

Read About HARRY WHARTON & Co.'s FEUD WITH CLIFF HOUSE!

The Magnet

Billy Bunter's
Own Paper



THE CUT DIRECT!

Give Cecil Ponsonby, the cad of Highcliffe, a chance of venting his petty spite on Harry Wharton & Co., the chums of Greyfriars, and he'll seize it with both hands!

The FEUD with CLIFF HOUSE!

By FRANK RICHARDS



Ponsonby, the cad of Highcliffe, withdrew a penknife from his pocket and cut the painter of the Cliff House boat. "Don't be a cad, Pon!" said Gadsby, in an angry whisper. "You can't leave the girls stranded on the island!"

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Beastly for Bob!

BOB CHERRY groaned. It was a bright summer's day and a half-holiday at Greyfriars School.

Bob's face was generally sunny on the cloudiest day.

Nevertheless, he groaned—dismally.

Bob was sitting in the Remove Form Room—alone. Outside, the sun was shining, and cheery voices floated in at the open windows. From a distance came faintly the cheery click of bat and ball.

For ten minutes Bob had been seated at his desk.

On the desk before him lay a Latin paper—a nice little exercise in irregular verbs.

Bob had not touched it so far.

Mr. Quelch, his Form-master, had prepared that exercise for him with care, to keep him occupied during an hour of detention. Probably he thought that Bob might derive benefit from it, for there was no doubt that Bob was rather weak in irregular verbs.

That task had to be done before Bob could get out and join his chums along the river. So, obviously, the sooner it was started, the better. Bob seemed to find it difficult to start.

Bright sunshine, fleecy skies, and a wind from the sea attracted him—but never had Latin verbs seemed so fearfully unattractive as they did that lovely afternoon.

For long minutes he gazed at that paper dismally. Finally, he groaned.

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Bob was not given to grousing, but really, this was too thick. Detention on a rainy day was not so bad, but detention on a glorious day like this was the limit.

"He, he, he!"

Bob Cherry started, and looked round. Following his dismal groan came that unmusical cackle.

A fat face looked in at the Form-room door. Two little round eyes blinked at Bob Cherry through a pair of big round spectacles.

Billy Bunter grinned at him cheerfully.

Bunter seemed amused.

"Feeling rotten, old chap?" asked Bunter.

"Yes, fathead!" grunted Bob.

"Well, if you let Quelch cop you sliding down the banisters, what do you expect?" asked Bunter. "You jolly well asked for it, didn't you?"

"Have you come here to tell me that, ass?" growled Bob. "Take your face away, Bunter! It's bad enough without that!"

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"If Quelch catches you here, fathead, you'll get ragged!" said Bob. "Get out, and shut the door after you!"

A minute ago Bob had been feeling fearfully lonely, almost like Robinson Crusoe on his island. But the arrival of Billy Bunter did not seem to afford him any comfort. There were worse things even than solitude.

"That's all right," said Bunter, "I'm only stopping a minute. I've only looked in to ask you if I can have your bike."

"No!"

"You won't want it, old chap, being

in detention. Mine's got a puncture. I want to go out—"

"The sooner the better!"

"I don't want to walk. Can I have your bike?"

"No!" roared Bob.

"It's rather urgent, old chap. My sister Bessie may be coming over from Cliff House to see me this afternoon. So I want to get out quick."

Bob Cherry grinned. Bob would not have wanted to get out quick had he had a sister coming to see him. But brotherly love was not highly developed in the Bunter tribe.

"Well, can I have it?" asked Bunter. "Don't be selfish, old fellow. I never could stand selfishness. I'd borrow Toddy's bike, only it got a pedal twisted when I borrowed it last week. Can I have yours?"

"You fat ass!" hooted Bob. "As soon as I get out of this I'm going after my friends as fast as that bike will go. They've gone up the river, and I'm going after them. Now scoot!"

"Tain't allowed to ride on the tow-path!" said Bunter, shaking his head. "You'll get into a row, Cherry! Better let me have the bike."

"Scoot!"

"Now, look here, old chap—"

"Bunk!"

"We haven't settled about the bike yet. You see, I want it—"

"Hook it!"

"You'll never catch up with Wharton's mob, old chap, if they've started already. Better give it a miss. They won't mind if you don't join them. Why should they?"

"Travel!"

"Jolly glad to get a rest from you,

very likely," argued Bunter. "You're a bit of a noisy hooligan, old chap, ain't you? Depend on it, they'll be jolly glad if you don't join up. Don't you think so?"

Bob Cherry did not answer that question. He picked up the Latin grammar from his desk and took aim.

Billy Bunter backed swiftly outside the Form-room door.

"Beast!" came from an invisible Bunter.

Bob laid down the grammar and picked up his pen. That loathsome exercise had to be done. Willy-nilly, he had to improve his knowledge of irregular verbs. With a wrinkled brow, he started.

