flesh creep as they thought of it.

Was it possible, after all, that there was some supernatural explanation—that some hidden horror lurked in the unexplored depths of the deserted ship?

"Buck up, Wharton," said Bob Cherry huskily; "let's get out on deck."

"I'm finished."

The juniors left the cabin in a body. Each of them grasped a weapon of some sort, as if they feared to meet a foe in the recesses of the ship. But there was no one—nothing—to be seen; solitude and silence surrounded them.

They breathed more freely as they reached the open deck and the fresh air from the sea blew upon their faces, and they found themselves in the clear light of the stars.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

Not an Enemy.

THE juniors remained on deck, but it was not for a long time that they thought of sleep. Afar across the bay they could see the lights of the fishing-village of Pegg, but the lights died out one by one. There was as yet no sign of Keeley and the longshoremen returning, but the juniors had resolved to keep careful watch. The light of the stars fell clearly upon the slanting deck of the *Aspasia*, but on shore, under the shadow of the great Shoulder, and amid the big rocks, the darkness was thick. Round the grounded steamer the tide flowed with a low murmur; save for the sound of the water the silence was deep and oppressive.

The face of which they had caught so short a glimpse in the negative was still before the juniors' eyes—it seemed to haunt them.

They had left several lamps burning below, in case they should have to go down. But in the dark recesses of the steamer—in the hold, which they had not entered—their excited imagination peopled the shadows with strange shapes.

Harry Wharton broke the silence suddenly.

"Hark!"

He held up his hand.

From the shore came a sound of a boot grinding upon soft sand.

The juniors were upon their feet in a moment.

"The longshoremen!" muttered Nugent. "They're coming again!"

"Get ready!"

"Right-ho!"

The juniors were almost glad of the interruption of the deadly silence. A human foe was something they could face, and the excitement of approaching combat drove from their minds the thought of the hidden horror of the deserted steamer.

They lined the rail towards the big rock, weapon in hand, ready for the longshoremen when they came near.

The heavy footstep ground into the sand again, and there was a splash in the water, as if the new-comer had plunged into it in the darkness.

Then a muttered exclamation came to the ears of the listening juniors.

"There's only one of them!" muttered Nugent.

"Keeley himself, most likely, spying to see if we're gone," muttered Wharton. "I expect the others are hanging back in the dark there."

"Quiet!" murmured Johnny Bull. "Let him think we're asleep, and as soon as he gets near we'll collar him. If we can get him tied up it will prevent the brutes troubling us again to-night."

"Good!" murmured Wharton, his eyes gleaming. "If he comes along, let him get on board, and then collar him."

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"I've got a rope here."

"Quiet!"

The juniors crouched behind the port rail, listening, with beating hearts.

They distinctly heard the sound of boots scraping on the rocks.

Then a dark shadow loomed up in the starlight, and their hearts beat faster at the sight of the dim form moving on the big rock near the side of the grounded ship.

The dim figure paused, looking towards the steamer, and then they heard a faint chuckle. The figure advanced, and reached the rail, and stepped over it upon the slanting deck.

Harry Wharton sprang up.

"Collar him!" he shouted.

There was a sudden gasp of affright from the new-comer.

But before he could make a movement the four juniors were upon him. They leaped at him like tigers, and bore him crashing to the deck.

"Groo!" gasped the prisoner.

"Got you!" said Wharton. "Keep still, or you'll get this boathook across your napper. Tie up his hands, Johnny."

"What-ho!"

"Groo! Oh!"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" exclaimed Bob Cherry suddenly. "This isn't one of the longshoremen!"

"Groo!"

"I thought he was too small for Keeley!" exclaimed Nugent. "Who is it?"

"Groo! Yoop!"

"My hat!"

"It's Coker!"

"Yow! Lemme go!" groaned Coker, of the Fifth.

"Coker!"

"The silly ass!"

"That fathead Coker!"

The Famous Four released their prisoner. Coker, of the Fifth, sat up, and glared at them, and gasped for breath.

"You—you silly chumps!" he stuttered. "What do you mean by piling on a fellow like that?"

"What do you mean by coming here?" demanded Wharton, in his turn.

"Groo!"

"We took you for one of the longshoremen—they've tried to board us!" Bob Cherry explained. "It's your own fault."

"Groooh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Coker staggered to his feet. He looked inclined to rush at the chums of the Remove, for a moment. But he realised that he would be roughly handled if he did, and he refrained.

"You silly chumps!" he growled. "I came here to stay with you. I got old Prout's permission to come; I explained to him that you kids wouldn't be safe without a senior to look after you. And this is the thanks I get. Groo!"

Bob Cherry sniffed.

"It's all the thanks you deserve," he growled. "Now you've come, you'd better buzz off again. We don't want any Fifth here."

"No fear!"

"Rats!" said Coker. "I'm going to stay! I've a jolly good mind to give you cheeky kids a licking each, all round."

"Rats!"

"I'm jolly well not going back," said Coker. "I think it's good fun to camp out here. I'm not going to make any claim to share your rotten salvage. I wonder some of the longshoremen in Pegg don't shift you, and rob the steamer."

"They've tried—Peter Keeley and his gang."

"Why didn't they do it, then?"

"We licked them."

"Oh!" said Coker. "Well, if they come back again, I'll take the command, and we'll give them a good hiding."

"We'll give them a hiding," said Harry Wharton. "But you jolly well won't take the command, Coker. I'm captain of the Remove, and this ship belongs to us."

"Bosh!" said Coker. "As a Fifth-Former—"

"As a silly ass, you mean—"

"Look here—"

"Go and eat coke!"

Coker glared at the Famous Four. But they were evidently ready to toss him over the side of the steamer if necessary, and he controlled himself.

"Well," he said, more amicably, "I didn't come to row with you fellows, but to help you. As a matter of fact, I thought that some of the roughs from Pegg might give you trouble after dark, and I came to lend a hand."

"Oh, that's all right!" said Wharton. "We'll be glad to have you—so long as we don't have any of your Fifth Form swank."

"Hear, hear!"

Coker grinned faintly.

"All serene," he said. "Got anything to eat?"

"Yes, rather—here you are!"

Coker attacked cold coffee and sandwiches with a good appetite. In spite of the hostility generally subsisting between Harry Wharton & Co., of the Remove, and Coker, of the Fifth, the Famous Four were rather glad than otherwise of the arrival of Coker. Coker was certainly a duffer—at all events, Harry Wharton & Co. hadn't any doubt about that—but he was a big, powerful fellow, with plenty of pluck, and he would be very valuable if there was another fight with the longshoremen, especially if Peter Keeley brought help with him, as very probably he would. And Coker's high spirits had the effect of relieving the minds of the Removites of the unpleasant, uncanny thoughts that had been working in them, after the sight of the negative.

"What are you chaps camping on the deck for?" asked Coker.

"Fresh air!"

"Must be more comfy in the berths down below, surely," said Coker. "I fancy I shall turn in in a state-room, and one of you chaps can call me if the longshoremen come."

The juniors looked at one another. Not one of them wanted to go below; but they hesitated to explain their reasons to Coker. The Fifth-Former was pretty certain to laugh at their uneasiness.

Coker observed the expression upon their faces.

"What's the trouble?" he asked. "Nothing wrong with the berths below, is there?"

"Ahem—no!"

"What are you looking queer about, then?"

"Well, it's better to camp on deck."

"Why?"

"There's something uncanny about this ship," Wharton confessed. "We don't like being below."

"Well, of all the funks——"

"Look here, Coker——"

Coker chuckled.

"You young asses! Are you afraid of the dark? Ha, ha, ha!"

"You know we're not!" said Wharton angrily.

"Then why are you funky about sleeping down below?"

"We're not funky."

Coker chuckled again.

"Only it's—it's queer!" said Nugent.

"What's queer?"

"Well, about the crew having disappeared," said Nugent uncomfortably. "What's become of them?"

"Gone off in the boats," said Coker.

"The boats are still here."

"Oh!" said Coker. "All of them?"

"Yes; and all the lifebelts, too."

Coker's face became very thoughtful.

"That's jolly odd!" he said. "Still, if the ship's deserted, and there's nobody but ourselves on board, I don't see anything to be nervous about."

"We're not nervous, you ass! Only—that isn't all."

"What else is there?"

Harry Wharton explained the circumstances of the photograph. Coker grinned as he listened.

"Oh, rot!" he said airily. "Got that negative?"

"It's in the state-room. I left it there to dry after the washing."

"I'd like to see it. I expect you fancied that look on the face in it, you know. Negatives look queer sometimes, owing to the lights coming up as darks, and the darks as lights."

"I know that—but——"

"Well, let's see the negative," said Coker.

Bob Cherry grinned.

"You'd better go and fetch it yourself, as you're not nervous," he remarked. "You can show that you're not in a blue funk, you know."

Coker laughed.

"I'll go fast enough," he said. "Tell me the number of the state-room, and the place where you've left it."

"Hang it all, we'll come with you!" said Wharton.

"No, you won't!" said Coker. "You'll jolly well see that I'm not afraid to go alone. I'm going down now."

"Hold on, Coker——"

"Rats!"

And Coker went below.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

The Mystery Deepens.

HARRY WHARTON & CO. stood on the starlit deck listening.

Coker had insisted upon going below by himself; and the juniors were glad enough not to go. But after all, what danger could there possibly be? They had been below a dozen times already, and nothing had happened. What possibility of danger was there in the interior of the deserted ship?

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ONE
PENNY.

And yet a feeling of strange uneasiness was upon them. Bob Cherry called out to Coker.

"Are you all right, Coker?"

There was no reply.

"Coker!"

"Coker!"

A rush of footsteps, a horrified gasp, and Horace Coker reappeared. He leaped into view, and dashed towards the side, and did not stop till he reached the rail. The juniors ran to him, in strange terror.

"Coker!"

"What's the matter?"

"What did you see?"

Coker panted.

"My Heaven!" he muttered. "What—what was it?"

"What was what?" cried Harry Wharton, grasping the Fifth-Former by the shoulder, and shaking him in his excitement. "What are you saying?"

"What did you see, Coker?" panted Nugent.

Coker's teeth chattered.

"I—I didn't see anything!" he stammered. "I—I heard something! I—I think there was something moving—but—but——"

His voice trailed off huskily.

The Greyfriars fellows stood grouped together by the rail, looking back with starting eyes. If anything had appeared on deck in pursuit of Coker, they were ready to leap over the rail and take refuge on the rock alongside.

But there was nothing.

The silence was unbroken. Coker gradually recovered his nerve. The colour that had fled from his cheeks came back slowly, and his limbs ceased to shake.

"It was nothing," he said, a little unsteadily. "I—I suppose it was nerves, owing to what you fellows had been saying. Look here, there isn't anybody on board playing tricks, is there?"

"No!"

"You are sure you are the only chaps on the ship?"

"Quite sure."

"You've searched?"

"From end to end."

"In the hold?"

"Well, no. But there can't be anybody in the hold. We've looked in, and it's cram full of cargo," said Bob Cherry.

"Then I can't understand it. I'll almost swear that something moved, but—but I didn't exactly see anything," muttered Coker. "There might be a cat or a dog on board."

"They'd have shown up before now," said Nugent. "They'd be hungry, I should think, and would come out for grub."

"Quite certain," said Wharton.

"Well, I—I don't catch on to it," said Coker. "I suppose it was nerves. All the same, I—I think I'll leave that negative where it is. I'll stay on deck with you chaps. I—I'm blessed if I half like staying here at all."

"We're going to stay," said Harry Wharton grimly. "I'm not going to run away from a shadow. There can't be any danger, and if there is I don't care. I'm going to see it through."

"Same here!" said Bob Cherry determinedly.

"Oh, I'm going to see it through with you!" said Coker. "But—but I think it's a good idea to stay on deck."

"You haven't seen the negative."

"Never mind. I don't specially want to see it."

The juniors might have retorted upon Coker his remarks about a blue funk, but they did not. As a matter of fact, they were feeling uneasy, and far from being in a jesting mood. The mystery of the deserted ship was weighing upon their minds and upon their spirits.

The lights of the fishing village across the bay had disappeared now, and with their being extinguished a new and deeper solitude seemed to fall upon the Greyfriars fellows on board the *Aspasia*.

"Blessed if I like the idea of going to sleep!" said Bob Cherry, after a long pause. "But—but I suppose we shall have to."

"I'll keep watch!" said Coker.

"Oh, I'll do that!" said Johnny Bull.

"I was going to offer!" remarked Nugent.

Harry Wharton smiled faintly.

"I don't think any of us feel inclined to go to sleep," he said. "Let's all stay awake and watch."

"Good egg!"

"What about a sing-song?" suggested Bob Cherry.

The suggestion was not received with favour. A sing-song would certainly have dispelled the oppressive silence, and drowned the low, faint murmur of the waves round the

ship, but the juniors did not feel inclined for it. As a matter of fact, they were listening all the time.

A silver crescent of moon showed over the summit of the Shoulder. Nugent and Johnny Bull began to nod. It was close upon midnight now, and the silence and stillness were conducive to slumber, in spite of the state of their nerves.

Coker stood leaning against the rail. Harry Wharton was seated on the steps of the bridge, and he was still listening. Once or twice it had seemed to him as if he heard a faint sound from below.

Suddenly he started.

He leaped to his feet, and stood quivering from head to foot, holding up his hand to the other fellows as a sign to be silent.

"Hark!" he breathed.

The juniors were all on their feet now.

They listened with straining ears.

From the deep silence of the ship there came a faint sound—a sound as of a soft body dragging along a floor.

The juniors listened spellbound.

What was it?

Whence came the sound?

It died away.

Dead silence reigned upon the ship. Harry Wharton & Co. looked at one another with blanched faces.

"Good heavens!" muttered Nugent huskily. "What—what was that? There's—there's something alive on board!"

"Oh, heavens, what—what—"

"Listen!"

They listened with throbbing hearts and bated breath.

But there came no new sound. The silence of the deserted ship was unbroken.

But as they stood listening, with throbbing nerves, there was a fresh sound—this time from the shore—the sound of rough boots on the sand, and there was a shout from Coker.

"Look out, they're coming!"

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

A Sudden Attack.

COKER shouted the warning as he caught sight of flitting dark forms on the shore. The alarm of the coming attack roused the juniors from their state of almost spellbound horror.

Whatever it was that made that strange sound on board the steamer, they had no time to think of it now; they had real and material foes to deal with.

