

THE UPPER HAND!

A Magnificent New, Long, Complete School Tale of Harry Wharton & Co. at Greyfriars.



The Magnet¹ Library

No. 428. Vol. 10. April 22nd, 1918.



BILLY BUNTER'S SENSATIONAL SURPRISE!

(An Amusing Scene in the Magnificent Long Complete School Tale in this Issue.)

MY READERS' PAGE

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," 1d., Every Saturday.

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:

"COKER'S CONSCRIPT!"

By Frank Richards.

In the grand, long, complete story which appears next week Mr. Richards will be found in his very best humorous vein. Coker hears of a certain Bill Filey, who is said to be dodging conscription. The great Horace makes up his mind to capture this rough, poaching fellow, and hand him over to the military authorities. The scheme becomes known to the Famous Five, and Wibley is induced to personate the supposed shirker. So far is the joke carried that Coker actually takes Wibley, in the guise of Filey, to the recruiting-office, where the deceiver is unmasked, Coker getting all the blame. Then the real Bill Filey, who is not really a shirker at all, turns up at the school, with exceedingly unpleasant results for Coker. It will be many a long day before Greyfriars ceases to chortle at the mere mention of

"COKER'S CONSCRIPT!"

A UNIQUE OFFER!

I think I am fairly safe in saying that probably not one of my readers is the possessor of a book which has been to the bottom of the sea, and has been recovered thence undamaged. Such a book would be worth something merely as a curiosity, even if one did not care about reading it.

Now, I am in a position to offer not one book only which has undergone this strange experience, but copies to the number of

SIXTEEN HUNDRED!

They are books with the names of which you are all familiar. One was

"RIVALS AND CHUMS!"

Mr. Frank Richards' great school story. The other was another splendid yarn,

"THE KING OF THE FAGS!"

by Geoffrey Murray.

Eight hundred copies of each of these were on their way to Canada when the ship which carried them was

SUNK BY A COWARDLY HUN SUBMARINE!

The package was recovered, along with much of the rest of the ship's cargo, by divers, and the contents were found to be quite unhurt by sea-water. But in the meantime a fresh supply had been sent across the Atlantic, and we now have here and on sale the 1600 copies which have been through this queer experience.

They will be sold at the usual price.

FOURPENCE IN STAMPS

will bring you a copy—that is, if you write at once. Otherwise you may fail to get one at all, as I feel certain that there will be

A BIG RUSH FOR SO INTERESTING A MEMENTO

of the Great War as one of these books will form.

NOTICES.

Private J. Dear, 11094, 3rd Coy., 1st Batt, Coldstream Guards, B.E.F., France, would be glad to correspond with girl readers.

G. Carter, 17, Curlew Street, Horsleydown, London, S.E., wants to buy early numbers of both the "Magnet" and "Gem," and also the "Magnet" story entitled "The Punishment Policies," and the "Gem" story, "Captain D'Arcy."

Private J. Hanson, 14960, care of Sergeant Curtis, "K"

Coy., Scots Guards, Caterham, would be glad to have letters from readers.

Private Nathan Bibby, 3124, 3 Platoon, "A" Coy., 1/5 Batt. Loyal North Lancashire Regiment, B.E.F., France, asks for letters from a girl reader of about his own age—19.

Leonard J. Haynes, 12, River View, New Ferry, Cheshire, has started a Correspondence Club, which readers of the "Magnet" are cordially invited to join. All particulars sent on receipt of stamped addressed envelope.

Private J. Walker, 2868, Machine Gun Section, 12th Middlesex Regiment, B.E.F., France, would like to hear from girl readers.

R. H. Brown, 2, Arthur Street, Anlaby Road, Hull, wishes to form a "Magnet" League, and would be glad if readers in his neighbourhood who would like to join would write to him, enclosing a stamped addressed envelope.

A. G. Fowler, 53, Kennington Road, Wollaton Road, Nottingham, would be glad to hear from W. Barrett.

Gunner S. Pritchard, 1545, 2nd Battery, Herts. R.F.A., Brandon, Suffolk, would be glad to correspond with boy or girl readers in any part of the world interested in stamp collecting.

Pioneer H. Wolfe, 78949, Royal Engineers, 14th Army Corps, Headquarters Signal Coy., B.E.F., France, asks for correspondence with a girl reader.

Sapper C. B. Howell, 7741, 6th Siege Coy., R.N.R.E., The Camp, Monmouth, would be glad to correspond with readers aged 18-20.

Stanley G. Jessop, 81, Hurdsfield Road, Macclesfield, is starting a correspondence and exchange club, and will be pleased to send particulars to any reader who will send him a stamped addressed envelope. He also wants someone to help him with the secretarial work of the club.

Private David O. Greenwood, 14817, "Y" Coy., 17th Service Batt. Lancashire Fusiliers, 104th Brigade, 35th Division, B.E.F., France, would like to correspond with a girl reader.

G. Smith, Kanimbla, Woollahra, Sydney, Australia, would be glad if some of our readers would send him spare copies of any of the Companion Papers so that he can forward them to his brother serving with the Australian Forces in Egypt.

Private G. H. Baines, "A" Coy., 2022, 1st Canadian Batt., Ward A9, Woodcote Convalescent Camp, Epsom, would be glad to have back numbers of the "Gem" and "Magnet" for the use of himself and his comrades.

H. E. Webb and H. Wade, 5, Paisley View, Armley, Leeds, want to start a small amateur journal, and would be glad to hear from readers interested in the project.

Cecil A. Tower, formerly of Maidstone, now of 296, Livingstone Road, Marrickville, Sydney, Australia, would be very glad to hear from Claude Bradshaw, whom he used to know in England.

William Meneely, 75, Brookmount Street, Belfast, wants to buy "Through Thick and Thin," and "The Boy Without a Name."

Miss Alice Chapman, 17, Glenfield Place, Burnley Road, Sowerby Bridge, and Miss Amelia Penistone, 47, Burnley Road, Cote Hill, near Halifax, would be pleased to correspond with two lonely wounded soldiers who are readers of the "Magnet."

Henry Pollard, 15, Leighton Gardens, Kensal Rise, Willesden, London, N.W., wishes to buy the first twenty numbers of the halfpenny series of the "Magnet."

Clarence J. Parker, Post Office, Staunton, near Gloucester, wants to buy "The Boy Without a Name," and the numbers of the "Magnet" from 250 to 270.

Private T. Waldron, 1925, "A" Coy., 4th Gloucesters, Alton Park Farm, Clacton-on-Sea, would be glad to correspond with readers about his own age—19.



Your Editor

A Complete School-
Story Book, attrac-
tive to all readers.

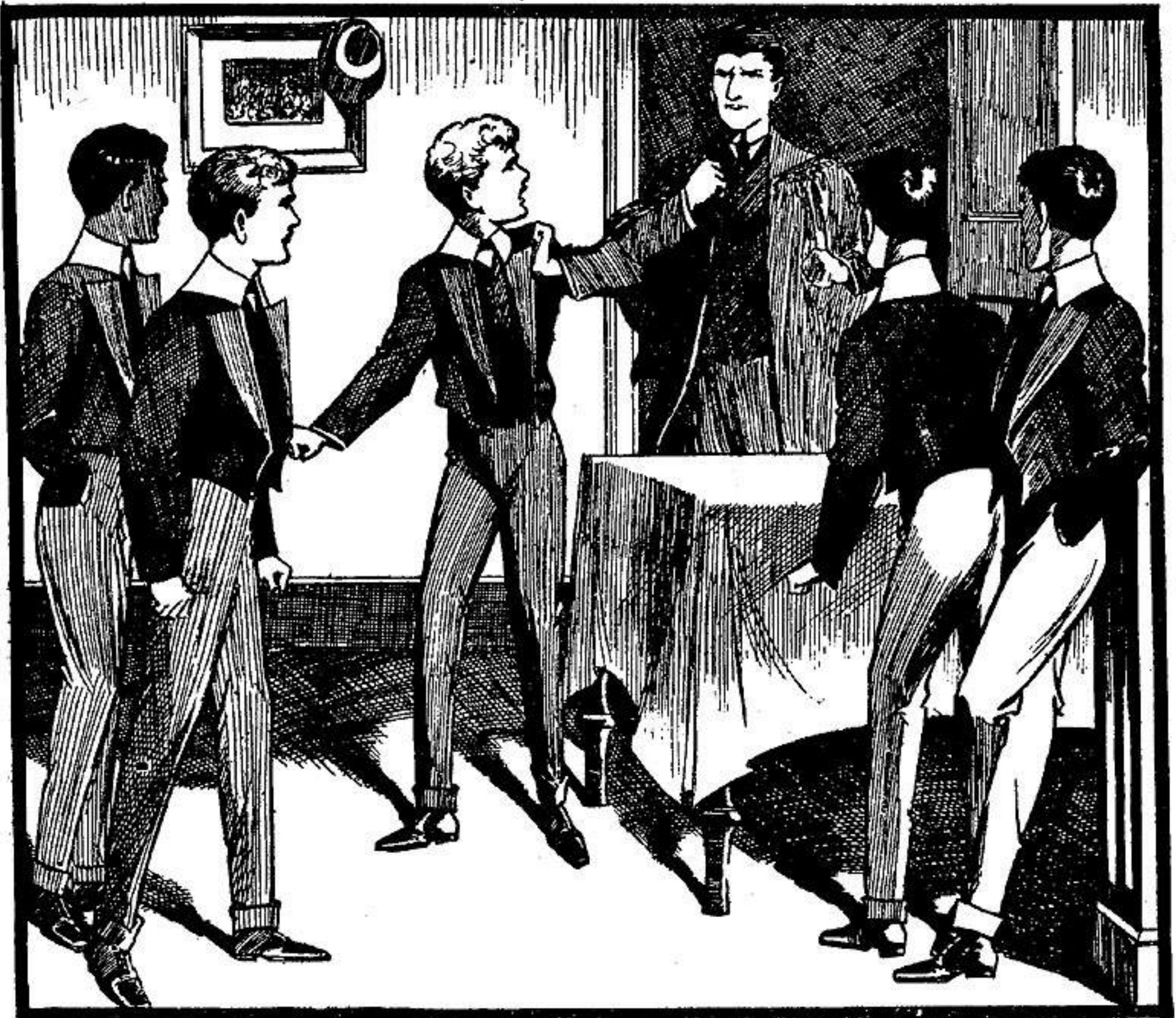


The Editor will be
obliged if you will
hand this book,
when finished with,
to a friend. . . .

THE UPPER HAND!

A Magnificent, New, Long, Complete Tale of
Harry Wharton & Co. at Greyfriars School.

By FRANK RICHARDS.



"My opinion is that the convict is a bit better than Black himself," said Bob Cherry. "Indeed!" said a steely voice at the door. The juniors spun round in dismay, and Bob Cherry gasped, for Mr. Black stood in the doorway of No. 1 study. (See Chapter 5.)

THE FIRST CHAPTER. Not a Capture!

BOOM!
Harry Wharton & Co. stopped abruptly.
The deep, dull report of the gun echoed among
the cliffs, and far away over the rocky slopes of
the Shoulder.

Boom!

No. 425.

"A giddy gunlet!" said Bob Cherry. "That can't be from
Wapshot Camp. The Huns haven't come yet!"
"It's from the prison," said Harry Wharton quietly.
"Blackmoor!" said Nugent.
Bob whistled.
"Then it means——"
"A convict has escaped, of course," said Harry. "Poor
beggar!"

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April 22nd, 1916.

"Ahem! That depends on the kind of johnny he is," said Bob Cherry. "Poor beggar or not, I shouldn't like to meet him alone on the cliffs!"

"Well, no. He won't have much chance of getting away, though," said the captain of the Greyfriars Remove. "The warders will be after him, and I shouldn't wonder if the Territorials turn out from Wapshot Camp. He won't have the ghost of a chance."

"The ghostfulness will not be terrific," remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "But the chancefulness is greater than at other times, as many of the esteemed warders have enlisted."

"True!"

The Famous Five of the Remove continued on their way over the cliffs of Pegg, in sight of the little fishing-village nestling by the bay. Their faces were thoughtful now.

Probably the convict who had escaped from Blackmoor Prison was some desperate and hardened criminal. Yet they could not help feeling a certain compassion for a man fleeing for his liberty. Though probably their compassion would have changed to quite another feeling if they had chanced to meet the convict in a lonely spot with no help at hand!

"That gun means that they've just discovered that he's bolted," remarked Johnny Bull. "He may have gone some time, though. I wonder——"

He paused.

"Well, what do you wonder?" asked Nugent.

"If he knows this countryside at all, he'll make for the caves to hide, as safe as houses," said Johnny Bull. "We might run into him this afternoon."

"Oh, my hat!"

"Then, instead of feeling sorry for him, we shall feel sorry for ourselves!" grinned Bob Cherry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, we'll chance that," said Harry. "There are five of us, anyway, and if we come on him, we'll capture him."

"Same as Coker did the Hun who escaped from the concentration camp!" chuckled Nugent.

"This chap won't be as bad as a Hun, anyhow. A British convict is a cut above a common or garden German."

"Hear, hear!" said the Co., in cordial agreement.

The juniors pursued their way by the rocky path. It was a sunny afternoon in the late spring, and they had been enjoying their ramble over the cliffs when the boom of the prison gun startled them.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" ejaculated Bob Cherry suddenly.

He halted, and held up his hand.

"What the——"

"Shush!"

Bob was in advance of the party, and he had paused where the narrow path wound round a big rock into a hollow of the cliffs. From beyond the big rock came a sound—the sound of a boot scraping on the stones. It was a lonely spot, and the chums of the Remove had not expected to meet other explorers there. The thought of the convict came into their minds at once.

"He's there!" whispered Bob.

"Well, somebody is. I heard Wingate say he was going to the caves this afternoon."

"It's a lonely place. Ten to one the chap is there," said Bob. "We shall be on him in a tick. Wingate couldn't have come up here, if he was going to the caves. It's the giddy convict, right enough!"

"We could go back," remarked Nugent.

Bob Cherry shook his head.

"Greyfriars never turns tail," he said. "Strategic retreats are not written in the history of Greyfriars."

"Bow-wow!"

"We'll collar him," said Bob, in a confident whisper. "Then we'll ask him questions. If he's one of those wronged and innocent johnnies you read about in novels, we'll let him go. If he's a peaky blinder, we'll nail him, and march him off to the police-station. I'll be judge, and you chaps can be jury."

The juniors grinned.

"Right-ho! Get on!"

"Follow your uncle!" said Bob.

He broke into a rush, and dashed at full speed round the big rock, with a loud whoop. The juniors followed him fast.

Crash!

Yell!

Bump!

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Bob.

The enemy was closer at hand than Bob had supposed—only it was not the convict!

Two Sixth-Formers of Greyfriars were seated on chunks of rock on the path, and Bob Cherry, careering round the corner, had rushed full tilt into them.

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Loder and Carne of the Sixth went reeling right and left. Cards and cash were scattered far and wide, and the two seniors sprawled on the rocky path, roaring.

"Yarcoop!"

"Oh, crumbs!"

"Great Scott!" gasped Bob Cherry, in dismay. "'Tain't the convict; it's Loder and Carne!"

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

Loder sat up and roared. Carne staggered to his feet, his face dark with rage, and his fists clenched.

"You young hound!" he shouted. "What do you mean by rushing into us like that?"

"Sorry——"

"You cheeky little beast——"

"Quite an accident," said Bob. "I thought you were a convict."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You—you thought what?" gasped Carne.

"I thought you were a convict," explained Bob innocently. "Knowing what you ought to be, I thought—— Yow-ow-woop! Help!"

The bully of the Sixth made a spring at the humorous Bob, and grasped him by both ears. Bob Cherry roared.

"Yow-ow! Leggo! Help!"

Harry Wharton & Co. rushed to the rescue at once. They grasped Carne all together, and dragged him off the Remove. Carne was bumped down—on Loder, as it happened. The Co. had no time to waste looking before they bumped him. There was a fiendish yell from Gerald Loder.

"Better cut!" murmured Bob Cherry, as Carne sprawled over his companion. "No good stopping to talk to them! They seem waxy."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Famous Five scudded away along the path, leaving the two black sheep of the Sixth sitting up, gasping for breath, and making remarks which would certainly have earned them the "sack" if the Head of Greyfriars had overheard them.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Wingate Goes Exploring!

BOOM! The heavy report of the gun floated through the crisp air to the ears of a group of schoolboys who were standing and talking by the big bronze gates of Greyfriars.

The echo of the sinister sound rolled in from the sea, and died away into silence. And silence had fallen upon the group of lads who had been carelessly chatting a few moments before. They knew what the gunshot from the distant building upon the hill meant.

A convict had escaped from Blackmoor, and the gun was fired to give warning to the countryside.

"A gun from the prison!" said Wingate, captain of Greyfriars. He looked away across the dark woods in the direction of the prison, the tower of which could be seen over the trees in the distance. "Some poor beggar made a bolt for it."

