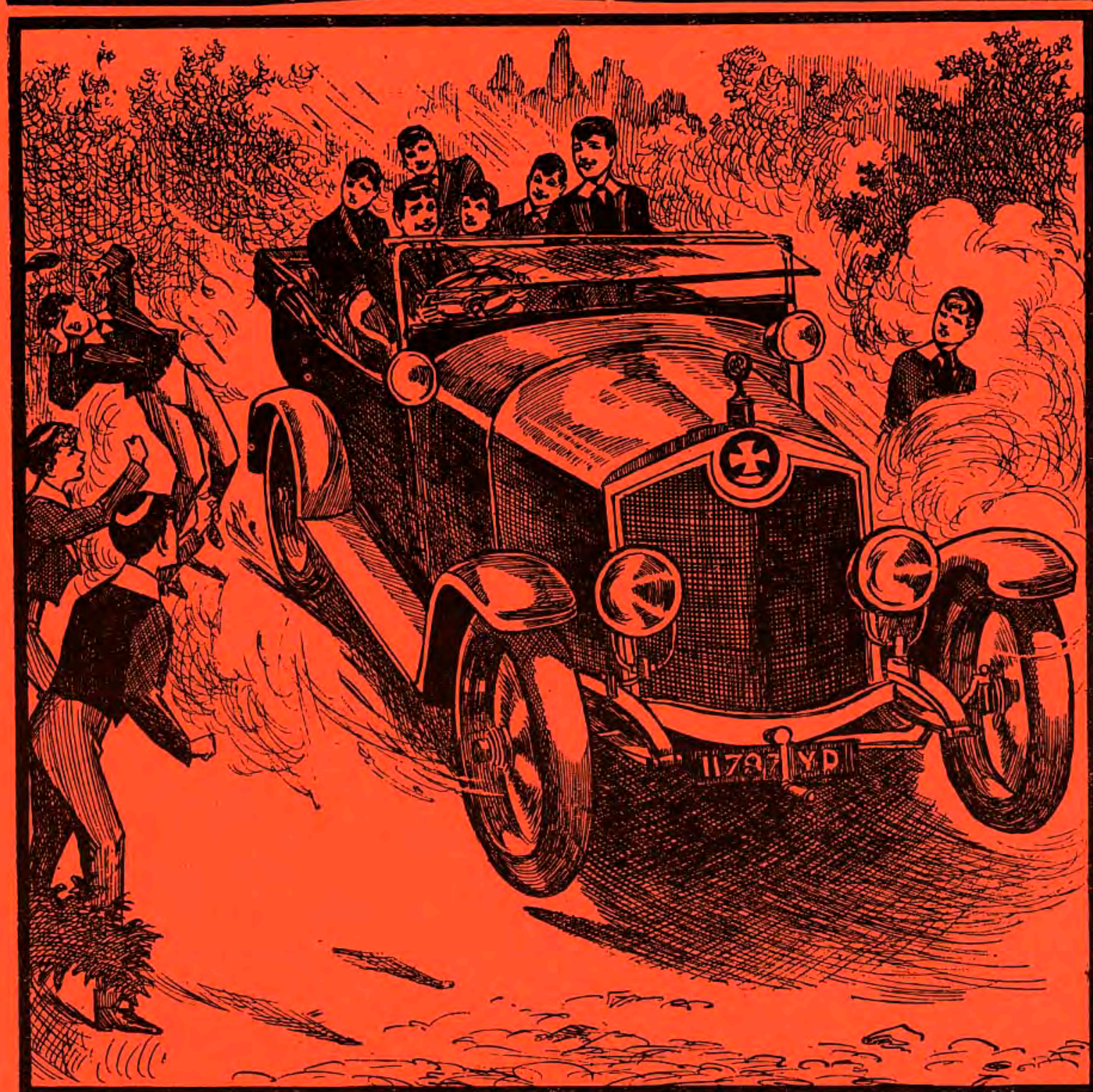


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at Greyfriars School.

By FRANK RICHARDS.



"What is the meaning of this?" demanded the man in a harsh voice. "What are you doing here? You!" he added, pointing at Wharton. "Drop that pump handle!" "Just a minute, sir—" "Drop it, I say!" thundered the stranger. (See Chapter 5.)

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

A Difference of Opinion!

"PASS the sardines," said Bob Cherry warmly, "and don't be a silly ass!"

"Look here—"

"I'm not going to argue any more," went on Bob, fishing the sardines over for himself. "I tell you the distance is only six miles—no more, and no less!"

"Rats!" said Johnny Bull bluntly. "It's seven and a half!"

"You're both wrong," put in Nugent. "It's just over eight!"

"In my humble estimation, my esteemed chums, the distancefulness is still more terrific!" said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "It is not lessful than nine miles!"

"Rot!"

"Look here, you asses—"

"Rubbish!"

The Famous Five were in the midst of a little argument, which promised to develop into a heated altercation. Harry Wharton & Co. were taking tea in No. 1 Study in the Remove passage at Greyfriars. They had a visitor with a somewhat lengthy name—Sampson Quincy Illey Field, to be precise. But as life was too

short for such a mouthful he always answered to the name of Squiff. At the present moment he proceeded to lay down the law.

"It's no good making silly asses of yourselves, my pippins!" said Squiff coolly. "The only way to be certain is to measure the whole giddy road!"

Johnny Bull sniffed.

"And how the dickens are you going to do that?" he asked sarcastically. "I suppose you'll go over the whole ground with a tape-measure?"

"My dear, good kid," said Squiff pityingly, "haven't you ever heard of a useful little instrument called a cyclometer? I've got one on my bike, so I vote we go for a spin after tea and settle the question once and for all."

Harry Wharton & Co. had been discussing distances, and each one had a different opinion. Harry Wharton himself declared that the circular route through Friardale, Courtfield, and then round by Pegg Bay to Greyfriars, was exactly seven and a quarter miles. But the others were equally positive that their own estimation was the correct one.

"No need to measure the distance," said Bob Cherry. "It's just six miles, and much as I regret to say it, Inky, you're a burbling duffer! In other words, you've got no more idea of measurement than my giddy boot. Why, you must be dotty to say it's nine miles!"

"Perhapsful I have made the mistakefulness," said Hurree Singh softly. "If so, the apology will be terrific!"

Harry Wharton chuckled.

"I expect we're all wrong, as a matter of fact," he exclaimed. "As Squiffy says, the only way to settle the point is to measure the ground. Well, there's nothing wrong in going for a spin after tea that I can see. It's a fine evening, and there's no cricket on. A spin will be jolly enjoyable."

"Yes, but I know the distance already," began Bob argumentatively.

"Oh, dry up!"

"Let's have no more argument!"

"We'll finish tea in comfort, and then settle the sore point," said Johnny Bull. "The only thing I'm doubtful about, Squiffy, is your cyclometer."

"What's up with it?" demanded Squiff warmly.

"Well, those things aren't always reliable," replied Johnny Bull, shaking his head. "For all we know it might measure the distance wrong, or, to be more exact, the cyclometer is very likely a thundering liar!"

"If it is," replied Squiff, "then the dealer who sold it to me is possessed of the same excellent qualities. But I know it's a good one, my son."

"What proof have you got?"

"The proof-fulness is terrific!" replied Squiff cheerfully. "I tested it once between two milestones, and it was correct to a yard. Of course, if I'd been tipsy at the time, and had wobbled all over the road, the thing would have measured a mile and a half!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The door opened suddenly, and three youths with serious faces marched into the study without ceremony. They were Temple, Dabney, and Fry, of the Upper Fourth. Apparently, by the look of them, Temple & Co. had called on important business.

"Hallo, still feeding your faces?" said Temple briskly. "Well, it can't be helped. We've got something to say."

Bob Cherry nodded.

"You generally have," he agreed—"something silly and vacuous!"

"We didn't come here to be cheeked," said Temple, frowning. "Our business is very urgent."

"Go hon!"

"And we don't want any idiotic remarks," went on Temple. "We, the three leading lights of the Upper Fourth—"

"Hear, hear!" chimed in Dabney enthusiastically.

"Shut up!" snapped Temple severely. "Can't you hear I'm talking on a serious subject? We, the representatives of the Upper Fourth," he went on, "have decided once and for all that we won't stand any more nonsense from the Remove. That's settled!"

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"Oh, that's settled, is it?" asked Squiff genially.

"It is!" replied Temple. "Now, with regard to cricket—"

Harry Wharton groaned.

"Oh, hellup! He's started the same old gramophone record again!" he said wearily. "Cricket! Ye gods and little bloaters! I thought that subject was dead, buried, and decayed by this time!"

"Well, it isn't," said Temple. "It's very much alive. You Remove kids seem to think that you can play cricket better than we can. Of course, that's utterly absurd!"

"Preposterous!" said Bob Cherry solemnly.

"Now don't be funny!" growled Temple. "I'm a plain chap—"

"You are!" agreed Johnny Bull. "In fact, you're ugly!"

Temple turned red.

"I'm a plain chap, and I speak plainly," he went on gruffly. "The present state of affairs has got to come to a stop. The Upper Fourth refuses to play second fiddle to the Remove any longer. It ain't in the order of things. When—when, I say, are you youngsters going to realise that the Upper Fourth are better cricketers than the Remove?"

Bob Cherry wrinkled his brow.

"At about the same time as the Germans conquer Great Britain!" he answered thoughtfully. "That'll be never, so you can work out the rest for yourself!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Temple looked aggressive, and Dabney and Fry glared round No. 1 Study with warlike expressions.

"Now, look here," growled Temple, "we didn't come here to argue. We came to state plain facts—namely, that the Remove has got to assume its proper position at Greyfriars!"

"And, likewise," said Bob Cherry gravely, "that the Upper Fourth are a set of cackling asses! As aforesaid, namely, and heretofore—"

Temple slapped the table vigorously.

"We didn't come here to be made fun of!" he shouted. "We didn't come here to be laughed at!"

Squiff looked astonished.

"You don't say so!" he exclaimed. "You surprise me! By this time I should think you're accustomed to being laughed at. You don't expect people to take you seriously, do you, Temple?"

"I expect you to listen to what I say!" replied Temple angrily. "What's the good of us coming here to state our decision—that is, the decision of the Upper Fourth—if you persist in making insane remarks?"

"We won't stand it!" said Fry wrathfully.

"Oh, rather not!" agreed Dabney.

"Well, my poor misguided youths," said Harry Wharton kindly, "if you can't stand it, there's the door, and you can clear out as soon as you like, and sit down somewhere in your own quarters!"

Temple & Co. breathed hard. Their visit to the Famous Five was not panning out exactly as they had planned. In fact, the Removites were inclined to treat their statements with unwarrantable levity.

"It's no good you youngsters trying to evade the subject," said Temple, in a fatherly tone. "We've come here with a serious object, and that is to tell you that in future the Remove has got to knuckle under to the authority of the Upper Fourth. That's absolutely settled. We consider that you're a set of young fags, and we're not going to put up with it any longer. We might allow one or two Remove chaps to be included in the junior cricket eleven, but if we do so it will be a very special concession!"

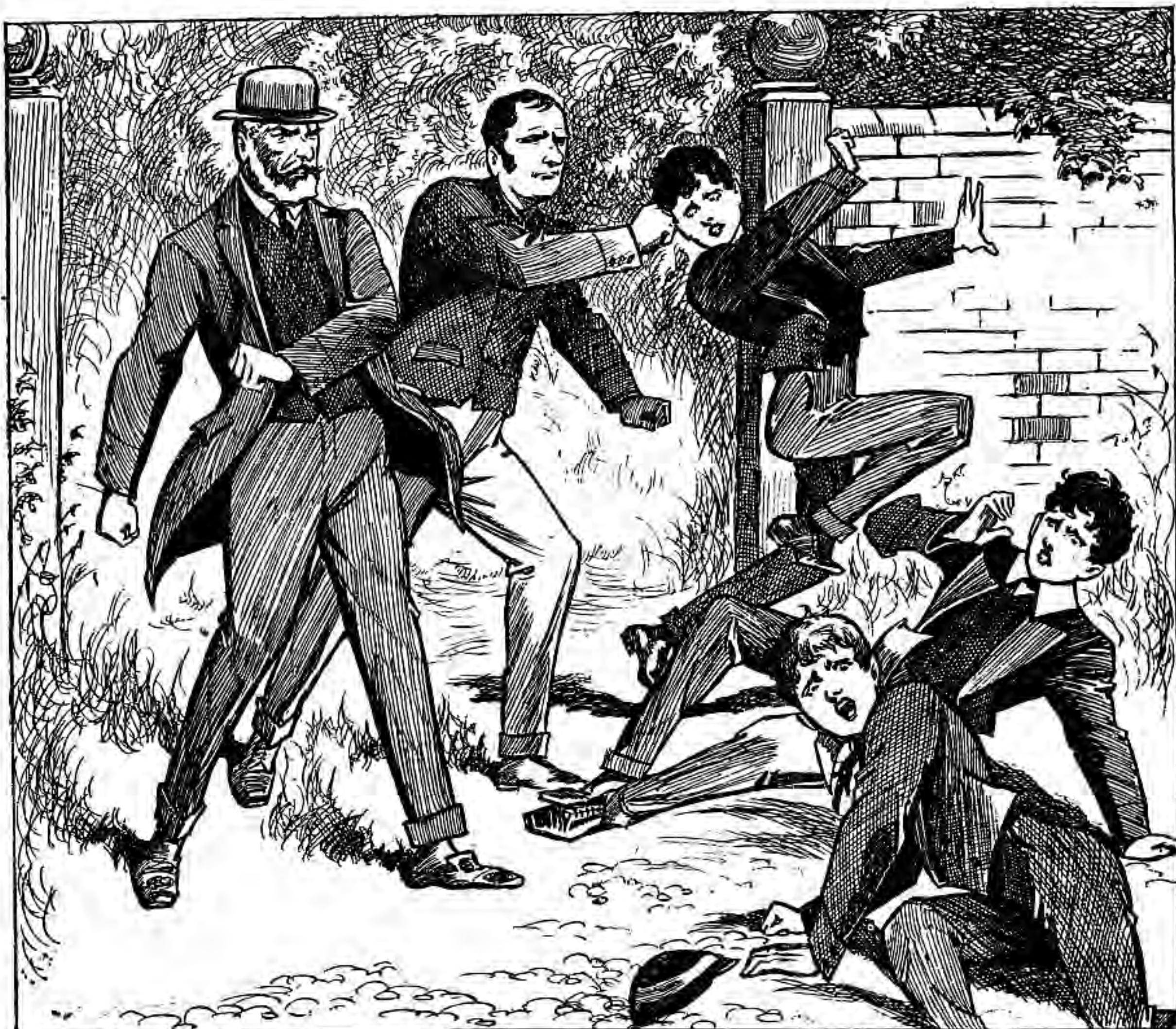
"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Famous Five and Squiff roared.

"Oh, you're too funny to live, Temple!" gasped Bob Cherry. "If you weren't so funny we should hurl you out of the study neck and crop. I'm not so sure about the crop, but I know jolly well you've got a neck—and it wouldn't do it any very great harm to give it a wash."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look here!" roared Temple furiously. "My neck's cleaner than any of you kids, anyhow! Are we going



Bob Cherry and Squiff fell in a heap, and before they could rise, Harry Wharton came hurtling forth. "Go!" snarled Mr. Roff. "And never, if you value your lives, show your faces within this gate again!" (See Chapter 5.)

to stand this, Dabney? Are we going to put up with any more of this nonsense, Fry?"

"No," replied Fry, "we're not!"

"We're going to show these bounders who we are!" said Dabney hotly.

Squiff chuckled.

"Oh, there's no need to show us," he said; "we know already, thanks! We know that you're all dotty on the crumpet, and we're not going to soil our hands by touching your grimy persons."

"We give you two seconds to buzz off," said Wharton. "We've stood enough of this. We want to finish our tea, and then we're going for a bike ride. So the sooner you remove your lovely faces from this study the better we shall like it!"

"If you think you're going to frighten us you're jolly well mistaken!" said Temple aggressively. "We're not going to stand any cheek. We're going to state our minds, as a matter of fact, and we think you're the most conceited, cheekiest, and impudent children in the whole of Greyfriars!"

Smiles left the faces of the Famous Five and Squiff, and they rose in their wrath.

"Children!" gasped Bob Cherry faintly. "Well, my hat, that's just about the limit!"

"It waltzes off with the bath bun!" roared Wharton.

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NEXT
MONDAY—

"THE MYSTERIOUS MR. MOBBS!"

"Children, indeed! We'll soon show these rotters whether we're children or not!"

Temple & Co. looked at one another rather nervously. Cecil Temple realised that he had not furthered his cause by making that unfortunate remark. He could call the Removites rotters or kids without their being greatly incensed, but to refer to them as children! It was the deadliest of deadly insults.

"You ass!" murmured Fry. "You thumping Jabber-wock!"

"Oh, rather!" agreed Dabney. "I—I say, let's clear!"

Harry Wharton & Co. were in no mood to let the Upper Fourth trio go unpunished, however.

"Out with 'em!" roared Squiff. "On the ball!"

"The ballfulness will be terrific!"

"Quite right, Inky!" said Bob Cherry grinning.

"The bawfulness will certainly be terrific in two ticks!"

And it was!

Temple, Dabney & Co. found themselves in the lion's den, so to speak. The Removites hurled themselves into the fray, and the Upper Fourth fellows were hurled into the passage!

And the howls they uttered were enough to wake the echoes! Temple, Dabney & Fry lay piled upon one another, dazed and sore. Temple's collar was crumpled

A Grand, Long, Complete Story of Harry Wharton & Co. By FRANK RICHARDS

and torn, and his nose was swelling perceptibly, acquiring a ruddy hue at the same time.

"Now," panted Harry Wharton, "perhaps you'll understand that even children can do a little damage now and again! The next time you show your ugly chivvies in this study we won't stop at trifles like this, we'll slaughter you outright!"

And Harry Wharton & Co. retired with dignity into Study No. 1 and slammed the door. The unfortunate Fourth-Formers picked themselves up painfully, and with many groans. Then, vowing vengeance upon their rivals, they crawled away to hide their diminished heads before they were spotted by other members of the Remove.

They straightened themselves out in a corner of the Close, having been prevented from going to their own study by the presence of Remove fellows in the Upper Fourth passage.

"Fat lot of good you did by your rotten speechifying!" growled Fry painfully. "Ow! I'm sore all over! The rotters chucked me out of their study, and I bumped on the floor with a frightful whack!"

"Yes, and stuck your beastly boot in my ear!" grunted Dabney.

Temple gritted his teeth.

"I'll pay 'em back!" he muttered wrathfully. "Can't you chaps think of some way of doing them in the eye?"

"Seems to me they've done us in the eye!" said Fry sullenly. "All your confounded fault, Temple. I told you not to go near the rotten study."

Temple gasped.

"Why, you—you thundering Ananias! It was your idea at the beginning!"

Temple's gaze wandered round the Close, and settled at last upon the bicycle shed. He started, and uttered an ejaculation.

"I've got a wheeze!" he exclaimed. "Wharton said they were going out for a bike ride, didn't he? Well, what's the matter with mucking up their jiggers?"

Dabney looked doubtful.

"I say, that would be going it a bit thick, wouldn't it?" he asked. "After all, you know, when you come to think of it, we did ask for it!"

"Ask for what, ass?"

"Why, for what we got!" replied Dabney. "It was your silly fault for calling them children. You know they're jolly touchy on that point. The fact is, Temple, you've got no tact!"

"Oh, rats!" growled Temple angrily. "Go and eat coke!"

And he walked away in a temper. Cecil Temple was feeling decidedly sore, both in body and in mind. And he felt inclined, at the moment, to do something really desperate. As a rule, Temple, although he had a decidedly inflated opinion of himself, was a decent enough chap. But just now something prompted him to perform an action which, afterwards, he would probably feel sorry for.

It was nothing very desperate, after all. He merely walked into the bicycle shed, extracted a pin from his waistcoat, and stuck it deliberately into the front tyre of Harry Wharton's bicycle. To make sure of the matter he stuck it in three times, in three different places. The tyre was not injured in the least, but it was punctured. There was no doubt about that!

"Now he'll have to mend the rotten thing before he goes out," growled Temple. "Serve him jolly well right, for having the nerve to lay hands on me!"

And the captain of the Fourth Form left the bicycle shed feeling just a little ashamed of himself, although he wouldn't have admitted it for worlds.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

A Lesson for Ponsonby & Co.

"PUNCTURED!"

"Eh?"

"My front tyre's punctured!" roared Harry Wharton. Look at it—as flat as a giddy pancake! Some rotter's done it on purpose!"

The Famous Five and Sampson Quincey Ilfrey Field were THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 388.

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in the cycle-shed, all ready to start on their measured ride round by Courtfield and Pegg. And Wharton had just made the awful discovery that his front tyre was devoid of wind.

"Well, you fabjous idiot!" snorted Bob Cherry. "Why can't you look after your jigger better? Fancy having such rotten tyres on your bike——"

"They're not rotten!" shouted Harry Wharton. "Somebody's done this on purpose!"

"Rot!" said Johnny Bull, in his blunt way. "Who'd be such a rotter? Besides, the tyre may have been punctured the last time you went out. If it's a small hole the wind wouldn't come out."

"But I was in here just before tea," interrupted Wharton. "The tyre was all right then!"

"Oh!"

"Then somebody has been playing a game," said Squiff.

"Game?" ejaculated Wharton wrathfully. "Nice sort of game!"

Temple of the Fourth looked in at the doorway.

"Hallo! What's the trouble?" he asked. "My hat! Your tyre's flat, Wharton."

Harry Wharton looked round at Temple sharply, and started.

"What do you know about it?" he asked, with a suspicion of the truth.

"I? What should I know?" asked Temple innocently. "Don't be such an ass!"

"You rotter!" said Wharton angrily. "So you did it, did you? Well, I didn't think you were such a spiteful bounder, Temple!"

"Do you mean to suggest that I punctured your tyre?" asked Temple warmly.

"I don't suggest it! I know you did!"

"You're dotty!" said Temple, although he took care not to deny the accusation—Temple wasn't a liar. "Well, anyhow, it jolly well serves you right! I'm glad your ride's mucked up! It'll teach you not to lay hands on Upper Fourth chaps again!"

The Famous Five glared.

"You cad!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "Fancy sticking a pin in a chap's tyre! I expect that's what you did, isn't it?"

"Find out!" said Temple politely.

He walked into the shed, and removed his own machine from its stand. Temple's bike was an expensive one, with all the latest improvements, and Temple never, under any consideration, lent it to another junior. He kept it exclusively for his own use. At the present moment he wheeled it towards the door of the shed.