Five or six roughs were clambering over the big rock towards the ship, with Peter Keeley at their head.

The longshoremen had crept silently as far as the water's edge along the shore, intending to take the grounded steamer by surprise, but the shout of Coker, as he caught sight of them in the moonlight, warned Keeley that further concealment was useless.

And he led a swift rush towards the ship over the big rock on the port side, the only point where it was possible to clamber aboard.

Roused by the sudden attack, the juniors rushed to the side.

They were only just in time.

Keeley and his gang reached the rail as soon as they did, and tried to clamber over it, at the same time slashing with heavy cudgels.

Keeley had evidently come prepared for a struggle this time. There were six of the longshoremen now instead of three, and they all carried cudgels.

But the juniors faced them bravely.

Harry Wharton & Co. had the advantage of position, as they were at a greater height than their assailants.

But the longshoremen came on fiercely.

The prospect of rifling the cabins of the grounded ship, even if they could not claim the vessel as salvage, was quite sufficient to stimulate them.

Along the rail a fierce fight was waged. Peter Keeley had one leg over when a slash from Bob Cherry's stick hurled him back, and he rolled on the rock.

At the same moment Doggett tumbled on the deck.

Coker seized him before he could rise, and the ruffian returned grip for grip, and dragged Coker down, and they rolled on the deck together.

Keeley staggered to his feet on the rock.

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"Get on!" he roared. "Bash them! Smash them!"

"Buck up, Greyfriars!" yelled Bob Cherry.

"Hurray! Give 'em socks!"

The juniors gallantly manned the rail, keeping off the attack of the roughs, while Coker was struggling with Doggett on the deck.

But the longshoremen were using their cudgels freely, and Keeley succeeded in getting one leg over the rail, and he clung there, slashing round with his cudgel, and keeping the place he had gained.

Another and another of the longshoremen followed his example, lashing out savagely, and Keeley slipped down to the deck.

He had gained a footing now, and he held his ground while the rest of the gang boarded and backed him up. Doggett hurled Coker away from him, and sprang up, and joined his confederates. The juniors backed away towards the bridge. The odds and the superior strength of the ruffians had told in the combat, but the Greyfriars juniors were by no means disposed to yield.

Keeley waved his hand to them.

"You're beat!" he exclaimed. "Clear off the ship, and we won't hurt you!"

"You've hurt me already!" growled Bob Cherry, rubbing a great bruise on his forehead. "And we're not going to clear off!"

"No fear!"

"You'll go to prison for this, you rotters!" panted Coker.

Keeley grinned.

"We'll risk that," he remarked. "This 'ere ship is ours, and we was on it first. You kids kem on to it while we wasn't lookin'!"

"Why, you lying rascal—" exclaimed Harry Wharton.

"One yarn is as good as another, and we've got plenty of witnesses," said Keeley, with a wave of the hand towards his gang. "Are you goin'?"

"No!"

"Mind, if you don't go we're going to chuck you off the ship," said Keeley, "and you'll get 'urt!"

Harry Wharton & Co. set their teeth. Outnumbered as they were, pitted against grown-up men, powerful ruffians all of them, they had little chance, now that the longshoremen had gained a footing on the steamer.

But they did not mean to yield possession of the derelict. Whether the longshoremen would be able to make their claim good was a question; but, as Keeley had said, one yarn would be as good as another. At all events, if the longshoremen obtained undisputed possession of the ship for the night, they had nine points of the law in their favour when it came for the matter to be decided, and they would certainly pocket all the portable articles of value in the vessel.

"We're not going!" said Harry Wharton fiercely.

"Then you'll be put!" said Keeley threateningly.

But the ruffians were in no hurry to make the final rush.

Most of them had received hard knocks already, and if the juniors fought to a finish they were likely to receive a good many more before Harry Wharton & Co. were got rid of.

And Keeley, too, did not wish to cause serious injury by some unlucky blow in a desperate affray with cudgels. He had no desire to risk a sentence of penal servitude.

"Now, you'd better go," said Keeley.

"You ain't got an earthly agin us. We're six, and you're five, and we're men and you're boys. Cut!"

"Rats!"

"I give you two minutes!"

"Go and eat coke."

Harry Wharton gritted his teeth. However hard the Greyfriars fellows struggled, it was certain that the rush of the longshoremen could have only one result—the juniors would be beaten, and hurled over the rail upon the rocks or into the water. Not one of them flinched; but it was useless to fight a losing fight. Not that Wharton had the faintest idea of yielding the possession of the derelict to their unscrupulous foes.

His brain was working rapidly as he stood there panting.

"We can't stop them!" he said, in the faintest of whispers. "There's only one chance. If we lock ourselves in a cabin, they can't shift us!"

"Good!"

"Follow me!"

NEXT
TUESDAY:

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Wharton & Co. at Grey-
friars.

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"Come up!" shouted Harry Wharton. "If we have to come down and fetch you, we'll give you a jolly good bumping!" Fisher T. Fish did not reply. A sudden and fearful change had come over his face as he stared into the darkness of the hold! (See Chapter 15.)

The horror the juniors had been feeling, their reluctance to go below, had been driven away by the excitement of the fierce struggle with the longshoremen. Wharton's idea was the only possible way of remaining on board; and the juniors had forgotten for the moment that strange sound below, and Coker's terror of the unknown Thing.

Wharton made a sudden rush to get below. Keeley made a forward movement, divining his intention; and Wharton hurled his boathook full at the ruffian's face. Keeley staggered back with a yell of agony, and the juniors rushed below. The longshoremen were after them a moment later; but in that moment the Greyfriars fellows had dashed into the professor's state-room, and closed and bolted the door.

"Open this door!" yelled Doggett.

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"Go and eat coke!"

"Hurray for us!" yelled Bob Cherry.

"Go and chop chips!"

The juniors yelled defiance at their foes through the fastened door.

Crash, crash!

"The table—quick!" exclaimed Wharton.

The table was rushed across to barricade the door, and the juniors held it in position, tight against the door. Crash, crash! But the door was stout enough to resist the blows of the cudgels.

The assault died away.

The angry voices of the longshoremen were heard outside, and presently Keeley joined them. The leader had been

half-stunned by the crash of the boathook in his face. He struck at the door with his fist.

"Let me in!" he said, in a voice hoarse with rage.

"Rats!"

"Will you open this door?"

"No!"

"Then we'll smash it in!"

"You'll find us ready for you!" said Harry Wharton resolutely. "The first man who gets his head in at that door will get it cracked!"

"We'll soon settle you, you young hounds!"

"Well, try it!"

Crash, crash, crash!

Keeley and his gang were evidently in deadly earnest. Their cudgels crashed again and again upon the door, and the door groaned and creaked.

Within, the juniors stood weapon in hand, prepared to strike as soon as the door yielded to their foes. They fully intended to resist to the very end. The swinging lamp, which had been left alight, lighted the state-room. There was no furniture save the little table and a chair with which to barricade the door. But Harry Wharton & Co. still hoped to be able to hold their own, for there was not sufficient room for all the gang to rush in at once when the door should open.

But the door did not open!

There was a sudden lull in the crashing blows from outside. Crash—crash—crash, and then, a sudden cessation!

A wild, fearful yell was heard, and a sound of desperate running, and then—silence!

Thud, thud!

It was the sound of men leaping from the deck of the steamer to the rock alongside.

Further off, the sound of boots grinding upon the wet sand—the sound of splashing in the water—gasping cries of terror from the distance.

Then silence!

Harry Wharton & Co. gazed at one another in silent horror. The enemy had fled.

Why?

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

The Thing Unseen!

SILENCE reigned upon the mysterious ship.

To the terrific din of a few moments before, the most deathly stillness had succeeded.

The last sound of the fleeing longshoreman had died away. Silence, stillness!

Why had the attack so suddenly ceased? Why had the raiders fled?

"Good heavens!" muttered Bob Cherry, wiping the perspiration from his brow. "What does it mean? Why did they go?"

Coker muttered hoarsely.

"They've seen it!"

"Seen what?"

"The Thing!"

"But—but there's nothing—there's nobody!" said Harry Wharton desperately.

"There's something—it wasn't fancy—I know there was something when I came down," said Coker huskily. "And—and they've seen it—perhaps plainer than I did!"

"But—but—"

"Something must have frightened them," said Johnny Bull, in a strained voice. "They wouldn't have run for nothing."

"Let's go out and see!" exclaimed Harry Wharton resolutely.

"No, no!"

"Keep the door shut!"

Wharton hesitated.

"Look here——" he began.

Nugent interposed between the Remove captain and the door.

"Keep back, you ass!" he said hoarsely. "That door's not going to be opened. It might get into here."

"It? What?"

"Whatever it is," said Nugent, with blanched cheeks. "Whatever it is that frightened that man we saw in the photograph—whatever it is that has destroyed the crew of this ship—whatever it is that's made Keeley and his gang run."

The juniors panted.

It seemed impossible to doubt it now.

There was something—something strange, mysterious, intangible—some hidden horror on board the derelict—something that had destroyed the crew, and was still on board!

Still on board!

The mere thought of that made cold shivers run through their limbs.

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The Thing, whatever it was, must have been on board all the time. They might have chanced upon it at any moment while they were searching the vessel!

What was it?

Before a human foe, even supposing that some man had remained hidden in the hold, the longshoremen would not have fled. There were six of them, all hardened ruffians, and in an excited and desperate mood. They would not have fled from a man, or from two or three men!

From what, then, had they fled?

What was it that had appeared in the corridor outside the state-room door, and put the rascals to sudden and panic-stricken flight?

It was impossible even to surmise.

But one thing was certain, that there was something—human or not, there was some fearful thing on board the derelict, and it was close at hand. Only the door of the state-room interposed between the juniors and the unseen, fearful enemy.

"We—we shall have to stop here!" muttered Coker, between his pallid lips. "We mustn't open that door! We—we can't go on deck again!"

Wharton shook his head.

"We'll stop here," he said.

Nugent held up his hand.

"Listen!" he muttered.

"Oh! Good heavens!"

With bated breath and throbbing hearts, the juniors listened.

From the deep silence came a sound—a slight, almost indefinable sound—the same that they had heard from the deck before the attack of the longshoremen.

A low, faint, dragging sound as of a soft but heavy body dragging itself along the floor.

It came closer to the door of the cabin, the juniors listening with freezing blood.

Closer and closer.

Then it stopped.

Silence!

The juniors' eyes met. They were silent, frozen with horror. The thing—the unknown, mysterious thing—was outside the state-room door.

Harry Wharton glanced at his companions in frozen silence.

There was a soft rubbing sound on the door itself—and it shook. Then the dragging sound again, passing away into silence.

Silence again, deep and still.

It was many minutes before the juniors moved or spoke. The horror of it was strong upon them; their faces were white; their breath came in short, sharp gasps.

But the deep silence remained unbroken.

Harry Wharton was the first to speak.

"You—you heard that?"

"Yes," muttered Bob Cherry.

"What was it?"

"Heaven knows!"

"It—it was something," muttered Coker. "It—it was the thing I—I saw! I don't know what it was—a—a moving shadow. But—but—but that's what has cleared out the crew of this ship, whatever it is."

"What can it be?"

There was no reply possible to that question. The juniors still listened with straining ears, but no sound came. Once or twice they fancied they heard the slow, dragging sound again, but it was only fancy.

"We—we can't stay here," Nugent muttered, between his trembling lips. "We've got to get out, you fellows."

"We can't—we mustn't open the door!"

"We can't stay here. I—I think I should go dotty if we had to stay here all night," said Nugent, huskily.

"We've got to," said Wharton, his own voice shaking.

"I wouldn't face that—that thing, whatever it is, for worlds. We daren't open the door."

Nugent nodded.

All the Greyfriars fellows were eager to escape from the state-room; to leave the mysterious ship; to get away from that mysterious, hidden horror which had been fatal to the crew of the *Aspasia*, and might be fatal to them in their turn.

But to open the door, and face the thing in the passage without—their hearts seemed to turn cold at the thought.

They could not do it. The bolted door was all that saved them from the eerie foe—it was their only protection. Indeed, who could tell if it would save them? The thing might be able to penetrate into the cabin.

Wharton shuddered as the thought came into his mind.

"We've got to stay here," he said. "It's lucky that it—it wasn't here when we came down. We might have found it in here."

The juniors shivered.

"We can sleep here—if we can sleep at all," said Johnny Bull. "I don't think I shall close my eyes to-night."

"Not likely!" said Coker.

Wharton went to the porthole and examined it. It was closed with glass, but when open there was no room for a body to pass. There was no escape for the juniors that way. Wharton secured the catch. He had a horrible feeling that the unknown foe might seek to attack them from without.

"No getting out that way," said Nugent.

"No."

"We've got to camp here," said Bob Cherry. "It's horrible. But—but there will be people coming down here in the morning, and then—"

"I wish it were daylight," said Johnny Bull, with a shudder.

"It will be in a few hours."

"But the—The Thing will be here if—if people come in the morning," said Coker, in a shaken voice. "They—they may run right into it, whatever it is."

"We shall have to warn them, somehow," said Wharton.

"I—I wish I knew what it was. It wouldn't be so bad if we knew."

Crowded in the state-room, the juniors spoke in muttering tones, and with continual glances towards the door. The silence remained unbroken. It was stuffy in the state-room with the porthole closed, but none of the juniors ventured to open it.

An hour passed; two hours. No sound. And now weariness was overpowering the juniors. Coker was the first to stretch himself upon the floor, with a pillow from the bunk, and fall asleep.

Johnny Bull and Bob Cherry followed his example. Nugent laid down in the bunk, and slept at last. Harry Wharton remained awake. He was sitting in the chair, nodding with weariness; but his nerves were too racked for him to sleep, for a long time. There was no need to keep watch, with the door bolted and the porthole closed. But for a long time he struggled with his drowsiness.

He slept at last, his head falling upon his breast.

How long he slept he did not know.

He awoke suddenly.

He awoke with a strange, low, soft sound in his ears—a sound that seemed to be within the cabin itself.

He sprang to his feet, his heart throbbing, his eyes starting. His gaze went to the door; it was still fast. There was no sound in the passage without. He gazed wildly round the cabin. Whence came that soft rubbing sound, as of a soft body upon glass? He turned to the porthole, and stood staring at it, with the blood freezing in his veins.

It was the Thing!

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

A Night of Terror.

THE Thing was there.