"I don't know about poor beggar," said Walker, of the Sixth. "Some hulking ruffian more likely; and he'll be hanging about the woods until they run him down."

"Well, they're bound to do that before long," remarked Wingate. "There have been escapes from Blackmoor before, but I don't think anybody ever got clean away. There was a chap escaped when I was a youngster in the Fourth here, and he was recaptured, starved almost to death, after four days in the woods. I saw him as he was being taken back to the prison by the warders, and I couldn't help feeling sorry for him."

Walker yawned slightly.

"Your tender heart does you credit," he said. "I don't suppose the man deserved much sympathy. It's all very well to feel sorry for him, but if he met you in a dark corner some night, you'd feel sorry for yourself."

The remark raised a laugh, and Wingate flushed slightly.

"Well, I'm off," said Wingate, turning away. "I've no time to waste, to be back before the match. Any of you fellows feel inclined to come and explore the caves with me?"

"Too much like work," yawned Walker. "Besides, now I come to think of it, those caves are just the place for the escaped convict to scuttle into. You may meet him there, and tell him how sorry you are for him."

Wingate made no reply.

He strode up the lane which led round the Shoulder to the shore, and the rest of the group dispersed to follow their various ways.

It was a half-holiday at Greyfriars, and the captain, who had long intended to explore the sea-caves under the



Loder and Carne of the Sixth were seated on chunks of rock on the path, and Bob Cherry, careering round the corner, had rushed full tilt into them. Cards and cash were scattered far and wide, and the two seniors sprawled on the rocky path, roaring. (See Chapter I.)

Shoulder, had fixed this afternoon for his excursion. He soon left the lane for the rough, shingly path, and came in sight of the sea, rolling vast and grey in the sunshine, with here and there a white sail or the black trail of a steamer's smoke upon it.

The fishing village was now to his right, and to his left the Shoulder, with its deep, dark caves, in which, so legend said, smugglers had stored their contraband goods in the old days.

Dark and gloomy looked the deep caverns as Wingate stood at the opening in the big, grey cliff. The thought came into his mind that Walker's suggestion might be near the truth; that the fugitive from the prison on the hill might very probably have taken refuge from his hunters in the recesses of the sea-caves. But the thought of possible danger did not deter him.

The captain of Greyfriars, the finest athlete in the college, knew how to take care of himself, and he was not afraid of a meeting with the escaped convict if it should come to pass.

There were other dangers in the caves, he knew, dangers more real—deep crevices, which were flowing streams when the tide was in, and yawning chasms when it was out. Half the sea-caves were partially submerged when the tide was at the flood.

Wingate halted to light the bicycle-lamp he had brought with him, and then advanced boldly into the cave. It seemed to extend to unknown depths into the cliff, and soon he passed a bend which completely shut him out from the daylight.

The lantern gleamed eerily upon dark walls of rock, clinging

masses of seaweed, and upon the glistening wet sand at his feet.

Suddenly he gave a start. In the wet sand before him he saw a footprint, evidently freshly made. He bent down and scrutinised it closely. Someone had lately been in the cave, and again Wingate thought of the convict.

He could not help giving a quick glance round into the dim shadows. But nothing met his gaze save the cold rock, and the next moment he smiled at his own nervousness. Flashing the lantern before him, he advanced deeper into the dim recesses of the cave.

Clink!

It was the sound of a boot upon a stone, but it had not been made by himself. And it was between him and the sea. Whoever had made that sound was behind him. A vision of a burly ruffian creeping upon him in the darkness flashed into Wingate's mind, and he swung hastily round. His foot slipped upon a mass of wet seaweed, and he stumbled. The lantern crashed against a rock, and the next moment he was in darkness.

Blackness, blacker than night, settled round Wingate as the lantern was extinguished. The lantern had slipped from his hand in the concussion. He got upon his hands and knees and felt in his pocket for his matches. They were not to be found. Had the box dropped from his pocket in his fall? He set his lips, and began to grope in the darkness over the rocky floor, moving on hands and knees, and a sudden, horrified shriek rang from his lips as he felt himself

falling. He had blundered over the edge of a crevice in the dark.

That one wild shriek he gave, and then the rush through the air stifled his utterance. There was a splash as he struck into icy water, and then he was struggling for his life in the blackness.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Rescued by the Convict!

GEORGE WINGATE was a good swimmer. He easily kept himself afloat, and felt round him in the gloom for the side of the crevice. His hand came in contact with the hard rock. The surface of it was rough, and he caught at a jut of it to hold on, but he was soon assured that it was impossible to climb. He made two attempts, and each time slipped back before he was quite out of the water.

The chill was now getting into his limbs, and his fingers were numbed; he would not be able to swim, or to hold on to the rock much longer.

Was it death, then?

He thought of the man in the cave. He was certain that someone was there; and even if it were the convict, surely he could not be wicked enough to leave a fellow-creature to die! Then came the chilling reflection that, if it were the convict, he would not run the risk of making his whereabouts known by saving the luckless explorer of the caves.

Still, there was a chance; one chance of life, and no other.

Wingate shouted for help till the cavern rang again.

"Help! Help!"

The echoes rolled back his voice like thunder—"Help! Help!"

To his joy, he heard an answering shout from the gloom above.

"Where are you?"

It was a man's voice, and Wingate could have cried out with joy.

"Thank Heaven! Can you help me? Will you help me? I'm at the bottom of a crevice, but for goodness' sake don't tumble in, too! It's slippery on the edge!" called out Wingate anxiously.

"I am taking care," came the reply. "Are you holding on?"

"Yes. But I'm chilled to the bone," said Wingate through his chattering teeth. "There's a lantern near where I fell, and, I think, a box of matches."

"Hold on while I look for them!"

There was a sound of groping in the darkness. Minute followed minute. The chill of the water was terrible. Then the welcome sound of a scratching match.

"I've found the match-box! Hold on!"

There was a glimmer of light.

A few moments more and a man, kneeling on the verge of the crevice, swung the lantern over the opening and cast its light downward.

Six feet below was the surface of the water, with the white face looking up from it; but it might have been sixty feet for all the chance Wingate had of getting out unaided. For the side of the crevice was as perpendicular as the side of a house, and a cat could not have climbed it.

"Have you a rope?" gasped Wingate. "Can you get one? You cannot reach me."

"I have no rope."

There was a brief, tense pause. They looked at each other in the lantern-light, and Wingate caught a glimpse of the man's clothes in the rays, and saw the mark of the broad arrow upon them. It was the convict!

He gave a groan.

"I will save you," said the man, in a low, steady voice.

"You cannot!"

"I can, and will!"

He set the lantern on the rock so that it shone over the crevice. Then he felt along the rough, rocky edge with his hands.

"Listen!" he said. "There is one chance. I cannot reach you, and I have no rope. I will lower myself down, and hold on by my hands. You will take hold of me and climb over me."

Wingate gasped.

"I shall drag you down to death! No, no; better one than two—"

"You will do as I say," interrupted the man coolly. "My life is of little value if I lose it. But I think I can hold on—I am sure of it."

"Heaven bless you!"

"Look out, then!"

The man's hands fastened upon a projection on the edge of the crevice, and he lowered himself into the gulf. His feet swung over the water, almost touching the surface.

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"I am ready!" he said quietly.

Wingate released his hold upon the rock. He took a grip upon the man's ankles, and then catching at his clothing, began to climb.

At any other time such a climb would have been nothing to him. But now he was numbed and shivering. Still, he climbed steadily. His grip changed to the man's waist, then to his shoulders. He heard a grunt from the man under his weight; he was standing the test nobly. Wingate's hand touched the top of the crevice, he gripped the rock, and drew himself out upon the floor of the cavern.

"Help me up!" said his rescuer faintly.

Wingate's strong grip closed upon him, and he was drawn up from the dangerous position. Wingate shook the water from his clothes.

"Thank you," he said quietly. "You have saved my life!" He held out his hand.

The man did not stir, but a bitter smile came upon his face.

"Do you know what I am?" he asked. "You must see the brand of the broad arrow upon my clothing—you must have heard the gun from the prison."

"You are an escaped convict?"

"Yes."

"But you are a brave man, and you have risked your life to save mine. Give me your hand!"

The man gripped his hand hard.

"Then you will not betray me?"

"You must think me an ungrateful brute to ask that question," said the captain of Greyfriars.

"No, no! But I am an Ishmael—every man's hand is against me. The gun from Blackmoor has sounded the alarm that a wild beast is let loose upon society!"

And the convict laughed savagely.

"I shall not betray you," said Wingate. "If you had let me drown in that hole, the police could have learned nothing from me; they shall learn nothing now."

"Thank you! And if you care to know it—that you may feel more at ease for granting me so much—I am innocent, as innocent of the crime laid to my charge as a babe unborn!" The man's voice was passionate and eager. "But what if I am!" he added bitterly. "Why should you believe me—an escaped convict?"

"But I do believe you," said Wingate. "A man so brave and generous cannot be a criminal—at least, I should hope not. I know that innocent men have suffered before now. I do believe you."

"Heaven bless you for those words! Tell me, you belong to Greyfriars, do you not?"

"Yes, I'm captain of Greyfriars," said Wingate. He looked at the man closely. "Haven't I seen you before? I have some recollection of your features. Yes, by Jove! You are the man who escaped from Blackmoor before, and I saw the warders taking you back."

"I have escaped before, it is true, but I was taken. I will never be taken again! If escape is cut off, there is the sea!" said the convict, more to himself than to Wingate.

The boy shuddered.

"Take care what you do," he said. "If you are innocent, as I believe, all may come right in the end."

The man laughed harshly.

"Yes, when a scoundrel who should be in my place confesses the truth—when a heart of stone is softened! But that will never be. I have escaped, and I will remain free, or die! But there's a chance! Boy"—he broke off abruptly—"I have saved your life. You say you believe that I am innocent. I tell you further—I am an old Greyfriars boy. I have a son now at Greyfriars College, though, thank Heaven, he does not know his father's shame—and will never know it, unless my name is cleared in the eyes of the world! Will you help me—will you help me to keep out of that inferno yonder on the hill?"

Wingate looked at him in amazement.

"You were a Greyfriars fellow!" he exclaimed. "You have a son there!"

"I swear it's the truth!"

"I believe you—I will help you. What can I do?"

"But—no, no; the risk is too great! You will be breaking the law, and if your headmaster should discover—"

"You did not think of the risk when you saved my life; I shall not think of it now. What can I do to help you?" said Wingate.

"You mean it? It means life or death to me! Bring me food and a change of clothing, so that I can make a bid for liberty—that is all I ask. Can you—will you do it?"

"I can, and I will."

"Heaven bless you!"

"I will leave you the lantern and matches. I will come to-night if I possibly can—if not, some time to-morrow—and bring you food," said Wingate. "You may rely upon me."

But stay! The warders may search the caves, so you had better keep close. We must arrange a signal so that you will know it is I."

"Whistle something, and I will listen for it."
"Good!" Wingate whistled a few bars from the Toreador song in "Carmen"—the first that came into his head. "When you hear that you will know who it is. And now I must bolt, or I shall catch a fearful cold."

The convict gripped his hand again. In the flickering light, his haggard eyes read the face of the captain of Greyfriars—a face that was rugged, but honest and true, more pleasing to the eye than many faces that were handsome.

"You believe what I have told you?" the convict asked sharply.

"Every word!"
"It is a risk for you to help me," the man muttered. "I have no right to ask it. If it is discovered, it may be ruin to you—"

"I know it."
"Yet—yet you will run the risk?"
Wingate smiled slightly.
"Did you think of the risk just now?"
"No. But—"
"Then I shall not think of it. You risked your life for me. I do not believe you are a guilty man—I cannot believe it. I shall help you, and chance the risk."

"Heaven bless you!" muttered the convict, with tears in his eyes. "Some day—some day, I pray to Heaven that justice may be done, and then—you will be glad that you have helped me."

He stared after the sturdy form of the captain of Greyfriars, as George Wingate picked his way from the cave. There was new hope in the drawn, white face now—hope in the heart of the hunted man.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Carne is Suspicious!

"HALLO, hallo, hallo! Wherefore this thushness, great chief?"

Bob Cherry asked that humorous question, as the Famous Five came suddenly on Wingate, on their way home to Greyfriars.

The captain of Greyfriars was hurrying along, squelching out water from his boots at every step.

"Had a tumble, Wingate?" asked Wharton.
Wingate coloured.
"Yes," he said briefly, and without pausing.
"Been in the caves, what?" said Bob. "Dangerous place for little boys, Wingate."

Wingate laughed.
He did not reply, however, but hurried on to the school. He wanted to get into dry clothes as quickly as possible; but that was not his only reason for leaving the juniors so hurriedly. He was anxious to avoid drawing attention to the fact that he had been in the sea-caves under the Shoulder that afternoon. Under the peculiar circumstances, the less said about his excursion there the better.

His meeting with the escaped convict from Blackmoor Prison had to remain a dead secret.

The man had saved his life—there was no doubt about that. Common gratitude required that he should keep his secret. Yet he was really breaking the law, and he knew it. It was a weight on his mind.

At all events, the secret should be kept, and when the hapless fugitive was gone from the neighbourhood, he could dismiss the matter from his mind. He was anxious to get in and change his clothes without attracting further attention.

But he seemed destined to run the gauntlet that afternoon. Loder and Carne of the Sixth came out of a footpath into the lane, and they joined him, looking at his drenched clothes in surprise.

"Accident?" asked Loder.
Wingate groaned inwardly.
"Yes—a tumble into some water," he replied.
"Hard cheese!"

"Been exploring the caves, what?" grinned Carne. "I heard you were going. Blessed if I can see the attraction. Looking for the smuggler's treasure?"

"Oh, no, just an excursion!" said Wingate.
"Seen anything of the convict?"
Wingate started.

"The—the what?" he ejaculated.

"There's a convict escaped from Blackmoor Prison," said Carne. "We heard the gun while we were up on the cliffs."

"Is there?" said Wingate, as carelessly as he could. "Yes, I remember I heard the gun before I started from Greyfriars."

"Just the place for him to hide, in the sea-caves," said Carne. "Lucky for you you didn't run into him."

Wingate did not answer.

Carne looked at the captain of Greyfriars very curiously. Big, honest, rugged Wingate was utterly unused to any kind

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of prevarication. He was a bad hand at keeping a secret. Carne's questioning caused him an inward uneasiness which his expressive face could not wholly conceal.

"I suppose you haven't met him, Wingate?" said Carne.
"Excuse me if I buzz on," said Wingate, "I'm soaked to the skin, and I shall begin sneezing soon. So-long!"

And he broke into a run for the school gates, which were now in sight, leaving the black sheep of the Sixth to follow at their leisure.

Carne glanced after him with a very peculiar expression.
"That's rather queer!" he remarked.

"Eh?" said Loder carelessly.
Loder was thinking chiefly about fifteen shillings he had lost to Carne that afternoon, in the little game on the cliffs.
"It's queer," repeated Carne.

"What's queer? The way you held the aces, do you mean?"

Carne laughed.
"No, I don't! What was Wingate looking so red and flustered for when I asked him if he'd met the convict?"

"Hanged if I know, or care!"
"I suppose he couldn't have met him, and decided not to mention it," said Carne, in a very thoughtful way.

Loder stared.
"Why should he?"

"Well, you know what a tender-hearted ass he is," said Carne, with a sneer. "The man might have pitched him a yarn. Anybody can get round Wingate. A fag could take him in."

"Oh, rot!" said Loder, with a yawn. "If he'd seen the man, he would give information to the police, I suppose."

"He might—and he might not," said Carne coolly. "If he were ass enough to take pity on the rascal—and he might—"

"Well, it's his own business, I suppose."

"Ours, too, perhaps," said Carne.
"Hanged if I see what you're driving at, Carne!" said Loder impatiently.

"I'll explain. Wingate's captain of Greyfriars, and he comes down on—well, on anything in our line, pretty hard. We don't have half the chance of a good time that we should have if another chap were captain of the school—say one of our own set."

"That's so," agreed Loder. "But—"
"If Wingate had to go—"

Loder laughed.
"Nine out of ten fellows would vote for Wingate, if there were a fresh election," he said.

"But if there were a fresh election, and Wingate didn't put up as a candidate, what?" said Carne, his brows wrinkled.

"Why shouldn't I get in then?"
"You!" ejaculated Loder.

"Why not?"
"You're talking out of the back of your neck. Wingate isn't likely to resign the captaincy."

"He might be made to," said Carne coolly. "If Wingate is beginning to keep shady secrets, he may be glad to make terms with a fellow who knows."

"What rot!"
Carne shrugged his shoulders, and walked on in silence.

But he was very thoughtful. Very often the thought had come into Carne's mind of ousting the popular captain of Greyfriars; but the idea had always seemed hopeless. Now it seemed to the cunning senior that there was a ray of light.