"This is where you sing small, my cheeky young asses!" he said unguardedly.

Harry Wharton pushed back his cuffs.

"I think you're the fellow who's going to sing small!" he said grimly. "You've practically admitted that you've punctured my bike, and then you have the utter nerve to come here and jeer at me! Well, two can play at your game, my son!"

"What do you mean?" asked Temple uneasily.

"I mean you would have done better to hop off quickly on your own jigger," said Wharton. "As you haven't, I'll use it myself! You've rendered my own bike useless, so I'll go for a ride on yours!"

"What!" roared Temple.

"You're not deaf, are you?" asked Wharton grimly. "And, what's more, I'll make you repair my puncture when I get back!"

"You—you silly ass!" shouted Temple. "Do you think I'm going to let you have my bike?"

"I don't think anything about it—I'm going to take it!"

"Hear, hear!" grinned Squiff. "Temple, my pippin, you're squashed!"

"We'll see about that!" roared Temple, in alarm. "There are a score of Upper Fourth chaps in the Close. If you touch me I'll yell for help—and then you'll be wiped up!"

Harry Wharton didn't answer. He simply grabbed the handlebars of Temple's machine, and yanked it away, from the Upper Fourth skipper. At the same moment Bob Cherry and Nugent collared Temple, and held him fast.

"One good turn deserves another!" grinned Harry Wharton. "We'll change jiggers for awhile, that's all. You're perfectly at liberty to go for a spin on mine!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Temple went purple with wrath.

"You—you rotters!" he howled. Help! Rescue, Fourth! Ow! Lemme go, you cads!"

Johnny Bull looked out into the Close.

"We'd better clear off!" he said hurriedly. "Scott and Turner, and a whole crowd of other Upper Fourth chaps have heard this blighter's yells, and they're pelting across here! Let's vamoose!"

The others were ready. Temple was hurled on to a bench, and the Famous Five and Squiff hastily wheeled their bicycles out into the open. Wharton wheeled Temple's magnificent machine, and Temple made a frantic effort to stop him.

"No, you don't!" gasped Wharton. "You punctured my tyre, so you'll have to suffer for it! That's only right and proper! Farewell, fair youth!"

The Removites were only just in time.

They hopped on to their machines hastily. Wharton only just managed to get his leg over the saddle before Temple grabbed at him. Temple missed, and stood outside the door of the cycle-shed simply gasping with indignation.

"Stop them, you chaps!" he bellowed.

But the Fourth Formers were too late. Harry Wharton & Co. were already mounted, and they pedalled at top speed for the gates. Had a master seen them—Mr. Quelch, their own Form-master, especially—there would have been trouble in store for them.

Fortunately, however, the Close was solely occupied by juniors. Peter Todd, Vernon-Smith, Tom Brown, and many other Removites, grinned hugely when they saw what had happened.

"Hurrah!" roared Peter Todd. "Go it, ye cripples!"

By the way Harry Wharton & Co. were going it, it didn't seem very much as though they were cripples. They shot through the gates in a clump, like racers in a hundred-yards handicap. By a miracle they succeeded in getting out into the road without an accident, and Temple & Co. came to a halt between the gate-posts, breathing hard, and with Temple simply bubbling with fury.

But Harry Wharton's action in appropriating Temple's bicycle had been perfectly justified, and the Remove skipper was feeling cheerful as he and his chums rode towards Friardale.

"We dished old Temple properly!" he said, with satisfaction. "This isn't half a bad old crock of his—blessed if it doesn't go easier than mine!"

"I say," said Bob Cherry suddenly, "did you set that what's-its-name of yours, Squiffy?"

"That which of mine?" inquired Squiff.

"You know! That cyclometer of yours," said Bob. "Not much good going for a spin to measure the distance if we don't do the thing properly!"

"It's O.K.!" replied Squiff, glancing down at the little instrument against his front hub. "I set the thing at nought, so by the time we get home it'll register the exact mileage we've been."

"Good enough!"

And the Removites went on with their ride at a sedate pace. The evening was a splendid one for cycling, for there was hardly a breath of wind, and the air was cool. They passed through the village, and then started out along the quiet road for Courtfield. It was a pleasant road, almost flat, with scarcely any houses, except an occasional farm.

The juniors turned a bend in the road, and before them lay a long, straight stretch. Close ahead there were some farm buildings near by, and in the road itself quite a number of chickens were complacently strolling about as though they owned the whole universe.

"Get to the near side, you chaps," said Johnny Bull.

The others looked ahead, and saw the reason for Bull's word of warning. A motor-car was coming swiftly towards them from the opposite direction. It was, in fact, exceeding the speed-limit very thoroughly. The occupants were evidently engaged in the gentle pastime known as "joy-riding."

"I say," exclaimed Nugent, "those asses in that car will do some damage if they go along at that giddy rate! They're shifting like the wind!"

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PENNY.

"Great Scott!" ejaculated Harry Wharton suddenly. "Half those chickens will be killed if the car doesn't pull up!"

The oncoming automobile, however, was apparently being driven by a reckless gentleman who held the lives of chickens at a very low estimate. He sounded his horn—a discordant electric abomination—violently, and made no effort to slacken the pace of his car. The livestock in the road were peacefully unconscious of the coming peril.

Harry Wharton jumped from his machine, and his chums followed suit. The car was now close at hand, and the electric buzzer sounded again.

"I'm hanged if I'm going to stand this!" said Wharton grimly. "Those rotters in that car evidently mean to dash among those chickens for the sheer fun of it!"

"It looks like it," said Squiff. "What the dickens shall we do?"

"Better buck up, anyhow," said Bob Cherry.

"The buckupfulness will have to be terrific!"

"Do?" repeated Harry Wharton sharply. "Why, we'll fill the road up with our jiggers, and the rotten car will have to stop! It'll teach those blessed joy-riders a lesson!"

The Famous Five and Squiff followed Wharton's instructions without a second's loss of time. They drew their jiggers right across the road, from one side to the other, thus forming an impassable barrier.

Buzz-z-zz!

"Go it!" said Bob Cherry. "Buzz away, you rotters! That's more than we're going to do, anyhow!"

The juniors could see several forms in the car standing up and gesticulating wildly. But the driver seemed to realise that his wild career could not go on. So he pulled the brake-lever over, and the car slowed down. When it passed the chickens it was going quite slowly, and the birds were enabled to scurry away unharmed. Then, as the motor drew up within ten yards of the barrier of bicycles, Bob Cherry uttered a surprised exclamation.

"Great pip," he said, "it's Ponsonby!"

And so it was.

The driver of the car was Cecil Ponsonby of the Fourth Form at Highcliffe. Beside him sat Gadsby, while behind, in the tonneau, were Vavasour, Merton, Drury, and Tunstall, also of the Fourth Form. Ponsonby & Co. were looking furious. They were pleased to consider themselves gay young sparks, and the form of pleasure they were now indulging in was one of their favourite pastimes. Ponsonby was rolling in money, and it was nothing for him to hire a motor-car for the evening. But he took care never to exceed the speed-limit unless he was on a quiet country road.

Ponsonby & Co. were on the very worst terms with the Greyfriars fellows—for obvious reasons. Ponsonby and his set were pretty disgraceful young rotters, while Harry Wharton & Co. were fine examples of manly British boyhood.

Ponsonby glared furiously at the Removites.

"Oh, it's you!" he said savagely. "What the deuce do you mean by this?"

"Like your rotten nerve!" shouted Gadsby.

"Oh, absolutely!" agreed Vavasour.

"What do you mean by it, I say?" roared Ponsonby.

"Well, I should say it's pretty obvious!" replied Harry Wharton coolly. "You were scorching along at a fearful pace. We didn't know it was you when we barred the road, but we might have guessed."

Ponsonby scowled.

"I suppose I can drive my own car as fast as I like without any interference from you?" he said furiously. "It's no concern of yours that I can see!"

"What you can't see, Poi, amounts to a lot!" said Bob Cherry calmly. "You were going to dash among those chickens, and you would have done so if we hadn't been on the spot to prevent you."

"They're not your chickens, are they?"

"No; but we weren't going to see you murder and injure the poor things for the fun of it," replied Harry Wharton grimly. "You ought to be jolly well ashamed of yourselves!"

"What!"

"I think I spoke clearly," said Wharton quietly.
 "By gum, you'd better not say it again!" shouted Merton.

"I'll say it a dozen times if I feel inclined to do so," said the Remove captain. "You ought to be ashamed of yourselves, you rotters; and, if you're not, it's the fault of your rotten upbringing!"

"My hat!" gasped Ponsonby, red with fury.

"Perhaps I can add a few welcome remarks," put in Squiff. "Pon, you and those other cads in that car are a collection of callous bounders! You're a disgrace to Highcliffe, and if the Head there wasn't such a milk-and-watery old frump you'd have been sacked months ago!"

Ponsonby stood up in his seat.

"Are we going to stand this?" he roared.

"No, we're not!" bellowed Gadsby. "Let's wipe the cads up!"

And Ponsonby & Co. piled out of the car, and threw themselves upon the Famous Five and Squiff. It was rather an unwise proceeding, but the Highcliffe juniors were so furious that they didn't stop to consider.

They certainly took Harry Wharton & Co. by surprise, and before Squiff could lay his bike down Merton's fist landed violently upon the Australian junior's nose. Squiff gave a roar, and dropped his jigger into the dust.

"My hat! I'll give you something, you rotter!" he shouted.

And he forthwith proceeded to do so. Merton certainly got something, but it wasn't what he wanted. Squiff was a tremendous fighting man once he started. And he started now, with the intention of going on for quite a long time. He finished Merton promptly, landing two beautiful punches upon that young gentleman's left eye. He followed this up with an upper-cut which fairly lifted Merton off his feet.

After that Merton thought it wisest to crawl away while he was still whole. Squiff, meanwhile, transferred his attentions to Drury, and Drury had quite an exciting two minutes. Wharton, Bob Cherry, and the rest were by no means letting Squiff do all the hitting. The Famous Five, in fact, were thoroughly enjoying themselves. They really took keen pleasure in a scrap of this sort.

Ponsonby & Co. were literally wiped up in less than three minutes, and they realised then that they would have done far better to swallow their wrath, and proceed on their way.

"Hold on!" gasped Ponsonby, whose nose was streaming "claret" liberally over his magnificent fancy waistcoat. "We give in!"

"Absolutely!" panted Vavasour faintly.

The Greyfriars juniors dropped their hands.

"You admit you're whacked?" asked Wharton breathlessly.

"Yes; hang you!"

"All right; say you're sorry," said Bob Cherry.

"We won't!" snarled Ponsonby.

"If that's the case we'll give you some more!" went on Bob, closing his fists again. "Say you apologise, and promise to be good boys, and we'll let you off!"

"That's it," grinned Squiff. "Promise to be good little children!"

"Confound you, we won't!" panted Ponsonby, between his teeth.

"Collar him!" said Wharton. "We'll bump him until——"

Pon glared round helplessly.

"All right!" he snarled. "I—I promise!"

"You'll be nice and gentle in future? You won't do naughty things?"

"No—I—I mean, yes! Hang you——"

"Oh, let him go!" growled Johnny Bull. "They ain't worth soiling our hands on! We shall have to scrub ourselves when we get home, as it is!"

And Ponsonby & Co. were allowed to climb painfully into their car. They all looked the worse for wear, and their expressions were hardly angelic. Ponsonby jammed the clutch in, and the car jerked forward.

"We'll pay you out for this!" he shouted furiously. "By gum, we'll make you sit up!"

Harry Wharton and his chums grinned.

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"Don't laugh at him!" said Bob Cherry. "He can't help it, poor chap! He only threatens us like that when he knows he's safe. My only Aunt Angelina, what a collection of beauty! Did you ever gaze upon such lovely faces?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Famous Five and Squiff roared, and their vanquished rivals went off simply boiling over with helpless fury.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Playing it Low!

"HA, ha, ha!"

Bob Cherry uttered that expression of hilarity as he pedalled along. He and the others had mounted their bikes again, and were proceeding on their way.

"What's the joke?" asked Frank Nugent.

"I was thinking of Pon's joyful expression as he started the car," chuckled Bob. "Pon always amuses me! He makes such dire threats, and then proceeds to get the worst of it! He hasn't got the pluck of a midge!"

"Oh, let's forget those rotten bounders!" said Wharton. "If we have many more stoppages we sha'n't be able to complete our round-the-country ride."

"There are such things as punctures——"

"Oh, dry up, fathead!" snapped Johnny Bull. "If we begin talking about punctures, we shall get one, sure as fate!"

Bob grinned, and dried up. Bull's prediction didn't seem likely to come true, for the party went through Courtfield and then on by the roundabout road to Pegg. They passed through the little fishing-village with everything still "all well." Nugent's chain was creaking a little, but that was because it wanted lubricating; or, as Bob Cherry put it, because the poor thing was thirsty.

"Well, what about your giddy superstition?" inquired Bob, when they were riding along the deserted, lonely road between Pegg and Greyfriars. "What have you got to say, Johnny, my son?"

Johnny Bull grunted.

"If you say I'm superstitious I'll get wild," he replied. "It's a fact, though, that it often happens that as soon as anybody begins to talk about punctures——"

"Hallo!" ejaculated Nugent suddenly.

Johnny Bull looked round sharply.

"What's the matter?" he asked.

"My front tyre!" said Nugent. "Perhaps it's the road—but it feels—— Yes, by Jove, the giddy rim keeps bumping! The rotten thing's punctured!"

There was no doubt about it. Frank Nugent's front tyre was very, very slack, and within another minute it was quite flat. All the juniors dismounted, Bob Cherry looking rather askance at Johnny Bull.

"Rotten!" grunted Nugent irritably.

"Well, I knew what would happen," said Bull bluntly. "Didn't I say one of us would have a puncture?"

"Oh, rats!" said Wharton. "It would have happened in any case."

"Of course," agreed Bob Cherry.

"I don't know about that!" exclaimed Johnny Bull, shaking his head. "These things are jolly curious. I'm not superstitious, goodness knows, but it's queer! Next time I'm out cycling I sha'n't say a word about punctures."

"And you'll get heaps of 'em!" grinned Bob Cherry. "Don't be a thumping ass, Johnny! It's just coincidence, that's all."

Nugent grunted.

"What the dickens does it matter if it was coincidence or any other old thing?" he demanded. "It's got to be mended; and if we ain't quick we shall be late for calling-over. It's getting dark already."

"Right-ho!" said Squiff briskly. "Let your uncle have a squint at the tyre!"

They all squinted at it, in fact. Not that squinting did much good. Squiff, however, turned up his sleeve, and, assisted by Nugent, soon located the cause of the trouble—a big thorn.

"I suppose this is the only puncture?" said Nugent.

"Well, it'll be better to make sure," replied Squiff. "Nothing like doing a thing thoroughly, you know."

But it was the only puncture, and Squiff proceeded to smear the solution upon the patch.

The bicycle was lying at the side of the road, well out of the way. At last the patch was tacky enough to stick on—and on it went.

Then the tyre was replaced on the rim.

A few pumps of wind were injected into the tyre, and then Squiff, who had his hands dirty, and who was therefore allowed the doubtful honour of being chief repairer, so to speak, was fetched over to Hurree Singh's bicycle in order to tighten a loose nut.

The juniors were so intent upon what they were doing that they failed to observe a motor-car approaching from the direction of Greyfriars. It was, as a matter of fact, Ponsonby & Co. who had, by this time, got over their first encounter with their Greyfriars rivals.

It seemed that they were to have another meeting before the day was out.

Ponsonby, who was driving, as before, suddenly noticed the collection of cycles, and the six juniors round them. He noticed, particularly, the colour of their caps.

"By George!" he ejaculated. "It's those young Greyfriars rotters again!"

Vavasour rubbed his nose tenderly.

"Better drive right past!" he said. "We don't want any more of their rotten fouling!"

"Oh, rats! It was a fair enough scrimmage, Vav!" said Drury, who seemed to possess a little decency. "Still, I'm not exactly hankering after another scrap! I know when I've had enough."

Gadsby nodded.

"Same here," he growled. "Drive right past, Pon!"

Cecil Ponsonby had every intention of doing so. But at the present moment his eyes were gleaming viciously. He knew that another fight would only lead to a finish similar to the first encounter. But Ponsonby badly wanted to have his own back. And he thought he saw a way of revenge now.

His eyes were upon Nugent's bicycle. It was lying flat upon the ground, with the front wheel projecting just a little into the roadway. There was heaps of room, and to spare, for any motor-car to pass. But that didn't worry Ponsonby in the least.

"I'll give the rotters something to think about!" he muttered savagely. "I'll jolly well drive over the edge of that wheel! It'll bust the wheel up, and one of the blighters will have to walk home!"

It was a pretty despicable plan; but just such a one as Ponsonby delighted in. The bike lying there, with its front wheel projecting into the road, provided a good mark; and Pon could easily say that it had been a pure accident. He wasn't supposed to notice things lying in the road.

Harry Wharton & Co. were aware of the car's approach now; and they were also aware as to its occupants.

"I'll bet the bounders don't stop this time!" grinned Squiff, chuckling.

"Rather not!" said Wharton. "They've had enough of us for one day; and enough's as good as a feast. Our fatherly words evidently had effect, for Pon's driving quite sedately now."

The car was approaching fast, but not scorchingly. The Famous Five watched it interestedly, while Squiff tightened up the nut on Hurree Singh's machine—the looseness of which had been terrific.

"They've seen us," said Bob Cherry. "My hat! Look at the expression on Ponsonby's face!"

"Yes, he looks ferocious," agreed Nugent. "And if he doesn't look out, by gum, he'll drive dangerously near to my jigger!"

Harry Wharton started.

"Great Scott! He can't mean to—no, that would be a bit too thick even for Ponsonby!"

"What do you mean?" asked Bob sharply.

"Why, look at the way Pon's driving! He's coming straight for Nugent's bike!"

Frank Nugent uttered a roar.

"And he means to drive over it, the cad!" he shouted excitedly.

"Gammon!"

"Rot!"

"Pon would draw the line at that!"

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MONDAY—

"THE MYSTERIOUS MR. MOBBS!"

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ONE
PENNY.

"I tell you——"

Nugent broke off abruptly. The motor-car was within twenty yards now, and it was plain to Harry Wharton & Co. that Ponsonby was, indeed, contemplating something drastic. His expression was ferocious and vindictive.

"Quick! Drag the bike out of the way!" roared Nugent.

"Ass! Ponsonby doesn't mean——"

"He does!"

Nugent started forward, but Wharton grabbed his arm.

"Don't be a silly ass!" exclaimed Wharton quickly.

"You'll be knocked down!"

Nugent dragged himself away.

"Do you think I'm going to see my bike busted up?" he roared wrathfully.

The car was nearly on the spot now, within a few yards, in fact, and Nugent would have to act quickly if he meant to act at all. It was obvious now to the Removites that Ponsonby intended driving over the bicycle—and the Famous Five were furiously indignant.

"Hi, you ass! Look where you are going!"

"Steer clear, you rotter!"

"Plenty of room on the other side!"

Ponsonby grinned viciously, and deliberately swerved. He had no intention of doing his enemies any personal injury, but simply meant to get his own back by smashing up one of their bikes. Nugent, however, stumbled on a loose stone as he flew to the rescue of his jigger.

"Good heavens!"

Nugent tripped forward at the same second as the car swept past. He made a frantic effort to save himself, but it was too late.

His head, as he stumbled forward, came in violent contact with the woodwork of the car's hood.

Nugent staggered back with a gasping cry, and the car swept past.

Crash!

It ran clean over the front wheel of the prostrate machine, smashing it out of all recognition. Ponsonby & Co. looked back with grinning faces. To do them justice they did not know that Nugent had been struck, and they failed to see him as they looked back. Had they known the true state of affairs they might possibly have stopped.

Harry Wharton & Co. were simply white with anger.

"The rotters!" gasped Bob Cherry. "Oh, the fearful villains!"

"Nugent!" said Harry Wharton hoarsely. "Where is he?"

The smashed bicycle was forgotten; Ponsonby & Co. were forgotten; and the juniors dashed across the grass to the ditch at the side of the road.

Nugent was there.

He had been flung back by the force of the blow, and had staggered into the ditch. He lay there still, white and silent. An ugly wound showed upon his forehead, and a slow trickle of blood was dripping on to the grass.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER

The Lonely House!

"NUGENT!"

Harry Wharton bent agitatedly over his chum. Nugent showed no sign of consciousness.

"Franky!" exclaimed Wharton hoarsely.

"Speak to me, old man! Say you ain't hurt!"

"Ho is hurt," muttered Johnny Bull. "Oh, the rotters! They've injured poor old Franky! Oh, what the dickens shall we do? He's hurt, you chaps!"

They lifted Nugent into an easier position, and Wharton dabbed his forehead anxiously.

"Thank goodness it doesn't seem to be much!" he exclaimed fervently. "The skin's cut through, and is bleeding a bit. There'll be a whacking great bruise to-morrow. He's stunned, poor old kid!"

The juniors looked at one another with pale faces.

"It can't be anything serious," said Bob Cherry. "The car only seemed to give him a mere touch. Oh, what an ass he was to rush forward—you warned him not to, Wharton."

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"I know I did," said Harry. "But that doesn't make any difference, does it? What the dickens shall we do to bring him round?"

"Get some water," said Squiff quickly. "It's no good standing here and looking at him! Water—quick!"

Bob Cherry looked round.

"What's the good of saying that?" he demanded. "There ain't any blessed water! The ditches are as dry as the giddy desert, and there's not a river for miles!"

"We must have some water," said Wharton anxiously. "Where's a cottage? Why don't you chaps go and ask for a basin—"

"There are no cottages, you ass!" said Johnny Bull. "There's a big house just down the road, though."

"All the better!" said Squiff. "Look here! Three of us will go for water while the other two stop here with old Nugent. If three go for water we shall make a commotion and get it all the quicker. Poor old chap! He looks as white as chalk!"

Nugent was still stunned, and showed no signs of regaining consciousness. The necessity of fetching some water was really urgent. The juniors didn't exactly know how seriously their chum was hurt. Water would possibly bring him round, and thus set their fears at rest.

Harry Wharton, Squiff, and Bob Cherry decided to go to the big house.

"Look at the bike!" said Bob wrathfully. "A wreck! Great Scott! We'll make Ponsonby & Co. pay for this! The front wheel's smashed—"

"Never mind the bike!" said Squiff briskly. "Let's get the water."