Outside, in the sky, the stars were glimmering; but the light burning inside the cabin made the night seem blackness itself, outside the glass.

The porthole was a black, circular patch, with a glimmer of light from the lamp upon the glass.

Outside, in the blackness, a blacker shadow moved.

It was there!

What it was, Wharton did not know; he could not see. The thickness of the glass, the darkness outside, prevented him from discerning what it was. But something was rubbing on the glass—rubbing and twisting as if seeking entrance.

The boy stood shuddering.

What was it?

Was it something that could pass through the porthole, if it were open; something that only that disc of glass kept out of the cabin?

If the glass broke—

He uttered a choked cry. Bob Cherry sat up, panting.

"Harry! What is it?"

Wharton could not reply; his tongue was cleaving to the roof of his mouth. He raised his hand and pointed to the porthole. Bob Cherry scrambled up.

"Oh! Good heavens!"

The other fellows awakened. They stood in a shuddering group, their starting eyes fixed upon the porthole. Outside, the black, shapeless shadow moved, and the soft rubbing continued. The Thing was seeking entrance.

The juniors could not speak; could not move. They knew that the porthole overlooked the big rock beside the steamer, but at a height above it which made it utterly impossible for any human being to reach the porthole from thence. And below was the smooth side of the ship, impossible even for a monkey to climb.

How had the thing reached the porthole outside? Could it be a being of this earth that was seeking entrance there?

"Oh! My God!" murmured Nugent.

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ONE
PENNY.

The dark shadow on the dark glass disappeared; the sound ceased. The Thing was gone; it had failed to enter. But if Wharton had not fastened the window—

It was impossible to think of sleep again that night.

The juniors stood, or moved restlessly about the cabin, waiting and praying for dawn.

It seemed centuries before a glimmer of silver lighted up the darkness without, and the porthole glass glimmered in the early rays of the sun.

It seemed to the imprisoned, wearied juniors that it was the face of a friend looking upon them, as the blessed daylight climbed the sky.

"Light! Thank Heaven!" muttered Wharton.

Day had come.

Since the attempt to enter at the closed porthole, there had been no sound—no sign of the mysterious foe of the derelict.

It had retired, perhaps, to some hidden recess of the ship, where doubtless it had been hidden at the time the juniors boarded the steamer and searched it. It was gone now, but for how long? It might be hidden in some recess of the hold, or it might be lurking in the passage outside, waiting for the prisoners of the state-room to show themselves now that the dawn had come.

The boys looked at one another with haggard faces.

They were silent, troubled, only feeling comforted as the sun rose higher, and the dawn of a summer's morning glimmered upon the sea and the rocks and the cliffs.

If the Thing had come to the window again they could have discerned it now, but it did not come.

"It—it may not show itself in the daylight," muttered Johnny Bull.

Harry Wharton nodded.

Strong-minded, and free from superstition as he was, he could hardly persuade himself that the hidden horror of the derelict was not a being of another world. For if it was of the earth, how had it reached the outside of the porthole, inaccessible to man or animal.

"We—we shall have to risk opening the door, and make a bolt for it," muttered Coker.

"I suppose so."

"Shall we go?" asked Bob Cherry.

The juniors hesitated.

They were eager to leave the ship—to escape from their fearful imprisonment. But to open the door, with the Unknown, perhaps, lurking in the alley-way without—

"Hold on a bit!" muttered Nugent.

The morning light strengthened. That the danger was real, there was no doubt; or else why had the longshoremen fled, abandoning their prize when it was within their grasp? And they had not returned—there was no sign of Keeley and his gang. Whatever it was that lurked in the shadows on board the derelict, it had terrified that lawless gang, and they had fled, not to return. And if the door were opened, how did the juniors know that they would have time to get clear?

Harry Wharton extinguished the lamp, which was burning low. The sunlight was strong in the cabin now. The air was thick and heavy; there had been little ventilation in the room all night, and five fellows had slept there, and the lamp had burned. Wharton crossed to the porthole and put his hand on the catch.

"Don't open it wide!" muttered Bob Cherry. "You—you don't know—the Thing may be near, and—and—"

Wharton opened it a couple of inches, and the juniors breathed gladly the whiff of fresh, keen air from the sea.

"We'd better think this out," said Harry quietly; "we can't stay here. All the fellows at Greyfriars know about us being here, and there will be some of them coming down to see us as soon as rising-bell goes. Rising-bell's going now at the school, as a matter of fact. Tom Brown or Linley, or some of them, are sure to come as soon as the school gates are opened."

"Most likely."

"They're sure to. We can't let them run into danger, because we're funking it ourselves. We've got to get out."

"But—but suppose it's in the passage!" faltered Nugent.

"Look here," said Wharton steadily; "it's not a ghost. Whatever it is, it's not that. We've got weapons, and we can fight, whatever the Thing is. We've got to make a rush for it."

Bob Cherry drew a deep breath.

"Well, I'm ready, if you are," he said.

"I—I say," muttered Coker, "hold on a bit. There's no hurry. Suppose—suppose it's some awful lunatic, or—or something of that sort?"

"We shall have to chance it."

"Yes; but wait a bit."

No one was anxious to open the door. The juniors

listened, but there was no sound from without. But that might only mean that the enemy was lying in cunning ambush.

Harry Wharton looked from the porthole. Below he could see the rock, and further on the sands and the great cliffs of the Shoulder. The tide was going out, and the bows of the grounded steamer were dry.

A sudden sound struck upon his ears. It was a clear whistle from the distance. Someone was coming along the sands, early as the hour was. Across the bay, in the fishing village, the fishermen were doubtless astir. But on the side of the bay where the billows broke in foam on a wilderness of rock and sand, all was solitary; the broken and dangerous waters at the base of the Shoulder were always solitary and deserted.

Harry Wharton looked out of the porthole, guessing that the new-comer was a fellow from Greyfriars, drawn out thus early by curiosity to see the derelict.

A Greyfriars cap came into view among the rocks. Harry Wharton swung the round glass of the porthole open as wide as he could. There was not room for Wharton to put his head out, but he waved his handkerchief through the opening to attract the attention of the new-comer.

"Give him a yell!" said Bob Cherry.

"Hallo!"

A shout came back. Another cap appeared by the first over the rocks; there were two of the Greyfriars fellows.

"Hallo!" came back the shout. "You fellows awake?"

"I guess they are!"

They were the voices of Tom Brown and Fisher T. Fish, of the Remove. Tom Brown came scrambling over the uneven rock towards the side of the steamer, and the American junior followed him. Harry Wharton shouted again.

"Hallo! Stop!"

Tom Brown looked round in surprise.

"Where are you?" he called out.

"Here! Stop! Don't go aboard!"

"Eh?"

"There's danger!"

Tom Brown looked up at the porthole. The rock sloped away from where he stood towards the sea, so that, if he had walked along the side of the ship towards the porthole, he would have had to descend, and the opening would have been far above his head. He stood where he was, and looked across the intervening space at the porthole, where he could now partly make out Harry Wharton's face.

"Danger!" he repeated, in amazement.

Fisher T. Fish chuckled.

"I guess they're pulling our leg!" he remarked. "I'm going aboard. I guess there ain't any danger."

And he ran to the highest part of the rock, and scrambled over the rail of the grounded steamer. Tom Brown hesitated.

"Make him come back!" yelled Wharton. "It's not safe aboard!"

"What's the matter?"

"Danger!"

"But what's the danger?"

"I—I— There's something there. Keep off!"

"Why don't you come on deck?"

"It's not safe."

Knock!

The juniors in the state-room swung round towards the door. There were footsteps outside, and Fisher T. Fish was knocking on the door.

"Here I am!" shouted Fish. "Open the door! What are you locked in for?"

Bob Cherry gasped.

"He's there! Then he hasn't seen it!"

"Open the door—quick!"

The juniors tore away the table from the door, dragged back the bolt, and threw the door open. Fisher T. Fish looked in upon them with a nod and a grin.

"I guess you can't fool me!" he remarked. "Jovver, get left?"

"You ass!" gasped Bob Cherry. "Got on deck—quick!"

"But—but what—"

The grin died away from Fish's face as he saw the white, stricken faces of the prisoners of the cabin. He looked at them in amazement and alarm, his jaw dropping.

Harry Wharton caught him by the arm, and rushed him back to the deck. Fisher T. Fish went unresistingly. The juniors followed from the state-room, and in a few seconds they were on the open deck again, with the fresh breeze blowing in their faces. Tom Brown had climbed over the rail, and he met them there, his look showing how astonished he was.

Harry Wharton & Co. looked about them with sharp, THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 239.

nervous glances, but there was no sign of the mysterious foe. Whatever it was, all sign of it had vanished with the daylight.

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.

Vanished.

HARRY WHARTON drew a deep, deep breath.

The horror of the long and terrible night was still upon him, and his heart was still beating painfully. But the worst of it was over; if danger came now, the way lay open for flight to the shore. Tom Brown and Fisher T. Fish eyed him in astonishment.

"What on earth's the matter here?" asked Tom Brown. "If you are not japing—and you certainly don't look like it—what's the matter with you?"

"I guess they're stuffing us," said Fisher T. Fish. "But they can't pile it on me."

"It's not a jape," said Harry Wharton. "I wouldn't go through a night like that again for a shipload of sovereigns! Thank goodness it's over!"

"But what's happened?"

"I—I think we'd better get ashore," said Nugent. "I should feel a bit safer on the rock there, anyway."

"But what for?" demanded Tom Brown. "What are you afraid of?"

"I'm not afraid," said Coker angrily. "But I'm not going to stay here. I'm going jolly well straight back to Greyfriars. I've had enough of this horrible place."

"But—but what—"

"I advise you fellows to clear off, too," said Coker, as he put his leg over the rail. "I'm fed up with it. Get off while you're safe."

And Coker tramped away swiftly over the big rock, and disappeared, and his footsteps died away on the sand of the shore.

Tom Brown stared after him blankly, and then looked at the Famous Four. He could not understand in the least what was the matter with Coker. The Fifth-Former was evidently in a state of utterly-shaken nerves, and that was all he could see.

"What is it?" exclaimed Brown. "What on earth has happened here? Is the giddy ship haunted?"

"I guess they've been japing Coker," said Fish.

"Is that it, Wharton?"

Harry Wharton shook his head.

The chums of the Remove hesitated to explain. Now that they stood in the fresh air and the sunlight, the events of the past night seemed like some horrible dream that was over. How could they expect the juniors to believe the strange story they had to tell? And yet it was no dream, and there was fearful danger on board the derelict. Otherwise, why had Keeley and his gang fled without returning?

"Well, what is it all about?" demanded Tom Brown impatiently. The New Zealand junior was puzzled and a little alarmed. "Have you been having nightmares?"

"It seems like one," said Harry Wharton, looking about him involuntarily. "I—I hardly know how to tell you. There's somebody—something—on board this ship—I don't know what, but—but—"

"Have you seen it?"

"No!"

"What is it?"

"I don't know."

"We've heard it," said Nugent, with a shudder.

"Heard it! What was it like?"

"It was moving about, just outside the door, and—and it made a sort of soft, dragging sound, like—like a cat creeping—"

Fisher T. Fish chuckled.

"I guess you had a bad dream," he said.

"We were awake, ass!"

"Oh, fellows have the nightmare sometimes, if they're awake, if they're in a state of nerves," said the American junior airily. "Pity I wasn't with you. I'd have bucked you up!"

The Famous Four glared at him.

They felt that it was the only reception they could expect for their strange story. The hidden horror had vanished; and a fellow who had not been through the terrible experience with them would not understand it, and would think it incredible. Their fearful adventure would be set down to nerves; to the effect of solitude and darkness upon their imaginations. It was inevitable.

"Tell us all about it," said Tom Brown quietly.

Wharton did so. He told of the attack of the longshoremen, and their sudden flight—for no explained cause. Proof of that part of the story, if it was needed, was close at hand; for one of the ruffians, in his hurry, had left his cap lying

on the deck where it had fallen in the struggle, and there were a couple of cudgels there too. Tom Brown and Fish looked at them curiously.

"And they never came back?" asked Brown.

"No!"

"And after that you heard the sounds you spoke of?"

"Yes."

"At the cabin door, and then at the porthole?"

"Yes," said Harry, with a shiver.

"Well, it's jolly queer," said the New Zealand junior. He hesitated. "I say, you know, I don't doubt your yarn for a moment; but—but are you sure you didn't dream it? You might have been half asleep, and heard the water swishing against the side. The tide makes queer sounds sometimes, you know, among these sunken rocks—"

"I guess that was it."

The Remove chums shook their heads.

"That was not it," said Harry Wharton steadily. "There is something—some fearful and unknown thing—hidden on the ship. I suppose it's hidden itself again now it's daylight. But if there wasn't something, why did Keeley and his gang run?"

"They might have been frightened by a shadow, you know, or—or perhaps they felt they were going too far."

"They wouldn't have gone without stealing the valuables in the cabins, if they hadn't been scared out of their wits," said Bob Cherry.

"Are there valuables there?"

"Yes. Every cabin is just as it was left. There's money in the pockets of some of the clothes, and a gold watch hanging up in one cabin over a bunk, and other things like that. The passengers and the crew took nothing away with them when they went. You can see the boats are all here."

"It's extraordinary how the steamer was deserted, without the boats going," said Tom Brown. "Blessed if I can make it out!"

"They saw the—the Thing!" said Nugent, shivering. "Either it killed them, or—or they were frightened into jumping overboard."

"Let's get out," said Johnny Bull uneasily.

"You fellows can go, if you're nervous," said Fisher T. Fish. "I'll stay here and keep watch for you; I'm all serene. If those longshore bounders come back, they'll find me in charge. I guess I'm not frightened because you chaps have had the nightmare."

"It wasn't nightmare!" yelled Bob Cherry. "It was real, whatever it was. Can't you believe us, you silly ass?"

Fisher T. Fish chuckled.

"Yep! I believe your word, but not your fancies and nightmares, Cherry, old man. And if there's a giddy mystery on the ship, I guess I want to find it out. I'm staying."

"So am I," said Tom Brown. "We've got permission from Mr. Quelch to stay with you, you know."

"If you fellows want to go, you can buzz, and we'll take care of the ship," said Fisher T. Fish. "We shall be all right, I guess."

Harry Wharton & Co. exchanged glances. They wanted nothing better than to get off the derelict; but to go and leave Tom Brown and Fish there was impossible. The hidden danger was as real as ever, though the two juniors, who had seen and heard nothing of it, did not believe in its reality.