It was the barest chance that Wingate had encountered the escaped convict, and was keeping the wretched man's secret—otherwise, how was the Greyfriars captain's evident uneasiness to be accounted for?

If a strange chance gave him the upper hand, Carne would not be deterred by any scruples from using it to the full.

The black sheep of Greyfriars had more than once found Wingate in their way. If he could be removed from their way, the "sporting set" in the Sixth could count upon a much easier time.

It was a chance—a bare chance. But Carne's mind dwelt upon it, and the thought remained with him.

Meanwhile, Wingate hurried on to the school. Coker and Potter and Greene, of the Fifth, were in the gateway, and they stared at the captain of Greyfriars.

"Hallo, you look wet!" said Coker.
"I am wet," grunted Wingate.

"Taken a tumble in the caves?"
"Yes."

"You should have asked me to come with you," said Coker; "I'd have looked after you. By the way, Wingate, about the cricket this season—am I going to play in the First Eleven?"

"Rats!" said Wingate laconically.
"Look here—"

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But Wingate was gone. He hastened across the Close to the School House, several fellows asking him, en route, why he was so wet. As he entered the School House, a slim, dark-complexioned man met him in the hall, and stared at him. It was Mr. Black, the new mathematics-master, who had taken the place of Mr. Lascelles, now far away at the Front in khaki.

Mr. Black stopped.

"Bless my soul! What is the matter, Wingate?"

Wingate suppressed his impatience.

"I have had a fall, sir, and got wet."

"You had better change your clothes at once," said the mathematics master.

"Yes, sir!"

Wingate hurried to his room, glad to escape questioning at last. He rubbed himself dry, and changed his clothes. There was a tap at his door, and he opened it. His chum Courtney of the Sixth came in.

"Hallo, I hear you've been swimming with your clothes on," remarked Courtney.

Wingate laughed.

"I had a tumble in the caves," he said. "Tea ready?"

"Yes; in my study. I suppose you haven't seen anything of that giddy escaped convict the fellows are chattering about?"

"Oh, blow the convict!" said Wingate. "I'm fed up with him! Let's go and have tea—I'm as hungry as a hunter!"

And the chums of the Sixth went to Courtney's study for tea, and the subject of the convict was dropped.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER. Black, But Not Comely!

BANG!

Bob Cherry brought his fist down on the table in Study No. 1.

The table jumped, and so did all the fellows in the study.

"It won't do!" growled Bob.

"No, it won't, you ass!" said Wharton. "The table won't stand that twice! What are you smashing our furniture for?"

"We're not going to stand it!"

"What—the table?"

"Fathead! I'm talking about Black!"

"Oh, blow Black!"

"The blowfulness is terrific!" purred Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

Bob Cherry snorted.

"Mathematics is rotten, anyway," he remarked.

"Hear, hear!"

"But we could stand maths when old Larry was here."

"Good old Larry!"

"Larry's gone to the Front, and blossomed forth into Lieutenant Lawrence Lascelles," said Bob Cherry. "Of course, that's right enough. Larry's place was at the Front, and I hope he's killing Huns by the bushel. But we've got a no-class, beastly bounder in his place."

"Can't be helped!" said Wharton. "We've got to stand Black until Lascelles comes back. The Government may wake up, and end the war any time, you know."

"The beast has given me an imposition!"

"Rotten!"

"And I haven't done it!"

"Better buck up with it, then! Black doesn't like to be kept waiting for his impots," remarked Frank Nugent.

"How could I do it when I've been out on the cliffs all the afternoon?" demanded Bob warmly.

"Ha, ha! Better explain that to Blackey!"

"The beast wouldn't take that as a good reason," growled Bob. "I'm fed up with him. Look here, we've got to make Black learn his place."

"Hear, hear!"

There were half a dozen juniors in Study No. 1, and they were all in hearty agreement with Bob Cherry.

Mr. Black, the new mathematics master at Greyfriars, was not popular.

In the first place, it was known that he was only a few months over military age, and he was an athletic fellow, who still played games, so there was no earthly reason why he shouldn't have been at the Front. But Mr. Black evidently hadn't the slightest intention of getting anywhere near the Front.

Mr. Lascelles, the former mathematics master, had been popular, and he had thrown up an excellent position to do his duty for King and Country. The contrast between the two masters was very unfavourable to Mr. Black.

But that was not all. Mr. Black was a most unpleasant person. He was severe, and he was not just.

Mr. Quelch, the master of the Remove, was severe, but he

was just—a beast, but a just beast, so to speak. But Mr. Black was an unjust beast, and that was a fault his pupils could not forgive.

He would sometimes move about very quietly, and catch words that were not intended for his ears, and punish the unhappy speakers who had thus put themselves into his power—a proceeding that caused bitter wrath among the juniors.

Bob Cherry in announcing that he was fed up was only voicing the general feeling of the Remove.

"Gentlemen, chaps, and fellows," said Bob Cherry, looking round, "I hereby call upon this meeting, representing all that is best at Greyfriars—"

"Hear, hear!"

"Representing the Remove, in fact——"

"Bravo!"

"I call upon this meeting to get its back up, and put the Black beast into his place!"

"Hurrah!"

"The hurrafulness is terrific!"

"Done!" said Squiff. "Lead on, Macduff, and we'll scalp him first, then boil him in oil, then read him one of Mr. Asquith's speeches, and then strew the hungry churchyard with his bones."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Don't be an ass!" growled Bob Cherry. "I heard the beast saying to Quelch that he was thinking of joining in to help the police hunt down that convict chap. Of course, the convict ought to be bagged; but my opinion is that the convict is a bit better than Black himself."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Indeed!" said a steely voice at the door.

The juniors spun round in dismay. Bob Cherry gasped. Mr. Black stood in the doorway of Study No. 1.

There was a glitter in his eyes, and his thin lips were tightly set. Evidently he had heard Bob Cherry's unfortunate remark.

Bob stood rooted to the floor.

Certainly he had spoken very unguardedly, and his remark could not be called respectful. But, on the other hand, Mr. Black certainly had no right to come so very quietly along the passage, with his keen ears and cat-like tread.

"So that is the opinion you have dared to express of your master, Cherry?"

"Ahem!" gasped Bob.

"We—we didn't know you were listening, sir," stammered Johnny Bull.

Wharton trod on Johnny's foot. Johnny's way of putting it was most unfortunate.

A flush came into the cheeks of the mathematics master.

"You are as impudent as Cherry, Bull!"

"Oh!"

"What explanation have you to give of your words, Cherry?"

"Ahem!"

"You are an impudent boy!"

"H'm!"

"Go to my study and fetch me a cane," said Mr. Black.

Bob Cherry hesitated for a moment, and then obeyed. Mr. Black surveyed the chums of the Remove grimly.

"I came here for Cherry's imposition," he said, "and I hear you discussing me in opprobrious terms."

"Mr. Quelch would take no notice of words overheard by chance, sir," said Harry Wharton quietly.

"Mr. Quelch's methods are not mine, apparently."

"No, certainly they are not," said Wharton, with a curl of the lip.

Bob Cherry returned with the cane, and with a most lugubrious expression on his face. It was clear that Study No. 1 were "booked."

"You will hold out your hands in turn—both hands," said Mr. Black. "This study is the most unruly in the Remove. I shall see whether I can reduce you to a little better order!"

Swish, swish!

There was no help for it. Each of the juniors went through the infliction in grim silence. The amiable master seemed a little disappointed that he had not been able to wring a cry of pain from the juniors. The infliction was just finished, when a fat face and a pair of large spectacles were projected into the doorway.

"I say, you fellows," exclaimed Billy Bunter breathlessly, "what do you think of that utter beast Black— Oh, crumbs!"

The Owl of the Remove broke off in complete dismay as he caught sight of the mathematics-master in the study.

"Oh—oh, dear!" gasped Bunter.

"You were speaking of me, Bunter?" said Mr. Black, in a grinding voice.

"Nunno, sir!"

"What!"

"I—I wasn't speaking at all, sir," stammered Bunter. "I—"



"Hallo! What the dickens——" Two men in uniform were coming towards the cricket-field, and, at a glance, they were known as warders from Blackmoor prison. Mr. Black walked off the field and met them. "What do you want here?" he asked. (See Chapter 6)

I really meant to say, sir, that—that I was just going to do my impot, sir, and—and that we—we all admire you very much, sir. That's what I really meant to say!"

"Hold out your hand, Bunter!"

"Oh, dear!"

Bunter's fat hand came out unwillingly. The cane came down with a savage swish, and the fat junior involuntarily jerked his hand back.

The cane, meeting with no resistance, swept downward, and lashed Mr. Black's own leg.

The mathematics master gave a yell of agony.

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

The cane sang across his shoulders, and he dodged promptly round the study table. Then Mr. Black grasped the terrified Bunter by the collar, and swung him round.

Swish—swish—swish—swish—swish!

"Yaroooh! Help! Fire! Murder! Yooop!"

Mr. Black tossed the yelling Owl of the Remove aside, and strode from the study with knitted brows. Bunter sat on the carpet and roared.

"Ow—ow—ow!"

"Yow-wow!" said Nugent, rubbing his hands. "Oh, the beast! Yow-wow!"

"The yow-wowfulness is terrific!" groaned the Nabob of Bhanipur.

And in No. 1 Study for some considerable time the chief sounds uttered were "yow" and "wow," and the feelings of Harry Wharton & Co. towards the new mathematics master were positively Hunnish.

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THE SIXTH CHAPTER

An Interrupted Cricket Match!

"W HERE'S Wingate?"

The Sixth-Form cricketers on Big Side were asking that question the following day soon after lessons. The First Eleven had gone down to practice, and Mr. Black, the mathematics master, was captaining a scratch team to oppose them. But Wingate, the captain, had not turned up.

"Where the dickens can he be?" Courtney said to Valence. "Blessed if I know! I saw him cut out on his bike just after lessons!"

"On his bike?" said Carne. "He's gone out on his bike just before a practice match!"

"Looks like it!" growled Courtney.

"Precious captain for the First Eleven!" sneered Carne.

"Oh, rats!"

Courtney was surprised, but was not disposed to hear anything against his chum. He looked anxiously across the Close. It was not like George Wingate to be absent when he was wanted on the field of play.

Mr. Black crossed over to Courtney and his companions.

"Are you ready?" he asked.

"Wingate isn't here yet, sir," said Courtney awkwardly.

"I'll send a fag to find him. Here, Bunter!"

Billy Bunter rolled up, keeping a safe distance from the mathematics master, however. William George Bunter preferred giving Mr. Black a wide berth.

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"Cut off and tell Wingate we're waiting for him," said Courtney.

"It's all right, Courtney," said Bunter cheerfully. "I happened to see him come in. He brought in a bundle from the village on his bike. I think he's been down to the tuck-shop."

Carne laughed.

"What rot!" growled Courtney. "He wouldn't go down to the village shop for grub when there's a shop here—just before play, too!"

"Well, I asked him what was in the bundle, and he said I was a cheeky beast," said Billy Bunter. "I'll ask him again if you like!"

"Shut up, you young owl!"

"Hallo! Here he comes!" said Walker.

Wingate came hurrying down to Big Side in flannels, his bat in his hand. He was a little flushed.

"Sorry if I've kept you waiting," he said. "I'm ready."

And the practice match started. Billy Bunter blinked at Wingate, and rolled away to the School House. Bunter was very concerned to know what was in the bundle the captain of Greyfriars had brought in on his bike. But Wingate's study door was locked, and the Peeping Tom of Greyfriars had to give it up.

And as he peered disconsolately through the keyhole into the study, Peter Todd's finger and thumb fastened on his fat ear, and led him away, gently but firmly, to an accompaniment of doleful howls from William George Bunter.

The match was between the First Eleven and a scratch team captained by Mr. Black.

Mr. Black was a tall, well-built man, with a somewhat narrow and not very cordial face. He was a good athlete, but few were found to like him for his personal qualities. There was no love lost between him and the captain of the school, though they always met with an unvarying show of politeness.

"I think we shall beat you this time, Wingate," said Mr. Black, with a smile, as the two captains met to toss the coin.

Wingate smiled.

"I hope not, sir. We shall do our best."

"Heads!" said Mr. Black. "Ah, heads it is! You will bat first, Wingate."

Wingate and Courtney went to the wicket, but before the ball was sent down there was a sudden shout.

"Hallo! What the dickens—"

Two men in uniform were coming towards the cricket-field, and at a glance they were known as warders from Blackmoor Prison.

The cricketers looked at them in amazement.

"What do you want here?" asked Mr. Black. "Has there been an escape from the prison?"

"Yes, sir," replied one of them. "Didn't you hear the gun yesterday?"

"No; I was away."

"We are looking for him, sir, and the others are scouring the country in all directions. We thought perhaps some of the boys might have seen something of him, as it's a holiday at the school, sir, and he's hanging about somewhere."

"You may question them," said Mr. Black. "It is our duty to render you any assistance in our power. By the way, who is the man who has escaped—a desperate character?"

"Well, no, not exactly, sir. I don't know that he'd do

anyone any harm," said the warder. "But he's given us a lot of trouble. This is the second time he's got away."

Mr. Black changed colour slightly.

"Ah! The same man, Convict 27?" he asked.

"The same, sir. You heard about that, then?"

"Yes," said Mr. Black; "I heard about it. Well, I wish you every success!"

He returned to the cricket-field.

During this colloquy the teams had waited with a good deal of impatience. Anybody but Mr. Black would have been sharply called to order for acting in such a manner, but the mathematics master had the privilege of doing as he liked. He rejoined his team, and play started, and the cricketers were soon hard at it.

The warders, taking advantage of Mr. Black's permission, asked questions of a good many of the boys about the ground. Of the players, of course, they could ask nothing, and so George Wingate escaped the ordeal of questioning.

The two men in uniform presently disappeared, long before the game ended. Wingate, who, of course, guessed their business, was glad to see them go.

The keenness Mr. Black usually showed in the game was gone now. He was absent-minded, and missed chances, and more than once both followers and opponents stared at him, wondering what had come over him since his interview with the two warders from Blackmoor Prison.

The match ended with Greyfriars First victors, but the defeated eleven felt that their failure was due to their captain's lack of interest in the game, and looks the reverse of amiable were cast at him as the cricketers strolled off.

Mr. Black was unheeding of all. He left the ground quickly, and, having changed his clothes, he quitted the school, and he did not return until a late hour that night. Where he had been he told no one.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

A Night Expedition!

ELEVEN struck from the school clock. As the last stroke died away, Wingate opened his study door.

The corridor was dark and silent. Greyfriars School was asleep, save, perhaps, that one or two of the masters were burning the midnight oil.

Wingate's face was very grave, but quietly resolute. He knew that he was about to break the rules of the school, but his promise was to be kept, and he regarded his intended help to the unhappy fugitive in the light of a sacred duty.

The man who had risked his life and liberty for another was no common criminal, and Wingate fully believed the convict's declaration that he was an innocent man. He believed him, too, when he said that he was an old Greyfriars boy, and had a son at the school. For many reasons he was determined to help the unhappy man who had escaped the iron grip of the law.

The captain of the school had made his preparations earlier. His purchases had been made in Friardale, and he had done the work of caterer well. His cricket-bag was stuffed to its utmost limits. There were other things in a package in his coat-pocket, such as a can of oil for the bicycle-lamp, matches, candles, and a towel.

To visit the caves in the daylight was risky, especially carrying a parcel. For the sake of the convict, it was neces-

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easy to go after dark, and the captain could only escape curious questions by going when the rest of the school had been wrapped in slumber. It was a serious infraction of the school rules, but Wingate was satisfied that he was doing his duty, and so he went about it quietly and resolutely.

He had extinguished his light. He went quietly down the passage and descended into the Hall. A door in the rear of the School House gave him egress into the Close, and the rest was easy.

He crossed rapidly towards the gates, and suddenly stopped, his heart beating at the sound of a footstep. In a moment he had stepped behind one of the big elms.

A man passed him, walking quickly towards the House. Wingate caught a glimpse of him, and recognised Mr. Black. The master was looking tired and depressed. He disappeared in a moment or two, and Wingate, congratulating himself upon his narrow escape, went on to the gate.

It took him but a minute to climb it and drop down into the road outside. Then, with the bag under his arm, he set off rapidly towards the shingly path leading down to the caves.

Once or twice as he went down the lane he fancied he heard a footstep behind him. He stopped and looked back, but could see nothing in the dim shadows. He put it down to fancy, and strode on, and at last reached the cave.

Grim and gloomy looked the great Shoulder in the blackness of night, with the sea invisible in the darkness, rolling with a sullen murmur upon the rocks at its base.

Wingate stumbled over the shingle, striking matches several times to assure himself that he was on the right path. At last he stood within the cave.

Standing there in the darkness, he began to whistle softly, and then more loudly.

"Hist!" It was an eerie voice from the darkness. It made Wingate start in spite of himself.

"You are there?" he said. "Where is the lantern?"

"Burnt out."