The welfare of their chum was certainly more important than a dozen bicycles, and the trio set off down the road at a sharp run. It was very dusky now, and the juniors knew that they would be late for calling-over. Not that they cared a fig for that; under the circumstances being late was of no consequence.

The house Johnny Bull had spoken of was close at hand, and Wharton and the others soon arrived at the gates. They were old and rusted, with scarcely a spot of paint upon them. The house itself could just be seen set back a good distance from the road, dark and grim among tall trees.

Upon the gate-post the name of the house could faintly be seen—the Gables.

"Looks a mouldy old hole!" panted Bob Cherry.

"What does that matter as long as we get some water?" asked Wharton. "Come on; we'll buzz straight to the front door and bash for all we're worth!"

The drive was weed-grown and neglected; and, altogether, the place seemed to have a somewhat sinister look about it. No sign of life was to be seen—not even a light, although it was now getting dark.

"Crumbs! Suppose the house is empty?" exclaimed Squiff.

"It's not," replied Wharton. "This is the Gables. I heard that some new tenants came in only about a fortnight ago. And, anyhow, suppose the place is empty? There's sure to be a pump or a tap outside somewhere. One thing's certain—we've got to take some water back with us!"

"And we've got to be quick about it, too!" added Squiff.

They came in full view of the old house. It was a rambling sort of building, with a kind of tower rising over the centre portion. Right at the top of the tower was a little window. Below it, the walls were bare and weather-stained.

"H'm! Not very inviting-looking," commented Bob Cherry. "Still, I don't suppose we shall ever come here again. Poor old Nugent! Let's buck up with the water. That wound of his wants bathing badly."

They walked quickly up to the front door and gave the bell a vigorous pull. The jangle of it could be faintly heard in the rear quarter of the house.

"That ought to bring somebody," said Wharton impatiently.

They waited, but without result.

"Oh, rats! Give another ring!" growled Squiff. "Think of poor Franky waiting down the road senseless!"

Harry Wharton was thinking of his chum, and he

pulled the bell so strenuously that it nearly broke the string. But again nothing came of it. The door remained closed, and there were no footsteps within the house to show that the ring had been heard.

"Hang it! Just our luck!" said Wharton crossly, and with anxiety in his tone. "What the dickens shall we do? There's no other house for a mile!"

Squiff moved away from the door.

"Let's go round the back," he said. "Might be able to make them hear better."

So they hastened round a little pathway which led to the rear premises. They arrived in a weed-covered yard, and beheld a dilapidated back door. Of any kind of life there was no sign.

Squiff bashed upon the door loudly with his boot.

"That ought to wake somebody!" he grunted. "The other chaps will be wondering what the dickens is keeping us!"

If the house was tenanted, as Harry Wharton stated, then the good people were either all out, or fast asleep. It was distinctly curious, anyhow. The house was a large one, and the tenant would surely keep servants. For, although the property was rather neglected, it was nevertheless a gentleman's residence.

"Oh, what's the good of this?" said Squiff angrily.

"Well, we can't help it, can we?" demanded Bob Cherry. "I think it's simply rotten of the people to be out just when we want some water!"

Harry Wharton looked worried.

"I'm thinking of old Franky," he said. "Oh, let's go and search for a pump! There's sure to be— My hat! Is that one?"

Wharton pointed, and ran across the yard to a moss-grown wooden erection, with a rusty iron handle sticking out of one side of it. At close quarters it was easily recognisable as a pump.

"By Jove!" exclaimed Wharton. "The very thing we're looking for! Squint round for a tin or something."

"Half a tick!" said Bob Cherry. "Try the handle first. The blessed thing may be dry!"

Wharton grasped the rusty handle and worked it up and down. It went very easily, but there was no result.

"Confound it!" muttered Wharton. "The rotten thing's N.G.!"

"Stick it, you ass!" said Squiff. "Old pumps like this always have to be wangled a few minutes before they act."

Harry Wharton persevered eagerly. His closest chum was lying down the road senseless, and water simply had to be found. And after a few more pumps, the handle went stiffly, and a gurgling sound was heard in the depths.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" murmured Bob. "Now we're getting something!"

Creak, creak! Gurgle, gurgle!

"Jolly long time coming!" panted Wharton. "Hold something under—"

Bang!

The three juniors jumped.

A terrific explosion—at least, so it seemed to them—had taken place in a little shrubbery thirty yards away. Almost at the same second they heard a patter-patter of something like hail on the roof of the house.

"A gun-shot!" gasped Squiff amazedly. "Didn't you hear the shots spattering on the roof and wall of the house? By gum! What the dickens does it mean?"

Wharton grasped the pump-handle again.

"Accident perhaps—" he began.

But at that moment he became aware of a burly figure approaching from the shrubbery. The man was quite visible in the half-light, and the juniors could see that his face was simply red with anger.

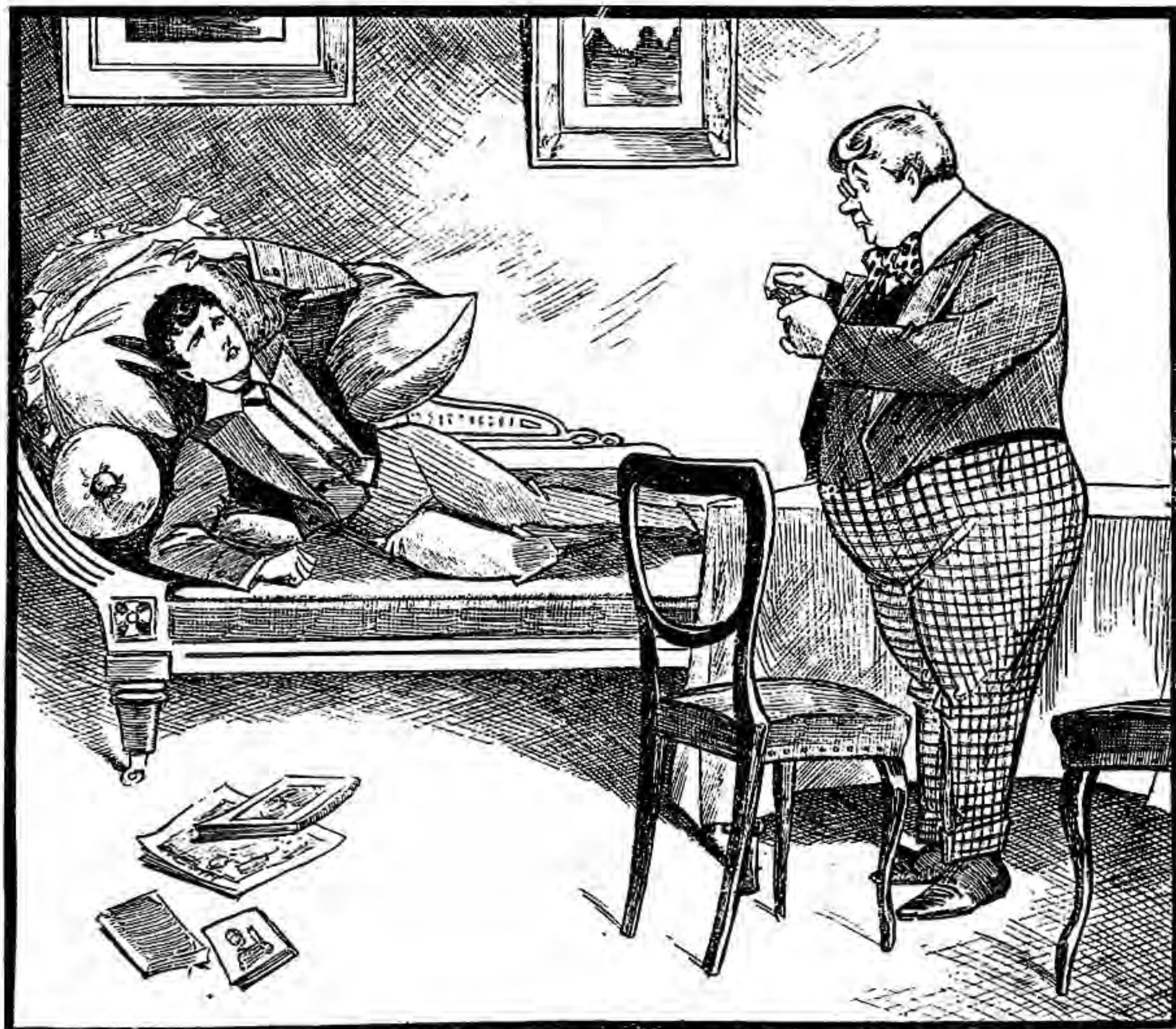
"This," murmured Bob Cherry, "is where we cop it in the giddy neck, my sons!"

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

The Fury of Mr. Roff!

THE stranger approached with rapid strides.

Wharton, Bob Cherry, and Squiff watched him rather anxiously, for they had no desire to waste time. Their chum urgently needed water, and the juniors felt sure that a few words of explanation would



"You're a brick, Mauly!" said Bunter, grabbing up the purse. "This is jolly decent of you. Why—what the dickens—there's nothing in here!" he roared. "Yaas, I know!" said his lordship innocently. (See Chapter 7.)

be sufficient. They were trespassing—but they had an excellent excuse.

"What is the meaning of this?" demanded the man in a harsh voice. "What are you doing on these premises? You," he added, pointing at Wharton, "drop that pump-handle!"

"Just a minute, sir——"

"Drop it, I say!" thundered the stranger.

Harry Wharton released the handle reluctantly.

"We'll explain, sir——"

"You'll explain nothing!" snarled the man. "Get off these premises before I throw you off! My name is Mr. George Roff, and I am tenant of this property!"

"Then you're the very gentleman we want to see," said Squiff quickly. "No need to get wild, sir. We only want a little water."

Mr. Roff looked at the pump closely, and seemed to be relieved when he observed that it was still dry.

"You won't get any water here!" he exclaimed harshly. "That pump isn't in working order. I do not allow impertinent schoolboys to have the run of my premises. If you're not out within one minute I'll——"

The three juniors began to get impatient.

"But, dash it all, we were doing no harm, sir!" protested Bob Cherry.

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"Harm or no harm—get out!"

Harry Wharton gritted his teeth.

"We admit that you have the right to order us off, sir," he said, "but there's utterly no reason why you should get into such a towering rage. We've done no harm, and have no desire to do so. All we want is some water."

Mr. Roff uttered an oath.

"Which you won't get!" he rapped out. "Hang you! Shall I have to use force, after all? My time is more valuable than to waste it upon bandying words with insolent schoolboys!"

Harry Wharton and his chums breathed hard. They had to control themselves pretty thoroughly, or they would have given voice to a few remarks which Mr. Roff would scarcely have called polite. The man's attitude was altogether unreasonable. The three juniors were becoming incensed to a very marked degree.

"Look here, sir!" said Squiff, calming himself with an effort. "We came here in a perfectly honest way, and knocked at the front door. Getting no answer, we came round here. We saw the pump, and were just about to help ourselves when you fired off your gun——"

"Which I meant to frighten you!" interrupted Mr. Roff sharply. "This is my property, and I can do as I

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like on it. I do not allow anybody to help themselves to water!"

"But——"

"Go!"

"I'm blowed if we will!" said Bob Cherry wrathfully.

"What!"

"I say we're not going until we've got some water!" replied Bob. "If you'll let us explain, perhaps you'll adopt a more reasonable attitude. We were out cycling, and one of our chums had an accident. He's lying out in the road unconscious, and if we don't take some water to bathe his head——"

Mr. Roff stamped his foot impatiently.

"And what is this to do with me?" he demanded angrily. "Do you think I care what accidents happen on the highway? If your friend is injured that is your concern—not mine. You can have no water from here!"

"But his head needs bathing——"

"I cannot help that!" snarled Mr. Roff. "Leave these premises at once!"

The three juniors gasped with furious indignation. The man's callous disregard of them was simply amazing. They had merely asked him for a little water, which would cost him nothing; and, although he knew that it was needed to bathe an injury, he still persisted in maintaining the same attitude. It was more than amazing—it was inhuman.

"You can't be serious!" ejaculated Harry Wharton. "It's impossible! Poor old Nugent's stunned and bleeding, and we must have some cold water to bring him round. There's no other house for miles. You can't realise what you're saying!"

Mr. George Roff snapped his teeth.

"I do realise what I am saying," he replied, in measured tones. "And I realise, too, that I'm a fool to stand here listening to your impertinent remarks. You will allow me to know my own mind; and I feel disinclined to continue this argument."

"Right-ho, sir, we'll go!" said Squiff. "But while we're standing by this pump we'll make use of it and take away the water we want. Surely you do not object to that? Pump away, Wharton!"

Harry Wharton raised the handle.

"Stop!"

Mr. Roff's voice was urgent, and it vibrated with fury.

"Am I to be flouted in this outrageous manner?" he roared. "Do not dare to touch that pump-handle again!"

"But——"

"Hang it all——"

"Really, sir——"

"I intend to teach you boys a lesson!" snapped Mr. Roff. "You evidently think that you have a perfect right to come here and steal water. My views on the subject are totally different. Had you been polite I might have granted your request. As it is you can go elsewhere for your water; you will not get a drop here!"

"We didn't get wild until you bellowed at us, sir," said Wharton grimly. "And, under the circumstances, I consider we have got a right to demand the water!"

"You insolent young rascal!"

"Call me what you like, sir," replied Wharton. "There's no question of insolence about it. You've got water here, and you won't let us take any, and you have yourself admitted that you are behaving in this way for the childish reason of teaching us a lesson. Good heavens, can't you realise that the matter is terribly urgent?"

Mr. Roff glared.

"I'm sorry for your friend," he snapped, "but I have no time to concern myself with him. In any case, this well is dry!"

"I don't believe you!" said Squiff quietly.

"What! Do you dare suggest——"

"I don't suggest anything, sir. I merely state my

opinion," replied Squiff coolly. "Water was on the point of coming up when you fired that shot!"

Mr. Roff looked a little uncomfortable.

"Perhaps I was wrong," he admitted. "But the water is not fit for use. The well is a very old one, and you would be unable to bathe your friend's wound with—— But why should I stand here and continue this conversation?" he burst out irritably. "I've already ordered you to go. You will be wise to do so before I lose my temper!"

The three Removites looked at one another helplessly. Already much valuable time had been wasted. Johnny Bull and Hurree Singh would be wondering what was the matter. It was clear to Harry Wharton, and to the others as well, that Mr. Roff was inventing the excuses. He was evidently a harsh, callous man, or he would have been touched by the juniors' appeal, which, after all, amounted to very little. The whole affair seemed rather suspicious. It almost looked as though Mr. Roff feared the juniors being on his premises.

"Go at once!" he commanded. "Do you hear me, you young hounds?"

That was a little too much. The three juniors were already angry beyond words, and they felt almost desperate. Squiff looked at his two chums out of the corner of his eye.

"We're three to one!" he murmured.

"You mean——" asked Bob softly.

"I mean that we two can hold the rotter while Wharton pumps the water!" muttered Squiff grimly. "Are you game?"

"Game for anything, old son!"

"Good biz!"

Wharton had overheard the muttered conversation, and he was quite ready. Mr. Roff had behaved so rottenly that they felt justified in taking the course they contemplated. Indeed, they felt that they would thoroughly enjoy a set-to with the tenant of the Gables.

Wild with indignation at the man's base callousness, they would take matters into their own hands. Within one yard of a pump, and they were not allowed to draw the water they so much needed! It was altogether too exasperating to be stood.

And Harry Wharton and Squiff and Bob Cherry didn't mean to stand it.

"We're going to have some water, sir!" said Harry Wharton quietly.

"What do you mean, boy?"

"You'll either let us pump some water without interfering," went on Wharton, "or we'll take French leave and pump it in defiance of you!"

"You impertinent young rascal!" bellowed Mr. Roff.

"That's no answer, sir!"

"It's the only answer you'll get! By heavens, I'll kick you out——"

"It's no good!" growled Bob Cherry angrily. "Collar him, Squiffy!"

The collarfulness, as Hurree Singh would have described it, was terrific. Before Mr. Roff could realise what had happened Bob Cherry and Squiff had flung themselves at him. And they weren't in the least gentle either.

Crash!

Bob Cherry tripped Mr. Roff neatly, and the man measured his length upon the hard ground with such force that it nearly knocked all the wind out of his body. In a moment Squiff was sitting upon his feet, while Bob Cherry squatted comfortably upon Mr. Roff's chest. Meanwhile, Harry Wharton worked furiously at the pump-handle.

"Help!" roared the tenant of the Gables. "Help! Marris! Confound you, man! Where the deuce are you?"

Squiff looked round anxiously.

"Evidently another rotten merchant somewhere about!" he exclaimed. "Buck up, Wharton!"

"Marris, you fool!" howled Mr. Roff desperately. "This way——"

"Keep quiet!" ordered Squiff sharply. "We'll give you something——"

There was a quick patter of running feet, and a man

ANSWERS

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appeared in the dusk—for it was now nearly dark—from a thick clump of trees.

"By gosh!" he exclaimed. "What's the matter, sir?" "Drag these infernal boys off me, and throw them off the premises!" shouted Mr. Roff desperately. "Hurry, man!"

Marris, as his name appeared to be, wasted no time. He ran up, grasped Bob Cherry and Squiff before they could prepare for the attack, and yanked them into the air as though they were sacks of chaff.

"Yarroooh!" roared Bob. "Leggo, you rotter!"

"Ow! Hellup! You're busting my collar!" gasped Squiff.

Marris' strength was tremendous. Bob and Squiff were like babies in his hands; they simply couldn't do anything. Harry Wharton, too, dropping the pump-handle to rush to the rescue, found himself in the arms of Roff himself.

"Throw them out, hang them!" snarled Roff, white with passion.

"Right you are, sir. This way, my beauties!"

Bob Cherry and Squiff struggled desperately, but it was no use. Marris held them as in a vice. And they were hurried along towards the gates with Wharton following in the grip of Mr. Roff. Arriving there, Marris simply gave one heave, and his two captives were hurled forcibly into the road.

Bob Cherry and Squiff bumped against one another, tripped, and fell in a heap. And before they could rise Harry Wharton came hurtling forth. He floundered upon his chums, and they lay in the dust in a writhing mass.

"Go!" snarled Mr. Roff. "And never, if you value your lives, show your faces within this gate again!"

Bob Cherry and Harry Wharton and Squiff sat up and gasped. They were altogether too flustered and too furious to reply. They had, literally, been chucked off the premises!

THE SIXTH CHAPTER. Suspicious!

"MY only Aunt Josephine Mary!"

Bob Cherry uttered that exclamation, in wrathful tones. His collar was torn, his tie in ribbons, and his clothes smothered with dirt, and crumpled almost out of recognition.

Squiff and Harry Wharton were in a similar plight.

"The rotters!" gasped Wharton at last. "The beastly bounders! Oh, my hat! Did we ever, in all our naturals, meet such a pair of utter blighters?"

"Never!" said Squiff feelingly.

"Chucked off the premises!" said Bob Cherry, with set teeth. "Hurled into the road like sacks of coal! Great Scotland Yard, Mr. George Roff has got something to answer for, you chaps! And, by gum, he'll answer for it some day, too! We'll have our own back for this outrage!"

They rose painfully to their feet.

"And we didn't get a drop of water, after all!" exclaimed Wharton sulphurously. "Poor old Franky! I wonder how he's getting on? Let's buzz back to the others!"

They didn't exactly buzz, for they were too sore. But they trotted, and soon arrived at the spot where they had left Johnny Bull and Hurree Singh and Nugent.

"How is he?" asked Wharton anxiously.

"Oh, I'm all right, ass!" answered Frank Nugent cheerfully. "I was only knocked silly for a minute. I'm nearly well now, except for a headache that's throbbing like the very dickens. Where's that giddy water you went to fetch?"

"Thank goodness you ain't badly hurt, Franky!" exclaimed Harry Wharton.

"Where's the water?" asked Bull bluntly.

"The esteemed water seems terrifically conspicuous by its august absence!" remarked the Indian junior softly. "My dear chums, you have been absentful a beastly time!"

"The absentfulness, Inky, has been terrific," said Squiff calmly. "We haven't got any water, and we're simply fuming with fury. We've been having the time of our lives, my sons! In short, we've met two frightful scoundrels, and they got the better of the argument!"

Johnny Bull glared.

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NEXT MONDAY—**"THE MYSTERIOUS MR. MOBBS!"**

"Don't talk in riddles!" he growled. "Explain, ass!"

"Yes, what's the matter?" asked Nugent, who was sitting up, and who looked fairly all right again. "You're smothered in dust, and your collars are like bits of torn paper. Have you been having a gory fight?"

"Not exactly that, but jolly near it," replied Bob Cherry.

And he explained, helped by Wharton and Squiff at intervals. When they had done their chums grinned unsympathetically.

"Well, it seems that it was your own fault," said Johnny Bull shortly.

"Our—our own fault!" gasped Squiff.

"Of course! You should have left the premises when he first told you. You simply asked for trouble by bowling that Roff chap over!"

"Yes, you ass, but we wanted the water!" said Harry Wharton warmly. "Old Nugent was dying——"

"Dying!" roared Nugent. "You thumping ass, I'm as well as you are!"

"Well, you were unconscious——"

"Only for a minute!" growled Nugent. "I couldn't help that. If my bike wasn't smashed up I'd start off now for Greyfriars, just to show you how well I am. I'm blessed if I'm going to have you chaps think I'm crocked!"

"Well, I'm jolly glad to hear you speak so cheerfully, Franky," said Harry Wharton. "We thought you were really injured. And, of course, under the circumstances, we got thundering wild when Roff wouldn't let us have any water."

"Oh, blow the merchant and all his works!" growled Johnny Bull. "How are we going to get back to Greyfriars? Nugent's jigger is in little bits!"

"Ponsonby's doing!" said Nugent furiously. "The rotter! The awful cad! By Jove, we'll make him pay for it—— Oh, crikey, my head's splitting!"

"Don't talk, then!" said Bob Cherry sharply. "Keep quiet, ass!"

"Rats!"

The patient was rather inclined to be obstreperous. Hurree Jamset Ram Singh remarked that the obstreperousness was terrific; although it nearly cracked Inky's jaw to say it.

At last, after due consideration, Frank Nugent's machine was left behind the hedge; it was impossible to take it with them. They could send the cycle-repairer in Friardale to fetch it, and repair it. Then Harry Wharton hoisted Nugent on to his shoulders, and the party set out, after lighting their lamps, for Greyfriars.