"We're not going to leave you here," said Harry Wharton abruptly. "You don't understand—I tell you the Thing is on board—"

"It was only a nightmare, I guess."

"Fathead!"

"Well, if it's on board, let's hunt it out," said Fisher T. Fish, picking up one of the cudgels left by the longshoremen in their flight. "I'll take the lead, if you've still got a fit of nerves on. Follow the Star-spangled Banner!"

"Come back, you ass!"

"Nope! I'm going to search the ship!"

And Fisher T. Fish ran below before he could be stopped. The Famous Four looked worried and troubled. Tom Brown followed Fisher T. Fish.

"The idiots!" growled Bob Cherry. "If they happen upon it—"

"We can't let them face it alone!" muttered Wharton. "Come on!"

"But, I say—"

"It's no worse for us than for them. Come on."

"Oh, all right!"

And the Famous Four followed Brown and the American into the interior of the steamer. They descended with their weapons in their hands, and their eyes on the alert.

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 239.

A Grand, Long, Complete School Tale
of Harry Wharton & Co. next Tuesday:

THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER.

Face to Face!

UP and down through the derelict the juniors went—Tom Brown and the American junior leading the way. They were full of the excitement of exploring the deserted ship; and it was plain that they did not feel any alarm. Indeed, as Harry Wharton & Co. followed them, they began almost to think that the events of the night had been some fearful dream. For of the unknown foe there was no trace. The juniors explored the charthouse, and the forecastle, and the state-rooms. Nothing to alarm them was seen; and there was no track, no trace of a footprint; no sign of any foe, save the marks that had been left by Keeley and the gang of longshoremen.

"Nothing, so far!" grinned Fisher T. Fish. "I guess you chaps will have to admit now that you were dreaming. Jever get left?"

"There doesn't seem to be anything, really," said Tom Brown.

"We haven't found it yet," said Wharton.

"Perhaps it's gone ashore," suggested Fish, with a grin; "or vanished into thin air. It may have flown away. You see, it must be able to fly, or it couldn't have got at the cabin window in the way you described."

Tom Brown laughed.

The chums of the Remove turned red. In the daylight, and after the failure to find any trace of the hidden horror, and with the ridicule of the American junior poured upon the whole matter, it seemed to them that perhaps they had exaggerated the terrors of the night.

"It might have been a stray dog, left aboard by the crew," said Tom Brown. "That would account for what you heard in the ship."

"A dog couldn't have got at the porthole outside," said Nugent tartly.

"Well, no; but—"

"Besides, where is the dog now?" said Bob Cherry.

"Might have gone ashore, after the longshoremen."

"Oh, rot! There's something—"

"Well, we haven't found it," said Fisher T. Fish. "Of course, if there is something, we must find it. I should like to carry it back to Greyfriars, and keep it stuffed, in the study."

"Oh, shut up!"

The Yankee junior chuckled.

"Well, I'm going to search the hold now," he said. "If you chaps feel nervous, you can stay up here."

Wharton grasped his shoulder.

"You sha'n't go down there!" he exclaimed sharply.

"Why not?" demanded Fish.

"Because—because it's bound to be there, as it isn't in any other part of the ship."

"Well, I guess I want to find it, you know."

"Suppose it corners you in the hold—you can't get up that ladder very quickly—"

"I guess I sha'n't want to."

"Look here—"

"Oh, I'm going!"

"I tell you—"

"Rats!"

Fisher T. Fish jerked himself away. But Harry Wharton and Bob Cherry caught him by the arms and stopped him.

"You sha'n't go down there," said Harry sternly. "You can cackle as much as you like, but you sha'n't run into danger."

"I guess—"

"Cheese it! You're not going."

"Chuck him off the ship," said Nugent. "I've had enough of his funny ways. Take him up and pitch him over the rail!"

"Good egg!"

Fisher T. Fish struggled.

"Hold on!" he exclaimed. "Look here, I'm not in a blue funk, if you are. I guess I'm going down. Come on, Browney!"

"The steamer belongs to these four chaps," grinned Tom Brown. "They saved it. Must obey owners' orders."

"I guess not!"

Fisher T. Fish gave a sudden wrench, and tore himself loose, and before the chums of Greyfriars could grasp him again he made a leap into the open hatchway of the hold, and went down three or four steps at a time.

"Ow!"

He lost his footing on the steps, and rolled to the bottom.

"Groo! Oh!"

Fisher T. Fish sat up at the bottom of the steps in the semi-darkness below. The chums of the Remove looked down at him angrily.

"Come up!" shouted Harry Wharton. "If we have to come down and fetch you, we'll give you a jolly good bumping, you idiot!"

Fisher T. Fish did not reply.

A sudden and fearful change had come over his face.

He was staring into the darkness of the hold, and the juniors, as they looked down upon him, saw his face become white and fixed and terrible.

Bob Cherry choked.

"He sees it!"

"Good heavens! It's there!"

"Fish! Fish! Run for it! Come up—come up!"

The juniors could not see what Fisher T. Fish saw. He was looking into the recesses of the hold from where he sat paralysed at the bottom of the ladder. What was it that he saw in the midst of the cargo, in the deep dusk of the hold?

"Fish!"

"Come up!"

No reply.

The junior remained where he was, transfixed with terror.

"Good heavens!" muttered Tom Brown. "There must be something—What—"

Harry Wharton, clenching his teeth, stepped upon the ladder to descend. Bob Cherry grasped his arm.

"Harry! Stop—stop!"

"I must get him out!"

"But—Oh, Heaven!"

Wharton ran down. He did not stop to look about him; he grasped Fisher T. Fish by the collar, and lifted him by main force, and dragged him up. Fish did not make a movement to help himself; he was powerless with the fearful terror that gripped him, mind and body. With an exertion of strength he would not have been capable of at any other moment, Harry Wharton dragged the American junior out to safety.

There was a sound below!

A soft, gliding sound, as of a body dragging itself along—the sound the juniors had heard outside the state-room in the dead of the night.

Fisher T. Fish fell helplessly beside the panting Wharton. He had fainted.

"Run!" gasped Nugent.

The sound from below was louder. Wharton raised Fisher T. Fish in his arms. He felt that there was no time to get him to the deck above. He dragged him away along the alley-way, into the state-room the juniors had occupied the previous night. It was the nearest refuge. In a few seconds they were within, and Wharton let Fish roll to the floor, where he lay fainting, groaning faintly to himself. Wharton whirled round to the door. Bob Cherry had already slammed it, and was shooting the bolt.

"Where's Nugent?" shrieked Wharton.

He and Bob Cherry and Johnny Bull were in the cabin with Fish. But Frank Nugent was not to be seen. Wharton sprang to the door, but Bob Cherry jammed the bolt home, and dragged him back from it.

"Franky's all right!" he gasped.

"And Tom—"

"They're both all right; they've bolted."

Wharton panted.

"They're off the ship?"

"Yes."

Wharton ran to the porthole and looked out. On the rough, uneven rock beside the steamer he caught sight of Tom Brown and Frank Nugent. They were scrambling away from the steamer at top speed, evidently under the impression that the others were running, too. Harry Wharton shouted from the porthole.

"Franky! Tom Brown!"

The running juniors stopped, and looked back.

"Oh!" gasped Tom Brown. "They—they haven't come!"

"We're all right," shouted Wharton. "We're bolted in. Run for it!"

"Right! We'll bring help!" yelled back Nugent.

And they ran on.

They disappeared in another moment among the rocks, and their hurried footsteps died away in the distance along the wet sand.

Harry Wharton turned back from the porthole. Fisher T.

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Fish lay on the floor, his face white and strained, his eyes closed, his lips moving. Whatever it was that he had seen, it had overcome him with terror. Bob Cherry had jammed the table against the bolted door again, and was holding it there. Johnny Bull stood against the wall, leaning, his breast heaving as he panted.

Wharton held up his hand.

"Listen!"

It was the sound again!

Outside in the alley-way, soft and low, came that strange, dragging sound—the sound of the unseen foe as it moved—the foe that the American junior had seen, but which none of the others could even picture to their minds, save as something vague, formless, and terrible.

The sound stopped outside the door. The door creaked slightly, as though from a pressure without, and the juniors' hearts stood still. Then that gliding sound again, and silence.

"What—what can it be?" muttered Bob Cherry, through his chattering teeth. "Fish has seen it—can't he speak?"

He shook the American junior.

Fish opened his eyes dully, and shuddered. His gaze swept wildly round the cabin.

"Save me!" he gasped.

"Fish, old man—"

"Help! Is it there?"

"What was it?" cried Wharton.

Fish groaned.

"I—I saw it! There it was, coiled up— Oh, Heaven! And—and it's eyes—" He broke off with a scream of fear. "Look! It—it is there!"

He pointed to the window, shrieking.

The juniors swung round towards the porthole, Wharton realising, with a deadly grip at his heart, that it was open!

THE SIXTEENTH CHAPTER.

The Mysterious Enemy!

"THE snake!" shrieked the American junior. "There it is!"

The snake!

But the juniors did not need telling now.

A hideous head was groping outside the porthole, feeling for an entrance, as it had groped and felt the previous night, when in the darkness the imprisoned juniors had been unable to see it.

But they could see it now.

With starting eyes they looked at the fearful apparition.

The great reptile was coiled, doubtless, upon the rail above, and its head swept downwards to the porthole outside, as if instinct had warned it where to seek its victims.

The circular glass was slanting open, as Wharton had left it.

The head of the serpent came sliding, gliding in. It squeezed in the narrow aperture, and the sinuous neck behind seemed to crease and crumple with the pressure.

The juniors stood transfixed.

They knew what it was. The gigantic size of the reptile told them that. It was a boa-constrictor, and once to be enfolded in its deadly coils was death!

The hidden horror of the derelict was revealed at last!

Fisher T. Fish shrank back into a corner of the cabin, muttering with terror. The other juniors stood dumb.

Harry Wharton was the first to recover.

Death was staring him in the face. Instant action was needed, and it was fortunate for the Greyfriars juniors that Wharton recovered his presence of mind in time.

He caught up a cudgel, and leaped towards the porthole, his face white as death.

Bob Cherry gave a shriek.

"Harry! Look out!"

Wharton did not heed.

It was for life or death now, and life hung upon a chance. Before the snake could get its sinuous neck through the narrow opening it was necessary to act—and even then it might not be repelled.

The cudgel flashed through the air.

Crash!

The threatening head was jerked back, but the reptile could not wholly escape the blow. The eyes glittered horribly as the cudgel glanced on the hideous head. There was a horrible, hissing sound, and the head jerked out from the porthole.

It thrashed wildly against the ship without, evidently in pain.

Wharton did not shrink back. He dropped the cudgel, and grasped the porthole glass and closed it, and fastened the catch.

Then he reeled back, almost fainting.

He leaned against the wall, white as death, panting for breath.

"Good heavens!" he muttered incoherently. "Good heavens! It's—it's a boa-constrictor! If—if it gets in—"

"Look!" muttered Bob Cherry, with clicking teeth.

Outside the glass a head was groping round, seeking entrance again. The reptile seemed puzzled at finding no

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admittance where before there had been an opening. The hideous head glided to and fro, flattening over the outside of the glass, pressing and writhing.

The juniors watched it breathlessly.

If the glass should break!

Perhaps a heavy blow from the reptile's head might have broken it, but that did not come. The fearful creature was striving to find an entrance. For five minutes—five centuries of horror to the juniors watching within—the hideous head groped over the outside of the glass.

Then it was withdrawn.

The glass was clear again, and the juniors, imprisoned in the state-room, almost sobbed in their relief.

"It's gone!" muttered Bob Cherry.

"Oh, the—the horrible thing! Then—then that's what it was—that was what cleared the ship of the crew!" panted Johnny Bull. "Good heavens!"

"Listen!"

They heard the gliding sound in the passage again—the sound they understood now—of the huge reptile writhing along the floor. Again the door creaked under a pressure from without. Then the reptile glided on.

The juniors breathed again.

"That's it!" said Wharton, in a low, shaken voice.

"That's what Keeley and his gang saw; they must have seen it while they were hammering at the door here last night. No wonder they ran!"

"The rotters!" muttered Bob Cherry. "They might have sent help—"

Harry Wharton nodded.

"And that accounts for the face in the negative," he said.

"We know now why that man in the photograph was racing past the door here, when the camera snapped. That horrible thing was after him."

The juniors shuddered.

"But—but how did it get here?" gasped Johnny Bull.

Wharton shook his head.

"I dare say this ship has touched at a South American port, and it was taken on board there," he said. "Perhaps bringing it over here for some zoological collection. And it must have got loose somehow from where it was kept."

"I—I suppose that's it."

"It must be so. I don't see how it could get on the ship by accident. They must have been bringing it over, and it escaped from its cage."

The juniors shivered as they thought of that scene—of the fearful reptile loose upon the steamer amid unarmed men.

"What happened, then, we can only guess," said Wharton.

"The men may have jumped overboard to escape it; if the ship was in sight of land they may have taken to swimming to get away from the awful thing. Perhaps some of them shut themselves up in the cabins, but they would have to venture out for food, and then—"

"Oh, it's horrible!"

"We don't know how long that horrible brute has been roaming about the ship—days, weeks, or months. I believe they lie in a stuffed state without moving for weeks after a meal," said Harry. "That beast is hungry now, though. We don't know whether it's had a meal since it broke loose; if so—"

"Good heavens!"

"Heaven knows what its last meal was!" said Harry, with a shudder. "But it is hungry now; but—but it can't get at us."

"It—it's coming again!" muttered Fish.

Again the reptile was heard gliding along the passage outside. But this time it passed on without stopping, and the sound died away again.

Fish staggered to his feet.

"This—this is horrible!" he muttered. "We—we must get out of this. Oh, I—I wish I'd gone when you fellows wanted me to! Oh, dear!"

The boastful confidence of Fisher T. Fish was quite gone. He was in a state of terror such as the other fellows had not experienced even during the watches of the night, when the hidden horror was close at hand, but as yet unseen and unknown.

"We shall get help soon," said Harry Wharton. "I don't think the awful brute can get in here; and Nugent and Brown will send help."

"I—I wish they'd come."

Wharton looked through the glass of the porthole. The shore was silent and deserted. The hour was yet early.

"They can't be long," he said.

The Greyfriars juniors waited.