"I have brought you a can of oil for it, and some grub—enough to last you some days. I haven't been able to get any clothes."

"Never mind. Heavens, I am starving!"

Wingate struck a vesta. The cave was very cold, and the convict was white and shivering. Wingate's face was full of compassion.

"I wish I could get you some blankets or something," he said. "I was pretty well loaded this time, but I will come again. Anyway, I'll leave you my overcoat."

"No, no! It will be missed, and—"

"That will be all right."

Wingate laid down his parcels, and took off his coat. It was quite big enough for the man, and he gave a grunt of relief as he felt its warm folds round him.

By the light of a vesta Wingate refilled the lantern, and then lighted it. The convict opened the bag, and his famished eyes danced as he saw the store of good things within.

"You are very kind!" he said, in a choking voice. "I had almost ceased to believe in human nature. God bless you!"

"You saved my life!" said Wingate.

The man ate ravenously, and yet with a certain decency which showed that, convict as he was, he had been accustomed to better things.

Wingate waited while he ate. He wanted to get back to the school as soon as he could, but he knew how much human companionship must mean to the man who had been shut up in the cavern for so long alone, and so he determined to linger for a while.

"You must take care not to leave any traces," he remarked. "The warders are pretty certain to search the caves for you."

The convict nodded.

"I have found a recess in the rocks," he replied. "It is high up the side of the cave, some distance in, and I think I can hide there in security if the caves are searched. Shall I see you again?"

"Yes; it wouldn't do to come here in the daylight, but to-morrow night I'll try and pay you another visit," said Wingate. "I'll bring you the clothes then, if I can. If you really have a safe hiding-place, though, it would be best for you to lie low here for a few days before you make a run for it."

"Yes, I was thinking of that. Have you seen anything of the warders?"

"Yes; two of them came along this afternoon while we were at cricket. They asked some of the fellows if they had seen you, but I was playing, so they couldn't question me."

"No one suspects that you have seen me?"

"No one, I think, unless—"

Wingate paused.

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"Unless?" repeated the convict anxiously.

"There's one chap. He seemed to suspect that something had happened when I told of my tumble in the caves," replied Wingate. "Once or twice in the evening he's made references to the matter. But I don't see how he can really suspect anything of the truth. Still, if he smelt a rat, I would ask him to keep quiet, and I expect he would."

"You think you could trust him?"

"I believe so."

"Who is he?"

"A fellow named Carne."

The convict bent and fumbled in the bag, and Wingate could not see his face.

"Yes," said the man, after a long pause. "But you'll keep the secret from him if you can, won't you? You won't let him know anything about it if you can possibly help it?"

"Certainly not!"

"I should feel terrified if I thought anybody else knew," said the convict nervously. "Keep it from him!"

"That's all right. I dare say he'll have forgotten about it by to-morrow."

"You had better return now," said the convict abruptly. "I must not keep you out. Heaven bless you for what you have done!"

"Good-night, then!"

"Good-night, my boy!"

Wingate strode out of the cave.

The convict, lantern in hand, retired into the recesses of the black cavern. Wingate turned up the shingly path, and after a few paces ran right into a dusky form.

In a moment his grip had fastened upon it.

"Who are you? What are you doing here?"

"Hands off!" said a sullen voice. "Hands off, George Wingate!"

Wingate released him in sheer astonishment, for it was the voice of Arthur Carne!

There was a tense silence for some moments. Then Wingate stretched out his hand again, and caught Carne by the arm.

"Come!" he said briefly.

Carne sneered.

"Afraid your convict friend will hear us?" he asked.

"Come!" repeated Wingate, and there was a tone in his voice which made Carne think it was best to obey without further demur.

With the captain's hand still on his arm, Carne walked by his side till they had left the shingle path, and stood under the trees in the lane leading to the school. Then Wingate stopped.

In the dim light of the stars they stood facing each other. Carne was a little pale, but his brow wore a smile of malicious satisfaction. Wingate's brow was very stern.

"You followed me?" he said.

Carne nodded.

"Why?"

"To find out what you were up to."

"And what was your motive for playing the spy?"

"Do you want to know?" asked Carne, with a sneer.

"I'll tell you, then. You put up for captain of Greyfriars, and beat me at the poll. I don't complain of that—the fellows had a right to select whomsoever they chose; but the captain of Greyfriars is supposed to have the honour of the school at heart. A fellow who consorts with convicts has no right to hold such a post!"

Wingate's teeth set hard.

"I suspected something was up this afternoon," continued Carne. "You gave yourself away. Then I found out that you were getting provisions together, and you borrowed a can of oil of Walker."

Wingate smiled bitterly.

"You should be a detective," he said.

"At all events, I bowled you out," said Carne. "It was pretty plain to me, and I made up my mind to watch you. I guessed what the grub was for, and that you'd try to get it to the cave after dark. When I saw you breaking bounds in the middle of the night, of course I knew where you were going. I followed."

"Like a rotten, cowardly spy!"

"Hard names break no bones," said Carne. "Of course, if the man's a friend of yours, I suppose you can't be blamed for sticking to him. If he's your father or your uncle, or anything like that—"

"Hold your tongue!"

Carne gave a chuckle.

"Certainly. But I suppose he's a relation of some kind, or you wouldn't be doing all this for him."

"He is nothing at all to me, but he saved my life when I fell into a pool in the cave."

"Quite romantic! And, of course, he assured you that



Wingate released his hold upon the rock, took a grip upon the convict's ankles, and then, catching at his clothing, began to climb.

(See Chapter 3.)

he was an innocent man, deeply wronged, and so forth," said Carne, with a sneer.

"He did, and I believed him."

"More fool you!"

Carne turned away to walk to the school.

"Stop a minute, Carne!" said Wingate quietly.

Carne shrugged his shoulders.

"It's late! I'm going back!"

Wingate made a stride towards him, and gripped him by the shoulder with so fierce a grip that a cry of pain was forced from the senior's lips.

Carne looked at the captain of Greyfriars with burning eyes.

"Let me go!" he muttered thickly.

"You've chosen to come here spying! Now you can wait as long as I choose!" said Wingate, between his teeth.

His hand had dropped from Carne's shoulder, but his fists were clenched now, his eyes gleaming like steel. Carne, a little pale, stood still.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

The Upper Hand!

WINGATE of the Sixth was silent for some moments, his breath coming quickly. Carne stood watching his face in the pale starlight, his thin lips curled in a sneer, his eyes glittering like a snake's. He held the upper hand, though he had shrunk under the hard grip of the Greyfriars captain. His tingling shoulder, hurt by that fierce grip, made him more and more bitter. He knew that Wingate could have smashed him with a blow, and that knowledge was enough to turn his whole nature to malice.

It was the first time that the black sheep of the Sixth had held the upper hand of the captain of the school; it was a possibility he had longed for, but hardly expected to come

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to pass. But he held Wingate in the hollow of his hand now, and he knew it.

Wingate's explanation of having befriended the escaped convict might or might not be believed; but nothing could alter the fact that Wingate had succoured a fugitive from justice.

Whatever his motive, he had refrained from giving the police warning of the hiding-place of the convict. He had taken him food. That was more than enough to ruin Wingate if it were known.

Carne's eyes glittered as he thought of it. The hour had come to feed his old grudge against the captain of Greyfriars!

Wingate knew it, too. To ask a favour of a fellow like Carne—a fellow whom he despised from his very soul—went hard against the grain. But he thought not only of himself, but of the poor, white-faced wretch shrinking in the darkness of the cavern under the rocky Shoulder, and he made the effort.

"Well, why don't you speak?" said Carne at last. "You've kept me here to jaw—why don't you jaw?"

Wingate drew a deep breath.

"Are you going to betray that poor fellow, Carne?"

"What poor fellow?" sneered Carne.

"The convict in the cave."

"I don't consider him a poor fellow," replied Carne. "He's a ruffian—a criminal escaping from justice. I haven't any pity to waste on him."

"Are you going to betray him? That's my question!"

"I don't call it betraying. It's a fellow's duty to give information to the police in such a case."

"And you're going to act purely from a sense of duty?" said Wingate bitterly.

"Certainly!"

"You spied on me from a sense of duty, I suppose?"

Carne shrugged his shoulders.

"Hard words break no bones," he replied. "Following you wasn't quite as bad as what you're doing, I suppose!"

"Never mind that. The man risked his life to save mine when I had my tumble in the cave yesterday afternoon."

"He didn't save my life!" said Carne, with a yawn.

"He's starving," said Wingate. "I couldn't get to him last night, though I wanted to. He's had nothing to eat for thirty hours."

"He should have stayed in prison. He'll have a square meal when he gets back to Blackmoor!" grinned Carne.

"Then you've made up your mind?"

"I've got my duty to do."

Wingate broke out angrily.

"Drop that!" he exclaimed. "I know how much sense of duty a fellow has when he plays the rotten spy!"

"Is that all you've got to say?" asked Carne calmly. "If it is, we may as well be getting back to Greyfriars. It's late."

"Will you keep this matter secret, Carne?"

"Why should I?"

"Why shouldn't you?" said Wingate. "It won't do you any good to give the poor beggar away."

"Nor any good to keep the matter secret," said Carne coolly.

"You mean that you've got this up against me, and that you're determined to use it?" said Wingate, between his teeth.

"Why not?" Carne was beginning to enjoy the situation now. "You've never been very easy on me. You squeezed in as captain of Greyfriars when I wanted the place. You've threatened to report me for smoking, you've burnt a pack of cards in my study, you've stopped me sending fags down to Friar-dale for things I want. You've had the upper hand, and you've used it. Now I've got the upper hand, why shouldn't I use it just the same?"

"I suppose it's no good talking to you?" said Wingate.

"Not much, certainly!"

Wingate's hands clenched harder. It was all he could do to keep his fist from dashing into the cool, sardonic face before him.

Carne understood, and he stepped back a little. "Have you finished?" he asked. "It may be bad for both of us to waste time. Old Black was nosing about the Close when I came out, and I dodged him. If he spots us that will be the end of the secret, anyway."

"I saw him," said Wingate. "He nearly saw me. It's curious that he should be out of bed this time of night."

Carne laughed.

"I fancy he's been out helping to look for your pet convict."

"What!"

"I fancy so. He's talked about doing it, anyway; and he'd be all the more determined because Quelch and Prout were down on the idea. That's the kind of man he is."

"He's not likely to find him," said Wingate, after a pause.

"Not without help, perhaps," returned Carne, smiling.

"With a word from me, he would find him easily enough. In an hour he could bring a crowd of the Territorials from Wapshot Camp and rope him in."

"I ask you to hold your tongue about this, Carne."

"You can ask!"

"And you refuse?"

"Why shouldn't I?"

Wingate's eyes blazed.

"You cowardly cad! Tell me what you mean to do—yes or no!" He strode towards the cad of the Sixth as he spoke.

Carne backed away quickly.

"None of that!" he said. "As a matter of fact, I haven't decided yet. I'm going to think it over."

"To decide what is your duty!" said Wingate bitterly.

"To decide whether it will pay me best to speak or to hold my tongue," said Carne coolly. "You may be able to make it worth my while to keep silent."

"If you want money, I've precious little of that!" said the captain of Greyfriars contemptuously.

"Oh, I don't want your money! There are other things. But this isn't the place to discuss all that. I'll speak to you to-morrow," said Carne.

"And until then—"

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Wingate was silent for some minutes, his breath coming quickly. Carne stood watching his face in the pale starlight, his thin lips curled in a sneer, his eyes glittering like a snake's. "Well, why don't you speak?" said Carne, at last. (See Chapter 8.)

"Until then, mum's the word!"

"You will say nothing at least without giving me warning first?" asked the Greyfriars captain.

"Yes; that's a go."

"Very well. That's enough."

Wingate strode away without another word. Carne of the Sixth looked after him, with a mocking light in his eyes, and burst into a soft laugh. He followed on Wingate's track more slowly.

"The upper hand!" he muttered. "It's the upper hand at last, and I've got him fairly down! He can have the night to think it over, and to-morrow the choice of disgrace and expulsion or of knuckling under!"

Carne laughed again softly.

"Captain of Greyfriars!" he murmured, as he strode away through the darkness towards the school. "Loder laughed at the idea—but—we shall see! Without that hound in the way—why not?"

Carne laid his head on the pillow that night in a mood of complete satisfaction. Matters were going well for the cad of Greyfriars. But there was little sleep for George Wingate.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

No Chance for Bunter!

"SOMETHING'S up!"

It was Vernon-Smith, the Bounder of Greyfriars, who made the remark.

A group of Remove fellows were chatting in the Close after morning lessons the next day, when Wingate of the Sixth came out of the School House. Several glances followed Wingate.

The Greyfriars captain's usually sunny brow was clouded, and he did not seem to see the Remove fellows as he passed them.

"Something's up!" repeated the Bounder. "Anybody know what's wrong with Wingate?"

"Caught a cold after his ducking the other day, perhaps," said Bob Cherry.

The Bounder shook his head.

"It isn't that."

"He looks pretty glum," said Harry Wharton. "Blessed if I can see why. The first eleven is in great form for the match with Rookwood."

"Almost up to the form of the Remove eleven, by Jove!" said Bob.

And there was a laugh.

"I say, you fellows—"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Here's Bunter! Tell us all about it, Bunter."

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"You know all about it!" said Bob. "You must! You happened to tie your boot-lace near a keyhole, and you heard all about it! Don't say you didn't!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Billy Bunter blinked wrathfully at the humorous Bob.

"Blessed if I know what there is to cackle at!" he said.

"What are you asking me about, you ass? If you want advice about the St. Jim's match, I'm willing to give it. I should recommend Wharton to turn you out of the eleven, Cherry—"

"What?"

"And put me in your place. Then there wouldn't be much doubt of a sweeping victory," said Billy Bunter.

"For St. Jim's?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"No, you ass! For Greyfriars!" said Bunter. "You fellows know the way I play cricket."

"We do—we does," said Squiff. "But cricket isn't the subject before the meeting now, Bunter. We want to know what's up with old Wingate. Haven't you been making any of your keyhole discoveries?"

"Oh, really, Field—"

"The downfulness in the mouth of the esteemed Wingate is terrific!" remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "Perhaps he had recklessly backed the wrong geegee."

"Fathead!"

"My esteemed chums—"

"Oh, I know all about Wingate!" said Bunter airily. "As it happens, I chanced to be stooping to—admire the landscape outside his study door—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I—I mean, to tie my shoe-buttons—I mean, to button up my shoe-lace—that is to say—"

"Never mind what you weren't doing," said Bob Cherry.

"We know where your fat ear was all the time."

"Oh, really, Cherry! I happened to hear—"

"Well, don't tell us what you happened to hear, you fat Prussian!"

"Why, you were asking me!" said Bunter indignantly.

"And now I jolly well won't tell you, though I really think it's hard on old Wingate to be dunned for money by a fellow like Carne."

"What?"

"Wingate hard up?" ejaculated Squiff.

Bunter nodded.

"Yes, I happened to hear Carne speaking to him in his study—quite by chance, of course. Carne said: 'I've got the upper hand now, and you'd better get that into your head.'"

"Bow-wow!"

"He did!" howled Bunter. "And Wingate said: 'You cad, Carne!'"

"Well, that sounds like old Wingate," grinned Bob Cherry.

"He always hits out straight from the shoulder."

"Then he said—" went on Bunter.

"Rats!"

"No, he didn't. He said: 'What do you ask to hold your tongue about the whole matter, Carne?' And then the beast heard me at the door, and opened it, and—and kicked me," said Bunter. "I tried to explain that I was tying my boot-lace, and he wouldn't even listen. He kicked me."

"Good old Wingate!" said Bob Cherry. "I hope it hurt!"

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"Gentlemen, chaps, and fellows!" said Bob. "It's up to us to follow the noble example of our captain."

"Hear, hear!"

"I—I say, you fellows, don't play the giddy ox, you know," said Bunter, in alarm. "Besides, I've got a splendid scheme for helping old Wingate out of his fix."

"Bow-wow!"

"I'm expecting a postal-order shortly—"

"Br-r-r-r!"

"When my postal-order comes," said Bunter, with dignity, "I shall lend it to old Wingate."

"He will be old Wingate then, and no mistake!" said Squiff. "Venerable, ancient Wingate would be nearer the mark."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Meanwhile," said Bunter, "I'm thinking of raising a fund for Wingate. If you fellows care to contribute, I'll take charge of the money. I'll take every shilling to—"

"To the tuckshop."

"No, you fathead! To Wingate!"

"Wingate would see a lot of it—I don't think!" remarked the Bounder. "Now, then, who's going to follow Wingate's example?"

"You and I and all of us!" chuckled Bob.

And there was a rush for Bunter.

The Owl of the Remove fled for his life, and three or four boots clumped on his fat person as he fled. Billy Bunter vanished, with a howl. And that was all the reward the Owl of the Remove received for his generous scheme of helping Wingate out of his supposed difficulty by means of a Remove fund.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

Coker to the Rescue!