After travelling a mile they came to some cottages, and here Wharton made Nugent dismount, and his head was attended to. A kindly labourer's wife did all that was possible. She bathed the cut, and revealed a dark bruise underneath. Then, bandaged up, and feeling ever so much better, Nugent again took his elevated position on Wharton's back, and the journey to Greyfriars was continued.

The gates were locked when they arrived; and Gosling, the porter, grinned amiably as he opened them. Gosling was always amiable when he knew that some juniors were in for trouble. Juniors, according to Gosling, were too troublesome to live. He looked upon them as necessary evils.

"Wot I says is this 'ere," he growled, as the gates swung open. "I shall 'ave to report ye to Mr. Quelch. You're hover a hour late——"

"Oh, rats! You needn't tell us!" said Squiff crossly.

"Which I ain't goin' to be cheeked——"

"My dear Gossy, you haven't got a say in the matter," remarked Bob Cherry. "If we like to cheek you, you've got to stand it! Wot I says is this 'ere—we've 'ad an haccident, and we was prewented from coming hearlier!"

Gosling glared.

"Young rip!" he grunted. "I'll report ye for sauce!"

A sharp footstep sounded on the gravel of the Close, and Mr. Quelch loomed up.

"Ah, so you have condescended to return, boys," he said sarcastically. "You will have to give me a very good explanation for this lateness. Good gracious,

Nugent, what is the matter with your head? Why are you wearing that bandage?"

"It's nothing, sir—"

"Don't take any notice of him, sir," interrupted Harry Wharton. "He's had a nasty knock, and won't admit that he's hurt much. There's been an accident."

"Dear me! Come inside, boys, and tell me what happened."

Mr. Quelch listened seriously as Wharton told of a motor-car—he didn't say who was driving, or who else was in the car—which had accidentally bowled Nugent over, and had, incidentally, smashed his bike.

"Disgraceful!" said Mr. Quelch. "These motor-cars are a positive danger to all decent folk! I shall have to write to the police, and tell them to keep a stricter look-out for reckless drivers. Did you notice the number of this car?"

"No, sir."

"A great pity," said Mr. Quelch. "However, I am glad your injury is nothing serious, Nugent. You had better go along to the matron, and let her look at your head. She will probably send you straight off to bed."

And Mr. Quelch went off, presumably to write to the police. Nugent managed to get round the right side of the matron, and he was wasn't packed off to bed. He was certainly feeling rather groggy, but he had a horror of being "coddled up."

When bed-time came he was glad enough, and went off to sleep like a top—to awake, the next morning, with a clear head, and only a tender bruise, and a big patch of sticking-plaster, to remind him of the previous evening's accident.

"Feeling fit?" asked Wharton anxiously, as the Remove dressed.

"Rather!" replied Nugent. "I'm all right, ass!"

"I like the ornament on your manly forehead!" grinned Peter Todd. "It's a great improvement to your face, Nugent, because we can't see so much of it!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, rats!"

Nugent came in for a good deal of chipping, and he didn't exactly welcome it. However, he couldn't fight the whole Remove, so he had to grin and bear it; at least, he bore it, but he didn't grin.

"My bike'll cost me a pretty penny," he said, as he and his chums waited in the Close for the brekker bell to ring. "New front wheel, new tyre, new forks! My hat! It'll be a long bill!"

"That's O.K.," said Squiff. "We'll all contribute, and it won't be much each."

"Of course," said Wharton. "Don't worry about that."

"Oh, but it ain't fair——"

"Dry up!"

"I can't let you pay——"

"Ring off, ass!" roared Bob Cherry, glaring. "I suppose we can pay something if we like? It's only fair, too. It was one of Pon's rotten tricks, and it wasn't directed particularly at you. He didn't care whose bike it was he smashed."

"My hat! Pon will have to suffer for that bizney!" said Wharton grimly. "And so will that rotter, Roff! It's my opinion, kids, that there's something queer about the Gables! Roff was terribly anxious to get rid of us. Why?"

"Ask me another!"

"Why?" repeated Wharton. "There's a mystery about that house!"

Clang! Clang!

"All right; let the giddy mystery remain there," said Squiff. "I'm hungry, and the brekker bell's just tinkled out. Come on, my sons!"

After breakfast, Vernon-Smith stopped the Famous Five in the Remove passage.

"Did you see that paragraph in the local paper?" he asked.

"Which paragraph?"

"Why, it seems that there are German spies somewhere about this district," said the Bounder. "At least, the police suspect it. They've had evidence that something

suspicious is going on. Of course, the spy may be an Englishman."

"How can a German spy be an Englishman, fathead?" asked Bob politely.

"Can't he be a traitor to his country?" asked Vernon-Smith.

"My hat!"

"Oh, that's too thick!" said Nugent. "No Britisher would be such a skunk!"

"Well, we never know," said Vernon-Smith, and he marched off, leaving Harry Wharton looking very thoughtful. So preoccupied was he, in fact, that he didn't hear a remark which Johnny Bull addressed to him.

"Asleep?" asked Bull, giving Wharton a dig.

"Ow! What's up?" roared Harry, rubbing his ribs.

"What's the matter with you?"

"Nothing, you idiot! I was thinking!"

"Well, don't think so thoroughly, then," said Johnny Bull. "What's the good of my talking to you if you don't hear me?"

Harry Wharton grunted, and pretended to listen to Johnny Bull. It was only pretence, for he was deep in thought again, and his youthful brow was very wrinkled. And the chief things which buzzed in his brain were German spies, the Gables, and Mr. Roff!

Could there possibly be any connection?

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Trying to Raise the Wind!

BILLY BUNTER, the Owl of the Remove, rolled out of the common-room with a disconsolate expression upon his fat face.

Billy Bunter was in that unfortunate state which is vulgarly described as "broke to the wide." Not that this was anything new for Billy Bunter. In fact, he was far more often stony than he was in funds. For Bunter to be in funds was an event. At the present moment, however, he was not only stony, but he was tremendously hungry into the bargain.

And Mrs. Mimble, in the little school shop, had a fresh stock of pastry in that evening. Of course, Bunter had had tea in No. 7 Study with Peter Todd and Dutton, his study-mates, but it had been, to Bunter's mind, rather frugal.

He was desperately hungry again, and he hadn't got a brass farthing; not that a brass farthing would have been much use to him, even if he had got it.

"Stony!" growled Bunter. "Oh, rats! And I'm expecting a postal-order to-night, too!"

He didn't really expect a postal-order, but he had got so used to telling the yarn about an expected postal-order to the fellows, that he actually made himself believe that one was in the post.

"I must get some tin," he told himself. "Mrs. Mimble won't let me have anything on tick—the mean old rotter! I know what I'll do; I'll try and borrow something until to-morrow!"

Billy Bunter was a wonderful chap, in his way. He would go borrowing without the slightest intention of paying his debts back; and the fact that he owed money all round didn't worry him in the least. He would turn up smiling, and ask for another loan with all the confidence in the world.

"If I can't get a loan from one chap, I'll go to another!" he murmured. "I shall be bound to strike oil somewhere. Who shall I start with first?"

The question was answered for him, for Vernon-Smith came along the passage whistling.

"I say, Smithy——"

"Now don't you start bothering, Bunter!" said the Bounder.

"But I only want to keep you for a moment, old man," said Bunter affectionately. "It's just a little favour——"

Vernon-Smith grinned.

"As per usual, I suppose?" he inquired. "How much do you want, Bunter?"

Billy Bunter blinked at Vernon-Smith eagerly. "This is jolly good of you, Smithy," he said. "Half-a-quid will be enough for to-night!"

"Sure?" asked the Bounder genially.

"Well, a quid would be better, certainly!" said Bunter. "This is ripping of you, Smithy. I'll pay you back to-morrow, when my postal-order comes."

"Pay what back?" inquired Vernon-Smith innocently.

"Why, the quid, of course!"

"Which quid?"

Billy Bunter began to get impatient.

"Didn't you say you were going to lend me a quid?" he asked. "Hand it over, old chap!"

Vernon-Smith chuckled.

"You take too much for granted, Bunter," he replied.

"I merely asked you if half-a-sovereign would be enough. I didn't say I was going to lend you anything—because I'm not! Don't make any mistake on that point, my son! Try somebody else!"

And Vernon-Smith continued his whistling, and went on his way.

"Rotter!" gasped Bunter indignantly. "Just when I thought I'd touched, too!"

He rolled off in disappointment, and suddenly bethought himself of Lord Mauleverer.

Mauleverer was the most frightful slacker in the Remove, and he never did any work unless he was compelled to do so. He had a study all to himself, and it was furnished on the most luxurious and lavish scale. Bunter looked upon it as a most scandalous waste of money. The cash, to his mind, would have been far better expended on tuck.

He walked into Mauleverer's study without knocking, and, as he had expected, the slacker of the Remove was lounging languidly on a softly-padded settee.

"Hallo, Mauly!" began Bunter. "Can you spare me a few minutes?"

"Yaas. I—I mean no," said Lord Mauleverer lazily.

"Go away, Bunter, I'm busy!"

"Busy!" repeated Bunter blinking. "Yes, you look it!"

"Yaas; but I am busy, my dear fellow."

"What are you doing, then?"

"Thinkin'!"

"Thinking! What are you thinking about?"

"Begad! Don't bother me, Bunter! I—I'm thinkin' how nice it would be if no silly asses came here bothering me. I suppose you want me to lend you something? My purse is on the table. Take as much out of it as you want, and clear off!"

Billy Bunter's eyes gleamed behind his big spectacles.

"You're a brick, Mauly!" he said, grabbing up the purse. "This is jolly decent of you. Why, what the dickens, there's nothing in here!" he roared.

"Yaas, I know!" said his lordship innocently.

Billy Bunter glared.

"You surely don't think I'd tell you to take all you wanted if there was anything in the purse, do you?" asked Mauleverer in surprise. "Now, buzz off, Bunter, there's a good fellow!"

"Ain't—ain't you going to lend me anything?"

"No."

"But you've got some tin?"

"Yaas; heaps!"

"Where do you keep it?"

Lord Mauleverer yawned.

"It's in my pocket, my dear fellow; but I can't get at it!"

"Why not?"

"Too much fag!"

"You—you lazy bounder!" gasped Bunter. "You slacking rotter!"

"Yaas, I've been told that before!" said Mauleverer complacently.

"If you don't fork out at once, I'll give you a thick ear!"

"Begad!"

"I mean it!" roared Bunter recklessly.

"If that's the case, Bunter, I'd better get up!" said his lordship.

And, with amazing briskness, Lord Mauleverer leaped from the settee. When he liked, Mauly could be as active as anybody in the Remove—but he didn't often like. At the present moment, however, there was no doubt about his intention.

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NEXT MONDAY—**"THE MYSTERIOUS MR. MOBBS!"**

"There's the door, Bunter," he said quietly—"get out!"

"Oh, really, Mauly——"

"I might have lent you something if you'd been polite," said Lord Mauleverer; "but as you seem to demand it, you won't get a farthing!"

"Oh, I didn't mean it, Mauly!" gasped Bunter. "I think you're the most generous chap in Greyfriars! In fact, there's nobody else in the whole school with half so much good nature as you!"

"Begad! I don't want any soft soap——"

"It's all true, Mauly!" said Bunter eagerly. "Lend me a quid——"

"Begad! Do you want me to throw you out?" said Mauleverer, with a sigh. "I give you three seconds, Bunter. I'm fed up with you—and I'm tired!"

His lordship commenced to roll up his sleeves, and Bunter, who knew that Mauleverer could use his fists when he liked, backed out of the study hastily. He closed the door with a terrific slam.

"Beast!" he shouted wrathfully.

"You'll get a thick ear, Bunter, if you call me that again!" said Tom Dutton, who was just passing along the passage.

"I wasn't speaking to you, ass!" growled Bunter. "It's Mauly who's a beast! I—I say, you're in funds, ain't you? Lend me five bob!"

"My name ain't Bob, you idiot!" said Dutton.

Tom Dutton was tremendously deaf, and he nearly always misunderstood all that was said to him. As Peter Todd said, it wasn't his fault, it was his misfortune—and the misfortune of anybody who happened to be speaking to him.

"I didn't say your name was Bob!" exclaimed Bunter impatiently. "I asked you to lend me some tin."

"I can't hear it," said Dutton.

"Hear what?"

"A din! Didn't you say you could hear a din?"

Billy Bunter gasped.

"I asked you for some cash!" he roared. "Let me have a loan!"

"I ain't touching you!" said Dutton indignantly.

"Ain't—ain't touching me?"

"You're off your rocker, Bunter!" said Dutton, glaring. "I ain't even touching you, and you tell me to let you alone!"

"I didn't!" howled Bunter. "I asked—— Oh, lor! Talk about a gate-post! I'm stony, Dutton, and I want some money!"

"I think you're mad, Bunter!" exclaimed Dutton suspiciously. "What on earth are you talking about? How can mutton be as sweet as honey?"

"Oh, my only strawyard!"

Billy Bunter leaned against the wall and gasped.

"You're not feeling well, Bunter," said Dutton.

"You'd better see the matron."

"Can you lend some tin?" bellowed Bunter desperately.

Tom Dutton grinned.

"Can I lend you some tin?" he repeated, understanding at last. "Why didn't you say so before? Of course I can if I like—but I'm not going to! Not likely!"

And Dutton went off with his hands in his pockets.

"Mean cad!" panted Bunter, who was breathless. "After all that shouting, too! Hang it all, I'm famished!"

The Owl of the Remove went out into the Close, and the first person he saw was Horace Coker of the Fifth. Coker was a mighty man in the Fifth—at least, in his own estimation. Everybody else smiled benignly upon Coker, and said that he couldn't help it.

"I say, Coker, old man——"

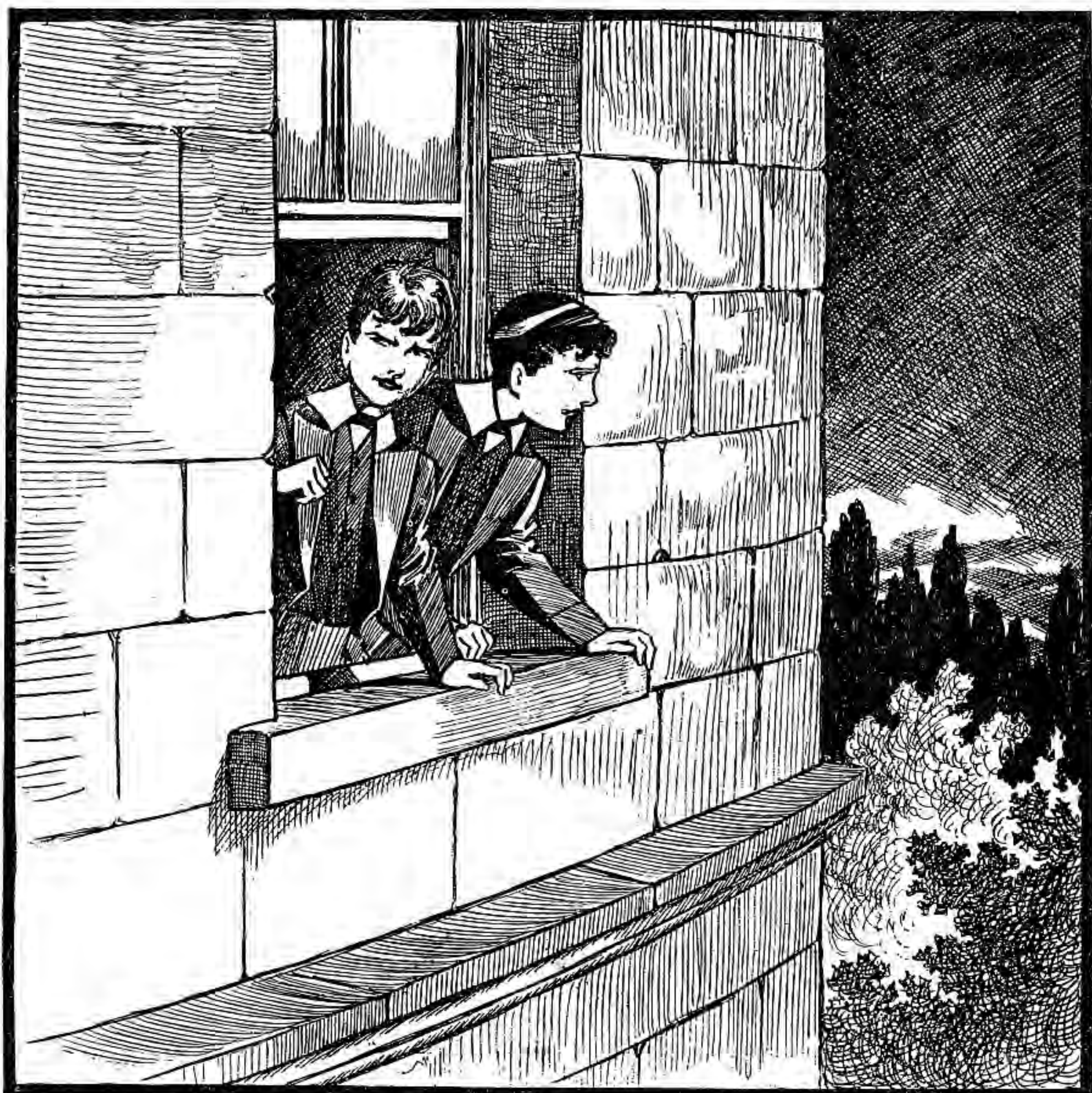
"Eh? Say that again, Bunter!" said Coker, glaring. "What did you call me?"

"N-nothing, Coker!" puffed Bunter. "I think you're letting yourself be too easy with the rest of the Fifth."

"What do you mean?"

"Why, you ought to be captain," said Bunter calmly. "Blundell ain't half such a good skipper as you'd make!"

Coker beamed.



Bob leaned out of the window. "Hopeless!" he grunted disgustedly. "We're at the top of that rotten tower. Look! The wall is absolutely sheer, without a gutter pipe or even a twig of ivy!" (See Chapter 10.)

wonder if some awful rotters have found that wallet and are dividing up the giddy spoil.

It was a terrible thought, and one that spurred Bunter to make immediate investigations. He would probably have made investigations in any case, but that thought determined him to do so at once.

He crept forward, nearer and nearer to the unseen speakers.

He soon discovered that they were on the other side of a thick hedge, and therefore they had no inkling of his presence. He stole up on tiptoe and listened intently. The voices were now quite clear and distinct.

"Don't talk nonsense, man!" somebody was saying curtly. "We've simply got to have the place before the week is out. There's no time to lose. Once the presence of the stuff is suspected, it will be all up with my scheme."

"But surely, sir, a few days extra will not make any difference?" said another voice. "The place has been empty—"

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"That is not to the point, Marris. There is danger every day until the whole transaction is completed. Once that is over I can do as I like—the whole world can know, but it will make no difference. I can bring my machinery plant down from London, and have the whole affair working like steam in less than no time. It may mean thousands into my pocket."

"And what about the plans, sir?"

"The plans, Marris?"

"Yes, sir. The plans of—"

The man lowered his voice, and Bunter failed to catch the rest of the sentence, much to his chagrin.

"If we don't have any more affairs like that one of last night," the other man said, "everything will be perfectly all right. Those confounded boys nearly discovered the whole secret, Marris."

"Nearly, sir, but not quite," returned the unseen Marris. "I don't think there's anything to fear. They don't suspect at all."

"Well, we can't be too careful, you know. Under no

circumstances whatever must we allow a stranger to enter the grounds, no matter how unsuspicious he may look. A mere inkling of the truth, and the whole thing would be common knowledge."

The two men, who had evidently paused in the wood during a walk, now went on their way again, and Bunter was left crouching behind the hedge, listening to their receding footsteps.

"Blessed if I know what they're jawing about!" he grunted. "They might have been a little more explicit. Rotten! Just when I thought I was going to hear something of a secret nature, too!"

Bunter felt that he had been unfairly treated. He always thought that when he was prevented from overhearing a private conversation just when it reached its most interesting point. At the present moment, however, he had something else to think about—Coker's precious wallet, to be exact.

Bunter thought about it quite a lot. Exactly what he thought was rather too choice to set down. He found no traces of it, and at last, when it was nearly dark, he disgustingly decided to return to Greyfriars.

By chance, he met Coker in the entrance-hall, and Coker grinned cheerfully.

"Did you find it, Bunter?" he asked, chuckling.

Bunter looked at the Fifth-Former suspiciously.

"No, I didn't!" he grunted. "I don't believe the rotten thing's there, Coker! I believe you told me a rotten yarn, just for a joke!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Coker.

"Funny, ain't it?" growled Billy Bunter, glaring.

"Well, I should say it is!" replied Coker. "Jolly funny! You were diddled properly, Bunter. Perhaps it'll teach you not to come bothering for loans again!"

"You—you rotter!" gasped Bunter. "And I've been searching the wood for hours! I'm famished, Coker," he added piteously. "It ain't fair, you know, to do the dirty on a fellow like that!"

Coker fished in his pocket.

"Mind, I don't believe in lending you tin, Bunter," he said, "but considering that you have had a decent amount of trouble, I'll advance you half-a-dollar. Pay me back when you like. I shall expect it as a kind of old-age pension!"

And Coker went off, leaving Bunter somewhat relieved in mind. After all, half-a-crown was exactly two shillings and sixpence—and for two shillings and sixpence he could obtain a fairly decent snack.

"It'll be a pretty rotten feed!" murmured Bunter, as he made a bee-line for the tuckshop. "Still, I might have done worse!"

He entered the tuckshop and planked his coin down upon the counter. Mrs. Mimble, the good dame who presided over the establishment, needed no telling that no change was required in cash. Bunter would receive eatables to the exact value—and more, if he could get them!

"Something queer going on in the wood," he remarked, with his mouth full. "I saw a couple of awful scoundrels there. I say, Mrs. Mimble, these sausage-rolls ain't fresh. I shall want 'em at a halfpenny each instead of a penny!"

"They're fresh in to-day, Master Bunter," said Mrs. Mimble indignantly.

"Don't take any notice of him, Mrs. Mimble," said Bulstrode, who was leaning against the counter with Tom Brown, Peter Todd, and one or two others. "It's only a rotten wheeze of his to get more for his money!"

"Oh, really, Bulstrode—"

"What's that you were saying about some scoundrels in the wood, Bunter?" asked Peter Todd.

"It's right!" said the Owl of the Remove. "Two frightful rotters! One of them was named Harris, or Barris, or something like that."

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" exclaimed Bob Cherry, coming into the tuckshop with Squiff and Harry Wharton. "What are you yarning about now, Bunter?"

"I ain't yarning," said Billy Bunter. "I'm telling the chaps of something I heard in the wood not long ago. Two chaps were talking, and I happened to overhear them."