The strange, uncanny fears of the night were over. They knew now it was no unearthly foe they had to deal with—the horror of the unknown and unseen was past. But they knew, more clearly than before, the fearful danger they were

in. Only the cabin door, already weakened by the savage attack of the longshoremen, stood between them and an awful death. For once at close quarters with the boa-constrictor, their cudgels would not be of much avail in their defence.

Once close upon them the huge reptile would crush his victim in the powerful coils which no living thing could resist.

Again they heard the reptile gliding, and listened with beating hearts. Harry Wharton watched anxiously from the porthole. He gave a sudden shout of relief.

"Hurray!"

"They're coming?" gasped Bob Cherry.

"Yes. Hurray!"

The juniors crowded round the porthole. Nugent and Tom Brown had reappeared on the big rock, and with them were five or six of the sturdy fishermen of Pegg Bay. The fishermen carried axes, and one of them had a gun under his arm. Wharton opened the window.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" shouted Bob Cherry.

"This way!"

"You're all right?" called out Nugent.

"Yes; but look out for the snake!"

"Right!"

And the rescuers came cautiously close to the side of the grounded derelict.

THE SEVENTEENTH CHAPTER.

The Last of the Horror.

HARRY WHARTON & Co. listened anxiously, with beating hearts.

The rescuers were numerous, and they were armed, but the rescue was fraught with peril.

If any of the fishermen fell within the fearful coils of the boa-constrictor he would not be extricated living.

Where was the reptile?

The juniors had not heard it moving for some time. If it had retired to the hold the sound of footsteps would probably bring it forth again.

Wharton heard Nugent's voice on the rock.

"There it is!"

There were loud exclamations from the fishermen. Then suddenly a loud report.

Bang!

Then came a sound of a terrible struggling on the deck above—the thrashing of a gigantic reptile in agony.

Wharton shuddered.

"He's got it!" he muttered.

There was a scraping of footsteps on the rocks. Nugent and Brown and the Pegg fishermen were retreating. Wharton looked anxiously out.

"It's all right!" shouted Nugent. "He's got it in the head!"

"Not killed?"

"It's dying."

Harry Wharton and his comrades waited.

The sounds of the struggling reptile died away above, as the great coils stretched out in stillness.

But it was a quarter of an hour before the assailants ventured to clamber aboard the derelict, axe in hand, to finish the reptile.

"Come on!" said Harry Wharton.

He unfastened the door of the cabin. Fisher T. Fish gave a yell.

"Hold on! Keep that door shut!"

"Rats! We're going to lend a hand!"

"I guess it's not safe. I——"

"Bosh!"

Wharton dragged the door open, and rushed out, cudgel in hand. Bob Cherry and Johnny Bull followed him.

There were trampling footsteps and shouts on the deck. The Removites dashed upon the scene.

There, under the sunlight, in the midst of the crowd of fishermen, lay their terrible foe—the hidden horror of the derelict.

The gunshot wound had shattered the hideous head, and a blow from an axe had now severed it from the powerful body.

Yet still, dead as it was, the huge coil of the boa-constrictor contracted and writhed on the deck, the last convulsive movements dying slowly away.

As it lay dead the juniors could see the tremendous size of it—thirty feet long at the least, a mass of savage, sinuous strength.

No wonder Keeley and the longshoremen had fled in terror the previous night, when they had encountered that fearful monster in the passage below. No wonder the man, whose face was pictured in the negative in the professor's cabin, had fled from the terrible monster with that look of horror that the camera had so strangely preserved. Dead

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as the reptile was, the juniors could not look at it without shuddering.

"Dead!" said Bob Cherry, in a low voice. "Thank goodness!"

"Yes, sir," said one of the fishermen. "And 'ave you been on board all night with that awful thing, Master Wharton?"

Harry Wharton nodded.

"Yes," he said. "Thank you for coming to our help. I'll see that you fellows have a good whack in the salvage-money for what you've done."

"Yes, rather!" said Johnny Bull and Bob Cherry together.

"You can come on deck, Fisher!" called out Nugent. "It's dead!"

The Yankee junior came up from below. He was looking very white, and he shuddered at the sight of the fearful creature stretched out in death.

"Sure it's—it's dead?" he stammered.

"Look at it."

"I guess it was enough to scare a fellow," said Fish. "When I dropped down into the hold, it was coiled up there—and—and—groo! I'm glad you've finished it off, I guess. Of course, I wasn't afraid."

The juniors laughed. They could afford to laugh now.

"Of course not!" said Bob Cherry. "You were in the bluest funk I've ever seen a chap in. You're half afraid of the giddy snake now."

"I guess——"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "Here comes all Greyfriars."

It was not quite all Greyfriars; but a considerable crowd of fellows were coming down the shore to see the derelict. Coker had doubtless told his story at the school. He had not come back to the shore; but there were twenty fellows, at least, with Wingate, of the Sixth, at their head. The juniors waved to them.

Wingate was the first aboard. He jumped at the sight of the dead boa-constrictor.

"Great Scott! Was that it—what Coker has told us about?" he exclaimed.

"That's it, Wingate!"

"Good heavens!" exclaimed the captain of Greyfriars. "You might have been killed."

"We came jolly near it," said Harry Wharton. "I wouldn't go through another night like that for a hundred times the salvage of the *Aspasia*!"

"Same here," said Bob Cherry.

"And you were allowed to stay here because there was no danger!" said Wingate grimly. "You young asses! You'd better cut off to Greyfriars at once now. I'm going to arrange for someone to be put in charge of the derelict."

"It will want guarding," said Harry Wharton anxiously. "Keeley and a gang of longshoremen tried to get on board and turn us out last night."

Wingate started.

"My hat! And what did you do?"

"We put up a fight," said Bob Cherry, rubbing the bump on his head. "They had to go—they caught sight of the snake, though we didn't know it at the time. Then we were shut up in the cabin, with that fearful thing crawling about outside. Ugh!"

The Famous Four were glad enough to leave the derelict and return to the school. A crowd of Greyfriars fellows walked back with them, and they had to tell the story of their night's experiences; and when they arrived at Greyfriars they had to tell it over again to the Head. Dr. Locke listened very gravely.

"Heaven be praised that you have escaped safely!" he exclaimed, when they had told him. "Of course, this fearful danger could not have been foreseen. As for Keeley and those ruffians, I shall communicate with the police at once. They will be punished."

And Harry Wharton & Co. went to their breakfast.

The mystery of the derelict was never fully cleared up. That the boa-constrictor was the cause of the disappearance of the crew was certain; but the details of what had happened aboard the ill-fated steamer could never be known. They could be surmised—but that was all. And it was not a subject that Harry Wharton & Co. cared to think about.

It was some time before the effects of that fearful night on board the derelict wore off their minds. The salvage was realised in due course, and the shares that the Greyfriars juniors received compensated them somewhat for their terrible experience on board the derelict with the Hidden Horror.

THE END.

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THE FIRST CHAPTERS.

"BY FOUL MEANS OR FAIR, I'LL WIN."

Nathan Gore, millionaire and jewel-collector, clenched his hands furiously and raved like a madman on the deck of the liner Coronation. He had started specially from America in order to be present at the sale-room in London where the costly diamond, "The World's Wonder," was to be put up for auction. "A telegram for Mr. Gore," a voice rang out through the darkness. The American was told the message, and, as he listened, his face came over deathly pale, and he gave vent to a terrible oath. The message was: "Ferrers Lord purchased 'The World's Wonder' privately. No bidders. Price unknown." "I'll win yet," shrieked the man. "By foul means or fair, I'll win!"

"THE WORLD'S WONDER."

In the magnificent drawing-room of Ferrers Lord's house in Park Lane was assembled a varied collection of individuals. First of all there was the celebrated millionaire himself, and close to him sat Ching-Lung, a Chinaman, busily engaged in making paper butterflies. Hal Honour, the great engineer, was sipping tea, and Rupert Thurston yawned in a chair. "How much did you pay for that great diamond?" presently asked the latter. The millionaire smiled. "Money and fair words, Rupert," he replied. "By the way, you have not seen it yet?" The priceless gem passed from hand to hand. A thousand fires burned in its crystal heart; a thousand colours, ever changing, leaped from every facet. "I guess it would have been more money and less fair words if old Gore had turned up," remarked Ching-Lung sagely.

"I'LL TAKE THE CHALLENGE!"

The millionaire's house was wrapped in silence. A faint light shone from the drawing-room. Ching-Lung pushed open the door, then a cry broke from him. A man lay face downwards on the floor. There was a ghastly crimson stain on his collar. The man was Ferrers Lord. "Ching—the diamond!" came in a hoarse voice. Ching opened the drawer which Lord indicated, but there was no diamond there. But a message had been left behind: "To Ferrers Lord,—Knowing that you would not sell 'The World's Wonder,' I have taken it. Do your worst. I defy you. The stone is mine.—Nathan Gore." The millionaire rose to his feet. "I take the challenge, Ching," he said. "I'll hunt him down and win back my diamond." He begins the chase after the diamond thief, and rushes across Germany into Russia in a special train, taking with him a number of the crew of the Lord of the Deep, which vessel has been destroyed by Nathan Gore.

They are not able to overtake Gore, however, and when they reach the estate of Prince Miguel Ollenorff, the prince invites them to stay at the mansion. Ferrers Lord, thinking that Nathan Gore is in hiding there, accepts. After a stay of a few days, Nathan Gore escapes, and continues his mad flight through Russia to the Black Sea. Ferrers Lord follows, and they take a boat, on arriving, to pursue Gore, who has caught the packet steamer to Constantinople. The boat they hire is an old one, but Hal Honour puts it at its best speed, at a great risk of bursting the boilers, and they have hope of overhauling Gore at Constantinople.

(Now go on with the story.)

Gan Waga Causes The Boat To Roll!

Ching-Lung had not appeared. Barry went to look for him, and brought word back that he was still sleeping. The news was confirmed by Joe, who saw a pair of slippers protruding from the prince's bunk.

"Talk about laziness," said Barry, "Oi never heard the loike! Faith, Oi'd be ashamed to kape so quiet avin av Oi was dead!"

"It ain't like him, by hokey, it ain't!" said Prout.

"He's gen'rally a lot too wide awake."

"Mor'n wide awake," said Maddock, "kickin' wi' both feet."

"Looks like gettin' foggy," added Joe.

The sun was hazy, and a thin mist was wisping over the water. There was an unpleasant roll on that needed good sealegs. Barry, who was not much of a sailor, soon found a seat on a case of salt fish. He began to look a greenish-yellow colour, and they winked at each other.

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"Let's lave him alone a bit," whispered Joe. "He's going to get it."

They walked away, smoking their pipes. Gan glided below. Ching-Lung had just dressed, and was rolling a cigarette.

"What-hoo, Chingy!" grinned the Eskimo.

"What-ho, my fat son!" How goes it?"

"Ole Barry got de mally mares!" chuckled Gan.

"The who? The what?"

"Mally mares, Chingy! painises in his jum-stack! Hoo, hoo, hoo! He sits on de fish-boxes, and hold him waist-coats, and groans norrible, like dis: 'O-mi, o-mi! Stops de ships! I die! I deds! O-mi, o-mi, o-mi-i-i!' Hoo, hoo, hoo!"

Ching-Lung tittered.

"My blubber-biter, you mean mal de mer, not mally mares! It's French, and means seasickness. I say, Ganus, is he very bad?"

"Norful, Chingy."

"THE SPY OF THE SCHOOL!" In the "Gan" Library, 1d. Out on Thursday. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

"Then, my son, I have something here. Wait, and do not smile."

Ching-Lung opened a locker. There was a sheepskin coat in it belonging to one of the crew and a peaked cap. He put them on. He added a pair of sea-boots, a bushy, black beard from one of his amazing pockets, and seized a bucket and a piece of pipe.

"What do I look like, Gan?" he asked.

"Not knows, Chingy. Hoo, hoo, hoo! Who you are, hunk?"

"I amski Doctoroski Rubarbpillinski, my Gansniffski, medical manski to this vesseliski, and I amski going to cure old Baryoff O'Roonysnooff of seasicknessski. Twigski?"

"Hoo, hoo, hoo!" roared Gan. "Yo' talksos Russian a treats, Chingy!"

"Hushski! Not a wordwiski!"

"Yo' say whisky, Chingy!"

"Shut up! I go!"

His Highness rolled the soft part of a loaf into pills, and sent Gan to see whether he could find a megaphone. Gan brought back a huge speaking-trumpet.

"Fine!" grinned Ching-Lung. "Let me whisper! Dost hear?"

"Hoo, hoo, hoo!" laughed Gan.

Ching-Lung went on deck. He ran into Prout, Joe, and Maddock, who were all giggling, for they were sharers in the plot, and Gan had warned them. Poor Barry was abaft the funnel, but he was not quite so ill as they imagined—in fact, he was recovering rapidly; but still, he was very sorry for himself.

His weary voice reached them in lamentation:

"Sorra me, sorra me! Sure, ut's dooin' Oi am at last! Oh, whoy, whoy did Oi iver thrust meself to cross the ragin' billers on anythin' barrin' a bridge? Murther! Is ut insoide me insoide is, or is ut outsoide? Let me lay down me toired head and pay in me chips!"

Groans deep and piteous followed. Ching-Lung hurried towards the sufferer.

"Myski poorsniff manoski," he said, looking tenderly at Barry.

"Go away, yez bearded ruffian!" howled Barry. "Oi don't want yez sneezin' on me!"

"Seasicksniff—eh?" asked Ching-Lung.

"None of yer sniffs!" yelled the Irishman. "Go and commit suicide, or singo yer whiskers!"

"Inski painovitch?" murmured Ching-Lung.

"Go and doie, yez Rooshian atrocity," said Barry savagely, "afore Oi gives yez painovitch wid me fist!"

Barry held his waistcoat and moaned.

"Me doctor. Not speak moochski Englishooski," said Ching-Lung. "Cure you queek."

He put the funnel of the huge brass speaking-trumpet over Barry's watch-pocket, and listened at the other end.

"Oneski, twoski, threeski, fourski, fiveski, sixski," he counted, looking at his watch. "Oh, myski pooroffshi man!"

"W-what is—is ut?" asked Barry.

The doctor shook his head sadly.

"Us ut sarious, docthor?"

"Fatalski, unless you recover," said the doctor.

"Murther—murther—murther!"

Prout, Maddock, and Joe rushed forward at Barry's wail, and began to inquire what was wrong.