THERE was no doubt that there was something wrong with Wingate that day.

Everybody noticed it.

George Wingate was not the kind of fellow to keep a secret easily, especially a troublesome secret.

He was in Carne's power, and he knew it; and to be in the power of a fellow he despised was harassing.

And he looked harassed, and his looks were remarked upon on all sides. In the little world of school the captain of Greyfriars cut a prominent figure, and he was naturally the cynosure of all eyes.

Harry Wharton & Co. had noticed it first. Temple, Dabney & Co. of the Fourth were talking about it. Coker of the Fifth observed it, and confided to Potter and Greene his opinion that Wingate had misgivings about the St. Jim's and Rookwood matches.

"I feel rather sorry for the silly ass," Coker said generously. "He's beginning to feel that he's not quite up to the bizney, you know. I sha'n't offer him my services again. But if he approaches me in a proper spirit, I sha'n't refuse my cap for the eleven. I shall play, for the sake of the school, and let bygones be bygones."

And Potter winked at Greene, and agreed that that was quite generous of Horace Coker.

But, to Coker's surprise, Wingate did not approach him in a proper spirit, or, indeed, approach him at all.

Coker reflected on the matter, and took counsel with his chums. Potter and Greene listened to him as solemnly as they could, but it was really a little difficult to keep serious when Horace Coker talked cricket or football.

"You've noticed about Wingate?" Coker remarked that afternoon.

Potter nodded carelessly.

"P'raps he's got the toothache," he suggested.

"Don't be a funny ass, George Potter! He's worrying over the St. Jim's match, of course!"

"Well, let him worry!" said Greene. "It's his place to worry, as cricket captain, ain't it?"

"That's all very well. But if a fellow could help him out, a fellow might do it, even if he's a fellow whom a fellow has treated rather badly, and not as a fellow has a right to expect of a fellow," said Coker thoughtfully.

"What a lot of fellows!" murmured Potter.

"Eh? What's that?"

"I mean, exactly. What about tea?" asked Potter.

"Never mind tea. I'm thinking of helping Wingate out of his troubles," said Coker. "He hasn't approached me yet. I expected him to, but he hasn't. Now, the question arises,

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could a fellow, consistently with that fellow's personal dignity, approach him instead, in a frank and manly way?"

"Is that a conundrum?"

"You funny ass!" roared Coker. "This is a serious matter. The result of the St. Jim's match depends on this, and, in fact, the whole prospects of the cricket season for Greyfriars."

"Oh!" said Potter and Greene.

"I'm willing to listen to your advice," said Coker. "Do you think that without too big a sacrifice of dignity, I might make the first approaches on the subject?"

"Why not?" said Potter, closing one eye at Greene. "Go to Wingate's study and offer to help him out—"

"And then he'll help you out!" remarked Greene.

Coker glared at Greene.

"What do you think, Potter?" he asked. "It's clear enough to me that Wingate realises that he can't do without me in the cricket team, but he's too jolly proud to make the first advances. It's worrying him. Ought I to let bygones be bygones, and make the first step?"

"Certainly!" said Potter. "Go and put him out of his misery, and then we'll have tea."

"You really think so?"

"Certainly!"

"Well, I agree with you!" said Coker. "A fellow in my position can afford to make some small sacrifice of personal dignity for the general good. Don't you think so?"

"Ha, ha!—I mean, yes, certainly! It's what the whole of the Fifth Form would expect of you, Coker!"

"Then I'll do it!" announced Coker determinedly.

"Oh, do!" murmured Potter.

Horace Coker made his way to Wingate's study, in the Sixth-Form passage, with a lofty but at the same time benevolent expression on his face. Coker was going to do a noble thing, and he realised it. His intention, in fact, was to be generous.

He tapped at Wingate's door, and opened it. Carne, of the Sixth, was in the study with the captain of Greyfriars. He looked round irritably as Coker entered.

"Hallo!" said Wingate.

"Hallo!" said Coker cheerily. "I thought I'd look in, old chap!"

"Well, what do you want?" asked Wingate, not particularly pleased at being addressed as "old chap" by Coker, of the Fifth.

"About that little trouble on your mind!" said Coker agreeably.

Wingate jumped, and Carne started back a little.

"About what?" exclaimed Wingate.

"About what's been worrying you lately!" said Coker. "I can set the whole matter right, and I'm going to do it!"

"What the dickens do you mean?" growled Wingate. "You don't know anything about it!"

Coker smiled genially.

"Yes, I know all about it!" he said.

"You—you know?" ejaculated Carne.

"Certainly I do!"

"Have you been spying, too?" shouted Wingate, springing to his feet.

Coker jumped.

"Spying! What do you mean? It doesn't need much spying to see that you're bothered about our prospects for the St. Jim's match!" he said.

Wingate stared at him for a moment, and then burst into a laugh. For a moment he had supposed that Coker knew the secret of the hidden convict in the sea-cave.

"You ass!" said Wingate.

"Look here, Wingate, I quite understand how you feel about it," said Coker; "but you needn't have any uneasiness—none at all. I'm an accommodating chap!"

"What on earth are you driving at?"

"About the cricket. You feel that the team isn't complete without me, but after refusing my services in a foolish and obstinate way, you don't feel inclined to ask me to play for Greyfriars. I understand perfectly. Well, I'm going to put my pride in my pocket, for the sake of the school—"

"Eh?"

"And offer my services again!" said Coker magnanimously. "There you are! And here I am. I'm at your service for the St. Jim's match, Wingate!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Wingate, while Carne grinned.

Coker stared.

"Where does the cackle come in?" he demanded warmly. "Don't you understand, Wingate? I'm offering you my services as a cricketer."

"Many thanks!" said Wingate, laughing. "I'm not in want of them at present. When I'm playing a girls' school or a team specially passed by Army doctors, I'll call on you, Coker; not before!"

"You don't want me?" ejaculated Coker, in astonishment.

"Thanks, no!"

"But—but I thought that was what you were worrying about?"

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NEXT MONDAY—**"COKER'S CONSCRIPT!"**

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Wingate laughed.

"You've made a slight mistake, that's all. Good-bye!"

"Look here—"

"There's the door!" hinted Wingate.

"Blow the door!" said Coker wrathfully. "I've come here to talk cricket to you, Wingate. If you haven't sense enough to play me in the first eleven, it's time Greyfriars had a new captain!"

"Well, when Greyfriars has a new captain you may have a chance of playing for Greyfriars," said Wingate; "not before that. At present you'd better go and offer your services to some comic cinema merchant! Good-bye!"

"You silly ass!" roared Coker.

"Buzz off!"

"You crass dummy!"

"Get out!"

"I've a jolly good mind to mop up the study with you! I've a— Yaroooh! Leggo! Why, I'll smash you! I'll— Yooooop!"

Coker sat down in the passage, and Wingate closed his door. Coker sat for some moments recovering his breath. Mr. Black came along the passage, and nearly fell over the great man of the Fifth. He uttered an angry exclamation.

"What are you doing there, Coker? How dare you play such childish tricks!" exclaimed the mathematics master. "I shall report this to Mr. Prout! Go!"

Coker went, gasping.

He came into his study with a brow like a thunder-cloud. Potter and Greene regarded him with smiling inquiry.

"Did Wingate jump at your offer?" asked Potter.

"Or did he jump at you?" queried Greene.

Horace Coker did not reply. His feelings just then were too deep for words in the English language. Only German could have done justice to them.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

Mr. Black Makes a Request!

"LOOK here, Carne—"

Wingate broke off suddenly, as another tap came at the door.

"Come in!" he rapped out.

Wingate was feeling restive. Carne, of the Sixth, had come to his study, and the Greyfriars captain knew that he had come to make terms—his price for keeping the secret of the hidden convict.

It was Mr. Black who entered the study in response to Wingate's somewhat surly invitation.

He nodded to the two seniors.

"I wish to speak to you, Wingate!"

"Yes, sir."

Carne made a movement towards the door, but the mathematics master signed to him to remain.

"Do not go, Carne. You may hear what I have to say."

"Very well, sir!" said Carne, somewhat wonderingly.

"You are aware that a convict has recently escaped from Blackmoor Prison?" said Mr. Black.

The two Sixth-Formers exchanged an involuntary glance.

"Yes, sir," said Carne. "We heard the gun on Wednesday."

"The police, so far, have been unable to track him, though assisted by men lent by the Commandant at Wapshot Camp," said the mathematics master. "Of course, such a man being at liberty is a danger to the neighbourhood. It may lead to school bounds being restricted. For the sake of the whole countryside, the man ought to be caught as quickly as possible."

Wingate nodded without speaking. He did not agree with the mathematics master, but he was not disposed to argue with him.

"Now, I have not been long at this school, and I know little of the lie of the land in this vicinity," went on Mr. Black, "but many of the Greyfriars boys, of course, know the country thoroughly."

"Most of us do, sir!" said Wingate.

"I have thought, therefore, that some of the older boys might offer their aid to the police," said Mr. Black. "The prefects of the Sixth, for example. You yourself, Wingate, might be very useful."

"Perhaps so, sir!" said Wingate drily.

"It is, of course, your duty. May I take it that you will devote your next half-holiday to helping the police in their search for this dangerous man?"

Wingate shook his head.

"We're playing cricket, sir!"

Mr. Black's brows darkened.

"You will not place a game before your duty, I suppose, Wingate?"

"I don't regard it as my duty, sir!" said the Greyfriars captain bluntly. "If the Head should ask me, that is a different matter!"

The mathematics master flushed.

"You would accede to a request from the Head, when you refuse one from me!" he exclaimed.

"It would be a different matter, sir. I don't feel in the least inclined to lend a hand against the poor wretch!"

"What do you say, Carne?" asked Mr. Black, turning his back on Wingate.

"I'll help you with pleasure, sir!" said Carne cordially. "I've no doubt at all that the scoundrel ought to be secured as soon as possible!"

"Very good. Walker and Valence have also promised to assist," said Mr. Black. "I have done what I could myself, but my lack of knowledge of the country has been in my way. I am disappointed, Wingate, to see that you have so little desire to lend assistance in upholding law and order."

"I am sorry, sir," said Wingate.

"Perhaps you may think fit to change your mind!" exclaimed the mathematics master angrily.

"I think not, sir," said the Greyfriars captain calmly.

"This is impertinence, Wingate!"

Wingate remained silent. He had nothing to say to that. Mr. Black gave him an expressive look and quitted the study. Wingate looked rather puzzled. Why the new mathematics master of Greyfriars should be so keen in hunting for the unfortunate refugee was a mystery to him. Carne, too, felt perplexed. He could not understand Mr. Black's motive.

"Everybody doesn't seem to regard escaped convicts as you do, Wingate," Carne remarked, with a laugh.

"I can't understand why Black is specially down on him," said Wingate.

"Same here. Sense of duty, I suppose," grinned Carne.

"Mr. Quelch and Prout and the Head aren't troubled by a meddling sense of duty in the same way," said Wingate drily. "The man has done no harm, so far, and it's plain enough to anybody that he is not a dangerous ruffian."

"He ought to be secured, and you know it!"

"In an ordinary case, yes. But this is not an ordinary case. The man risked his life to save mine."

Carne yawned.

"Yes; so you told me."

"That makes a difference to me," said Wingate quietly.

"I believe what he told me—that he is innocent."

"What rot!"

"Innocent men have been condemned before now," said Wingate. "Judges make mistakes, like other men. And if an innocent man is condemned, it might be any man—your own father, or mine."

Carne laughed.

"It might be," he said. "It's rather far-fetched, but it might be. Such things have happened, I suppose. But in this case the man is an ordinary ruffian."

"He is nothing of the kind!"

"You want me to keep the secret?" said Carne abruptly.

"I have said so."

"You think I ought to keep it?"

"That's for you to settle."

"Suppose you asked your father for advice, what would he advise, do you think?" asked Carne, with a mocking look.

"I think he would advise me to do as I am doing," said Wingate calmly. "The man saved my life, and I believe he's innocent. Stay! If you're in doubt, I'm willing that you should write to your father and tell him the whole circumstances, and abide by what he orders you to do—to speak, or not to speak."

Carne shrugged his shoulders.

"As my father happens to have a post in Central Africa, and I haven't seen him for years, and am not likely to, that wouldn't be much good," he remarked. "But I'm not bothering about what my pater would think. I'm satisfied with my own opinion. My opinion is that a captain of Greyfriars ought to be a bit more careful in his conduct."

"That's for the captain to decide."

"Not quite. What would the Head say if he knew?"

"Have you come here to ask me conundrums?"

"Not exactly. You know what the Head would do. How long would you remain captain of Greyfriars?"

Wingate was silent.

He wondered.

He was acting according to his conscience. He firmly believed that he was doing right. But what view would others take, if they knew—others, who had not seen the wretched man in the sea-cave, had not read the truth in the haggard, desperate face? They would condemn him, he

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knew that. But he did not need telling that Carne held the upper hand. He was only too bitterly aware of that already.

"Come to the point!" he said brusquely. "Are you going to keep the secret, or are you not?"

"I am—on my own terms," said Carne quietly, but with a steely glitter in his eyes. "My terms may be hard. You can agree to them or not, as you like. They won't be altered."

"You want something from me?"

"Yes."

"Money?"

"No."

"Then what?" And Wingate waited.

Carne did not speak for a moment, but his cold eyes glittered as they were fixed on the captain of Greyfriars.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

Carne Makes Terms!

WINGATE waited.

"I'm willing to come to terms, if you are," said Carne at last.

"What terms do you mean?"

"You know as well as I do that it's hardly the thing for a captain of Greyfriars to consort with convicts, and break bounds in the middle of the night to take food to them, I suppose," sneered Carne.

"Have you come here to preach to me?"

"No; I've come to make terms."

"I'm waiting."

"I've thought the matter over," went on Carne, "and I've come to a decision."

"The sooner you get it off your chest the better," growled Wingate. "There's a limit to my patience."

"I'm coming to it. You're captain of Greyfriars. I tried at the last election to get in—"

"And the fellows would have nothing to do with you!"

Carne gritted his teeth.

"It may be different this time," he said.

"This time! What do you mean?"

"What I say. You're going to resign the captaincy!"

Wingate started.

"I resign!" he exclaimed.

"That's it."

The captain of Greyfriars drew a deep breath. He had wondered what was the price the cad of the Sixth meant to exact for the keeping of the secret. But he had not thought of this.

"So that's it?" said Wingate at last. "That's what you want in return for saying nothing about the man in the cave?"

"That's what I want, and that's what I'm going to have, unless—"

Wingate made a gesture.

"You've got the upper hand," he said slowly. "I don't seem to have much choice in the matter."

"I'm glad you've got sense enough to see that, at all events. Of course, you can take your choice," said Carne, with a sneer. "I suppose you know it's your duty to resign under the circumstances?"

"We needn't discuss that," said Wingate quietly.

"I don't want to. I want your answer—yes or no."

"And if I say 'No'?"

"Then I shall go straight to Mr. Black, and your precious convict friend will be arrested before he's an hour older!" said Carne savagely.

Wingate was silent.

"You'd be expelled, too, for what you've done, if it all came out. And you know it," said Carne. "You know what the Head would say and do. And all the fellows who admire you so highly, they'd sing rather a different tune if they knew that you palled with escaped convicts."

"Hold your tongue!" broke in Wingate.

Carne shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, I leave it to you," he said. "Only make up your mind. I want a 'Yes' or 'No' at once."

"I've got no choice," said Wingate slowly. "I've given my word to the man in the cave, and I can't break it. I—I suppose it's no use making any appeal to you. That man is an old Greyfriars boy—"

"What rot!"

"He told me that he has a son at the school now," said Wingate.

Carne laughed scornfully.

"A likely story!" he said. "But I don't care. It makes no difference to me. I've stated my terms. Yes or no?"

"Yes," said Wingate, after a long, long pause. "I agree!"

Carne's eyes glistened.
"You're going to resign the captaincy?"

"Yes."

"Without putting up immediately for re-election, of course?"

"Of course."

"Good enough," said Carne. "It's a go."

"I won't tell you what I think of you," added Wingate bitterly.

"You needn't," drawled Carne; "it wouldn't make any difference. When are you going to resign?"

"I'll put a paper on the notice-board this evening."

"That's good enough!"

Without a word more Carne quitted the study. The captain's scornful glance followed him, and, in spite of his nerve, Carne did not care to meet it.

Half an hour later a curious crowd was collected in front of the school notice-board. Pinned upon it was a paper in the bold, strong hand of the captain, briefly announcing the fact that he had resigned the captaincy of Greyfriars.

No explanation was given, and a crowd of seniors went to his study to demand one. They found that he had gone out.

The Head passed the notice-board and read the notice, and his brow contracted a little. The captain had not consulted him in coming to his decision.

When Wingate came in he received a message that Dr. Locke wished to see him in his study.