"Quite by accident, of course?" asked Squiff sarcastically.

"Well, rather! You don't think I'm an eavesdropper, do you?"

"No, I don't think it, Bunter," said Squiff calmly—"I know it!"

"Oh, really, Squiffy—"

"Get on with the yarn, ass!" ordered Peter Todd.

"Well, there were two chaps in the wood, and they were saying something about some machinery and plants."

"Cabbages?" inquired Bob Cherry humorously.

"Oh, rats! How the dickens should I know?" said Bunter. "They were talking about plants of some kind, anyhow—and plans, too!"

"Plans?" asked Squiff.

"Yes. I couldn't quite catch what they were saying about plans, although I strained—I—I mean, they spoke a little lower, and—and—"

"Might as well tell the truth, Bunter. You've let it out now," said Peter Todd grimly. "You were listening—spying, in fact—and we don't want to hear any more about it!"

"Yes; but this chap, Barris—"

"Who?" asked Bob Cherry sharply. "Did you say Marris?"

"Yes; that's the name," said Bunter.

Bob Cherry and Squiff and Harry Wharton exchanged glances.

"Well," said Wharton, "what did Marris say?"

Bunter bit into a cream-puff before replying.

"Blessed if I remember everything!" he said. "Here, I say, Mrs. Mimble, don't take those tarts away. I haven't finished yet."

"Sorry, Master Bunter, but you've had your half-crown's-worth."

"Buck up with the yarn!" said Squiff impatiently.

He and Harry Wharton and Bob Cherry realised that Bunter had overheard a conversation between Mr. Roff and Marris, and he was probably in a position to tell them something that might give them a clue.

"I—I don't feel up to it," said Bunter, with a longing eye on a plate of meat-pies. "Perhaps if I had some more grub I might remember. I'm a funny chap that way, you know."

Squiff threw a florin on the counter.

"There you are! Feed your face with that!" he growled. "Now can you remember, you fat gorger?"

"Rather!" said Bunter eagerly.

As long as people were willing to supply him with tuck, Billy Bunter would have remembered anything, whether it had actually happened or not.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

Not Quite a Success!

SQUIFF tapped the counter impatiently.

"Buck up, Bunter!" he said. "Out with the yarn!"

"Oh, there ain't no yarn!" said Bunter, with his mouth full. "But I think it's jolly suspicious. Those two chaps were talking about plans, and one of them said he didn't think they had anything to fear. It looks to me as if they're up to something fishy, because one of them said some boys nearly discovered the whole secret, and that, if they had done, the game would have been up!"

"By George!" ejaculated Bob Cherry, looking at Squiff and Wharton meaningly.

So when they had gone for water to the Gables the previous night they had nearly discovered the secret! What the secret was Harry Wharton & Co. did not know, but they decided, then and there, to make further investigations.

"Anything else, Bunter?" asked Squiff.

"Oh, they said that they weren't going to let anybody else into the grounds, though I'm blessed if I know what they meant," said Bunter. "It seems that they're afraid of being copped, for Marris said that if anybody suspected the truth the game would be up!"

Peter Todd grunted.

"I'm blowed if I can make head or tail of that yarn!" he said. "Don't give him any more tin, you chaps. He's only making it up in order to get more grub! If you tell any more fibs, Bunter, I'll—"

"They ain't fibs!" roared Bunter. "I'm a truthful chap!"

"Truthful, by gum!" grinned Squiff. "That's done it!"

And he walked out of the tuckshop with Harry Wharton and Bob Cherry. On the School House steps they met Hurree Singh, Johnny Bull, and Nugent. The six juniors then had quite a long talk.

"I tell you it's as plain as a pikestaff!" said Bob Cherry at last. "Koff and his man are either German spies or counterfeiters! That's why they were so afraid of us being in the grounds of the Gables; they thought we might discover the guilty secret."

"Looks like it, certainly," agreed Harry Wharton. "But it doesn't do to rely on Bunter's fairy-tales."

"But we know this isn't a fairy-tale," said Squiff; "it must be the truth, because it exactly fits in with our own experience. Bunter even mentioned that some boys had nearly discovered the whole caboodle. Those boys were us."

"Counterfeiters, by Jove!" said Nugent. "No wonder they wouldn't let you have any water. I shouldn't be surprised if all their giddy tools and things were down that well."

"Well?" asked Wharton.

"Yes, you ass! There was a well under the pump," said Nugent. "Very likely there's a secret way down there to an underground cavern, where they do their coining."

Harry Wharton laughed.

"I say, this won't do," he said. "We must stick to facts. It won't help us to imagine all sorts of things, the same as they put in a story-book. The facts themselves are pretty suspicious; but what can we do?"

Bob Cherry rubbed his curly head.

"Well, we can all turn into miniature editions of Sexton Blake, and do some investigating," he said coolly. "What price we turn detectives? I say, it'll be simply ripping if we can bowl those two rotters out as German spies or coiners, or something frightful like that!"

"And, what's more," said Squiff eagerly, "I vote we take a trip there now and have a squint round. We may discover the secret straight off. I tell you, I'm jolly hot on anything like this!"

"Same here," said Bob enthusiastically. "I'm game!"

But Harry Wharton shook his head.

"Rats!" he said shortly. "We're not going to-night!"

"Why not?" demanded Bob warmly.

"Because it's a fathheaded idea!" said Wharton candidly. "It doesn't do to rush into these things in a hurry. Besides, I want to hold a meeting in the Rag about the last few cricket matches of the season."

"That can wait."

"No, it can't," said the Remove captain firmly. "Cricket's more important than the rotten Gables! What do you other chaps say?"

They said various things, including a remark from Hurree Singh to the effect that the rottenfulness of the detectiveful idea was terrific. Everybody except Bob Cherry and Squiff were for postponing investigation. Those two cheerful youths, however, were firm.

"Well, you asses can do as you like!" said Squiff. "I'm for looking into the matter straight away. You can go and hold your rotten cricket meeting, but Bob and I are going to the Gables."

Bob Cherry nodded.

"That's the wheeze," he agreed. "And if we succeed in unmasking the villains we shall get all the credit."

"More likely to get chucked into the road again," said Johnny Bull. "Those two men are regular rotters, and I should advise you to go easily."

Squiff chuckled.

"Well, if we're not back by supper-time," he said solemnly, "you can take it for granted that we've been murdered, and you'd better come and search for our remains!"

"Of course, we shall probably be buried by the time you arrive," added Bob Cherry. "If you happen to hear any smothered yells coming from beneath the ground you'll know that we're still alive and kicking, and it'll be your duty to dig us up again."

"Oh, don't be potty!" growled Harry Wharton. "I don't suppose you can help it, though. It's a potty idea altogether! Still, if you set your minds on it I know

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it's no good arguing. Might as well talk to brick walls as you chaps!"

Bob Cherry and Squiff had set their minds on the jaunt, and they wasted no time in setting out. By a piece of good fortune, they succeeded in obtaining a pass from Courtney of the Sixth, who happened to be in a particularly good temper. It was after locking-up, but, having the pass, the two juniors were not breaking bounds. But, of course, they would have to be in again before supper.

It was getting dark as they walked briskly along. They took a footpath by the cliffs which led on to the Pegg road not far from the lonely house among the trees.

"Well, it's up to us to find out something," said Squiff. "We've come on our own, and the other chaps will cackle like old hens if we fail."

They didn't exactly know what they were going to do, or how they were going to set about their investigations. They only walked on briskly, leaving their plan of action to shape itself when they arrived at the Gables.

When they did arrive it was almost dark, and the old house looked dismal and sinister among the thick trees. Not a single light showed in the front, and there seemed to be something grim and forbidding about the place. Bob Cherry and Squiff felt some of their enthusiasm oozing away as they stood in the road, wondering how they should act.

"Looks pretty creepy!" murmured Bob. "Wonder if we'd better risk it to-night, Squiffy? That chap Marris is as strong as an ox, and he might cop us."

"Hallo! Are you nervous?" asked Squiff.

"Nervous! You—you ass! I'm ready for anything!"

"Well, you were talking about chucking the project up," said Squiff. "I ain't feeling so very bold myself, but we've come here to investigate, and we'll do it."

"I suppose we'd better," murmured Bob.

"My hat, you ain't funky!"

Bob Cherry glared.

"Funky!" he exclaimed wrathfully. "Look here, Squiff, if you want a thundering thick ear you've only got to say that again! Funky, indeed! Why, you—you—"

Squiff chuckled.

"Keep your giddy hair on!" he grinned. "I didn't mean it, ass! Let's shin over the wall further along and creep round towards the back of the house. We may be able to see something—a lighted window, perhaps."

"Right-ho!" murmured Bob. "Lead on, Macduff!"

They were feeling better now, and entered into the spirit of the adventure. Once they were fairly over the wall, and actually in the grounds of the Gables, all their nervousness left them, and they were eager to find something which would substantiate their suspicions.

The place was still and silent, and appeared to be absolutely deserted. But the two amateur detectives didn't allow themselves to be rash on this account. They proceeded with extreme caution. At last they arrived at the back, and there, standing out boldly in the darkness, was a brightly-illuminated window.

"No blind!" breathed Squiff. "Perhaps we shall be able to have a squint in!"

"We'll try, anyhow!"

They stole forward silently, crossed a piece of waste ground, which had originally been a vegetable garden, and found themselves among some gooseberry-bushes, which gave them some sharp pricks before they were aware of their nature.

"Yow! I'm scratched!" growled Bob. "Bust the blessed bush!"

Squiff stood bolt upright suddenly.

"Look out!" he yelled in alarm. "Scoot!"

But before he could move, and before Bob Cherry realised what had happened, a big, burly form rose as though from the ground itself, and grabbed at the juniors. Two strong hands grasped the chums' collars, and they were held as in a vice.

"Got you!" snarled a harsh voice. "By gosh, you've let yourselves in for it now, my young beauties!"

THE TENTH CHAPTER.
Prisoners in the Tower!

"MARRIS!" gasped Bob Cherry.
 "Yes, that's me!" said the man roughly.
 "Thought you was on your own, didn't you?"
 Well, I was looking at you all the time—ever since you hopped over the wall!"

"My hat!" ejaculated Squiff.
 "Never mind your hat; come along with me!" growled Marris. "Mr. Roff will have something to say to you!"

"We—we——"
 "Better leave your explanation for Mr. Roff," said Marris gruffly. "This way, young shavers!"

And this way it was. Bob Cherry and Squiff did not waste their strength in trying to get away. They knew very well that any such attempt would be quite futile. The strength of their captor was very great, and they were, after all, only boys. Three of them might possibly have overpowered him, but he was easily the master of two.

"Wharton's beastly fault!" growled Squiff. "Why didn't the silly ass come with us?"

They were marched up to the back door, and Marris kicked upon it loudly. A moment later it opened, and a bright light shot out into the dark summer's night. Mr. George Roff stood in the doorway, smoking a large pipe.

"The door wasn't locked," he began. "Why, what——"

"Found these two young rascals in the grounds, sir!" exclaimed Marris fiercely. "Spying, they were!"

"By thunder!" shouted Mr. Roff furiously. "Bring them inside, and let me have a look at them!"

He grasped Bob Cherry himself, and the two juniors were pushed roughly along the passage into a large room which was barely furnished, but, nevertheless, quite comfortable and tidy. The remains of a meal were on the table.

"I thought so!" exclaimed Mr. Roff hotly. "These are two of the boys with whom we had trouble last night. What in the name of mischief do you mean by coming here and prying round?"

"Is there anything we mustn't see?" asked Squiff coolly.

"Answer my question, boy!"

Squiff looked Mr. Roff straight in the face.

"I will!" he said boldly. "We think there's something queer going on in this house. We came here in order to find out for ourselves. You threw us off the premises yesterday because you thought we might discover the secret. Well, suppose we have discovered it?"

Mr. Roff started.

"By thunder, if you have——"

"Ah!" exclaimed Squiff sharply. "Then you're afraid?"

"You caught him properly, Squiff!" put in Bob Cherry. "These blighters are doing something in this house that won't bear the light of day. Well, it's my opinion that you're both German spies!"

"Ha, ha, ha, ha!" roared Mr. Roff. And Marris smiled broadly.

"Or, if you ain't German spies," said Squiff, "you're coiners!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Mr. Roff roared with genuine laughter, but suddenly his face grew stern again.

"Enough of this nonsense!" he rapped out.

"It's all very well for you to laugh," said Squiff, grimly, "but it doesn't deceive us. As soon as you let us go we're going straight to the police——"

Mr. Roff uttered an oath.

"Make no mistake!" he said harshly. "You will not leave this house until I allow you to!"

"You—you scoundrel!" gasped Bob Cherry. "You don't mean to suggest you're going to detain us against our will? You're not going to keep us prisoners?"

Mr. Roff nodded.

"That is exactly what I'm going to do," he replied grimly.

"Great Scott!"

"You—you rotter!"

"You have been found prowling in the grounds of my

house," proceeded Mr. Roff. "The obvious deduction is that your intent was robbery. No, I don't say that you actually meant to rob me, but I am justified in taking that view. I am also justified in detaining you here until I choose to set you at liberty."

Bob Cherry and Squiff gazed at one another in consternation. Their expedition had turned out a ghastly failure, and it seemed that matters were going to be really serious. They were two boys against two men, so they had no chance of escape.

"It's outrageous!" exclaimed Squiff furiously. "If you detain us it will show that you're afraid of us going to the police and giving them information. It will show that you're up to some game here that is pretty dark!"

Mr. Roff laughed harshly.

"You are at liberty to think what you like," he said. "You will very soon discover that your suspicions are quite wrong. But, by thunder, I am not going to have all my arrangements upset by a pair of inquisitive schoolboys. As long as you are in this house I know that my plans will not miscarry."

"Our chums at Greyfriars knew that we came here——"

"Bah! Do you think I care for that?" rapped out Mr. Roff. "If inquiries are made I shall say that I have seen nothing of you, and nobody has the right to search my house. To-morrow morning you'll be set free, because I shall no longer have any reason to keep you here."

"You wouldn't dare to keep us here all night!" exclaimed Bob Cherry wrathfully.

"Enough of this!" snarled Roff. "We will take them into the tower, Marris. There is a strong door there, and the window is very high. Once in that room they will be safe there until I choose to let them out!"

And Bob Cherry and Squiff, furiously indignant, and somewhat alarmed, were forced upstairs by Roff and his companion. Arriving on the upper landing, they were then taken up a narrow spiral staircase, at the top of which was a strong oaken door. By the light of the candle which Marris carried, Roff unlocked the door, and Bob Cherry and Squiff were pushed into a dark apartment.

"I don't think there's much fear of you escaping from here," said Roff roughly. "In about an hour I will send Marris up with some sandwiches and hot coffee for your supper."

The door slammed, and Bob Cherry and Squiff were left alone in the darkness. They heard the footsteps of the two men as they retreated downstairs.

"My hat!" exclaimed Squiff coolly. "What do you think of it, my son?"

Bob Cherry grunted.

"I'd better not say what I think!" he growled. "Do you realise, Squiff, that we're prisoners—prisoners in a giddy tower, like they used to treat those old traitor merchants in the Middle Ages?"

"Prisoners!" repeated Squiff. "What the dickens will the prefects say in Greyfriars when we don't show up at bedtime? What will Harry Wharton and the others do?"

"Come and look for us, I expect," replied Bob. "Somehow, you know, I don't think Roff's a deep-dyed villain. He's a first-class rotter, but there must be some decency in him, or he wouldn't send up sandwiches and hot coffee!"

"That may have been swank," said Squiff. "It may have been his idea of a joke. Personally, I believe Roff's a counterfeiter; that's what the talk of machinery meant. He's taken this old house, and he's going to have his giddy printing machines brought down and fixed up."

"Printing machines?" repeated Bob. "Counterfeiters use molten metal and moulds and things!"

"Not when they're making counterfeit banknotes, you ass!"

"Oh, I forget about banknotes," said Bob. "Well, look here, I'm blessed if I'm going to stick in this hole without making an attempt to escape. If we could only get free we could bunk to the police, and have the precious pair arrested in no time."

"Well, strike a match, and let's have a squint round."

Bob Cherry ignited a wax-vesta, and as the light flared up they saw that the little room was quite bare. The door was exceedingly strong, and escape that way was out of the question. The window, however, was a simple one, with just an ordinary catch.

As the match burnt out Squiff walked over to the window, and pushed up the lower sash. Then he and Bob leaned out.

"Hopeless!" grunted Bob disgustedly. "We're at the top of that rotten tower. Look! The wall is absolutely sheer, without a gutter pipe or even a twig of ivy."

Squiff nodded dismally.

Mr. Roff knew what he had been about when he had locked the juniors in that room. Directly below the window were stone flags, so that a leap out would have meant either death or broken limbs. The wall, as Bob had said, was quite smooth, without even a hold for a monkey. Of course, the juniors could shout for help, but what would be the good of that when there was not a soul near? Mr. Roff and Marris would probably hear, and that would consequently result in further trouble.

"If we only had a rope!" exclaimed Bob Cherry, with a sigh.

Squiff started violently.

"My only Aunt Jane!" he ejaculated, in a breathless voice.

"What's up with you, fathead?" growled Bob. "Hi, you ass! Leggo! Wharrer you at?"

"Hooroo!" chortled Squiff softly, grabbing hold of Bob Cherry and waltzing him round the little room. "Why didn't I think of it before? Oh, what a thundering ass I am!"

"You are!" agreed Bob Cherry breathlessly. "Have you gone dotty?"

"No," replied Squiff excitedly. "But I just remembered something. You know I was practising with my lasso this afternoon? Well, when I'd finished I wound it round my giddy tummy, as I always do, and it's there now!"

"By gum!" ejaculated Bob.

The two prisoners stared at one another in silence for a moment. Squiff, being an Australian, was an expert with the "rope," and he had been trying his skill that very afternoon. When he had finished, instead of carrying the rope home in a coil he had wound it round himself, underneath his waistcoat.

"We can use it!" exclaimed Squiff excitedly. "It's quite long enough to reach the ground. My hat, we'll diddle old Roff yet, and make our get-away, as Fisher T. Fish would say, in his beautiful American language!"

"But it's not strong enough," protested Bob Cherry. "Think what would happen if the rope busted when I was half-way down!"

"You'd get a nasty knock," said Squiff coolly. "But it won't break, my tulip! It's as strong as steel wire."

He proceeded to remove the rope from his person, and when that was done he affixed one end of the line round the two window sashes. These were quite strong enough to bear the weight of both juniors together, if necessary.

"No time to waste," said Squiff briskly. "I'll go down first, to show you the rope's strong enough."

"Right-ho! I won't argue," said Bob. "Shin down!"

The two juniors were so engrossed in what they were doing that they didn't hear a slight sound outside the door, but a faint footstep receded quickly downstairs. Either Marris or Mr. Roff had been listening!

Squiff took a firm hold on the rope and clambered out of the window. Then Bob Cherry watched with great anxiety while his chum lowered himself hand over hand to the ground. It was a strenuous task, but both boys were strong and healthy.

At last Squiff touched the ground.

"Phew!" he whispered. "It's given my hands what-ho! Down you come, old dear!"

Bob wasted no time. He followed Squiff's example and was soon standing by his side. They were both out of breath and rather sore-handed, but otherwise all right.

"Now to do the vanishing trick!" murmured Squiff. "Crumbs! What an adventure!"

"And we've escaped!" said Bob joyfully. "Squiff, old man, you're a chap in a thousand! Fancy having all that rope round you as if you were a giddy parcel!"

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NEXT
MONDAY—

"THE MYSTERIOUS MR. MOBBS!"

"Talk about luck!" grinned Squiff. "We're free again. I vote we buzz off before the bounders smell a rat!"

"Rather!"

"This way then; follow your uncle!"

Squiff took a step forward, past a clump of evergreens. A hand grasped his arm, and he shook himself.

"Leggo my arm, you ass! You can see, can't you?"

"I'm not touching you. Yaroooh!" roared Bob Cherry. "Crikey, we're copped again!"

And they were.

Even as the two juniors were in the act of stealing off they were gripped by unseen hands, and a second later Marris and Mr. Roff revealed themselves. They had been hiding behind the bushes, waiting for their victims.

"You you— Well, I'm blowed!" gasped Squiff. "Copped again! You're like a couple of wizards! How did you know we were free?"

"Bash him in the eye, Squiffy!" shouted Bob Cherry desperately. "We ain't going to be locked up again! Make a desperate effort—"

"Enough of that!" snapped Mr. Roff curtly. "Don't be a young fool!"

"You—you scoundrel!" gasped Bob.

"You're clever, my boys—very clever," said Mr. Roff grimly. "But you haven't given me the slip yet. I heard your plan and immediately took steps to prevent you getting away. I and my man were waiting here for you!"

"You—you rotten spy!" panted Squiff.

"Not at all. I came up to the top room with your suppers," said Mr. Roff. "Hearing you talking excitedly I listened, with this result. I was very foolish not to have you searched before I imprisoned you."

"Better bung 'em in the cellar, sir," suggested Marris gruffly.

Mr. Roff nodded.

"That is what I intend to do," he replied grimly. "They will not escape again!"

And Bob Cherry and Squiff, disheartened and inwardly fuming, were led into the Gables again. They had made a bold bid for liberty—and had failed. What would the next move in the game be?

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER:

Two on the Trail!

JOHNNY BULL stared out into the darkness of the Close from the School House steps.

"Frabjous asses!" he exclaimed bluntly. "Not a sign of them!"

"And it's nearly supper-time," said Harry Wharton anxiously. "I say, I hope the fatheaded chumps haven't done something rash. Just like Bob and Squiff to go and play the giddy ox!"

"The oxfulness is evidently terrific!" said the nabob of Bhanipur. "Our august chums have perhapsfully been getting it in the neckfulness!"

"Serve them right!" growled Nugent, who wasn't much the worse for his accident. "I jolly well knew this was going to happen!"

"We don't know that anything's happened yet," said Harry Wharton. "Still, I wish the bounders would come in!"

Two minutes later the supper bell rang.

"Well, I haven't got any pity for them," said Johnny Bull. "If they have a row with old Quelchy it's only what they deserve!"

The four juniors trooped in to supper, and they kept looking anxiously at the door during the first part of the meal. But Bob Cherry and Squiff did not show up. When supper was done most of the Removites either went to their studies or the common-room, but Johnny Bull, Nugent, and Hurree Singh went out into the Close.

"This is serious!" said Harry Wharton gravely. "I'm beginning to think Bob and Squiff have got into trouble of some kind at the Gables."