"Oi'm doicin'—Oi'm doicin'!" groaned Barry. "Oi've got onskitwoskithreeskifourski! Ut's fatal! Ax the docthor!"

"No, doctor, no!" cried Joe wildly.

"Say it's a mistake!" sobbed Maddock.

"Don't leave us—don't, Barry!" shrieked Prout. "By hokey, don't, oh, don't! Is there no hope?"

"Noneski," said the doctor.

The three men covered their eyes with their coatsleeves and wept.

"How can we spare him, so young and lovely?" wailed Joe. "Can't I die instead? Are you in pain?"

"Ixpoirin'!"

"Come!" moaned Joe. "You feel the motion wust just ere? Come yonder, my poor, poor friend, and let the fresh breeze play on your paling brow! Let me lead you!"

"Lave me alone!"

"Come, darling, come!" persisted Joe. "Help me, Ben!"

They put their arms round Barry and persuaded him to take a couple of pills. Then they led him across the deck, and placed him tenderly on another case.

"What are your last words?" asked Prout, opening a pocket-book.

"Are you easier?" inquired Joe.

Barry was not easier. Either the deck or the case, or both, was wobbling and rolling in a fashion that would have upset a man-of-warman. Barry clung desperately to Joe, and glared about him in agony.

"Are you worse?"

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"Oi'm goin'!" said Barry feebly. "Farewell!"

"But yer last words!"

Barry's lips moved, and Prout bent to catch the whisper.

"What does he say?"

"Somethin' about pancakes!" sobbed Prout.

"You are a loiar!" said Barry. "Oi said, give me yer hands to shake. Not Prout's, nayther, for he niver washes. Arrah, Oi doie! Farewell, farewell! Raise me just wance, that Oi may gaze on the blue say. In the wurds of the poet:

"Wan last, long, lingerin' luk
Afore Oi take me hook."

The case was rising, falling, and rolling, though the boat was fairly steady. They lifted Barry. His knees could hardly support him.

"Kiss me," he said—"all but him wid the whiskers!"

They kissed him.

"Let me thry and stand wan minute— Oh, Oi cannot! Good-boie—good-boie!"

He tottered. Ching-Lung made a wild attempt to catch him, but Maddock was in the way. Barry dropped with all his weight on the case. There was a sound of rending and splintering wood, followed by hideous howls. Barry jumped up and burst into a roar of laughter.

Out of the ruins crawled the wobegone form of Gan-Waga, who had been causing the locker to roll.

"How do you faal, Neptchune?" asked Barry. "Are yez saysick?"

Gan got up and felt himself. Then, with one deep moan of anguish, he went to find the Elliman's.

The Fog—Ferrers Lord Takes the Risk of an Explosion— Queer Fuel—A Shipwreck, a Human Sandwich, and a Night Alarm.

The mist came down heavily, but the speed was not slackened. The Black Sea, though not exactly a German Ocean or an English Channel, floats a great deal of small shipping; but the millionaire took a slightly more westerly crossing, and kept the "scrap-iron" engines busy.

He was very restless, but he took no one into his confidence. He seldom left the deck, and for hours his tall figure loomed through the fog as he paced the rusty bridge. Rupert and Ching-Lung were quite as eager as himself for the chase to end. They were heartily tired of it. There was little amusement to be got out of wretched railways, dirty hotels, canal-boats and tramp-steamers, but there was plenty of discomfort. It was not reasonable that men who had pierced the icebelt of the north, explored the mysterious realms beneath the sea, and crossed trackless Tibet could be satisfied with such a journey.

Perhaps the millionaire understood; perhaps this was why he was urging them on. And yet he was playing with chance, it seemed, in making direct for the Bosphorus. A few gold roubles squeezed into the hand of the shipping-clerk at Potio had elicited the fact that Nathan Gore had sailed for Constantinople under an assumed name. The Yankee's personality was so distinct that the Paul Howard Jones who had booked for the city over which the Sultan rules was certainly Nathan Gore.

But the packet touched at Sinope. Would the cunning Yankee disembark there?

Ching-Lung mentioned his idea to Rupert, and Rupert climbed the greasy ladder and spoke to Ferrers Lord.

"I did not forget that," answered the millionaire.

"Of course not, Lord—you never forget. Still, it strikes me as very probable."

"Let us consider it. He has got a good start. The packet stays several hours at Sinope. We are keeping well to the north. If he leaves the boat at Sinope he would have to go to Smyrna, and the line is frightful. You know what Turkish officials are. You know that the country between Sinope and Smyrna is in a ferment, and that fighting is going on between the soldiers and peasants. Probably portions of the railway are destroyed."

"I did not know that, old chap."

"I learned it at Potio, and he must have learned it. I went to the Turkish Embassy, and was advised not to ask for a passport, as the Porte could not be responsible for our safety. They had refused one to an American gentleman already. That was our friend the enemy. The packet belongs to Turkey, and Sinope is full of fugitives. She will land arms and embark fugitives. All this will take time. This fog, too, will delay her. You see, our chances are good."

Thurston nodded. As was always the way, Ferrers Lord had thought of everything. There were four thousand cases of caviare on board, valued at thousands of pounds. All were going into the furnaces, if need be, to carry them the

seven hundred miles that lay between the Trans-Caucasian and Turkish port.

The fog grew denser. There was no accident in the engine-room. The stokers once seemed on the point of mutiny, for they did not like to see the safety-valve weights jumping up and down. Hal Honour mildly showed them the butt of a revolver and a handful of gold roubles.

They chose the roubles. There was something about the handsome, silent giant that commanded obedience. He came up from the hot regions below, wiping the perspiration from his forehead.

"Well, Honour," said the millionaire, "how much more steam can we stand?"

"Another pound pressure would blow our old tin kettles to ribbons!"

"Put on fifteen ounces, then."

"And the odd three-quarters of an ounce?"

"If you like."

Hal Honour laughed, filled his great lungs, and vanished to obey. Barry, Prout, and the others had heard.

"That's mighty cheerin'!" said Barry. "Oi'm goin' below."

"What for?" asked Joe.

"Troth," answered Barry, "nade yez ax? Ut ain't the aisiest thing in the wurld to weigh out a quarther of an ounce of sthame! And who's more ginorous than Mither Honour? He kapes nothin'—not avin his whiskers, for he shaves rig'lar. Oi'll bet he'll give us too much, and thin we'll have to take a journey. Oi niver shtart on a journey widout a clane collar, a pair of socks, and a toothbrush. Oi'm off to pack 'em."

Gan paled, and there was loud laughter when they saw him with a lifebelt round his waist. Gan was preparing for emergencies.

"What do safestest place on ship dat goin' blows up?" he asked.

"The dog-watch ain't bad," said Maddock seriously.

"If yer was on the chains yer couldn't be blowed far," suggested Prout.

"Or the flyin'-studs'ls, Gan," said Joe.

"Yez are all wrong," said Barry. "The only safe place is ashore. Oi was wance in a ship that blew up. Ut was a woid and shtormy night, the billers mountains hoigh, and the vissil lay on her bame-inds, rocked in the cradle of the dape. Suddenly the brokers come aboard—"

"Brokers, Irish," corrected Prout.

"Brokers, Oi said, yez idjit, and brokers Oi shtick to! Sure, wasn't Oi there? Mo own uncle was skipper. And wasn't they the brokers—put in becasse we cudn't pay the dock-dues? Och! yez silly interruption has made me forgit the rist of the thrillin' sthory!"

"Hooray! Hooray!" cried three voices. "That's a bit of joy."

"Niver moind," said Barry; and he went off to pack his bag, chanting:

"There was wance an ould man in a fog,
Who throd on the tail of a dog,
Sez the dog, wid a laugh:
'Sure, Oi'll sample his calf,
Wid a twin-barrelled dynamite slog!'"

In spite of the fog, it was hot and stuffy. Prout was called to the wheel to take the place of the red-capped Caucasian who had been steering. There was little hope of reaching Constantinople under seventy or eighty hours. The ship smelled abominably of salt-fish and "green" leather. Ching-Lung, always inquisitive, summoned his faithful Gan on a voyage of discovery. Just then the first case of caviare was flung into the furnace.

Ching-Lung obtained a lantern and plunged into the dark recesses of the hold. The cases and bales were neatly packed and wrapped up, leaving narrow passages between. Smells and dust predominated. They found a square of neatly-planed mahogany-boards, on which was perched a savage-looking tom-cat, who spat and snarled at them ferociously. Gan tried to make peace with him, and actually stroked him. He was sorry, for the cat planted every claw it had in his arm, and fled with a weird, defiant howl.

"That's what one gets for being kind," grinned Ching-Lung.

"I nots going to to be kinds nebber no more," sighed Gan.

"I done wid him."

All the same, Gan looked round for something to present that cat with, in the shape of a missile. He was not successful.

Ching-Lung thoughtfully lifted one of the planks, and measured it with his eye.

"Gan," he said, "you can make more things out of wood than wooden-legs."

"Dat so, Chingy."

"Come away, my son—come away," said the prince.

"Likes to biff that pussy first, Chingy."

"Let him alone, oil-tub. Let him go his own evil way."

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A Grand, Long, Complete School Tale
of Harry Wharton & Co. next Tuesday:

EVERY
TUESDAY,

The "Magnet"
LIBRARY.

ONE
PENNY.

The night falleth fast, and it is time to eat. I know where there's—"

"Cangles, Chingy?" cried Gan, his eyes sparkling.

"No, my own skeleton. A tin of sardines, a box of arrow-root-biscuits, and a tin of peaches!"

"Let's me chase you, Chingy!" chuckled Gan. "I'm on dem likes a bricksand of thous!"

"A thousand of bricks, please. I'm always correcting you. Chase me, then!"

They devoured the spoil together, and uninterrupted, behind a sheet of sailcloth. Prout came to bed first, after a short spell at the wheel. He got into his bunk with his boots on. Joe followed, and then Barry. Maddock was on duty. Ching-Lung laid his finger on his lips, and winked at Gan.

"Not a word!" he whispered.

"Och!" came the voice of Barry. "Oi cud slape for a month! Oi am weary and ill at aise. There is no joy in such a loife—is there, Joe?"

"Nix!" growled Joe.

"Therefore," said Barry, dropping his boots with a couple of thuds, "Oi bunk into me bunk. The man who disthurbes me rist this noight will doie a swift and terrible dith!"

"Ear, ear!" said Joe. "I'm dog-tired, too. If Tom starts snorin', I'll slaughter him."

"And Oi'll hilp yez to do the dade."

Thud! Thud! Joe's boots fell with a crash that shook the smoky, swinging lamp.

"Wid the injines on the pint of bustin'," went on Barry, with a catch in his voice, "Oi lay me down to slape, Joe."

"Good job, too!" said Joe.

"Whisht, wisht! Lay yer swate lips to moine. We have lived and scrapped together, Joe, and owed aich other money. Afore the swate morn smiles over the say, we might be blowed to rags. As the poem warbles:

"There came a burrst of thunder sound,
The boy—ooh, where was he?
Ax of the winds that far around
Wid fragments strewed the say!"

"Oi may be that bhoy," added Barry, "though, bedad, Oi'd niver be chump enough to sit scorchin' me Sunday trousers on a burnin' deck."

"The flames rolled on; he would not go—"

"Fire, fire!" whispered Ching-Lung, and Gan grinned from ear to ear.

"Widout his father's wurrd,
The father, he had done a scoot,
And so he was not heard."

"Ut's a swate poem, Joe, but ut ain't sinse. Well, good-noight, and just wan lingerin' kiss."

"Go and fry your features, ass!" said Joe rudely.

"Troth," said Barry, "they'd fry fast enough av I got 'em near that rid nose of yourn."

Joe rolled into his sleeping-place. Barry's bunk was at the top, and in clambering up he trod on Prout. Prout did not quite waken, but he drove out an angry fiat that rolled Barry down with a crash.

"Av ut wasn't for me koind heart!" growled Barry, "and that Oi'm too marciful to rob a tired man of the rist, Oi'd shake him till his tathe fill out."

"You daren't," said Joe. "Tom 'ud eat you wi' one bite."

Barry crawled up again. The lamp flickered low, and tune-ful snores arose.

"Come," whispered Ching-Lung.

They crept away. Ching-Lung despatched Gan to the engine-room to see if he could borrow a screwdriver and some screws, or discover where the carpenter's chest was to be found.

Gan was usually successful, and he did not fail on this occasion. Ching-Lung had a pile of boards in his arms when he came back.

"I want some oil, Gan," he whispered, "and don't whisper a yell. Taisez, taissez!"

"Who him? Who taysay?"

"It's French for don't make a row, old knowledge-box. Get that oil!"

The snores in three different keys assured Ching-Lung that the three men were wrapped in heavy slumber. Ching-Lung bored holes in the boards at the ends, and in the middle. The dying lamp shed a weak and ghostly light as he piled up a few lockers.

"Here de oilses, Chingy. I not drinks none."

"S-sh! Hold this!"

Ching-Lung oiled the screws, while the grinning Gan steadied the board upright. It reached from the top of the upper bunk to the ground. The screws were driven home

without a sound, and a third of the bunkers were closed up. Two more boards imprisoned the sleepers completely, and a few holes were drilled for ventilation.

"Quick, Gan," whispered the prince. "Some buckets of water and some rope."

Gan made two journeys. The filled buckets were flung over the lamp-hooks, and the ropes carried through the door. Gan did not understand, but he grinned in anticipation.

"I'll soon be back," said Ching-Lung. "I'm only going to tell them to take no notice if there's a row. Hang it!"

"What wrongs, Chingy?"

"I've about brained myself. I've— Why— Ha, ha, ha! Take away those buckets."

Ching-Lung began to chuckle. He had run against the nozzle of the 'tween-deck fire hose. There was an emergency hand-pump attached to it.

"Uncoil that, Gan," he said. "You can leave the buckets. A bit of washing will do this shanty good."

"But what him all about, Chingy?"

"My son," said the prince, "we are going to explode the boilers."

"Den I goin' oberboards?"

"Don't be frightened, Ganus. You'll be all right. I'll look after you."

Ferrers Lord and Rupert had not left the deck. There was fog below, fog above, fog everywhere. Suddenly the siren began to scream in answer to another. The noise was deafening, for the fog seemed to multiply the sound a thousandfold. Ching-Lung thought he might as well save himself a journey. The clamour of the engines would prevent the men in the engine-room from hearing anything, and there was little chance of those on deck being alarmed by the forthcoming disturbance. Barry, Prout, and Joe were the only ones sleeping below.