With an extremely uneasy feeling the captain of Greyfriars presented himself before the doctor. Dr. Locke looked at him sharply.

"What is the reason of your resignation, Wingate?" he asked.

"I don't feel equal to the position, sir," said Wingate, lowering his eyes. "There are a good many other fellows quite willing to fill it—Carne, for instance."

"I am not sure that Carne would make a good captain," said the Head. "I suppose you have reflected before taking this step?"

"Yes, sir."

"I assume that you know your own motives best," said the Head stiffly. "I will fix a date, then, for the election."

And the same evening a note on the board in the doctor's hand announced that an election for a new captain would be held that evening.

To all questions and expostulations from his Form-fellows Wingate remained deaf. He could not explain his real motives, and he would not prevaricate, and so he was compelled to take refuge in silence, which hurt some of his friends and puzzled them all.

"We may have that boulder Carne in as captain!" said Courtney disconsolately. "You've let us in for a nice thing!"

"I don't think the chaps will back him up," said Wingate.

"P'raps not. But I know he'll have a hard try to get in. He never forgave you for beating him at the poll last time. Who's going to put up against him?"

"Why don't you put up yourself?"

"By Jove, I will!" said Courtney, struck by the idea. "I don't say I should cut much of a figure as captain of Greyfriars, but I would keep the place warm for you. You're off your rocker at present, it's clear, but when you're on it again you can depend upon it I'll resign and let you in."

Wingate laughed.

"Not at all! I hope you'll get in for your own sake!"

"But I mean it," declared Courtney, "and I should like to keep that boulder out, anyway. You'll do some electioneering for me?"

Wingate looked undecided.

"I don't know," he said; "perhaps I ought to keep clear of it."

He was thinking of Carne, and how he would take it.

"I don't think I shall vote at all, Courtney; but you have my best wishes."

"Right you are!" And away went Courtney to announce himself as rival candidate.

Carne had already put in his name, and as yet no rival had appeared.

The interval before the new election was short, and so the electioneering was brisk. Courtney was generally liked in his own Form, and as he was a good-hearted fellow he was also popular with the Lower Forms. As the late captain's special chum, too, he was likely to secure the votes of all Wingate's friends, especially Harry Wharton & Co.

Carne, as soon as he knew that Courtney had put up, scented a dangerous rival. His suspicious mind at once jumped to the conclusion that Wingate had planned Courtney's candidature for the special purpose of disappointing him, and he sought an interview with the late captain.

His disagreeable look warned Wingate that something unpleasant was coming. He prepared for it.

Carne came at once to the point.

"Are you going to vote for Courtney?" he asked.

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"I am not going to vote at all," replied Wingate quietly.

"You are backing up Courtney, though."

"I am standing out of the thing altogether. You don't expect me to back you up, I suppose? As you acted in the interests of the school in forcing me to resign, you want the school to select the captain it thinks best. You don't want any influence exerted in your favour."

Carne winced.

"Of course I want to get in if I can," he said. "I dare say I shall make as good a skipper as anybody else. Look here, one good turn deserves another. I want you to back me up for the election."

Wingate shook his head.

"I can't do it. If I did it wouldn't be any use."

Carne looked savage.

"You've been one too many for me," he said bitterly. "Still, Courtney is your chum, and he'd withdraw if you asked him."

"He might, but I certainly sha'n't do anything of the kind."

"Won't you?" Carne's face set grimly. "Have you forgotten that a word is enough to send the police to the cave to pick up your precious friend there?"

"I have forgotten nothing. We made a bargain; I've done my part, and I expect you to do yours."

"That's all very well; but it was understood——"

"Nothing was understood. You've got a fair chance, and you can't ask for more."

"Can't I?" Carne clicked his teeth savagely. "I can see your game. You intend to keep me quiet till the election to-morrow night, knowing very well that Courtney will beat me. And to-morrow you're going to cut off to the cave and warn the convict to clear out."

"I shall certainly warn him."

"You'd better not. I'm not going to let my hold on you slip off so easily," said Carne, with a sneer. "You won't go to the cave to-night."

"Who'll prevent me?" said Wingate, his eyes beginning to gleam.

"I will. You'll give me your word not to see the convict again till after the election, or I'll go straight to Mr. Black now and tell him the truth. Black will be glad to hear it," said Carne mockingly. "He takes as deep an interest in this gaolbird as you do, only in a different kind of way. He's been spending all his leisure time in helping the police and the warders to hunt for him."

"Black has?" ejaculated Wingate in surprise.

"Yes; I fancy he would be glad to be able to take them the news I have to give him," said Carne, with a grin. "Are you going to promise?"

"Yes," said Wingate. "I promise. And now get out of my room, you unspeakable cad, before I throw you out!"

And Carne walked out of the room. Wingate sank into his chair, but he did not turn to his books.

Had he made his sacrifice for nothing? He knew what was in Carne's mind. The convict would remain in the cave, unsuspecting, and if Carne lost the election he would set the law bloodhounds on the track. That was to be his revenge for Wingate withholding his support.

But Wingate could do nothing now. It was well known that he wished Courtney to get in as captain, and if he changed sides without a reason to give, what would the fellows think of him?

His situation was wretched. He could only hope that Carne would be successful at the poll, and that his own chum would be defeated. At the same time, he felt that the chances were great that Greyfriars would select Courtney for its new captain. And what was to happen then?

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

No Chance for Coker!

HARRY WHARTON & CO. were astounded. Wingate had resigned the captaincy! The Famous Five simply could make nothing of it. What reason old Wingate could possibly have for resigning was beyond them.

There was a crowded meeting in the Rag to deal with the matter. All the Remove turned up, and a swarm of the Fourth and the Third. The whole Lower School of Greyfriars was intensely excited. For every fellow in the school had a vote, and the new election was everybody's business.

ANSWERS

Even Wibley of the Remove was willing to put off a rehearsal fixed for that evening, and even Fisher T. Fish gave up some deep calculations he was busy upon, and William George Bunter was not heard to mention once that he was expecting a postal-order.

"Carne's up as a candidate," said Bob Cherry. "Of course, Greyfriars is going to have nothing to do with a cad like Carne."

"Hear, hear!"

"Wingate ought to be scragged for resigning!" exclaimed Tom Brown. "What the merry dickens does he mean by it?"

"I say, you fellows, I've asked him, and he pulled my ear and told me I was a cheeky little beast!" squeaked Bunter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I can see anything to cackle at! I shall vote for Carne now!"

"Courtney's up," said Harry Wharton. "If we can't have Wingate for captain, Courtney's the second best, I suppose."

"Hear, hear!"

Harry Wharton jumped on the table.

"Gentlemen, chaps, and fellows——"

"Hear, hear!"

"Wingate having gone off his rocker and resigned the captaincy of Greyfriars——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"This meeting hereby resolves that Courtney of the Sixth shall be elected in his place, and backs him up through thick and thin, specially to keep out a worm and a cad like Carne of the Sixth."

Thunders of applause.

"All the Remove will vote for Courtney, and any fellow who doesn't will be scragged by the Form!"

"Hear, hear!"

"I say, you fellows——"

"Scrag him!" roared Bolsover major.

"Oh, really, Bolsover—— Yaroooh! I was only going to say—yow-wow—I'm going to vote for Courtney! Groooh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Mind you do!" said Bolsover truculently. "We're not going to have a cad like Carne at any price. The Remove has got to roll up and vote as one man, or there will be thunder in the air!"

"Faith, every chap has a free choice," said Micky Desmond, "only he's got to choose Courtney."

"Hear, hear!"

"The freefulness of the esteemed choice is terrific."

"Election's at seven," said Harry Wharton. "What are you Fourth-Form bounders going to do?"

"Oh, we're backing up Courtney!" said Cecil Reginald Temple, with emphasis.

"Oh, rather!" said Dabney.

"Same here!" yelled Tubb of the Third. "Why, that beast Carne thinks he can pull a fellow's ears just as he likes! Catch me voting for him!"

"Same here!" chuckled Dicky Nugent, the great chief of the Second. "I'm backing up Courtney! Courtney's my man!"

"Looks like a majority for Courtney in the Lower Forms, anyway," grinned Bob Cherry. "Hallo, hallo, hallo, here's Coker! Whom are you going to vote for, Coker?"

Coker of the Fifth strode into the crowded Rag.

There was a very important expression on Coker's face. Evidently Horace Coker had something very important to say to the meeting. He mounted on a chair.

"Gentlemen——"

"Yah!"

"Gentlemen of the Lower School——"

"Go home!"

"I am here to make an appeal to you on this important occasion. Gentlemen, the great position of captain of Greyfriars is vacant."

"Like your napper, old chap," said Bob Cherry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Coker glared at Bob Cherry.

"Gentlemen, I am here to appeal for your votes!" he roared.

"Carne or Courtney?" demanded Wharton. "Mind how you answer! Upon your answer depends whether you go out on your feet or your neck!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"For myself!" roared Coker.

"What!"

"Which!"

"Who?"

"My hat!"

"I'm going to put up as a candidate," said Coker.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You cackling duffers!"

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"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Vote for me, and you'll get a good captain!" bellowed Coker, amid yells of laughter. "I promise to win the St. Jim's and Rookwood matches, practically off my own bat! I shall look after you fags, and jolly well keep you in order——"

The fags shrieked.

"What an inducement to vote for Coker!" gasped Squiff.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Vote for me, and you'll get the best skipper going. Now then, who's going to vote for me at the election?" demanded Horace Coker. "Don't all speak at once. I'll take your names down in turn."

Wharton jumped on a chair.

"Gentlemen, I put it to the meeting that this is not the time for Coker to appear in public with his comic turn——"

"Hear, hear!"

"I put it to the meeting that Coker be forthwith bumped and chucked out, as a lesson not to be funny on a serious occasion."

"Passed unanimously!" howled Bob Cherry.

"Hear, hear!"

"I'm not being funny!" roared Coker. "I'm quite serious! I've thought for a long time that what Greyfriars really needs is a captain like myself. I consider—— Yaroooh! Let that chair alone! Yooooop!"

Bump!

The Fifth-Form candidate came to the floor with a loud concussion. But he did not remain there. A forest of hands were reached out for him, and he was lifted and bumped again, on the hard, unsympathetic planks—once, twice, thrice—to an accompaniment of fiendish yells from Coker.

"Now chuck him out!" roared Peter Todd.

"Outside, Coker!"

"Yaroooh! I'll—I'll—I'll—— Yo-hooop!"

The yelling juniors rushed Coker to the door, and he disappeared into the passage. He picked himself up, and charged back like a wild bull. But there were a score of hands ready for him, and Coker shot forth again. Then Harry Wharton & Co. marched off to Big Hall for the election, leaving Coker of the Fifth trying to get his second wind.

Coker crawled away to his study. Potter and Greene, who were just leaving for the election, stared at him.

"What the merry dickens!" ejaculated Potter.

"Yow-ow!" moaned Coker.

He sank into a chair and gasped.

"Met an earthquake?" asked Greene sympathetically.

"Wow-wow! I refuse to put up as captain now!" gasped Coker. "If the rotters came to me on their bended—yow-wow—knees. I wouldn't do anything of the sort. Greyfriars can go to the—yow-wow—dogs! Groooh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You cackling duffers!" gasped Coker. "Lemme get at you with a cricket-stump, and I'll——"

Potter and Greene did not wait for the cricket-stump. They left the study hastily, still chuckling.

Coker remained in the armchair, gasping. He did not feel quite up to attending the election himself. His only consolation was that Greyfriars might realise some day what a tremendous chance it had missed of possessing a really first-class captain.

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.

The Rival Candidates!

ELECTION night! Excitement was keen at Greyfriars School. The great hall was packed, the partisans of each candidature having whipped up every possible voter. Two figures were absent—those of the late captain, and Coker of the Fifth.

The proceedings were under the superintendence of Mr. Black, and a teller was appointed for each side. When Courtney was proposed there was a ringing cheer, and Carne bit his lip. The volume of the cheer told him pretty clearly upon which side was the majority.

The counting was carefully done, till the forest of upraised hands were duly numbered, and a total of a hundred and fifty-two was declared for Courtney.

Carne bit his lip till the blood came. From the number of boys at the school, it was certain that there were not so many left to vote for him. However, his partisans put it to the test of counting.

Slowly and surely the hands raised for Carne were numbered, and the result was read out. Carne listened with anxious face.

"One hundred and fifty-two votes for Courtney, sixty-seven votes for Carne. Courtney is duly elected Captain of Greyfriars School!"

There was a deafening burst of cheering from the backers of Courtney.

The new captain, very red in the face, got upon his feet and made a little speech, somewhat confused and disconnected, but that was of no great consequence, as nobody heard a word of it. He was cheered till the hall rang again, and in the midst of the jubilation Carne left the room.

The boys poured out after him in a noisy crowd, bearing Courtney in their midst. Mr. Black went to his study, and Carne followed him there with a white, savage face.

"Come in," said the master, looking at Carne in some surprise. "Do you want to speak to me?"

"Yes, sir."

Carne stepped into the study and closed the door, a proceeding which the master viewed with some amazement.

"Well, what is it?" he asked sharply.

"I have something to tell you, sir," said Carne awkwardly.

"Well, tell me, then."

"You want the warders to find the convict who escaped from Blackmoor Prison the other day, sir," said Carne rather timidly.

Mr. Black started.

"What do you mean? How do you know anything about it?" he demanded.

"I saw—I mean, someone told me——" stammered Carne.

"Do you mean that you have seen the convict?" asked the master, a light breaking in upon him. "Is that what you mean? If so, tell me at once. I am, of course, eager to serve the ends of justice." He sprang to his feet. "Have you seen him?"

"I have not seen him, sir, but Wingate has."

"Wingate!"

"Yes. The convict is hiding in the sea-caves under the Shoulder, and Wingate has been taking him food. He broke bounds on Wednesday night to go down to the cave."

Mr. Black stared at him in blank amazement.

"Are you dreaming or romancing, Carne?"

"It's true, sir. I followed him, and saw him light the lantern he left in the cave, and speak to the convict."

"You are sure it was the convict?"

"I couldn't see him very clearly, sir; but I could see his clothes, and there was the broad arrow upon them."

A savage satisfaction had come into the master's face. Carne's manner showed that he was speaking the truth. Mr. Black was already hurrying on his overcoat.

"Thank you, Carne! You have done quite right. You——" Mr. Black broke off and stared at Carne, as a new thought seemed to strike him. He broke into a harsh, unpleasant laugh. "You don't know who this convict is, Carne?"

"Of course not, sir."

"No, of course not"—Black chuckled—"of course not."

"I expect Wingate will go to warn the convict, sir," said Carne, at a loss to account for the master's strange manner. "He'll guess I've come to you."

"Will he? I must see him, and—no, that will be a waste of time. Carne, will you go to the village station and send the police to the cave. I shall go straight there, and see that no warning reaches the convict, and that he does not get away. Tell them that, and tell them to hurry. There is no time to lose. Take your bike."

"Yes, sir," said Carne, hurrying from the room.

Mr. Black put on his hat, and, clearing the stairs three at a time, hastened out of the School House. A minute more and he was striding rapidly away through the winter evening towards the Shoulder.

Carne went to the bike-shed for his machine. As he wheeled it across the Close, Wingate came quickly up to him.

"I've been looking for you," he said.

"Have you?" said Carne coldly. "I'm in a hurry."

"Where are you going?"

"That's my business."

Wingate gripped his shoulder roughly.

"Let me go!" said Carne savagely.

"Where are you going?"

"If you must know, I am going to the police, to set them on the track of your precious friend in the sea-cave," replied Carne, with a sneer.

Wingate set his teeth and turned towards the gates. Carne laughed mockingly.

"It's no good," he said.

Wingate swung back quickly.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean it's no use your going to warn your friend," said Carne, with an insolent laugh. "I have told Black, and he's gone to the cave to see that the rascal doesn't get away. He's got the start of you by ten minutes, so you may as well give it up."

Wingate stood motionless for a moment. Then his arm came up, and he struck out, straight from the shoulder, a blow in which the anger and indignation of days was concentrated. Carne went down with a crash, and his bicycle clattered away and rolled over.

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Wingate did not stay to look at him. With rapid strides he reached the gate and passed out, and started down the lane. He broke into a run as he turned his face toward the Shoulder. There might be a chance yet.

Carne picked himself up dazedly, muttering savage words, and wheeled his machine into the road, and mounted. He set off at a scorching pace for the village, and in a few minutes he was at the little police-station with his news.

Wingate ran on swiftly through the dim night. He knew that Carne would not be long in bringing the police, and there was no time to be wasted. How could he circumvent the man who was ahead of him on the road—the Greyfriars master who showed such an inexplicable animosity towards the hunted convict?

His brain worked rapidly as he tore on, but he could think of no plan. His footsteps rang on the shingle. He stumbled, and stumbled again, but recovered his footing and ran on.

He was close to the cave now. The Shoulder and the sea-caves were wrapped in blackness. There was no glimmer of light from the caverns under the cliff. Where was Mr. Black?