"Well, didn't you expect it?" growled Johnny Bull. "The asses have been discovered, and probably carted off to the police-station for attempted robbery!"

"Rats!"

"Well, that's what I think," said Bull.

"You're sure to say something idiotic," replied Wharton. "And anyhow, what's the good of thinking? We've got to do something!"

"What can we do?"

"Well, we can break bounds and go and search for them. We're the only chaps who know where they've gone to, and we can't possibly go to bed if they're still out."

"And we can't tell Quelchy or the Head anything about the affair," added Nugent. "We can't expect them to understand these things, you know! The Head would probably gate the whole lot of us for interfering in something that doesn't concern us. That's how the Head would look at it!"

Harry Wharton nodded.

"Yes," he agreed; "if we are to do anything we must do it off our own bat. Still, we'll give the bounders until bedtime to show up."

Five minutes before the Remove's bedtime, however, Wharton and the others came out into the Close again. Of Bob Cherry or Squiff there was no sign. Nothing had been said by prefects or masters so far, because juniors often missed supper. But for the pair to be away at bedtime would end in serious trouble for them.

"Something's happened," said Wharton grimly.

"Yes, but what?"

"How should I know? We've got to go to the Gables and find out!"

The others stared.

"Rot," said Nugent. "It's imposs. to break bounds!"

"We'll see about that," said Wharton firmly. "Bob and Squiff have evidently got into trouble—perhaps they've been made prisoners!"

"Phew!"

"Well, it's possible," went on Harry. "I'm going to the Gables to find out, and I want one of you chaps to come with me; can't very well investigate on my own. Who's coming?"

Nugent and Hurrec Singh and Johnny Bull hesitated. "Nervous?" asked Wharton quietly. "Afraid of ghosts?"

"Rats!" the trio chorused. "I'll go!"

Harry Wharton smiled.

"No, I only want one," he said. "We can't all go. Nugent ain't well, so it's between you two other chaps."

"I am well, you ass!" said Nugent indignantly.

"Oh, all right! Toss up!"

They tossed up accordingly, and Johnny Bull was the chosen one. He and Harry Wharton lost no time in getting off. The Close was deserted, save for themselves, so the two rescuers easily shinned over the wall without being observed.

"We shall cop it hot when we get back!" said Johnny Bull.

"Oh, dry up!" growled Wharton. "We've hardly started yet. What's the good of thinking what'll happen afterwards? We've got to get on the trail of Bob and Squiff, and if we find they're in trouble we've got to get 'em out of it!"

"If we can."

"Oh, you blessed Job's comforter!" said Harry. "If you can't be cheerful, shut up!"

Johnny Bull, however, soon grew cheerful, and when at last they stood outside the walls of the Gables he was quite ready for anything. The trot to the old house had livened him up, and both he and Harry Wharton had entered into the spirit of the night's adventure.

"Not a light showing," murmured Wharton. "We'll try the back!"

Unlike Bob Cherry and Squiff, they didn't enter the grounds yet, but made a detour of the road and a neighbouring meadow. Then, through some trees, they saw the light in the back window.

"That's where we'll make for," said Johnny Bull briskly.

"Right! Follow me!"

They didn't know it, but had they been there twenty

minutes before they would have seen their two chums forced into the house just after their futile attempt to escape. Harry Wharton and Johnny Bull were pretty certain that something had happened to their school-fellows, and they were going to make it their business to find out what that something was.

"If they're still in the grounds, watching," said Wharton softly, "they'll spot us as soon as we walk across that bare space near the window. But I don't think they would have hung about the garden all this time. They are either inside the house or back at Greyfriars."

Johnny Bull nodded and they stole forward cautiously. Their hearts were beating faster than usual. Somehow they felt that they were going to make a discovery. The whole atmosphere of the place was mysterious and forbidding.

They succeeded in crossing the garden without being interrupted; then they silently approached the lighted window, which, they now saw, had a light blind before it.

"By gum!" breathed Johnny Bull. "The window's open at the bottom. If both Roff and Marris are in there we shall hear them talking!"

"Doesn't that seem like spying?"

"Rats! We're here to find out things, and we're jolly well going to find them out if we can!"

They went down on all fours and crawled up to the window. Then, pausing underneath the sill, they raised their heads and listened. Two voices within the room could be distinctly heard.

"Don't be absurd, Marris," the harsh voice of Mr. Roff was saying. "The boys will come to no harm in the cellar. It is impossible to release them until the purchase is completed! I do not intend to take any risks. A five-pound note each will keep the youngsters' tongues silent."

"But they'll be expelled for being out all night!"

"Nonsense!" said Mr. Roff. "I will interview their headmaster to-morrow and make things all right. You don't seem to realise, Marris, that a fortune is at stake. Suppose I let these boys go now, what would happen?"

"Well, they might not say anything, sir," began Marris.

"Tut-tut! Those boys know more than they will admit," said Roff. "Upon getting free they would at once go to the police. Or they might even go to Mr. Garth, the owner of the property, and then he would begin to suspect. We're safe, so far, Marris, and we've only got to wait until to-morrow morning. I have got the five hundred pounds here at last, and in the morning I shall pay it over to Mr. Garth, sign the deeds, and the Gables and its grounds will be my own freehold property. I can then let the whole world know that it is really a rich oil-field. Think of it, Marris! I have discovered oil in this out-of-the-way corner of Kent—a most amazing circumstance. Fortunately the owner is not aware of it, and once he has sold the property to me it is every bit mine, oil and all!"

"Well, it's been a narrow shave, sir," said Marris. "Those boys nearly pumped some water out of the well last night. If they had done so they would have seen the presence of oil in the water and they would have known the secret. To-morrow morning, thank goodness, the whole countryside can know, and we needn't be so mysterious!"

"And don't worry about the two youngsters," said Mr. Roff easily. "They have come to no harm, and will be all the richer for their adventure. When it is all over they will be rather inclined to thank me. But, by thunder, if they had thwarted me I would have had a terrible revenge!"

As Roff spoke the last words his voice vibrated with anger. Harry Wharton and Johnny Bull looked at one another with grim, set faces. They understood all now. The mystery was made clear to them. These men had discovered oil on the property and had decided to purchase it before the landlord became aware of the fact. Wharton understood now why Roff had been so furious with the juniors for attempting to pump the water. It

had not been heartlessness, but alarm! He had feared the consequences.

"My hat!" breathed Johnny Bull. "They ain't coiners after all—in fact, they're not doing anything unlawful at all!"

"But Roff's a beastly rotter!" murmured Harry Wharton. "I should like to do him in the eye. If only we could let Mr. Garth know that there's oil here he wouldn't sell his property, and Roff would be diddled. How can we do it?"

"Well, Mr. Garth lives near Courtfield," whispered Bull. "It ain't late yet. Suppose we buzz over there now and give him warning? He's a jolly decent old chap, and I'd rather he had the benefit of this discovery than a stranger like Roff!"

"Rather!" agreed Wharton. "Roff's a rotter! He's collared Bob and Squiff, and means to bribe them to say nothing. Well, it won't work, because we're going to make things go differently!"

The whole situation was clear to the juniors. Roff had discovered the oil and he was terribly anxious to get the property into his own hands before the fact became general knowledge. The Gables was up for sale at £500, but this figure would be tremendously increased if the landlord knew as much as the new tenants did. It seemed that Roff had had some difficulty in raising the cash, or he would have made the purchase before.

"Come on!" murmured Harry Wharton briskly. "We've heard enough. We'll buzz to Mr. Garth and put him wise, as Fishy would say."

"But what about Bob and Squiff?"

"Oh, they'll have to wait until we get back."

Wharton moved silently away from the window, Johnny Bull following him.

Crash!

"Great pip!" gasped Wharton. "That's done it! Scoot!"

In the darkness he had accidentally kicked against a pile of old tins and they caused a fearful clatter. Whether they had been put there purposely or not was a question. Anyway, they had given the alarm to Marris and Roff! It was the height of misfortune.

There was a sound of chairs being pushed back within the lighted room, followed by loud imprecations. Then the back-door was flung open and the two men appeared.

"There they go!" roared Mr. Roff savagely. "After them, Marris! I expect they've heard our conversation, and if we don't catch them it's all up!"

Harry Wharton and Johnny Bull fled towards the gates.

"They're after us!" gasped Wharton. "Run like the wind!"

Johnny Bull needed no telling. The two juniors were desperate, and they simply flew. And behind them, shouting threats, came Marris. The Removites could run, and run fast, and they managed to keep their distance.

Out of the gates they flew, and Marris strained every muscle to catch them up. But he was unable to do so. Pursued and pursuer dashed along the road for all they were worth, a distance of two hundred yards separating them.

"Let's dodge into the hedge!" gasped Johnny Bull.

"No good; there are no gaps!" replied Wharton breathlessly. "He would collar us before we got through. The only thing to do is to outrun him!"

And they tried their utmost to do so. But when Wharton glanced behind Marris was still the same distance away. Presently, however, the violent exercise began to tell upon him, and he ran a little slower. The juniors, on the other hand, were as fresh as paint, and were ready to run at the same speed until further orders.

"We're whacking him," panted Bull. "Keep it up, old son!"

Marris saw that his quarry was outdistancing him.

"Stop!" he roared. "By thunder, if you don't—"

"Rats!" yelled Wharton, turning his head. "Catch us if you can!"

Marris swore furiously. The juniors were now swiftly forging ahead. They would escape, and then Roff would be simply frantic with fury. The thought caused Marris to put on an extra spurt, but all to no purpose.

Even if Marris could have caught the juniors up the whole proceeding seemed rather futile, for he could only have held one of them. At least, he could only have

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caught one, and the other would have been free to complete the journey to Mr. Garth's house. So where was the sense in this chase?

Harry Wharton and Johnny Bull did not guess that there was some subtle plan at the back of it all.

They were soon to find out, however.

Suddenly they became aware of a low purr behind them. Wharton glanced round, and saw the lights of a motor-car approaching rapidly.

"Thank goodness!" he gasped. "I expect Marris will give up the chase now; he can't very well explain to this motorist why he's running after us!"

"Get to the side," panted Bull.

They did so, and the motor sped past. Then it came to a halt a few yards further on and a man leaped out. In the darkness the two juniors didn't recognise him. They ran up breathlessly, meaning to rush past; there was no time to explain the circumstances to the stranger.

But the motorist barred their way, and before they realised it he had gripped them both. They had expected nothing of the sort, and so had not prepared themselves. They were fairly caught.

"Here, I say!" roared Wharton wrathfully. "Leggo! What the dickens—"

"As I thought!" snarled Mr. Roff. "More infernal schoolboys. By thunder, you're not going to escape!"

"Roff!" gasped Johnny Bull.

"Yes; and I think I've captured you rather cleverly, eh?" said Mr. Roff grimly. "I sent Marris to chase you in order to keep you to the road, and then followed in my car. You didn't expect to see me, did you?"

"You—you cunning rotter!" panted Wharton.

"Not so much tongue, boy!" growled Roff. "I'm not a violent man, but I feel like showing my temper at this moment. You youngsters seem determined to trouble me with your confounded spying! Well, you have only yourselves to blame for what has happened!"

"We know everything," said Johnny Bull defiantly.

"We know about the oil—"

"I suspected as much!" rapped out Roff. "Well, you won't say anything to-night, because I sha'n't let you. To-morrow, when I release you, you can say what you will; it will not matter then!"

"Make an effort, Johnny!" gasped Wharton. "Bowl the rotter over!"

Marris came running up.

"Take one of these brats!" exclaimed Roff fiercely. "They are nearly too much for me!"

Marris grasped Johnny Bull roughly, and both juniors were held tight. All thoughts of escape were futile. They could do nothing against the two men.

Harry Wharton gritted his teeth impotently. He and Johnny Bull had come to the Gables to rescue Bob Cherry and Squiff, and they had only succeeded in getting themselves into precisely the same fix as their unfortunate chums.

But, while this excitement was happening on the road, neither the captors nor captives guessed what was occurring within the walls of the Gables.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER. Broken Glass!

UTTER darkness!

The cellar beneath the kitchen of the Gables was as black as pitch. The silence was only broken by the regular breathing of two unseen beings. Then came a grunt and a sound of somebody shifting restlessly.

"Talk about a frost!" came Bob Cherry's disgusted voice. "I reckon we've mucked things up properly, Squiff! Oh, my hat! What a giddy birthday!"

"Yes; we're having a ripping time!" said the unseen Squiff. "Well, we ain't murdered, and that's something to be thankful for."

The two unfortunate amateur detectives were propped against the wall of the cellar in a sitting position. Their hands and arms were bound, and their ankles were in a similar helpless state. In short, Bob Cherry and Squiff were prisoners, unable to move hand or foot.

"And we nearly gave the scoundrels the slip, too!" said Bob Cherry glumly. "Oh, won't we have our own back one day! I feel like a giddy heathen Chinese at this minute!"

"What do you mean, ass?"

"I feel like heating pokers in the fire!" said Bob, in a blood-curdling voice. "I should just love to have a whacking great tank of boiling oil, all bubbling and steaming! Then I'd drop Marris and Roff into it, and grin with delight as they frizzled up!"

Squiff chuckled.

"You cold-blooded ruffian!" he said coolly. "Hallo! What's up? By Jove! Did you hear that?"

From up above the voices of Marris and Roff, until now a low murmur, suddenly burst out, loud and angrily. Then, quite distinctly, the two prisoners heard the back door flung open, and Roff's shouted words reached their ears.

The two juniors quivered with excitement.

"It's Roff!" said Bob quickly. "He told Marris to buzz after them!"

"After who?"

"Why, Wharton and Johnny Bull and the rest, of course!" replied Squiff. "They've come to our giddy rescue, and have betrayed themselves. Ye gods, what a night we're having! Our hair will be grey to-morrow."

"Wharton and the rest!" echoed Bob. "Squiff, my son, we may be rescued from the castle dungeon yet!"

They listened intently, but could hear nothing.

Then, from up above, and to the left, came the sound of a motor being started.

"A giddy motor-car!" said Bob. "It's in the coach-house, just beside the main building. Roff is going to give chase—Begad! What the dickens—"

Crash!

A heavy door—the coach-house door, presumably—had swung to with terrific force, and the whole building quivered. At the same moment something fell to the floor of the cellar with a smash that gave Bob Cherry a start.

"What on earth was that?" he asked.

"Sounded like a bottle," answered Squiff. "The coach-house door did it, I expect—shook a shelf or something and made the bottle topple over. Good thing it didn't fall on one of our nappers!"

"Oh, blow our nappers!" said Bob impatiently. "Listen! Let's try and hear if the fellows are collared."

"Can't expect anything else, if they're being chased by a motor-car—Yaroooh!"

"What's the matter, you ass?"

"How should I know!" growled Squiff. "I shifted a bit, and something sharp struck into my leg—or nearly did, anyhow! Half a tick! I'll feel!"

He cautiously wriggled round, and lay on his side so that he could reach the floor with his bound hands. Roff had not secured the juniors cruelly, and had left a good deal of slack rope. There was no other exit except the trapdoor in the floor, so there was no danger of the prisoners escaping. Roff hadn't expected anything in the nature of this fresh adventure to happen.

"Well, have you felt anything?" asked Bob, after a few moments.

Squiff gasped.

"Phew! I should just say I have!" he exclaimed excitedly. "Great pip! Jumping haystacks! I should say I have!"

"Dotty?" asked Bob Cherry politely. "I always thought you were a bit touched."

"It's a bit of broken glass," said Squiff quickly. "A big bit, my son. Don't you understand?"

"No; I'm blessed if I do!"

"I can cut my bonds with it!" exclaimed Squiff eagerly. "It's as sharp as a razor! In two minutes I shall be free!"

"My only Uncle Jeremiah!" gasped Bob.

They were both thoroughly excited. That slamming door had provided a means of escape. The luck was with them again. The bottle had been knocked down close to Squiff, and he could cut his ropes. Then he would free his chum, and it would be a simple matter to make their escape, for they knew that the kitchen was now empty.

But there was not a second to lose.

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Mr. Roff and Marris might be back at any moment!

"What a brain you've got!" said Bob Cherry admiringly. "By gum, fancy thinking of such a thing! Just like you read in the giddy detective tales! Buck up, or—"

"Shut up! I'm bucking up as fast as I can!" gasped Squiff, who was in a cramped position. "It's no joke fiddling about with a chunk of broken glass, I tell you. If I ain't careful I shall gash my hands. My hat, that's got it!"

"Free?" asked Bob quickly.

"Yes."

"Bravo! Three cheers for you!" said Bob. "Now come over and untie me!"

Squiff had succeeded in cutting through the rope that tied his wrists, and he immediately wrenched off his ankle-bonds. Then, without pausing to breathe hardly, he crawled over to Bob, and soon had his chum liberated.

"Free! Now for the trapdoor!" exclaimed Bob Cherry briskly. "If we can only get out of the house before Roff or Marris return we'll be as safe as a giddy church! How do we get to the blessed trapdoor, though?" he added blankly. "They've pinched the ladder!"

Squiff struck a match, and looked round hurriedly.

"The ceiling's low," he said quickly. "Let me get on your manly shoulders. I can reach then. Once I'm up, I can soon lug you up after me."

"Good biz!"

The escape from the cellar was simplicity itself. Squiff hopped on to Bob's shoulders, and he could reach the trapdoor easily. He pushed it up, scrambled into the empty kitchen, and in two twos Bob was beside him.

"Talk about Sexton Blake and Tinker!" murmured Squiff. "They ain't in it with us! Look! The door's open, and we've only got to walk out! When the two deep-dyed villains return they'll find that the birds have flown—"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" interrupted Bob quickly. "A motor-car! Oh, my only sainted aunt! They've come back! We're copped before we've escaped!"

And, with that contradictory statement, Bob Cherry looked blankly at his chum. His words were only too true. Marris and Roff had returned, and their voices could plainly be heard. If the two juniors attempted to leave the kitchen now they would be seen.

Squiff looked round desperately.

"The cupboard!" he hissed, pointing. "Hop in—quick!"

They dashed across the room, opened the double doors of a big cupboard, and simply threw themselves inside.

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

The Tables Turned!

MR. GEORGE ROFF was in a furious temper. He pushed Harry Wharton into the kitchen, and was immediately followed by Marris with Johnny Bull.

Both juniors had their hands tied behind their backs.

"Young rips!" growled Marris fiercely. "Causing us no end of trouble, sir. What with them two in the cellar, and these as well, I'm fed-up with schoolboys! Mebbe there are a pile of others of the same breed knocking about."

"That is not probable," said Mr. Roff. "Anyhow, I mean to place these two with their companions, and we'll keep a sharp look out for others. In the morning, after the business is transacted—"

"You'll set us free, I suppose?" said Harry Wharton coldly. "Well, Mr. Roff, the police will have something to say! We're not going to be bribed by you or anybody else. You'll be in a queer position when we tell the police that you kept us in your house against our will—that you made us prisoners, in fact!"

Mr. Roff laughed harshly.

"Who will believe you?" he sneered.

"Everybody!"

"Don't be too sure, young shaver! Schoolboys are not exactly models of truthfulness," said Roff. "I shall deny that I have ever seen you, and Marris will uphold me. Your story will be taken as a mere trumped-up excuse for being away from school all night."

"You—you blackguard!"

"Careful, boy!" snarled Roff. "Don't make me lose my temper! I am prepared to be lenient with you, and you will be wise to take advantage of my good nature. If you do as I say I will make things right with your headmaster."

"We're not going to be bribed, you rotter!" said Johnny Bull stoutly.

"That remains for yourself to decide," said the tenant of the Gables. "If you think I am going to be foiled by a handful of schoolboys you have made a very great mistake. You seem to know that I have discovered oil on this property. Well, I am doing nothing criminal. The landlord could have made the discovery had he been sharp enough. As he hasn't, I am going to take advantage of my good fortune. The property is for sale, and I am going to make the purchase in the morning. When the transaction is settled I will release you—as well as your two friends, who are now prisoners in the cellar."

"We may escape——"

"Tut, tut! Make no mistake!" interrupted Mr. Roff. "I shall not let you escape! You are here, and you will remain here. I am puzzled to guess how you suspected me of anything wrong."

"We had suspicions when you refused to let us have any water from the pump," said Wharton grimly. "We thought you were criminals. Well, we made a mistake. We find you're doing nothing unlawful; but we'll frustrate your intentions if we possibly can!"

Roff laughed.

"Enough of this nonsense!" he said sharply. "Open the trapdoor, Marris."

"That's the talk!" growled Marris. "Get rid of the young brats, I say!"

He opened the trap—which Bob Cherry had thoughtfully lowered—and Roff walked over to it, leaving Marris to hold the two fresh prisoners. He placed the ladder, which had been standing against the kitchen wall, down into the darkness.

"I will go down and prepare a space for these young busybodies," he said. "Hold them tightly until I come up again."

"Trust me, sir," said Marris grimly.

Roff descended the ladder. As he did so the doors of the big cupboard behind Marris slightly opened and the animated face of Sampson Quincy Ifley Field appeared. One finger was over his lips. Johnny Bull spotted the apparition at once, and gave a sudden start.

"Mum-my hat!" he gasped.

"Now, then, young shaver, you'd better not try any tricks!" exclaimed Marris gruffly.

Johnny Bull didn't reply, but averted his gaze from the cupboard, lest he should give his chums away. Bob Cherry's face had joined Squiff's at the opening.

"Now's the time!" he breathed. "We can turn the tables on the bounders properly!"

"How?"

"Why, before Roff comes up!" hissed Bob. "There's only Marris——"

"You're right, by gum!" whispered Squiff excitedly.

There was a sudden shout from below.

"Marris!" roared Mr. Roff furiously. "By thunder, those two young whelps are not here!"

"Not—not there, sir?"

"They've escaped!" bellowed Roff.

"Quick!" gasped Squiff. "He's coming up the ladder. It's now or never!"

The cupboard doors burst wide open, and the two late prisoners rushed forth. Before Marris could even turn to meet the attack, Bob Cherry and Squiff were upon him.

"By hokey!" gasped Marris, in alarm.

That was all he had time to say, for his assailants gave him a sudden push. He staggered forward, uttered a wild yell, and disappeared through the trapdoor into the cellar below. The juniors had not intended to be so drastic, but their excitement had got the better of them.

As it happened Mr. Roff was ascending the ladder, and Marris landed fairly upon his chest. The two rolled over upon the cellar floor in a confused heap. Neither of them were more than bruised, but their fury was terrible.

"The ladder!" gasped Harry Wharton. "Yank it up."

"The yankfulness is terrific!" grinned Squiff.