"Gan," he said, "start pumping, and let the water run away till you get a good force."

"Yes, Ching," said the obedient Gan.

The pump clanked softly. Ching-Lung hoisted up the buckets, and stood on the ropes. Then, taking the nozzle in his left hand, he jumped clear.

Down came the buckets with a terrific crash and a fierce splashing of water.

"Bump 'em up and down, Gan, like mad," said Ching-Lung. "I'm going to turn on the fluid. You can do it with one hand, and pump with t'other. Make old Harry's own row. Now, go!"

"Hilp! We've bust up!" howled the muffled voice of Barry.

Bang! rattle! bang! clank! clattered the buckets, and then Ching-Lung turned the water on the boards. All the men were awake, yelling, kicking, and hammering. The water squirted through the holes, the buckets bumped, and altogether it was the most realistic idea of a shipwreck that could be imagined.

"Time!" said Ching-Lung. "They've stopped blowing the old siren. They'll hear us if we aren't steady."

A silence fell, as much of a silence as can ever fall on a moving steamer. They leaned forward to listen.

"Barry," said a voice like unto the voice of Prout, "are you alive?"

"No, Tom, bedad Oi ain't. Are yez aloive, Joe?"

Been dead minutes," answered the muffled accents of the carpenter.

There was another hush. It was broken by Barry.

"We must have turned roight over," he said, "and been crushed flat. Sure the soide of the ship is jammed up agin me. Ain't ut a funny faalin' to be a corrpse? Whisht!" he added softly. "Ut's a thrick, and the Chinee is in ut!"

"I knowed the b'ilers 'ud bust!" groaned Prout.

"Avast there, me hearties!" said Ching-Lung, in gruff, unearthly tones.

"Oo—er! Er—er—yis?" gasped Barry.

"How many of you inside?"

"T-three, sor."

"Only three! Shiver my locker!" roared Ching-Lung.

"What's the good of sending me three?"

Prout and Joe shivered.

"Plaze, sor," said Barry, "m-may Oi—Oi ax for yer carrd?"

"Davy Jones!" roared Ching-Lung.

"Bless me," said Barry, more cheerfully, "yez must be a relation of moine! Nora McGoodler, me uncle's mother-in-law's second niece boi marriage, run away wid a Davy Jones. He was a swape by thrade, and a hopper by perfession, havin' only wan lig. Me heart has ofthen bled for yez, Davy, for Oi knowed the gal. Will yez koindly git the sardane-opener, and lit us out?"

A door opened somewhere, and a gleam of light shot

through the cabin. Barry had his eye glued to one of the holes. Ching-Lung was standing there, holding his sides.

"I'll have you out in a minute!" thundered the prince.

"Oi think yez will, yez blayguard!" thought Barry.

He got his feet against the board, and his back against the bulkhead. In such a position a strong man can exert his greatest strength, and Barry was strong. The board was torn to ribbons, and before Ching-Lung could fly, Barry's arms were round his neck.

"Oi've captured Davy Jones, lads!" he shouted. "Come along wid yez, and larrup him. Many a good sayman the ould thafe has had. Troth, and I've found a rope. Come along, come along!"

They bounded out. Ching-Lung had fallen into a bucket, and was wedged in it, his toes almost touching his face. The light was weak, and the fog was strong; but they knew who it was, though they pretended otherwise: Gan, the faithless, had fled.

"Davy Jones, you murderer, take that!" growled Prout.

"And that!" said Joe.

"And that, bedad!" said Barry.

Down came the ropes' ends across Ching-Lung's shoulders. He could not get out of the bucket, but he turned over, and tried to walk away on his hands. Prout raised a piece of board, and brought it down on the bucket. It made the bucket tighter, and brought Ching-Lung's nose in very painful contact with the floor.

"Sure," said Barry, peering at the bucket, "Oi've often wondhered what Davy Jones was loike, but Oi nivir thought until this blissid minute that he was a koind of shellfish."

Ching-Lung never said a word, but he thought many things. He was in the enemy's camp.

"Let's throw him overboard," said Joe.

"Board?" said Prout. "Board? Yes, by hokey, that's it!"

Barry sat down on the bucket, and produced his pipe. He had gone to bed almost fully dressed. Prout had found the screwdriver, and was taking out the screws.

"Tie Davy's hands," he said, looking over his shoulder, "and don't forget his feet."

They turned Ching-Lung up again. Resistance was no good. His hands and feet seemed to ask to be tied. Prout took down the boards, and clutched the bucket.

"Pull, Joe!"

They tugged, and Ching-Lung shot out like a ginger-beer cork. He made frantic efforts to escape, but Joe clung to his wrists, and Barry to his ankles. They placed him on one board, and laid the other on top of him. And then they began to wind up the ropes. Strand after strand was wound round, and they made security doubly sure by fastening the boards longways as well.

Ching-Lung, when they had finished, was a human sandwich. Only his head and pigtail were visible.

"Saze him!" grinned Barry.

They bore him on deck, and stuck him up, lashing him firmly to the rail.

"Bedad!" said Barry, "where did Oi see an ould hand-bell?"

"In the kennel they call a charthouse," answered Joe. "I seed it."

Joe went off, and Barry, remarking that "Davy Jones moight wake the baby av he hollered," gagged the prisoner. Ching did not intend to yell. He would not have been found like that for fifty pounds. He was relying upon Gan-Waga to rescue him, unless he could wriggle free.

He shuddered. They were tying something to his pigtail—a bell. Ching-Lung groaned. He could not wriggle much without ringing it.

"Good-night, Davy!" said Prout.

"Good-noight, sor—good-noight!" added Barry.

Joe merely winked as he unrolled a reel of thread.

"Post yerselves about," whispered Barry, "and luk out for the Eskimo!"

"Right!" said Joe. "Mind the cotton, dear boy."

Prout mounted guard aft, making it impossible for Gan-Waga to come to the rescue, unless he could reach the deck by squeezing through a porthole, or flying through a grating. Barry and Joe sat chuckling at the foot of the steps.

"Sthroke up wid the liquid notes of joy, Joey!" grinned the Irishman. "Let her just rip!"

Joe pulled the thread taut, and let it go with a will.

Clang! clang! clang! clang!

The sound was startling, galvanising, terrible on such a night, and going at such a pace.

"Full speed astern!" rang the voice of Ferrers Lord.

"Quick, Rupert! We'll be into her!"

The deceptive fog was answerable for it. The notes seemed to come from another vessel. They had not bargained for this. In two seconds they were wrapped in their damp blankets, snoring like pigs, and shivering like leaves.

(To be continued next week.)

My Readers' Page.



**OUR GRAND NEW
WEEKLY FEATURE
ON PAGE 28 AND
PAGES III. AND IV.
OF THE COVER.
SHOW YOUR FRIENDS
THIS COPY.**

NEXT WEEK'S STORY "THE TUCKSHOP RAIDERS!"

From the above title my readers will be able to gain a hint of what Frank Richards' long complete tale of Harry Wharton & Co. at Greyfriars is about. A great midnight raid on Mrs. Mumble's tuckshop is part of a cunning plot to bring about the downfall of Harry Wharton, but the consequences of this reckless act prove to be more serious than was expected by

"THE TUCKSHOP RAIDERS!"

A NOTE FROM EASTBOURNE.

This week I have room to publish a short letter from a reader in Eastbourne, whose initials are A. M. H. This reader, although not a very old one, has evidently seen enough of THE MAGNET and its companion paper "The Gem Library" to appreciate them at their own value. This is what my Eastbourne reader says:

"Eastbourne.

"Dear Editor.—I am only quite a new reader. The first tale I read in THE MAGNET was the double number of last Christmas. A little while before a friend of mine showed me a copy of THE MAGNET, and now it is my weekly paper.

"Last week, having seen so many letters in your paper, I thought I would try 'The Gem,' and now I am going to take that weekly as well. In this town there are a great number of readers, and every week the shop I get my paper at sells all the copies out. I am sure this is because the tales are not of the 'blood and thunder' type like so many tales are. I think the three-page comic supplement is grand.

Wishing your paper every success, I remain, yours truly,
A. M. H."

Many thanks for your note, A. M. H. I know I have always had many loyal chums in the popular seaside town where you live, and I am glad indeed to hear that the good old MAGNET and "Gem," are now more popular than ever.

REPLIES IN BRIEF.

J. R. Doran (Nr. Preston).—Thank you for your letter. I cannot tell from your description if the coin you possess is a Spade Guinea or not, though I am afraid it is not. If it is it should tally exactly with the following description: Metal, gold; dates, between 1787-1799 (inclusive); edges milled, on the obverse side, a Laureate bust, and the inscription Georgius III. Dei Gratia; on the reverse side, arms in a square, garnished shield, crowned, with the type M.B.F.ET. H. REX F.D.B. ET. L.D.S.R.I.A. T. ET. E. If your coin tallies exactly with the above it is worth between £1 5s. and £2. This, of course, depends upon the condition the coin is in. If it does not agree with this description, I cannot tell you what it is without seeing it. An article on the subject of Coin Collecting will be appearing on the Chat Page before long.

P. Williams (Swansea).—Thank you for your letter. You may become apprenticed to an engineer by going to some marine engine works, and stating the facts of your case. If they are in need of apprentices they may take you on, when you will probably have to pay a small premium. This is, however, usually arranged in wages, so that for the first year or so you are working without being paid, and the second at half-rate, and so on, until the amount of your premium has been paid off.

Bob H. C. (Barrow).—Thanks for letter and idea, which is already under consideration.

E. K. (Edge Hill).—Thank you for your letter. You may hear more of the characters you mention at some future date. I am sorry your request for Back Numbers cannot now be inserted, as this column has been closed down.

S. Russell, and A. Sykes (Leeds).—Thanks for your interesting letter. You will probably hear more of Dalton Hawke at some future date.

"Black Diamond."—Was pleased to receive your very interesting letter and account of how you first became a reader THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 239.

A Grand, Long, Complete School Tale
of Harry Wharton & Co. next Tuesday:

"THE TUCKSHOP RAIDERS!"

Please order your copy of "The Magnet"
Library in advance.

of "The Magnet" Library. I know I can rely on your further help in increasing the popularity of the two companion papers.

Miss M. Holford (Dover).—Thank you for your interesting letter. I am sorry I cannot insert your request now as the Back Numbers Column is closed, as you may have noticed.

FURTHER HINTS TO STAMP COLLECTORS.

Many ardent stamp-collectors have far from accurate ideas as to the actual value of their collections, and were they to have their albums valued by an expert, they would be surprised and in many cases disappointed. A good deal of misapprehension exists as to the exact meaning of the term "catalogue value."

In books and articles on this hobby this term is often used, yet few know exactly what it means. It means the value that has been assigned to a stamp by a firm of leading dealers, such as Gibbons, or one of the other large businesses. Even if you possess a stamp that is catalogued at, say, £1, it does not always follow that you can sell that stamp for that amount. Unless it is in a perfect condition, and not always then, it will not realise the full amount. The value of a stamp depends largely upon the condition it is in, and only stamps in a perfect condition are worth the amount quoted. As a matter of fact, if the stamp is in the best possible condition it might only bring in three-quarters of the "catalogue value," and naturally, if a stamp is damaged it is worth very little, unless it is very rare specimen. Again, if a stamp is "off colour," or very heavily postmarked, the value is lessened.

What is a Perfect Stamp?

A perfect specimen of a stamp, if unused, must be as clean and fresh and bright as when it was first issued, with the design neatly and exactly centred, and the gum intact.

If used, it must be clean, lightly postmarked, edges perfect, and the colour unaffected by light or water. So the reader will see that to obtain an album full of perfect stamps is a very large order, and it is safe to say that half the stamps in the average collector's albums are more or less imperfect.

Sometimes Stamps are Sold by Weight.

This method of buying should generally be avoided, as in nine cases out of every ten it is merely a cute dodge to attract attention, and interest buyers in other more expensive stamps. In buying stamps a sharp look-out must be kept for faked specimens, as in this line of business there is great scope for forgery and underhand dealing. When buying at all, the best and safest method is to deal direct from one of the leading firms, when the surest value for money will always be obtained. A well-known "trick of the trade" lurks in the cheap parcel of stamps from "Office Correspondence," which more often than not will be found to consist of absolute rubbish, not even worth the trouble of cleaning.

The Back of the Stamp

is, on some occasions, of very great importance. By means of the gum on the back, especially in unused stamps, it is often an easy matter to find out whether the stamp is an "original" or a "reprint." In many cases the gum was originally of a yellowish or brownish tint, while in the reprint it is white. Examples of these may be found in the stamps of Heligoland and Sweden. One remarkable and unusual gum was that used on the stamps of Hanover. It was red in the "originals" and white in the "reprints." It can be seen from this how important it is to study the backs as well as the faces.

A Few Don'ts.

Don't carry stamps loose in the pocket. It comes cheaper to buy a duplicate case.

Don't paste stamps down flat in the album. Use hinges.

Don't plunge stamps into water to remove the backs. It is just as easy to steam them, or place them face upwards in lukewarm water.

THE EDITOR.

OUR SPLENDID NEW FEATURE!

SPECIAL COMIC SUPPLEMENT.

THE BUNSEY BOYS SPOIL IKE'S BEAUTY!



1. Deer Reederers,—How it happened nobody nose, but it is a fact that the uther day as we was takin' our Konstitooshunal in the park we met Ike neer a pleeceman! 'Kum on, Georgie, let's give 'em a littel of our paint,' ses I.



2. So we went up quiet like to 'em and gave 'em sum. "My!" smiled my deer bruther, "don't they begin to look pritty, Ferdy? It seems to me it's only Ike's kountenance that keeps him from bein' butiful." "Hush!" sed me.



3. When we had finnishd the kind ackshun we retired, not wishin' to be thanked, you see. Snore, snore, snore, came from Ike and the slop.



4. Presently, or thereabouts, we kood tell by the silence of the snoreless morn that the sleepers was awakened. "Ha, ha, HA!" yelled the pleeceman, as he kopt site of Ike's fase.



5. You see, deer peepel, neither of them two guys noed that he looked jest sich a big fool as the uther, and, consequently, both got ratty. "I'll teach you to insult the forse!" howled the pleeceman. And forthwith he proseeded wid the lesson.