As Wingate asked himself that question, there came a sudden thrilling cry from the night:

"Help! Help!"

For a second Wingate stood rooted, while dread visions flashed through his alarmed, excited brain. It was the voice of Mr. Black. Had the interfering master met the convict? Was the hunted man fighting for his liberty? Was a deed of violence being done there in the blackness of the caves? Wingate shuddered.

"Help! Help!" Fainter now the cry, with a ring of agony in it. "Help! Help!"

He shook off, with a strong effort, the horror that was fastening upon him, and ran forward.

THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER.

Father and Son!

AND what was happening in the darkness of the cave under the Shoulder?

Unconscious of the anxious boy following fast upon his track, Mr. Black raced down the shingly path to the cave. His eyes were burning as he ran; a malicious satisfaction was in his hard face.

He stopped, panting for breath, as he stood within the cave. The place was strange to him; the darkness was intense. He stood, breathing thickly, striving to pierce the gloom with his eyes.

A glimmer of light far up the cave caught his eye as he stood intently gazing—the reflection on the rock of a lantern afar off in the cave.

"It's true, then!" Some doubt of Carne's tale had perhaps lingered in the master's mind. "It's true! The convict is here!"

He smiled exultantly.

The hunted man was there, all unsuspecting, and here was his enemy, watching the only way he could escape from the cave; while already on the road to the Shoulder were the police and the prison warders!

"Your span of liberty is a short one, my friend," murmured Mr. Black; "shorter than the last! You are in the toils!"

And he advanced into the cave, drawing cautiously near to the light. It was possible that there was some other outlet by which the convict might flee when the alarm was given, and Black intended to be close upon him at that moment to intercept his flight.

He felt his way cautiously. He felt with his foot in advance each time before taking a step. Suddenly he felt his foot slip on a mass of wet seaweed. He drew it back, but stumbled at the same moment. His other foot slipped, and he made a desperate effort to regain his balance. In vain! He fell blindly in the darkness, but not upon the rocky floor of the cavern. He fell into space, with a wild, ringing shriek that woke every echo in the hollows of the cliff.

Down he went with a rush that choked his breath; and a terrible scream of agony floated up from the blackness. Then a still more terrible silence fell upon the cave.

A light came flashing from the gloom; a voice called out. A man in the hideous broad-arrow garb appeared, lantern in hand.

He stopped wonderingly close by the crevice into which Black had fallen. A sound came from below that made him start and shiver.

"Help! Help!"

"Heavens!" muttered Convict 27. "I know his voice! It is he!"

He stood hesitating on the brink of the chasm. A struggle was going on in his mind, visible in the spasmodic working of his features. From below came a deep groan, echoing eerily through the gloom. The sound seemed to decide the hunted fugitive from Blackmoor.

He turned away along the edge of the rift and reached the extremity of it, where the descent, though steep, was not precipitous; and, holding the lantern in his hand, he commenced to descend carefully into the black depths.

Active and daring as he was, it occupied some minutes for him to descend to the bottom of the crevice. He moved along in the direction of the groaning man. The crevice was wet, and there were pools and puddles in the hollows of the rock, but that was all. It was not flooded by the tide.

The convict flashed the light about him as he advanced. The rays fell upon the hapless man, lying on his side amid the boulders and splinters of rock. His face was contracted with agony. He turned his eyes upon the man with the lantern and started.

"You!"

"Yes, I, Henry Black. The man you have wronged—the innocent man you sent to prison to hide your own crime!"

The wretched man groaned. The convict stood gazing at him, and his expression somewhat softened; for it was evident that Black was very near to death.

There was a sound in the cave above.

"Mr. Black, where are you? What has happened?"

The convict rose and flashed the light above his head. He knew Wingate's voice.

"Take care!" he called out. "It is death to fall!"

"Where is Mr. Black?"

"He is here."

"Not—not—"

Wingate faltered and broke off.

"I have not harmed him," said the convict, understanding the boy's alarm. "He fell into this crevice in the dark. But he came, I believe, to harm me."

"Fly!" cried Wingate. "The police are coming! Arthur Carne has betrayed you!"

As Wingate spoke the warders caught sight of the convict.

"There he is! Surrender, Twenty-seven!"

There was a rush, and he was surrounded. Flight was impossible now. And the sight of the boy with the police seemed to have petrified the convict. He stood rooted to the ground, his eyes fixed dazedly upon Carne.

The warders' grip was upon him.

"Got you!" said the chief warder, with grim satisfaction.

"Thought we should have you. I don't know but what you might have led us a longer dance but for the kid. You won't get away this time, Twenty-seven, my man!"

The handcuffs clinked on the convict's wrists. He shuddered.

"Take me away!" he said hoarsely. "Take me away quickly!"

The warder looked at him curiously.

"No such hurry. There's a chap here came to look for you. Where is he? Have you done him in, Twenty-seven? I don't see him."

"Mr. Black has fallen into the crevice," said Wingate.

"Perhaps Twenty-seven knows how he got in, then," sneered the warder. "This may be a murder charge. Keep him tight, boys, while I go down."

The police had come provided with ropes. A couple of them began to lower the chief warder, lantern in hand, into the rift.

Meanwhile, Carne had drawn nearer the convict, curious to look at the man he had been the means of sending back to a life in death. He looked hard at the worn, haggard face, and the colour gradually deserted his own.

Wingate looked at him in wonder.

"What's the matter, Carne?"

Carne took no notice.

"Who are you?" he said hoarsely, staring at the convict.

"In Heaven's name, who are you? I know your face. It is exactly like the portrait I have of my—"

The convict gave a groan.

"My poor boy!"

Carne clenched his teeth.

"What do you mean? What are you talking about?"

"I have prayed to God that you should never know," said the man, in a low voice. "But now the secret need not be told, Arthur. Wingate will keep it; no one else need know a word. My poor boy! But, believe me, I was innocent. Dr. Locke believed that I was innocent, and when my disgrace fell upon me, Arthur, he was true, and he took you, and—"

"You are mad! My father has a post in Central Africa," said Carne shrilly. "He—"

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The boy broke off, realising the futility of his words. He knew now that that was only a fiction; that his father stood before him.

"I was innocent, Arthur! Before Heaven, I was innocent, and the guilty man was Henry Black—the man who came here to hunt me down, and who lies at the bottom of that crevice!"

Carne stood like one stunned.

This was the end of his spite and malice—he had hunted down his own father and delivered him into the hands of his enemies!

Carne groaned aloud in anguish of spirit.

During this strange scene the police were busy. Four men had descended into the crevice, and between them they carried the injured man up the steep slope of the extremity of the rift, and laid him upon the floor of the cavern. Black was deadly white, and his eyes were feverish. One of the men was hurriedly despatched to the village for a stretcher. Black lay breathing with evident effort, and the faces round him were grave, for it was easy to see that he had not long to live.

He looked at the handcuffed convict, and a bitter smile came upon his colourless lips.

"So they've got you!"

"Yes," said Hubert Carne quietly, "they've got me."

"And yet you do not ask me to speak?"

"Will you speak?"

"Yes."

There was a pause. The injured man seemed gathering his strength for an effort. His lips moved again, and all bent to listen.

"I call upon you all to witness my words." His voice was low, but clear. "Hubert Carne was innocent of the crime laid to his charge. I alone was guilty! I contrived to cast the blame upon him, partly because I disliked him, partly to save myself."

"And you helped us to hunt for him!" muttered the warder involuntarily.

A cynical look came upon the ghastly face.

"I knew that if he was free there was danger of the truth coming to light," said Black faintly. "That was my reason. If I were going to recover now, I should say nothing. But—but I know that I am dying. All of you witness my words. I was guilty, and Hubert Carne was innocent! I came here to track him down and watch against his escape, and I fell into the crevice. God have mercy upon me a sinner!"

His eyes closed.

There was a deep silence in the cavern. Carne drew nearer to his father and clasped his hand. The convict pressed it hard.

"Heaven has been very merciful to us," he whispered.

It seemed an age before the stretcher arrived, and the village doctor with it. The doctor shook his head at the sight of Black. It was evident that there was no hope. The injured man was placed upon the stretcher, and with him and their prisoner the police made their way out of the cave under the Shoulder.

The two boys turned their steps towards the school. Several times Carne glanced at Wingate as they walked on in silence, and his lips moved. At last he stopped and spoke.

"Wingate, I've had a lesson to-night that I don't think I shall ever forget. I—I've acted towards you like a rotten cad! I've been punished as I deserve. Will you look over it and let bygones be bygones, and let us start fresh?"

Wingate held out his hand.

"With all my heart," he said cordially. "And I'm jolly glad to hear you speak like that, Carne!"

Carne pressed his hand, and they finished the walk in silence.

The story of the happenings in the sea-cave under the rocks of the Shoulder was a nine days' wonder at Greyfriars.

A few days later Courtney resigned that briefly-held post, and George Wingate was re-elected without opposition—even Coker of the Fifth refraining from putting up as a rival candidate.

Mr. Black survived a few days, and confirmed the confession in the cave, and at length Carne's father was released, without a stain on his character. Even in his most reckless moments afterwards, Carne was not likely to forget the lesson of that night.

It was owing to Wingate that he had found his father, and found him an innocent man; and with all his heart he repented of what he had done when he held the Upper Hand.

THE END.

(Do not miss "COKER'S CONSCRIPT!" next Monday's Grand Story of the Chums of Greyfriars, by FRANK RICHARDS.)

DELICIOUS TUCK-HAMPERS ARE GIVEN AWAY TO READERS OF THE "BOYS' FRIEND," 1^d.

... THE ... GOLDEN KEY!

A Long Instalment of our Magnificent New Adventure Serial Story.

- - By - -
T. C. BRIDGES.



With an inward prayer that he might not miss, Dick's finger tightened on the trigger. Simultaneously the snake's coils quivered, then sank flat upon the ground. (See page 20.)

The First Instalments Told How :

DICK DAUNT and DUDLEY DREW, two chums, discover a letter in a bottle which they have extracted from the body of a shark.

They are informed by its contents that a certain MATTHEW SNELL is marooned on an unnamed island in the Keys, and he offers a substantial reward to any persons effecting his rescue.

On going to the island, however, they are unable to find Mr. Snell.

EZRA CRAY, a moonshiner, and his scoundrelly colleagues then visit the island, and, finding that it contains gold, attempt to kill the two chums.

Having previously hidden their boat, Dick and Dudley seek refuge in a cave.

Leaving the cave in search of food, they are captured by the gang, but eventually succeed in escaping.

Hungry and exhausted, the chums are resting on the beach, when Dudley notices a movement of the sand, as though it is being pushed up from below.

(Now go on with the story.)

A Rude Awakening.

Both waited breathlessly, and in about a minute a small round head appeared, not unlike that of a snake. It was followed by a thick body, covered with a brownish yellow shell, and next moment the creature showed complete as a good-sized tortoise.

"A gopher!" exclaimed Dudley; but before he could move, Dick had lunged forward and captured the queer-looking creature.

"Here's our breakfast, old son," he said, with an attempt at cheerfulness.

Dudley looked at the ugly beast doubtfully.

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"I mean it!" said Dick. "Niggers eat 'em, and though I've never tried one, they say they're quite good. Now let's find a place where we can light a fire without being spotted."

"Guess we'd better go round the end of Look-out Mountain," suggested Dudley.

"Guess again," replied Dick. "No," he continued more seriously, "that would be foolishness. Cray will take it for granted that we shall be hanging around for a chance to collar the schooner or our old boat, and the first place he'll look for us will be this end of the island. Our best plan, it seems to me, will be to go to the eastern end."

Dudley nodded.

"I reckon you're about right," he said. "Come on, then, and bring the breakfast!"

There was not much risk of any of Cray's folk being up and about so early, and, anyhow, the scrub was thick.

The two made straight up the backbone of the island, passed the camp half a mile to the south of it, crossed the creek, and got into the thick woods beyond. Here, where there was small chance of smoke being noticed, they camped in a little glade, and, gathering dry sticks, lighted a fire.

Their knives had been taken from them, but they still had the two pieces of hoop-iron with which Dan Grayson had provided them. With one of these, and a big stone, Dick managed to break the under shell of the gopher, and to clean it. Then, leaving the upper shell still on, he buried it in the embers, and raked the hot ashes over it.

He made Dudley rest while it cooked, and he himself went up on the hillside, a little above the glade, and kept a look-out. There was no sign of any movement near by, and after about an hour, he came down again, and disinterred the gopher from its fiery bed.

"Gee, it smells like chicken!" declared Dudley, as the savoury fumes reached his nostrils.

NEXT
MONDAY—

"COKER'S CONSCRIPT!"

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

"And tastes like it, too!" added Dick, as he tested a morsel on the end of his finger.

They were not far wrong. The gopher turned out excellent, and as there was quite three pounds' weight of meat inside the tough shell, made a good breakfast, even for two really hungry people.

Dudley threw away the last clean-picked bone.

"I feel a heap better, Dick," he said—"a whole heap better. But I'm mighty tired, and if you ask me, the best thing that we can do is to find a quiet place and get a sleep. We haven't had any to speak of for forty-eight hours past, and we don't know when we're going to get any again, so it's up to us to store some up while we've got a chance!"

Dick nodded.

"I was thinking the same thing myself. The only trouble is, I don't just know where we can lie up."

Dudley glanced at the blunt-topped hill above them.

"There ought to be tidy holes somewhere round here. The scrub is mighty thick."

"We'll try," replied Dick, and scrambled stiffly to his feet. "I vote we go up the brook. It's going to be infernally hot soon, and we must keep near water!"

The woods were marvellously quiet and peaceful as the two made their way through them, keeping up the left-hand bank of the stream.

It was difficult to imagine that less than a mile away Cray and his rascally crew had their headquarters. This part of the island looked as though human beings had never yet set foot there.

The ground became steeper, and the brook came tumbling down from above in a series of tiny waterfalls. Then quite suddenly they came to its source. This was a good-sized pool, which had been artificially deepened by a dam of earth and logs.

A biggish tree had been felled across the outlet, and this had been the beginning of the dam, which had been finished with smaller stuff, stones and the like.

The boys stopped and looked at it.

"I wonder who did that?" said Dick.

"Old Snell," Dudley answered promptly.

"How do you know it wasn't Cray?"

"Look at the stuff growing on it. That's been made months—maybe a year ago."

"Industrious old chap!" remarked Dick. "Jove, it's a pity he got wiped out! If he was still on the island, he'd be very useful to us!"

"I reckon he would," allowed Dudley. "I wonder what became of him?"

"Don't you suppose that was his skeleton that we found?"

Dudley shook his head.

"Shucks, Dick! That fellow had been dead for weeks! And old Snell had been in his house less than twenty-four hours before we arrived. Why, the meat we found open hadn't had time to go bad!"

"I'd forgotten that," said Dick slowly. "Well, he's gone, anyhow, and it's up to us to get out of this ugly hole by our own two selves!"

He stopped as he spoke by the edge of the dam, and, kneeling down, put his face to the water, and had a long drink. Dudley followed his example.

"That will keep us going for a bit," said Dick. "Now, what about lying up in those trees beyond? I don't fancy it likely they'll run into us there."

"It looks good to me," agreed Dudley; and after a look round they pushed on again.

The pool lay at the lower end of a long, narrow, heavily-wooded ravine, which had high sides thickly covered with brush. It seemed an ideal place in which to hide during the heat of the day, and they thought it was about the last place where their enemies would think of looking for them. The brush was so thick that it was out of the question to walk through it. They had to creep on hands and knees.

Fifty yards above the pool they found a tiny open space. Above it was a tree, a sort of evergreen oak, with a thick trunk and a great spread of branches. Underneath, it was cool and delightfully shady.

"Right here is my bed-room," said Dudley.

"Couldn't find a better spot," rejoined Dick.

They flung themselves down on the ground, which was thickly carpeted with dead leaves, and within less than a minute were dead asleep.

The sun rose higher, the shadows shortened, and began to lengthen again, but the two worn-out youngsters did not move a single inch.

It was nearly four in the afternoon when Dick stirred and slowly opened his eyes. For a moment or two he lay quite still, staring up into the branches above.

He shivered slightly.

"Ugh! What a dream!" he grunted. "I thought Cray had us sure!"

He turned his head, and was about to sit up, when all of a sudden he froze. A faint gasp of horror escaped his lips, and, leaning on one elbow, he remained absolutely motionless, staring with wide-open eyes at the sight before him.

Dudley Doubles Back.

Ten feet from him—not half a dozen from Dudley's head—was coiled a large snake. Its colour was a pale buff, and on its back were black marks in the shape of diamonds. It did not need the ugly, triangular, flat-topped head to tell Dick that what he was looking at was the king of the pit vipers, the dreaded diamond rattlesnake.

The brute's head was raised a few inches above the coil. Its tail was just visible, with the bony rattle at the end. So near was the creature that Dick could actually count the rattles. They were twelve in all, showing that the reptile was twelve years old.