And he and Bob Cherry did the yanking business in

less than two seconds. Then the trapdoor was slammed down with a crash.

"Victory!" roared Bob Cherry joyfully. "Hooray! We've caught the rotters in their own trap! It now remains to exact summary vengeance."

"If we poured cold water over them it would be wintry vengeance!" said Squiff, with a grin.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Unfasten these rotten ropes, for goodness' sake!" said Harry Wharton.

The hands of Wharton and Johnny Bull were soon freed, and the four juniors looked at one another with excited faces. They were all extremely light-hearted at having turned the tables so neatly upon the common enemy.

"What a time we're having!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "We only managed to escape from the deadly dungeon by the skin of our teeth. How on earth did you chaps manage to get yourselves collared?"

"We learnt the giddy secret, and then tripped over some tin cans," replied Johnny Bull. "We thought it was all up with us until we spotted your chivvies in that cupboard."

Harry Wharton nodded.

"Well, everything's turned out all right," he said. "The next thing we've got to do is to buzz off to see Mr. Garth, the owner of this property. We're doing nothing wicked—in fact, we're good little boys—and we shall be able to explain everything to the Head when we get to Greyfriars. I don't think he'll punish us under the exceptional circumstances."

"But what's all this about the landlord?" asked Squiff. "Who's Mr. Garth? What was that we heard about oil?"

"Oh, we'll explain everything going along," replied Wharton. "No time to waste now!"

He pulled out his handkerchief, and with it came a false beard and moustache. Wharton had put them in his pocket before leaving Greyfriars in case of necessity. Apparently there would be no necessity to use them.

"Boys!"

The voice came from below, and it quivered with fury. Squiff held up his hand for silence.

"Hallo!" he called. "Whose sweet voice ringeth out so lustily?"

"You—you young villains!" raved Mr. Roff. "How—how dare you! Open the trapdoor at once and release us! How dare you shut us down here!"

"Yes, how dare we!" said Bob Cherry, in a shocked voice. "We're too wicked to live!"

"By heavens, I'll make you pay for this!" thundered Roff savagely.

"Oh, don't be silly," said Squiff pityingly. "It's no good raving, old chap. You're down there—and down there you're going to stop!"

"You—you——"

"This is wasting precious time," said Wharton. "Let's pile all the furniture over the trapdoor and then buzz off to Mr. Garth."

The furniture was soon placed over the trap, and it was so heavy that there was no prospect of the prisoners escaping.

"My hat! It's after half-past ten!" exclaimed Johnny Bull suddenly. "If we ain't quick we shall find Mr. Garth in bed and asleep!"

"Can't help it," said Wharton briskly. "Our bizney is urgent. If he's in bed, he'll have to get up again. Come on—follow your uncle!"

And the four juniors trooped out into the night.

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.

A Surprise—And a Wheeze!

MR. GARTH, the owner of the Gables, lived in Courtfield—or, rather, just on the outskirts of the town. Fortunately, his house was in the quarter nearest to Greyfriars, so the juniors' walk was not an exceedingly long one.

Mr. Garth had a brother, a retired merchant, who lived in Friardale; but he wasn't the man Harry Wharton & Co. wanted to see.

They found the owner of the Gables just about to retire. He had been reading over a last cigar, and came to the front door himself in answer to their urgent knock. He was an elderly man with a wrinkled, though pleasant face.

"Good gracious!" he exclaimed. "What do you want, my boys? Am I mistaken, or are you Greyfriars' scholars?"

"That's right, sir—we're from Greyfriars," replied Wharton. "We've come on very important business. May we come in?"

"Certainly—certainly!" said Mr. Garth. "Dear me, this is extraordinary!"

He led the way into his study, and glanced at the clock as he stood upon the hearthrug.

"Nearly eleven!" he exclaimed. "Upon my soul! You boys will be seriously punished, I am afraid. You have no right to be out at this hour. You appear to be very excited."

"Yes, sir," said Wharton quickly. "We've come about the Gables."

"Ah, the Gables," said Mr. Garth. "Exactly. And what about the Gables?"

"You're the owner, ain't you, sir?" asked Squiff.

"I am," smiled Mr. Garth. "Not that I want to be. I am anxious to sell the property. Have you come to make me an offer?" he added, with a chuckle. "The house is tenanted just now by a Mr. Roff."

"Yes, sir, we know that," said Wharton. "He's coming here—"

"Dear me! Another visitor!"

"No, not to-night, sir. The Gables is for sale at £500, isn't it?"

"That is the figure—and remarkably cheap!"

Harry Wharton & Co. looked mysterious.

"Cheap!" repeated Bob Cherry. "It's a mere flea-bite, sir! The property is worth fifty times as much! In fact, you're very likely a millionaire, although you don't know it!"

Mr. Garth looked astonished.

"I am fairly well off," he said. "But a millionaire—Really, boys—"

"It's true, sir!"

"There's something in the grounds of the Gables that you haven't dreamt of," said Wharton solemnly. "We've come here specially, in order to warn you not to sell the property."

Mr. Garth's eyes twinkled.

"And what is this wonderful 'something'?" he asked.

Four voices answered in one breath:

"Oil, sir!"

Then they paused, and looked at Mr. Garth to note the effect. He didn't change in the least, but still smiled amusedly.

"Oil, sir!" repeated Wharton quickly. "Don't you understand? There's oil in the ground. The place is simply a gold-mine. Within a year you'll be wallowing in money!"

Mr. Garth laughed heartily.

"Ha, ha, ha!" he roared. "Upon my word, this is too funny!"

Harry Wharton & Co. stared.

"And do you mean to tell me," continued the landlord, "that you came here especially to tell me this marvellous piece of information?"

"Ye-e-es, sir!" said Squiff doubtfully.

In fact, all four juniors were beginning to look a bit dubious. Mr. Garth was not taking their amazing revelation in at all the flabbergasted spirit which they had anticipated. In fact, he didn't seem surprised in the least.

"You—you don't seem very delighted, sir," ventured Bob Cherry.

Mr. Garth suddenly became serious.

"I appreciate this effort on your part, my boys, very much," he said; "but I am afraid your news comes rather late in the day. I am exceedingly sorry to disappoint you, and still more sorry to deprive you of the pleasure you so keenly expected. The fact of the matter is, however; that I knew of the presence of oil at the Gables a month ago."

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Harry Wharton & Co. gasped.

"You—you knew it?" asked Harry Wharton faintly.

"Yes."

"My hat!"

"Great Scott!"

"Well, I'm jiggered!"

"And you've put the property up for sale at five hundred quid?" asked Squiff amazedly.

Mr. Garth nodded.

"The property is really worth more," he replied, "but I do not wish to keep it upon my hands. With regard to the oil, there is certainly petroleum present in a crude form. At the time I discovered it I was exceedingly excited. Mining engineers, however, disclosed to me the fact, after exhaustive researches, that it would only be a waste of money to attempt to bring the oil to the surface. There is not sufficient to pay for the cost of its extraction. So you can see, boys, the value of the Gables is in no way enhanced by the fact that oil is present."

Harry Wharton & Co. looked at one another blankly.

"Oh, crumbs! This is rotten!" grunted Bob Cherry. "After we thought we'd done something so clever, too! Talk about a wet blanket! I feel drenched!"

"I am sorry—"

"It's our own fault, sir," said Harry Wharton quietly. "We were too cocksure, that's all. Come on you chaps! We ain't wanted here any more. I—I feel a bit small! Let's clear!"

Mr. Garth was really sorry for the juniors, and bade them good-night, with expressions of sympathy for their injured feelings. When they stood out in the road, beneath the starry sky, Harry Wharton & Co. gazed at one another and breathed hard.

"Well, what are we?" asked Bob Cherry thickly. "A set of fatheaded, idiotic, frabjous chumps! That's what we are!"

"I'm not thinking of that," said Harry Wharton quietly. "There's something we didn't tell Mr. Garth."

"What was that?"

"We didn't tell him that Mr. Roff was going to purchase the property in the morning."

"Well, that doesn't matter," said Johnny Bull. "Roff will turn up with the money—"

"Will he?" asked Wharton anxiously. "Don't you see, you thundering asses, that we've spoilt the sale with our rotten bungling?"

"What the dickens do you mean?"

"Oh, you ass, Squiff! Haven't we imprisoned Roff and Marris?" said Wharton, in a worried tone. "What will be the result? Why, Roff will take it for granted that we've told the landlord everything, and he will also come to the conclusion that it's useless to try and purchase the property."

"No, he won't," said Bob Cherry. "We can go back and tell him that the Gables is still for sale."

"You—you ass!" growled Wharton impatiently. "Won't that come to the same thing? When Roff finds that he can buy the Gables for five hundred pounds, oil and all, he'll realise that the oil isn't worth anything. So he won't buy the property."

"Great pig!"

"You see it all now, then?"

"We—we've mucked up the sale!"

"Of course we have," said Wharton. "How the dickens can we put things right? Instead of doing Mr. Garth a good turn, we've done him a bad one. It's up to us to make matters right again."

"But how?"

"That's what we've got to think of."

For five minutes the four juniors walked slowly back towards the Gables. They were thinking deeply, and were all very gloomy. Everything had gone wrong. In their efforts to frustrate Mr. Roff they had, in reality, done exactly the opposite. They didn't think of their own punishment when they returned to Greyfriars. They only wondered how on earth they could make things right.

Then, suddenly, Harry Wharton uttered an exclamation.

"I've got it!" he exclaimed excitedly. "The very thing, by gum!"

(Concluded on page 111, of cover, column 2,

OPENING CHAPTERS. START TO-DAY!



Driven to Sea!

The Opening Chapters of a Magnificent New
Serial Adventure Story.

By T. C. BRIDGES.

THE FIRST INSTALMENTS.

Dick Damer, in consequence of an offer received from his uncle, goes out to Australia to live with him. On arriving he hears of his uncle's death from a man named Wesley Crane, his uncle's former partner.

Wesley Crane, in furtherance of a scheme best known to himself, has Dick drugged and smuggled aboard the Rainbow, a small schooner commanded by Captain Cripps, and bound for an unknown destination.

On the fourth day out a derelict is sighted. Captain Cripps and Dick go aboard, and discover a boy, who has been left behind, overpowered by gas-fumes.

Dick and the castaway, Barry Freeland, reach the Rainbow in safety, but Captain Cripps, who stayed longer on the derelict, is drowned owing to a storm rising, which causes the vessel to founder.

Barry Freeland takes charge of the Rainbow, and among the late captain's papers finds a letter from Wesley Crane, hinting at a shady transaction, and also a chart showing a mysterious island.

Dick and Barry determine to trace this island and obtain the pearls which are supposed to have been hidden there, as it is discovered that Dick, as his uncle's next-of-kin, is entitled to them.

They reach the mysterious island, and discover there a man named Captain Kempster, who informs them that he is the sole survivor of the Stella, a vessel commissioned by Dick's uncle to recover the pearls. The Stella was attacked by the Brant, a vessel captained by a notorious scoundrel named Burke, and the pearls are stolen.

While on the track of Burke, the comrades on the Rainbow pick up three of his colleagues, who were floating about in a small boat, apparently shipwrecked.

Barstow—one of Burke's colleagues—on certain conditions, guides the comrades to a pit on the island of San Cristobal, where Burke has hidden the pearls. They find the stolen pearls, and Dick hides them in a sandy cove on the sea-shore.

In Dick's absence, Barry and Barstow—who has sprained an ankle—are attacked by Burke and his men.

Dick arrives just in time to see his companions being carried off. He succeeds in shooting down the men who are holding Barstow, and raises his rifle again in an effort to release Barry in a similar way.

(Now go on with the story.)

The Rock Prison.

The very urgency of the situation seemed to brace Dick's nerves. All in a moment he was steady as a rock, and the sight of the rifle seemed to drop upon the near side man of its own accord.

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 388.

NEXT
MONDAY—

"THE MYSTERIOUS MR. MOBBS!"

He seized the moment as the two natives checked a moment to drag Barry over a long ridge of rock which lay full in their path, and the moment the dark, glistening body of the man rose into full view he pressed the trigger.

As the sharp report echoed back from the belt of trees opposite the nigger stumbled forward, and, pitching on his head, vanished into the hollow on the far side of the rock.

Without a second's hesitation Dick fired again at the other man. The bullet smacked upon the rock just behind the fellow's feet, and must have ricocheted and caught him in the legs, for he gave a piercing yell and sprang high into the air. Then, stumbling and swaying, he ran wildly for the belt of trees.

"Velly good shots!" said Chang approvingly, and Dick gave a deep sigh of relief.

But although the danger was over for the moment, only half the work of rescue was done. Barry and Barstow were still out there among the rocks within easy shot of Burke's people, who were hidden among the trees at the bottom of the slope.

"What's to be done now?" asked Dick, turning anxiously to Chang.

"No can do anything. Me tink dem clawl back."

Chang was right. Barry was already on his way back to Barstow. He went on hands and knees, taking cover cleverly behind the scrub and boulders.

Dick saw him reach Barstow. Then the two came back together, both crawling on all-fours, and making for the nearest timber. This was a point some distance below where Dick and Chang were stationed, and at Dick's suggestion he and the Chinaman went down to meet them.

Dick did not waste much time in reaching the place, and when he reached it he found that Barry and Barstow had not yet arrived. Barstow's damaged ankle made his movements very slow, and Barry stayed with him.

All this time not a shot was fired, and this struck Dick as decidedly strange. In spite of the cover afforded by the boulders, it seemed to him that Burke's people must have had several chances for a pot-shot.

At last Barry gained the edge of the timber and helped Barstow into cover. Barstow was almost done. He lay limply on the ground, but Barry stood up and stretched himself.

"Gosh, but I've had enough of that!" he growled. Then he looked at Dick. "So it was you who potted the niggers?" he remarked.

"It was some shooting," said Barstow from the ground. "Moonlight too!"

There was a new respect in his voice which gave Dick a little thrill of surprise and pleasure.

"I'll allow it was pretty shooting," said Barry. "But didn't I tell you to take the pearls back to the schooner?"

"You did," said Dick.

"Then why didn't ye do it?"

Dick's jaw hardened.

"Because I heard shooting, and knew you were in a tight place. And," he added calmly, "I'll disobey orders every time under the same conditions."

Barry drew a long breath. For a moment Dick hardly knew what he was going to do.

All of a sudden he gave a short laugh.

"'Pon my Sam, you are the queerest chap I ever ran into!" he muttered. "Well, what have ye done with the pearls—left them in the boat for a prize package for Burke?"

"I may be a fool, but I'm not such a fool as that!" retorted Dick. "I've hidden them."

A Grand, Long, Complete Story of Harry
Wharton & Co. By FRANK RICHARDS.

Barry grunted.

"The sooner we find 'em the better," he said. "Chang, think you can carry Mr. Barstow on your back as far as the beach?"

"Me tly," Chang answered simply.

He hoisted up the lame man, and the procession started. Barry walked in front, carrying Chang's rifle. Chang was in the middle, with Barstow on his back, while Dick brought up the rear.

It was a long job, for naturally Chang could only go very slowly, and even so, had to put his burden down and rest once or twice. But they were not molested. There was no sound or sign of the enemy, and at last they came to the break in the bush, and saw the moon shining on the smooth surface of the bay.

"Not a sign of the beggars!" muttered Barry, in a puzzled tone, as he pulled up in the shadow and looked across the moonlit beach.

"There's the boat all right," said Dick. "Come on. Let's get the pearls and get away from this beastly island. I've had enough of it to-night to last me for a long time."

Barry caught him by the arm.

"Go slow, Dick! I don't believe we've seen the last of Burko's crowd yet. Like as not they've stalked us, and are laying up in the bush on one side or the other, waiting to pot us as we get into the open. Burke ain't going to let them pearls go as easy as all that."

"By gum, he ain't!" put in Barstow. "Say, Mr. Free-land, I reckon we'd best do the Injun act, and crawl down in among them rocks. We don't want to give Burke's crowd any better targets than we have to."

"That's sense," Barry answered. "Shall I go ahead?"

"Guess you'd best let me go first," said Barstow; "me being the snail o' the party, so to speak."

Barry agreed, and Chang carried Barstow along the edge of the trees till they were opposite the boat, then put him down, and both started crawling towards the boat.

Dick and Barry stood meantime with their rifles ready, listening and watching keenly. The many excitements of the past few hours had steadied Dick wonderfully, but even so, he found the suspense horribly trying, and felt that he would give half his share of the pearls if he could only be safe in the boat and out of rifle-shot of the shore.

Five long minutes dragged away, and everything was so still that Dick could distinctly hear the slight rustling sound as Barstow and Chang crept across the shingle.

Barry turned to Dick.

"They're at the boat. Come along!"

He led the way, and Dick followed closely. Barry did not crawl, but, bending double, dodged from rock to rock.

A dozen yards from the boat he stopped.

"Where are the pearls?"

"In a crack between those two rocks just over there," whispered Dick. "Shall I get them?"

"Yes; but go quietly, kid. We don't want to bust up the show now we're so near the safe end of it."

Dick nodded, and slipped away. To get to the hiding-place he had to cross a long ridge of rock which rose like

the rib of some extinct monster out of the shingle, and which it would take too long to go round. It was only about a yard high, and before creeping over it he took a quick glance over his shoulder.

There was nothing suspicious in sight; and, raising himself softly, he flung a leg over the rock.

His foot struck something which squirmed beneath him, and before he could draw it back it was gripped in a clutch of iron, and he was jerked violently forward and pulled down in a heap on the shingle.

"Look out, Barry!" he just managed to shout before a hand upon his throat cut short his warning cry, and a man was kneeling on his chest, crushing the very breath out of him.

"Hands up!" It was Burke's voice. "Hands up, my son, or I shall reluctantly be compelled to blow your head off!" he repeated, and Dick knew that Burke was addressing Barry.

Dick struggled frantically, but it was no use, and the rock behind which he lay cut off all sight of Barry.

"That's better," came Burke's voice again, with the soft, sneering intonation that Dick knew so well. "Take his gun, Pyke. Where's Barstow?"

"It's all right, cap'n. The niggers have got him and the Chink, and Wigram has the boy. We've roped the whole bunch in proper."

"Roped the bunch, have ye?" returned Burke, with biting sarcasm. "Ay, but have ye roped the pearls?"

"You brat, have you got them pearls?" demanded the man called Wigram, hissing his question in Dick's face.

"No, I haven't!" retorted Dick. "You can search me if you don't believe me."

The man ran his hands through Dick's pockets, and gave an angry exclamation as he found them empty.

"Ay, I thought as much," came Burke's voice—"I thought as much! If you had only obeyed orders, Wigram, instead of grabbing the boy before I told you to, we should have had the pearls as well as the prisoners. But, then, you always did know more than your boss, Mister Wigram."

"I couldn't help it," Wigram answered, in an injured tone. "The brat stepped right on top of me."

"Well, it is your loss, Wigram—it is your loss," said Burke, with a soft chuckle. "It is a blunder which is quite likely to cost you a few thousand pounds."

"What's the use of talking like that?" retorted Wigram, with sudden violence. "If they've a-hidden them pearls, they got to tell us—that's all. You leave 'em to me, cap'n. I'll see they tell."

"Threats, my good Wigram—threats!" said Burke, in his most oily tone. "Let that lad up. I feel sure that he will relieve our curiosity without such crude methods."

"Get up, you!" growled Wigram, as he rose and hauled Dick roughly to his feet.

"Ah," said Burke, "it is my young friend of the forest! Sonny, my head is still sore from your violence. But, there, I am of a forgiving nature. Tell me where those two little bags are hidden, and by-gones shall be by-gones."

"Don't tell, Dick!" burst out Barry, whom Dick now saw to be standing a few yards away, with his hands firmly roped behind his back.

"I haven't the least intention of doing so," snapped Dick.

"Dear me—dear me!" said Burke mildly. "This is very sad! My boy, bethink yourself. Although, personally, I am of a peaceful nature, yet it annoys me to see my property stolen and my requests defied. And my friends, alas, are not so long-suffering as myself. I fear that, if you do not comply with my request they may make themselves unpleasant."

Dick was boiling. Even Wigram's brutality was infinitely preferable to this man's half-veiled threats.

"You can do anything you like," he answered curtly. "But I tell you straight, you won't get a word out of me!"

"So young and yet so stubborn," sighed Burke.

"Let me try a bit o' string round his head, captain," put in Wigram eagerly. "I never knowed that fail."

Burke seemed to consider a moment.

"The hour grows late," he said, "and, after all, there is no hurry. The pearls will not run away. I think that we will defer these little pleasantries until the morning. We shall then have more time to devote ourselves to business. Meantime, we will put the prisoners in safe keeping. Let us return to our humble abode."

It was a proof of Burke's extraordinary personality that, though Pyke and Wigram were, both of them, clearly sweating with anxiety to lay their hands on the pearls, they did not attempt to alter Burke's decision. They did not even grumble openly.

Wigram quickly pulled Dick's hands round behind his back and fastened his wrists with stout cord. Then, attaching a

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length of the same stuff to the lashings, he drove the boy before him.

Once more Dick found himself travelling up the valley alongside the stream. But this time, only for a little distance. A couple of hundred yards back from the beach the party turned to the left, crossed the brook, and began climbing a rough track up the far side of the gorge.

It is not easy to walk at all with one's hands tied behind one's back. To climb a steep, rocky path under such circumstances is all but impossible. Time and again Dick stumbled and fell, until shins and knees were one mass of cuts and bruises.

Wigram jeered at each fall, and jerked Dick back to his feet so roughly that he nearly dislocated his wrists. But Dick set his teeth, and did not make a sound. He vowed he would not give these brutes the satisfaction of letting them think they could hurt him.

Anyhow, he was not nearly so badly off as Chang, for Chang had to carry Barstow all up the cliff-side. Pyke walked behind him, and lashed him when he faltered with a length of rattan which he had cut for the purpose.

At last they reached the top, and came out on a piece of fairly level ground, covered with the usual bush. But here there was a regular beaten path, which made the going a trifle easier.

The path wound in and out among the trees, and Dick soon lost all sense of direction. It ended in a clearing, where stood four of the beehive-shaped brush-huts, such as are built by the natives of the Solomons.

They were frail-looking things, made of twisted rattans and matched with branches. Dick's first idea, when he saw them, was that they would not make very good prisons. The walls would be easy enough to break through.

Burke said something to Pyke which Dick did not catch; then, to Dick's surprise, Burke turned to the left, and led the way down a track so narrow and dark that it was more like a tunnel than anything else. This ended quite suddenly in a steep ledge of rock, in the middle of which was an opening just high enough for a man to walk into without bending his head.