6. Then kame a kalm. When the klouds had rolled by and the saucy langwidge dide away, Georgie and me lookt at wun each uther. "Deer bruther," sed Georgie, "we had a grand-stand view of that little lot! How do we goe?" "On krutches, I feer," moaned mo.

Yours till the klouds roll by, FERDY, The Bunsey Boy.



Brown: "My wife was walking in her sleep last night."

Jones: "How do you know that?"

Brown: "She went past my trousers-pocket without taking any money out!"



Farmer Giles: "I didn't smoke cigars when I was your age."

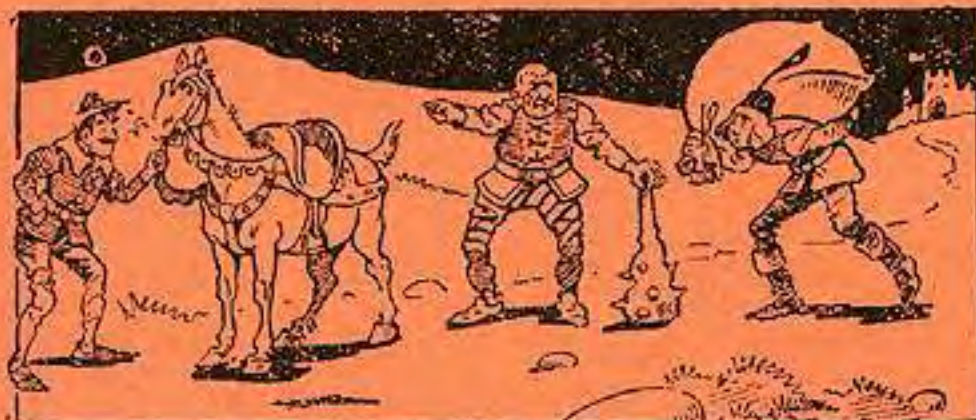
Enery: "No. I suppose you smoked cabbage-leaves. You country yokels were always behind the times."



Fond Uncle: "I hope, Percy, that you did as I told you, and didn't take a second piece of cake when you were at tea at Mrs. Smith's to-day?"

Percy: "No, uncle; I took two pieces the first time!"

A NUTTY IDEA.



1. Peter the page, on his way home to the castle with the autumn chestnuts, was waylaid by a couple of varlets. "Hand over thy sack, straightway!" cried the naughty knaves. "And sharp, too!" So the poor page did so.

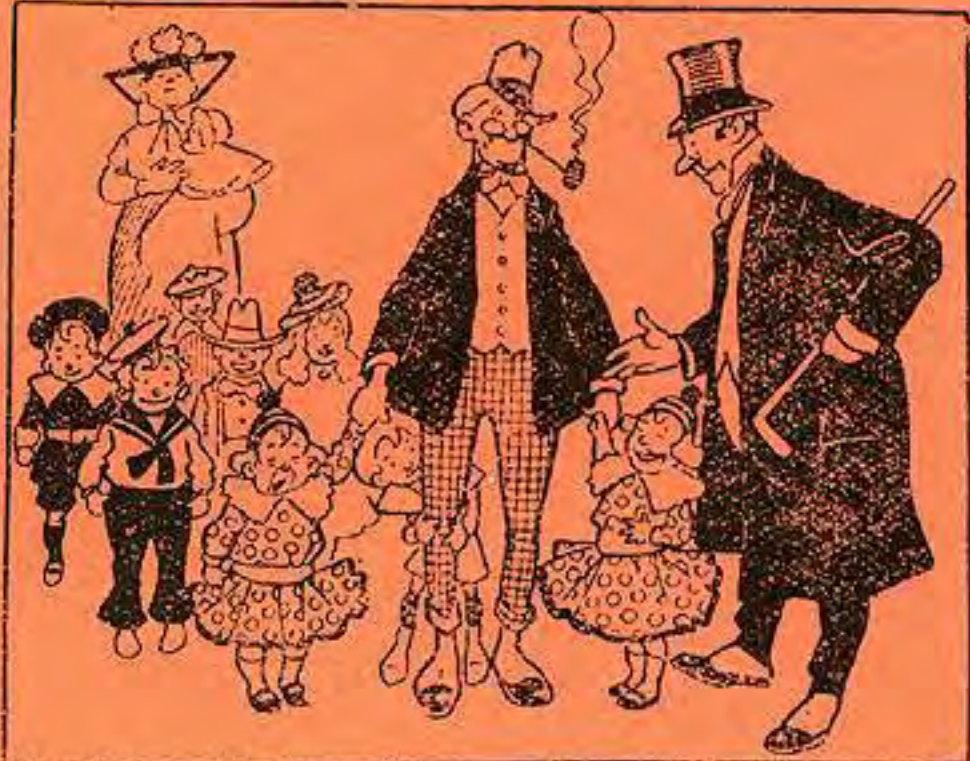


2. But the page, being a cute lad and smart withal, took the precaution to make a slit in the sack of chestnuts. So, as the robbers rode away, the chestnuts dropped out, and—



3. Of course, when the page told the baron, they were able to track the varlets to their lair. And the baron rewarded the page with many choice gifts for being so smart, so he did!

LOVE AT FIRST SIGHT!



Bachelor: "Was yours a case of love at first sight?"

The Proud Father of Nine: "Yes; it was the only time I was ever known to forget my glasses."

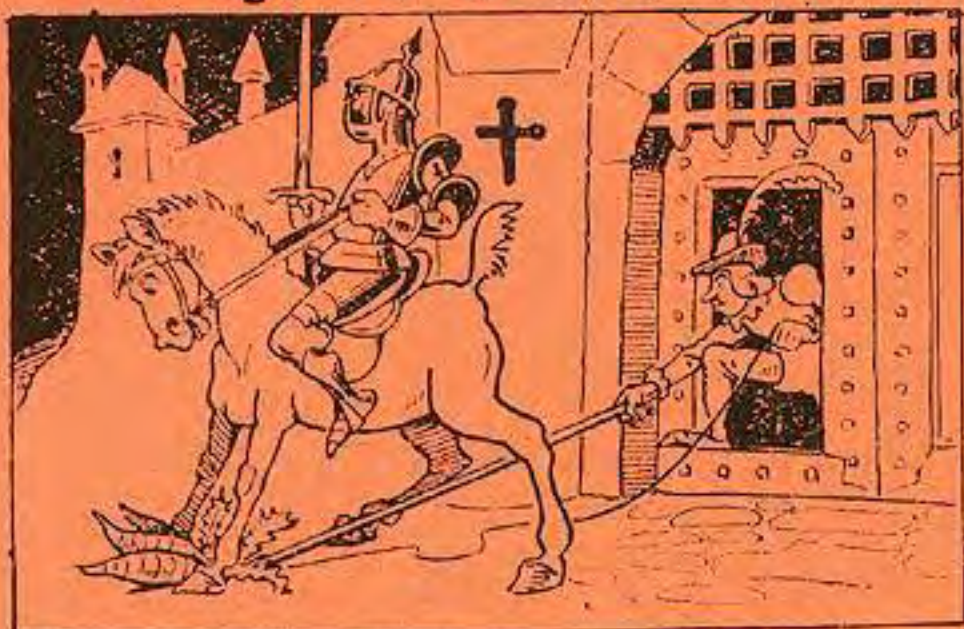
HARD TIMES!



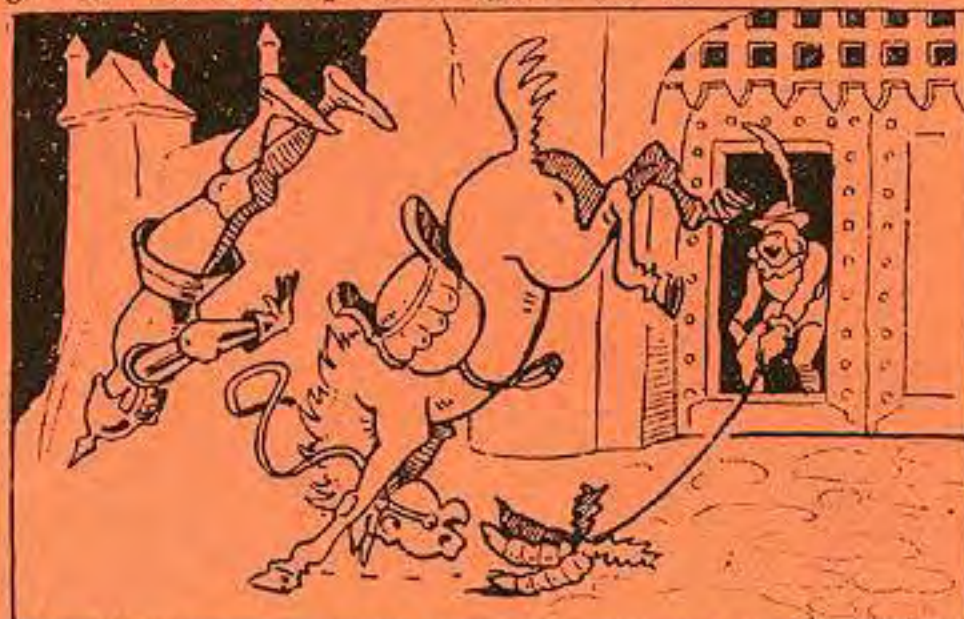
Brown: "Hallo, old chap! What's the matter. Influenza?"

Stump: "No, I bought a suit of clothes on the instalment system, and the chap's just called for the arrears, and I hadn't the money, so he's taken the togs."

IT QUITE UPSET HIM!



1. "Odds bodikins!" said the page. "I must e'en away to meet my lady love. But with yon valet on guard, I cannot get out. Odds jackpots, though, I have it!"

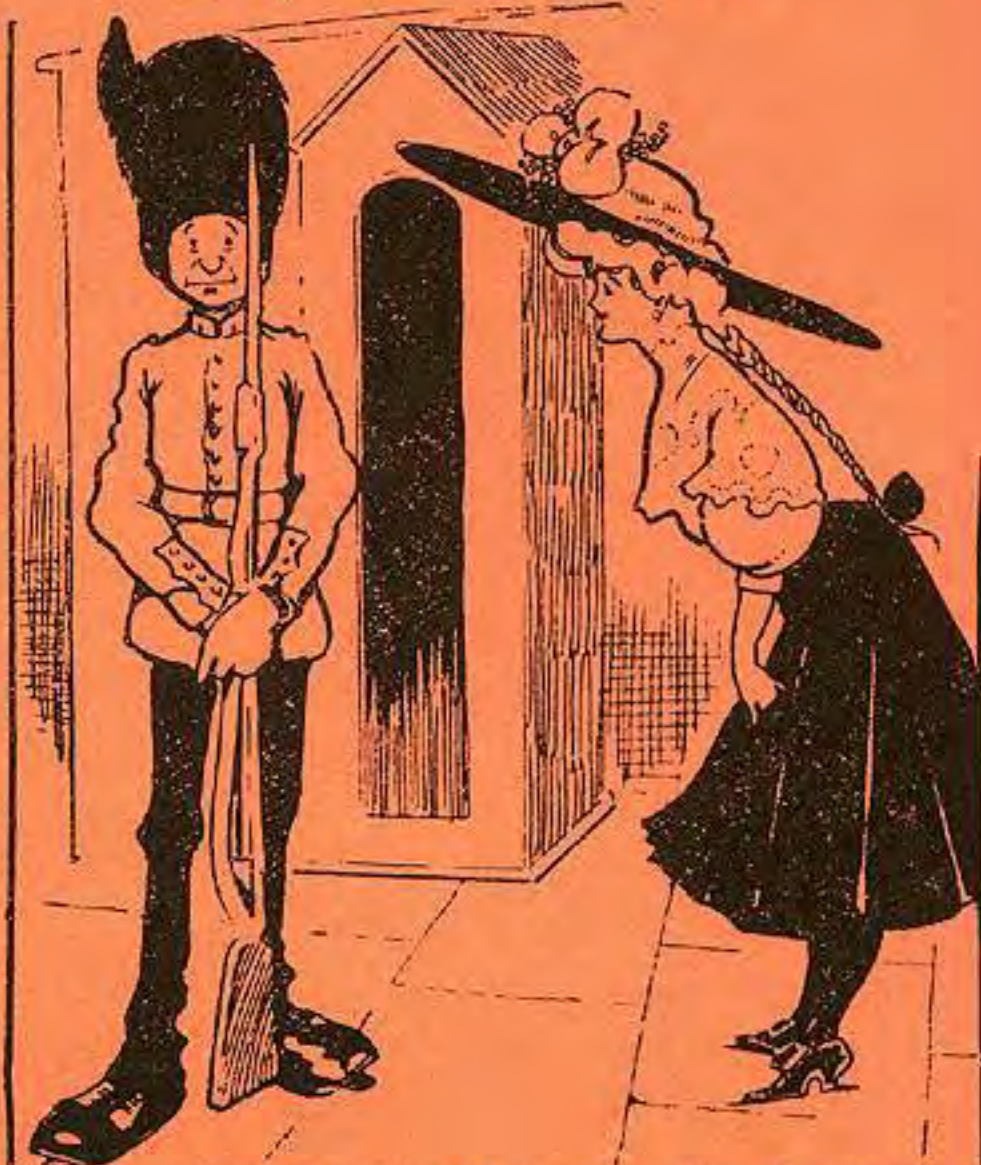


2. "With ye succulent bunch of carrots, I tempt ye, noble steed, in this fashion. If all goes well, I shall work ye merry oracle—"



3. "And, as ye bard says, 'That's done it!' Now, will I hop forth to keep mine appointment with ye faire Mariana at the castle gate, forsooth!"

THE NEW SENTRY!



Pretty Pearl: "And how long are you here for, sir?"
Pat O'Brien: "Shure, miss, and they tell me I'm here for a century."

CUTTING!



Economical Wife: "Henry, we must cut down our expenses this month. Can you think of anything we can do without?"
Henry: "Well, there's your mother, for instance!"

MAKING THE FUR FLY.



1. Spinks, the sportsman, was on his way to the shoot with his faithful hounds. Now, the hounds, being sporty animals with sportive instincts, spotted the foxes' heads on Miss Prettypet's fur.



2. So they promptly set about them, like this, much to the lady's surprise. However, Spinks called off the dogs in time, and, apologising muchly, Spinks saw the lady home, and now Miss Prettypet is Mrs. Spinks.