For several seconds Dick stared in fascinated horror at the great snake. It must have been nearly six feet long. The bite of such a creature meant death to the bitten within at most half an hour. His blood ran cold. Dudley was within easy reach of those terrible poison fangs, and if he so much as moved in his sleep his death-warrant was sealed.

Without moving a muscle, Dick looked round for the rifle. It lay between him and Dudley. He knew that it was loaded. He had seen to that before he lay down to sleep.

The question was, could he pick up the rifle and aim it without enraging the serpent or awaking Dudley?

There was no choice. It was the only thing to do, and he braced himself for the effort.

Hardly daring to breathe, he stretched out his left hand for the rifle. He moved it but an inch at a time. He knew that any abrupt movement would mean disaster.

The snake did not stir, but Dick felt the brute's deadly eyes upon him. Horrible eyes they were, cold, brilliant, and unwinking, with a suggestion in them of deadly malice.

He got his hand upon the rifle, and drew it towards him. At the same time he rose very slowly and gradually, so that he was sitting upright.

And still the snake did not move.

Then he had to raise the rifle to his shoulder. And now the rattler seemed to grow uneasy. Its head rose a little, and he could see its forked tongue licking in and out. A smell like that of fresh-cut cucumber filled the air. This is characteristic of the rattler tribe when angered.

The strain on Dick was awful. At any moment Dudley might move. He was always a light sleeper.

Still, Dick did not hurry, but continued very leisurely raising the rifle. Any hasty movement on his part must be fatal to Dudley.

At last the butt rested firmly in the hollow of his shoulder. In spite of the strain, he was steady as a rock. He would only have one shot, and if this did not finish the horrible brute, the second would be too late to save Dudley. Lightning is no more rapid than the strike of an angry rattler.

The creature's head was higher now. Dick aimed, not straight at its head, but at its neck. Then, if the bullet failed to cut the spine, it would at any rate crash through the coils beneath.

With an inward prayer that he might not miss, his finger tightened on the trigger. The report crashed out, startlingly loud in the breathless stillness of the hot afternoon, and simultaneously the rattler's coils quivered, then sank flat upon the ground.

The muzzle had been within a yard of Dudley's head. He fairly leaped out of sleep, and sat up, staring round with startled eyes.

"What—what——" he began.

Dick did not speak. He merely pointed at the snake. So perfect had been his aim that the head lay a foot away from the coils. The bullet had decapitated the reptile.

Dudley drew a long breath, as he mentally measured the distance which separated the dead horror from his own body.

"Thanks, Dick!" he said. "I guess that was a pretty good shot!"

"Not so dusty for me," Dick answered, as he rose to his feet. He was very pale, but otherwise much as usual. "And now, Dudley, I fancy we had better be shifting. The sound of that shot will have been heard pretty much all over the island, and we want to be quite some way off before Cray & Co. arrive on the scene."

"Hush!" muttered Dudley, and held his hand up for silence.

Next moment came a rush of feet. Without another word, both the boys plunged, head down, into the thick brush, and raced away as fast as the thickness of the scrub allowed.

Dick took the lead. He dodged in and out among the

(Continued on Page iii of Cover.)

THE GOLDEN KEY.

(Continued from page 20.)

thicker clumps of bush. Sometimes he was forced to burst a way through a tangled mass of creepers, but where he could he went round. Dudley followed close at his heels.

"Keep low! Keep low!" whispered Dick sharply, as they crossed a little open space. The warning was emphasised by the crack of a rifle and the vicious spit of a bullet close above their heads.

They were running up the ravine. Suddenly they came face to face with a cliff too steep to climb. Dick glanced quickly round. The cliff was equally steep on either side.

"We're in a blind alley!" he gasped.

"There must be some way up!" said Dudley desperately.

"No; we're boxed!" As he spoke Dick thrust fresh cartridges into the magazine of his rifle.

"Find some cover, Dudley," he bade his chum. "If there are not too many of them we may still be able to hold them off."

Dudley ran forward a little way. Dick stood facing down the gorge. The sound of pursuit was plain. He could hear a number of men crashing heavily through the thick scrub.

Dudley came dashing back.

"There's a way up. Creepers hanging over. I guess we can climb it!"

He pointed as he spoke.

Dick shook his head.

"No earthly! It's on the cards we can climb it. But what's the use? They'll pot us as we climb."

For a moment the two stared at one another. Dudley realised that Dick was right. The climb must be slow and difficult, and they would be perfect targets for their pursuers as they climbed.

"It's all right, boys!" came a voice from out of the scrub. "It's all right! No need to hurry! We've got the cubs boxed!"

No need to ask who had spoken. There was no mistaking Ezra Cray's harsh, grating tones.

"I'll get him, anyway!" growled Dick between set teeth, as he dropped flat on the ground, his rifle held firmly to his shoulder. "Whatever happens, he sha'n't brag he's caught us a second time!"

Dudley's eyes flashed, a curious gleam lit his keen face.

"Your matches, Dick—give me your matches!"

For an instant Dick thought that his chum had suddenly gone crazy.

"Matches? What do you want with them?"

"Give me them, sharp! No time to talk!"

Dick saw the other had a plan. He whipped out his corked bottle, which still held about a dozen matches.

Dudley had already picked up a dead branch covered with dry leaves. He tore up two or three handfuls of sun-dried wire-grass, and twisted them into the branch. Then, striking a match, he set fire to his improvised torch, and, hurrying a little way back down the gorge, thrust it into a clump of dry brush.

In spite of the rain of the previous night, eight hours' blazing sunshine had dried out the thicket, so that it was like so much tinder. In an instant the scrub sprang into flame.

Dudley rushed from one clump to another, firing everything as he went. Within an incredibly short space of time he had a wall of fire reaching almost from one side of the gorge to the other. It crackled and roared, sending up showers of sparks and great volumes of dark smoke.

The heat was terrific, but what little wind there was blew down the gorge, so that it carried the smoke towards their pursuers.

"Now's our chance!" cried Dudley, as he led the way back to the top of the gorge. "Sharp as you can, Dick, or they'll be out of the lower end and get round on us."

Dick did not waste a moment. He seized the end of a tough grape-vine which hung down over the low cliff, and pulled himself up as best he could. It was a hard scramble, and every moment he expected to hear Cray or his men open fire.

But the shouts and yells which came from below told a different story. Cray's men, if not Cray himself, were evidently panic-stricken by the roar of the blazing scrub and the huge masses of smoke which were beating down upon them. It seemed that they had all run for it.

Dick reached the top of the low cliff in safety.

"Catch!" cried Dudley, and flung the rifle up to him. Then he himself tackled the creeper and began to climb. He was slower than Dick, and Dick could do little to help him. It was some minutes before he reached the top, and then he was so done that he could hardly stand.

"Get on my back. I'll carry you," offered Dick.

"You're crazy!" retorted Dudley. "They'd have us before we could get a hundred yards. No; double back. That's the scheme. Double right back, and lie up in that thick stuff above the pool. It's a risk, of course, but I reckon they'll make sure we've gone straight on."

Dick saw that he was right. There was plenty of cover all the way, and, unless there was a pretty good tracker among their pursuers, Cray would never dream that they had gone back.

He took Dudley's arm, hurried him into the thickest of the scrub, then they both went down on hands and knees and crawled softly into the very heart of the stuff, where they dropped, panting and dripping, with exhaustion.

Next minute they heard Cray's buzzard-like croak coming from the opposite side of the ravine.

"D'ya see 'em, Bendall? Hurry, ye fool! They can't hev gone far! Hurry!"

"The smoke's so derned thick I can't see nothing!" Bendall answered hoarsely.

Dick raised his head a little. He was listening eagerly.

"Don't you worry, old son!" whispered Dudley in his ear. "I'll lay my share of the gold they'll never catch on to our little double. There's mighty thick cover on the east slope of the hill. They're dead sure to reckon we've run for it."

Some moments passed. In spite of Dudley's encouraging words, Dick was in a great stew.

From their hiding-place they could see nothing that was going on, and the roar of the fire drowned most other sounds.

Down in the gorge the whole of the scrub was ablaze, and the flames rose fifty feet or more into the air. The draught caused by the heat had become a brisk breeze, which swept the fire faster and faster down towards the pool. Sparks rushed through the smoke in myriads and were caught by eddies and scattered this way and that. Even where the boys crouched in the scrub, some thirty feet above the bed of the gorge, and fifty feet away from the edge, they could feel the heat.

At last Dick could stand the suspense no longer. He raised himself very cautiously.

"Say, what are you doing?" asked Dudley.

"I want to see what these fellows are at."

"A sight more likely they'll get their eyes on you!" returned Dudley. "You'd best lie low."

Unwillingly Dick crouched down again.

"It's getting mighty warm!" said Dudley presently.

Dick did not answer. He was straining his ears for some sound of their pursuers. But the crackling and snapping of the flames in the gorge below made it impossible to detect footsteps.

The air grew stifling. Smoke blew down upon them in clouds.

Suddenly Dudley started up.

"Say, Dick, the fire's over the edge! The scrub's alight on top of the cliff!"

He pointed as he spoke, and Dick could distinctly see little crimson tongues of fire flickering through the thick stuff within a few yards of where they lay.

"Guess we'd better shift if we don't want to be roasted," continued Dudley. "It's coming our way!"

They shifted without delay. It was time, too. Rabbits, snakes—all sorts of small creatures were coming towards them, driven by the fire. The worst of it was that the boys dared not rise upright. They were afraid of being seen. They ducked and dodged, making the best speed they could under the circumstances.

All of a sudden the scrub ended, and they found themselves on the bare hillside, with no cover of any sort, except a few rocks.

"This is a nice joke!" growled Dick, as he paused and looked out across the bare space. The nearest trees were at least a couple of hundred yards away. "Your little scheme has cut both ways, Dudley."

Dudley crawled out into the open and took a quick glance around.

"Can't see anything of Cray's crowd," he said, in a tone of relief.

"Then we'd better do a bunk across the open," Dick replied.

Dudley shook his head.

"I guess we can do better than that. What's the matter with turning right round and making back down the creek again?"

"The way we came? You're crazy, man! It'll take us right past the camp again."

(Another long instalment of this splendid serial story next Monday. The only way you can make quite certain of securing a copy of the MAGNET is to order in advance.)

THE PRIDE OF THE RING!

A Magnificent Serial Story dealing with the Noble Art of Self-defence.

By MARK LINLEY.

Aldershot.

A week after the events narrated in the previous chapter the Public Schools Boxing Tournament took place at Queen's Avenue Gymnasium, Aldershot, and Neddy Welsh, who feared no one of his own size and weight, went up to represent Earlingham.

He was accompanied by Bob Sullivan, his old friend and trainer, still as faithful and reliable as ever, and Dolly Gray, Weston, Phipps, and Kenrick. And there was one other spectator, who was bound to exercise a considerable influence over Neddy's display, and that was Molly Fenn. The girl had been obliged to argue with her father and the Head for a solid half-hour before they gave their consent for her to go; but she had won the day, and that was all that mattered.

Many public schools were represented on that mighty occasion. Eton and Charterhouse, Harrow and Winchester, Greyfriars and St. Jim's, all had rosy dreams that success would crown the efforts of their respective champions.

Except for Bob Sullivan and Dolly Gray, nobody connected with Earlingham considered that Neddy had a dog's chance. The school at large considered him a good boxer, but not up to the weight of those hailing from schools of greater renown. Bob Sullivan and Dolly Gray, however, knew Neddy for what he was worth, and set much store by him. Certain it was that he would fight to a finish, no matter how heavy the odds were against him.

The tournament opened with the heavy-weights, comprising a series of contests which lasted an hour. Then came the middle-weights, and then, amid a breathless hush, the first pair of light-weights, as appointed by the ballot, clambered into the ring.

The referee scanned a sheet of paper in his hand, and announced the names:

"Robert Cherry (Greyfriars) versus H. P. Burne-Jones (Eton)."

"Floreat Etona!" came a cheery voice from the gallery.

"Good old Greyfriars!" rose in an answering echo from the front seats, where Harry Wharton & Co. had established themselves.

"Seconds out! Time!"

The Etonian rushed in with lowered head, hoping to bring the bout to an early issue. But Bob Cherry was nothing if not brilliant. He met the fierce onslaught with a defence like a barn-door, and then his fists shot out—right and left in swift succession.

Thrown completely off his balance, Burne-Jones wavered, and Bob Cherry, following up like a flash of lightning, landed a straight left on the jaw, which sent the man spinning. There was a murmur of amazement from the audience as the Etonian came down with a thud and lay still.

In vain his second urged him to rise and renew the combat. The referee counted him out in solemn tones, and the fight was over. For brevity, the bout had almost equaled the celebrated occasion on which Georges Carpentier had disposed of Bombardier Billy Wells in the first round.

If the first tussle had been somewhat disappointing to the sport-loving instincts of the crowd, the second amply atoned for the deficiency. Tom Merry, of St. Jim's, entertained a smart-looking youngster from Charterhouse, and they went the full number of rounds. To the deep dismay of the St. Jim's fellows who were present, Tom Merry lost the verdict.

There were several more contests, of a highly interesting nature, and then an adjournment took place for lunch.

Neddy Welsh ate a moderate lunch, and when, half an hour later, he stood face to face with the Winchester boxer, he looked in perfect form.

The referee announced the names, and the next instant the two schoolboys were pummelling away at each other for dear life.

The boy from Winchester was a better fighting-man than Bob Sullivan had predicted. He was a little wild in his tactics, certainly, but his every action betokened a knowledge of ringcraft.

The first round finished with honours easy. In the second, however, Neddy Welsh let himself go, taking risks which everyone but a fellow of wonderful daring would have fought shy of.

Neddy's tactics paid, too. In the middle of the round he

broke clean through his opponent's guard, and knocked him off his feet with a delightful right-hander, straight from the shoulder.

The referee began to count, and the Winchester boy made heroic efforts to regain his feet. But he was beaten, fairly and squarely, and never rallied from the effects of that terrific punch of Neddy's.

"Welsh wins!" said the referee.

The announcement was hailed with a torrent of applause. Neddy Welsh had made a very favourable impression upon the public; and those who were blessed with powers of discrimination, prophesied that he would reach the semi-final, if not the final itself.

"That's great!" said Bob Sullivan, his handsome face radiant with supreme satisfaction. "Looks as though you're going to more than justify the training I've given you in the past."

"I hope so, Bob," replied Neddy. "What a gorgeous feather in Earlingham's cap if I win!"

That was just like Neddy Welsh. He always placed school before self, and so long as he could give additional lustre to the fair name of Earlingham, he was perfectly satisfied.

Neddy went from strength to strength. Victory in two more bouts brought him into the semi-final against the Charterhouse youth who had disposed of Tom Merry. Boxing with consummate skill and science throughout, Neddy gained the verdict on points; and presently the referee announced in ringing tones, which sent a thrill through the hearts of his hearers:

"Final, light-weights. Robert Cherry, Greyfriars School—"

"Hurray!"

"And Neddy Welsh of Earlingham!"

"Good old Neddy!"

"Wipe up the ground with him, old man!" roared Dolly Gray.

The referee raised his hand for silence.

"Seconds out of the ring! Time!"

The great boxing final, likely to be long remembered in the annals of the two famous schools concerned, had commenced!

Neddy Welsh looked much less fit and confident as he entered the fray against Bob Cherry. Where, before, his face had been stamped with the healthy flush of youth, it was now drawn and haggard, and his eyes had a lack-lustre look in them that Bob Sullivan didn't like at all. Something must be the matter, and the good-hearted drill-instructor felt genuinely concerned for his pupil.

Neddy Welsh contented himself by boxing purely on the defensive in the first round. His opponent scored several neat points, but on the whole the affair was tame. As Phipps remarked to Weston, the boundaries weren't putting enough ginger into it.

"Feeling bad, old boy?" asked Bob Sullivan solicitously, as Neddy Welsh sat down heavily on his knees at the interval.

Neddy pulled himself together with a great effort.

"I—I'm all right!" he muttered.

"You don't look it. What can I do for you?"

"Just sponge my chivvy, that's all."

"I should like to examine you to see if you're quite sound."

"No, no!" said Neddy, almost fiercely. "I'm all right, I tell you!"

And Bob Sullivan had to rest quite content with that.

The second and third rounds were repetitions of the first. Bob Cherry contented himself with desultory attacking, and Neddy Welsh fought mainly on the defensive. When he did hit out, it was usually with the right. His left seemed to be strangely idle.

"Do back up, Neddy!" urged Bob Sullivan, as he brought the sponge into play once more. "Where's that straight left of yours disappeared to?"

Neddy made no reply. He lay back on his second's knee, his face white and strained, his breath coming and going in great gasps.

"Look here!" said Bob Sullivan, in alarm. "You're not going on. You're not fit. Let me explain to the referee—"

(To be Concluded next Monday.)