One of the natives—of whom there were three with Burke's party—took a torch from a niche and lighted it. By its red, smoky flare Dick saw that a tunnel led into the heart of the rock.

The native led the way, and the rest followed.

The floor of the tunnel was smooth and greasy with drippings from the roof. The tunnel itself ran downwards at a steepish angle. It was all Dick could do to keep his feet.

On and on they went, in a grim silence, broken only by the occasional rattle of a loose stone or the splash of a foot in a puddle lying in a hollow in the floor. The air, though hot, was fresh enough.

Here and there the tunnel bulged out into small caves, where the crimson glow of the torch shone weirdly on snow-white stalactites hanging from the roof; and once Dick noticed a hideous carving in relief on the rock wall. It looked like a man with the head of an alligator.

At last they came out into a cave larger than any yet, and Dick felt a fresh draught of air blowing in his face.

Here Burke stopped.

"Gentlemen, behold your lodgings!" he said. "Your quarters do not err upon the side of luxury, but they are, at any rate, weather-proof and warm. They are also well lighted and aired." As he spoke he pointed to an opening in the wall about six feet from the floor, through which the moonlight shone. "A natural window, you observe," he continued, with the soft-voiced sarcasm which always filled Dick with an intense longing to kick him. "Still, I should not advise you to investigate it too closely. It opens on the face of the cliffs, some forty feet above the bay, and, as I feel sure you are aware, these tropical waters contain a large number of those unpleasant creatures known as tiger-sharks. The sharks will be your warders on that side, and on the other we have a little arrangement in the shape of a stone which seals the passage."

He paused, and chuckled softly.

"Good-night, gentlemen! Pleasant dreams! And I shall hope that the morning will bring wisdom, and that you will by that time have decided to restore to me the property which you have stolen. Otherwise—"

He left the threat unfinished, and, with a flourish of his fat hand, turned and walked away up the passage.

Pyke, Wigram, and the natives followed, and the four prisoners were kept standing in the cave, with the moon's rays shining through the rift above and lighting up their torn clothes and blood-streaked hands and faces.

A minute later, and from somewhere up the passage came a heavy clang, which sent a quiver through the rocks.

"That's the stone, I reckon," said Barry. "Burke's boxed us properly this journey."

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NEXT
MONDAY—

"THE MYSTERIOUS MR. MOBBS!"

EVERY
MONDAY,

The "Magnet"
LIBRARY.

ONE
PENNY.

Barry's Bid for Freedom.

"You didn't mention this little contraption," continued Barry presently, speaking to Barstow.

"That's a fact, mister. But the truth is, I never knowed of it. It's jest one of them little surprises as Burke has kept up his sleeve. Yes, I guess he's boxed us this time. We're right up against it."

Barry grunted.

"Oh, I don't know," he said. "We've got three or four hours before daylight. A heap might happen before then."

He spoke so coolly that Dick's spirits, which had been dropping to zero, at once revived.

"We've jolly well got to make it happen," he said suddenly. "Let's get our hands free, and see what we can do!"

"Bravo, kid!" said Barry, with his reckless laugh. "That's the way to talk. Here, Chang, you're the only one they haven't tied. Get these lashings off of my wrists."

Chang's long, yellow fingers made short work of the knots, and in a very few minutes they were all free.

"That's a heap better," said Barry, rubbing his stiff wrists. "Now, Mr. Barstow, you know Burke. What do you suppose he's up to?"

"Something mighty unpleasant for us!" answered the American drily.

"You mean he's going to put us through it?"

"Jest exactly that, mister. He's a-going to turn that peach Wigram loose on us till we owns up where them pearls are planted. And if you knowed Wigram as I do, you wouldn't exactly hanker after his little attentions."

Dick shuddered. He had learnt to bear pain with the best, but the idea of deliberate torture made him feel sick.

"What beats me," said Barry, after a short pause, "is why Burke kept Wigram off us to-night."

"He didn't do it without some reason," Barstow answered. "I'll lay my last cent on that! Maybe he thought we'd be more likely to cough up after thinking it over all night or maybe he wants to keep it all to himself."

"Keep it to himself?" repeated Barry puzzled.

"Ay! The pearls, I mean. Ye see, when they was hidden up in the gas-pit, I was the only other chap as knowed where they were. And I'm figuring that he's on the same lay again. I know Burke a sight too well to think he ever meant to divvy up fair with the rest of us. I guess that's the reason why he sent Redstall and Dent and me off in that canoe to look for a ship—I mean afore you picked us up. He knowed there was weather brewing, and he didn't reckon as he'd ever see any of us again!"

Barry nodded.

"Strikes me we're wasting time, jawing."

He turned as he spoke, and swung up into the embrasure as lightly and easily as a monkey. Lying flat on his stomach on the sill, he put his head out as far as he could without overbalancing.

"Just about forty feet to the water," he said. "I'd chance the dive all right if it wasn't for the sharks."

"There's no way of climbing out, then?" asked Dick.

"Not below. That's like a wall. I'm not so sure about the upper part. It looks to me as if there was some foothold just above the opening, but you can't see by moonlight. We'll have to wait till dawn."

"But if Barstow is right, Burke will probably be here pretty early," said Dick.

"I'll lay he will," put in Barstow.

"Then let's have a shot at getting out the other way," insisted Dick. "Oh, I heard the stone rolled back all right! But this cave is a pretty big one, and the rock is limestone. It's quite likely that there's some other passage hidden by stalactites, and if we could find one it might lead us to open air again."

"Or it might drop us into some shaft full o' water," returned Barry. "All the same, I'm willing to take chances. I'd sooner finish up that way than let that swine Wigram get his dirty hands on me."

"There's jest one thing you've forgot, gents," said Barstow, in his quiet drawl. "We ain't got no lights."

"I've got my torch," answered Dick quietly. "I hid it inside my shirt, and they didn't find it."

"Then I guess you'd better get right along," said Barstow.

"And if you should run on any kind o' outlet, why mebbe you'll give me a call, and I'll sort o' creep after you."

Dick gasped.

"Oh, I say, I'd quite forgotten about your being lame!"

"Don't you worry, Mr. Damer. I kin creep if I can't run. And I tell ye straight I'd sooner creep clear across this here island than meet up with Burke in the morning."

(Continued on page iii. of cover.)

OUR COMPANION PAPERS: "THE BOYS' FRIEND," 1d., Every Monday. "THE GEM" LIBRARY, 1d., Every Wednesday. "THE BOYS' FRIEND" 3d. COMPLETE LIBRARY "THE PENNY POPULAR," 1d., Every Friday. "CHUCKLES," Price 1d., Every Saturday.

MY READERS' PAGE

The Editor is always pleased to hear from his chums, at home or abroad, and is only too willing to give his best advice to them if they are in difficulty or in trouble. . . . Whom to write to: Editor, The "Magnet" Library, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.



FOR NEXT MONDAY:

"THE MYSTERIOUS MR. MOBBS!"

By FRANK RICHARDS.

The characters which made such a pronounced hit in "The Boy Without a Name," will reappear in next Monday's grand, long, complete story of Greyfriars and Highcliffe. Harry Wharton and his chums, while wreaking vengeance on Ponsonby & Co. for a very dastardly act, are interrupted by Mr. Mobbs, the contemptible little toady who rules junior Highcliffe. The master reports them to Dr. Locke, who metes out severe punishment. Naturally enough, the main desire which burns in the breasts of the juniors is to get even with "Mobby," and this is where Wibley of the Remove steps in! Disguised as the unpopular master, he succeeds in getting to Highcliffe, and Ponsonby & Co. find themselves very much "up against it" at the hands of

"THE MYSTERIOUS MR. MOBBS!"

AN ANONYMOUS ASS!

It seems to be getting quite fashionable in certain quarters for ignorant numskulls to send offensive, anonymous letters to the controller of the companion papers. These precious correspondents, while exerting their spite and venom in low-bred language, are always very careful to refrain from giving their names and addresses—a proceeding which is un-British and unsportsmanlike to a degree.

The latest communication of this kind is an effort of crude poetry, signed by "A Loyal Reader"—evidently a feeble attempt at sarcasm—and emanating, as I gather by the post-mark, from London, S.W. With the poem is a letter, in which the writer says:

"If you will publish my piece of poetry, made up by myself, in the 'Magnet,' at the earliest possible date, I will, on my honour as an English schoolboy, send you £3 to do what you like with. I prefer you to send it to some Fund, but, of course, you can keep it for yourself, if you will publish it no later than four weeks from the receipt of this letter."

Whether it were three pounds or three hundred pounds that was offered to me in such circumstances, I should never dream of defiling the pages of the "Magnet" Library with such coarse and contaminating piffle. "Loyal Reader"—or "Disloyal Reader," as I choose to call him—will probably be dismayed to see his attempt at bribery come tumbling about his ears, and will see that no good purpose can be served by bombarding an Editor with anonymous communications. Let me also tell him, for his own good, that, should his identity be discovered, things will go hard with him, and he may be called upon to defend his slanderous epithets in a court of law.

If my young antagonist exerted his venom on the Hums instead of on his own countrymen, it would be a much more creditable proceeding on his part.

BY SPECIAL REQUEST.

I have been specially requested to insert the following announcements in the "Magnet" Library:

S. Hill, 19, Morris Avenue, Manor Park, Essex, is anxious to form a "Magnet" readers' league in his district.

Montagu A. Potter, of the Convent of St. Aloysius, Oxford, is anxious to get into touch with his old chum, Albert Mann, of Plymouth. Will the latter, should this announcement meet his eye, kindly write?

REPLIES IN BRIEF.

"A Loyal Canadian Reader."—Another Ferrers Lord serial story will appear shortly. The characters mentioned in your letter are fictitious. Baseball is certainly played in England, but not nearly to the same extent as over the "herring-pond." Best wishes.

Driver R. Towse (British Expeditionary Force).—Very many thanks for your splendid letter.

Norman Cartwright (Oldham).—Sorry; but the back numbers mentioned in your letter are out of print.

Hugh Maxwell and Chums (Paisley).—The characters you mention are each fifteen years of age.

J. M. Edwards and Jack Smith (Carmarthen).—Much obliged to you for your letter and loyalty.

A. E. Curtis (Plymouth).—Very many thanks for your ripping letter. Your kind remarks touched me very deeply.

A. T. (London, N.).—The competition you mention was judged with perfect fairness, and the best man won. It is not usual to acknowledge unsuccessful efforts in any contest of this kind.

"Two Bedfordians."—Many thanks for your kind comments.

William Brown, 93, Coppin Street, Richmond, Victoria, Australia, will be glad to hear from "Magnet" readers living in England.

J. Maybanks (Liverpool).—Many thanks for your letter.

G. V. C. (Shanghai).—Your previous letters to me must have been mislaid. Your suggestion is quite a good one, and shall be put into practice.

G. E. H. A. N. (Leeds).—It is a pity that your father will not permit you to join the Boy Scouts—an organisation for which one can have nothing but praise. However, you should yield to his wishes, for the parental word is law. Thanks most sincerely for all you are doing to still further popularise the companion papers.

Douglas Banham (Brentwood).—I am sorry I cannot help you in the direction you name.

A. Y. Z. (Victoria).—Tom Dutton is not so deaf that he cannot hear when shouted to, and Mr. Quelch has less difficulty with him in class than you seem to imagine.

I. Cohen (London, E.).—Send your stories to the editors of those journals for which you think they will be most suitable.

Hilda L. Nicholls (Bristol).—I was very pleased to hear from you. My girl chums are a large and loyal following, and I always like to have their suggestions and criticisms.

"Australian" (South Wales).—Thank you for backing me up in my position with regard to the Army. You may depend upon it that were it not for prevailing circumstances I should have been at the front long ago. In drilling regularly at home, and providing the boys and girls of the British Empire with good, clean fiction, I am satisfied that I am doing my share in this great crisis.

"A Great 'Magnet' Reader" (Cardiff).—I was not in error by saying that Bob Cherry was the best boxer in the Remove. He has proved himself to be so on several occasions.

W. S. (Birmingham).—I will act upon your kind suggestion as soon as possible.

Owen Phillips (Cardiff).—I have now been able to ascertain that there are exactly forty-four boys in the Greyfriars Remove. Squiff is fifteen years of age.

E. F. and G. (Shepperton).—I need have no fears for the future of the "Magnet" Library, with such staunch supporters as yourselves at my back. Thank you indeed for your jolly letter.

The Editor

DRIVEN TO SEA.

(Continued from page 27.)

There's always the chance that he might finish you folk off quick. But he ain't going to forget as I've been in with his crowd. It'll be something slow and lingering for yours truly."

"All right; we'll come back for you," said Barry briskly. "Chang, you makee stay with Mr. Barstow. We'll fetch you both. Come along, Dick. There isn't a lot of time, and, anyhow, your torch won't last for ever."

As they went, Dick turned his light from one side to the other, and wherever there was any sort of a hollow in either wall they went in and explored it.

"Where's your way out, Dick?" growled Barry at last.

"There may be one higher up," Dick answered hopefully.

"If there is we can't reach it, old hoss," said Barry, pointing to a great slab of stone which closed the whole passage, and barred their way.

"So that's the stone Burke spoke of," said Dick, turning his light upon it. "Why, it's a regular door, and fitted into grooves. Must have taken a lot of fixing. I only wish I knew how it worked."

"Not from this side. You may bet your boots on that," answered Barry.

Dick did not speak. He was still examining the door. At last he looked up.

"I say, Barry, if we can't get out, at any rate, we can keep them from getting in. Look at these grooves. We have only got to wedge a few bits of stone in, and nothing short of dynamite would shift it."

Barry looked, and nodded thoughtfully.

"Not a bad notion, Dick—not a bad idea at all. It's a bit awkward not having any grub, but at any rate this will give us time to look round. Here, let's nick a few bits off these stalactites, as you call 'em, and make a job of it while we're about it."

Ten minutes' work, and the trick was done. The door was fast, and, as Dick had said, nothing short of dynamite would move it.

"And now," said Barry, "we'll go back and get forty winks. Sleep's what we all need worse than anything else."

He was right. All four were absolutely done, and, though they had to lie on hard rock, they were hardly on their backs before they were all sound asleep.

It was the sunlight shining full on his face from the rift above which awoke Dick.

"Didn't hear Burke knock, did you, Dick?" observed Barry, with a grin.

"I never heard anything," Dick answered. "I say, I'd give something for a wash."

Barry laughed outright.

"That's you all over. Myself, I'd do without water if I could get some grub. However, it's no blessed use thinking of breakfast. Here, I'm going to have a squint out of the window."

"Let me have a look, too," said Dick eagerly.

"All right. But hurry up! There's no time to waste."

Dick clambered up into the opening. It was a heavy, sultry morning, with a ring of dark clouds surrounding the horizon, and the water of the inlet lay like a sheet of molten glass under the brazen sun-glare.

The Rainbow was not visible. A headland to the left cut off all sight of her. But away to the right, across a low spit of land covered with mangrove, the masts of another vessel were visible, and Dick realised that she must be the Brant.

But what caught Dick's eye at once was a black, bulbous object resembling an overturned boat, which was floating out in the centre of the inlet. All round it the slack water was stirred by moving creatures of some sort, and the mysterious object itself bobbed about in the oddest fashion, sending slow ripples fanning out in every direction.

Barry came scrambling up alongside Dick.

"What's up, Dick? What are you staring at?"

Dick pointed.

"What the mischief is that?" he asked.

"Gee! A dead whale; and all the sharks in the Solomons round it. Say, Dick, this is a piece o' luck!"

"Luck? Why, what do you mean?"

"Don't you catch on? If the sharks have got a feed like that they won't be worrying about anything else. Here's my chance!"

Dick turned horrified eyes on his companion.

"You don't mean——"

"Of course I do!" cut in Barry impatiently. "I'm going to do a dive, and make a dash for it."

(Another splendid, long instalment of this fine serial story next Monday. Order your copy early.)

THE MYSTERY OF THE GABLES!

(Continued from page 24.)

"Let's hear it!"

"Well, what's the matter with my shoving on this false beard in my pocket, and disguising myself into a giddy tramp?" asked Wharton briskly. "Then I'll enter the Gables, and 'accidentally' find Roff and Marris. Somehow I'll make them think we haven't been to Courtfield—and so he'll still buy the property."

They discussed the scheme excitedly, and by the time they reached the Gables it was all cut and dried. Harry Wharton had donned his disguise. By a wonderful stroke of luck they had passed a field with a scarecrow in the middle of it. From this interesting individual they had borrowed a ragged overcoat, and, wearing a battered straw hat—also borrowed from the scarecrow—Wharton looked a shrovy tramp to the life.

He didn't waste any time, but walked into the kitchen by means of the back door. The light was still burning, and almost immediately a voice came up from below.

"Who's that?"

"My heye!" exclaimed the tramp. "I'm busted if that wasn't a voice! Crumbs! I'd better clear off!"

"Help!" roared Mr. Roff. "We're down the cellar! Drag that furniture from the trap door and let us out! Who are you?"

"I'm Bill Brown—gentleman of the road."

"Good!" said Mr. Roff. "I'll give you a sovereign if you'll release me!"

"What-ho! That's quid's mine, guv'nor!" said Harry Wharton eagerly. "I ain't going to ask no questions—not when there's quids knocking about!"

In less than three minutes Roff and Marris were standing in the kitchen looking closely at the tramp, who took care to stand in the shadow.

"Here's your sovereign," said Mr. Roff; and Wharton took it eagerly. "Some burglars broke in and overpowered us."

"That don't trouble me, guv'nor," said the tramp. "I'm havin' a funny night to-night, I am. Met some schoolboys down the road."

"You saw some schoolboys!" said Mr. Roff quickly. "Where?"

"Well, they was not far off Friardale. Talking about seeing a Mr. Garth, they was. Not as how I troubled me 'ead! It don't matter to me if there are fifty Mr. Garths in Friardale! Well, good-night, guv'nor!"

And Harry Wharton left Mr. Roff with the gentle hints he had dropped regarding the schoolboys. The result was exactly as he had anticipated. Five minutes later, as the four juniors crouched in the hedge, Mr. Roff's motor-car started out for Courtfield.

"Good egg!" chuckled Bob Cherry. "You must have done it O.K., Harry! Roff thinks that we've gone to the wrong Mr. Garth—the one in Friardale. So he's dashed off to Courtfield to effect the purchase before it's too late!"

And this was precisely the correct state of affairs. Through the ingenious scheme of Harry Wharton's, the tenant of the Gables awoke Mr. Garth from his sleep, handed over the purchase money in banknotes, signed the deeds in the presence of sleepy witnesses, and the Gables and its grounds became his sole freehold property.

In spite of all the obstacles he had won!

At least, this is what Mr. Roff thought. Harry Wharton & Co. were of the opinion that he had lost!

"Well, the Head was very decent about it," said Harry Wharton the next day, to the other members of the Famous Five. "He cut up rusty, and has gated us for a week, but he might have cut up a lot rustier!"

Sampson Quincy Iffley Field chuckled.

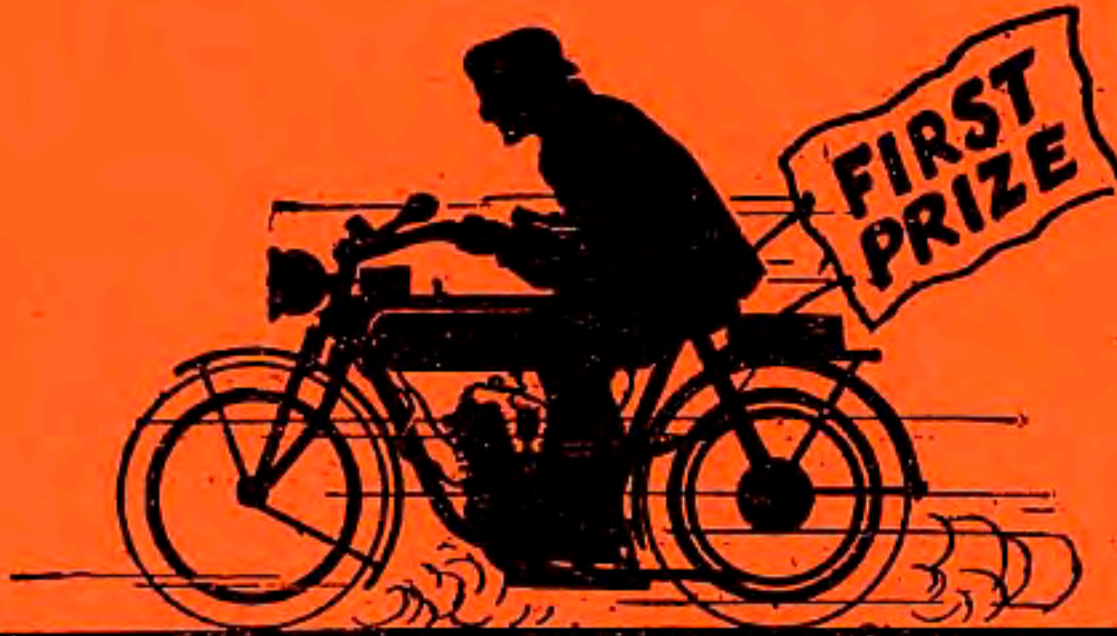
"And old Roff is dished, diddled, and done! That was a jolly ripping idea of yours, Nugent, to point out the truth to him when you met him this morning!"

Nugent nodded.

"The Head talked about setting the police on to Roff for holding us prisoners," he said; "but it wouldn't have done any good, as we pointed out. The whole affair's dropped, and Mr. Roff won't be seen in this neighbourhood again, I'll be bound!"

THE END.

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HOW TO WIN THEM.

All you have to do is to introduce "THE MAGNET" LIBRARY to your chums. Show this copy to them and let them read it. Then get them to sign their names. You can rule a sheet of paper in the manner shown below, and the readers who send in the largest list of names will win these magnificent prizes. This Competition is being run together with our companion papers, "The Union Jack," "Boys' Friend," "Boys' Realm," "Marvel," "Nelson Lee Library," "Gem," "Pluck," and "Penny Popular." It must be understood that this is one Competition, and that the decision of the Editor of the "NELSON LEE LIBRARY" must be accepted as final and binding in all matters concerning the contest. It does not matter which, or how many of these you get your chums to read. While one chum is reading the "NELSON LEE LIBRARY," get another to read the "Boys' Friend," and so on. Keep your lists by you until we announce the date for sending in.

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Let your chums sign their names and addresses
 on one side of the column, like this.

Name of paper which they have read.

.....

THE JUDGE:

The Decision of the EDITOR of the "NELSON LEE LIBRARY"
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