"I say, Cherry——"

Bob glared. The fat face and the big spectacles were peering round the door again. He dropped the pen and clutched the grammar.

"Will you get out?" he roared.

"I'm waiting to go, you silly ass," said Bunter peevishly. "I only want to settle about that bike. Can I have it?"

"Are you going?"

"Yes, when we've settled about the bike——"

Whiz!

Crash!

Billy Bunter dodged too late.

The grammar landed on his fat chin. There was a bump in the Form-room doorway, and a roar.

"Oh! Ow! Beast! Wow!"

"I'll give you the inkpot next!"

"Beast! I'm jolly glad Quelch's detained you!" gasped Bunter. "I wish he'd whopped you, too! I——"

"Bunter!"

It was a deep voice in the corridor.

"Oh crikey! I mean, yes, sir! I—I didn't see you, sir! I—I wasn't speaking to Cherry, sir! I was only asking him if I could have his bike——"

"Take fifty lines for speaking to a boy in detention, Bunter!"

"Oh lor'!"

"Now go!"

Billy Bunter went. The severe countenance of Henry Samuel Quelch looked into the Form-room. Frowning grimly, Mr. Quelch picked up the Latin grammar that had floored Bunter, and brought it across to Bob Cherry's desk.

"How much have you done of your exercise, Cherry?"

"N-n-not much, sir!" stammered Bob.

"Have you done anything at all?"

"N-n-no, sir."

"This will not do, Cherry. I shall return here in an hour from now, and if your exercise is not finished by then, it will be my duty to set you another."

"Oh, scissors!"

"What—what did you say, Cherry?"

"I—I mean, all right!" gasped Bob.

"Yes, sir!"

"I advise you, Cherry, to lose no more time!" said the Remove master. And, still frowning, he rustled out of the Form-room.

Bob Cherry grabbed his pen. He plunged into irregular verbs. Mr. Quelch's advice was too good not to be taken. The remotest prospect of another Latin exercise, to fill up the remnant of the afternoon, was dismaying—or rather, horrifying. With grim determination on his brow and a spot of ink on his nose, Bob Cherry bent over his task, devoting himself to irregular verbs as if he loved them!

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

One for his Nob!

"HIGHCLIFFE cads!" grunted Johnny Bull.

"Let 'em rip!" said Harry Wharton.

Four juniors were walking, at a very

leisurely pace, up the towpath along the bank of the shining Sark.

Harry Wharton and Frank Nugent, Johnny Bull, and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh had time on their hands that golden afternoon.

Their chum was in detention—for which, as Billy Bunter had pointed out to him, he had asked. It was difficult for Bob Cherry to resist banisters—he liked to come down with a whiz. But it was rather unfortunate that he had not resisted the temptation that day.

The Famous Five of Greyfriars were booked for tea with their friends, Courtenay and the Caterpillar, over at Highcliffe School. There was plenty of time to arrive for that function, and they were not going without Bob. So they walked round by the towpath, which was the longest way to Highcliffe. Bob was to follow on his jigger when he was let out, and to overtake them before they reached their distant destination.

It was a very pleasant walk by the sunny river, on the towpath shaded by thick green woods. The four Removites had passed the Three Fishers, and Popper's Island, and Popper Court, and Courtfield Bridge. On the upper reaches, above the bridge, Highcliffe boats were sometimes seen—and at the present moment a Highcliffe boat came into view, coming down with the current, with three Highcliffe Fourth Formers in it.

Cecil Ponsonby lolled in the stern seat, Gadsby and Monson toyed with

Even the best of friends fall out. But it is a big shock to Harry Wharton & Co. to be cut by their girl friends from Cliff House School!

the oars. The Highcliffe knuts were not exerting themselves. It was easy work coming down with the current; but Pon & Co. did not look as if they would ever be able to pull the boat back again to Highcliffe.

Having glanced at the three men in the boat, the Greyfriars fellows averted their glances and walked on. They did not want a visit to their friends at Highcliffe preceded by a row with their old Highcliffe enemies.

But Pon, as he sighted them, ceased to loll and sat up.

He spoke to his companions, and Gadsby and Monson, with a lazy pull at the oars, brought the boat nearer in to the bank.

Ponsonby groped in a pocket with his right hand, which he then held behind him. He winked at his friends, who grinned.

"Hallo, Greyfriars!" he called out, in quite an amicable tone.

The Removites looked round at him again.

"Hallo, Highcliffe!" answered Harry Wharton politely.

If Pon & Co. wanted to be civil, it was so much to the good, as they were going to Pon's school to tea.

Gadsby and Monson rested on their oars, keeping the boat a dozen feet off the bank.

Ponsonby gave the fellows on the bank quite an agreeable grin.

"Going to our show?" he asked.

"Yes. Courtenay's asked us to tea," answered Harry.

"I've got somethin' here for you!" said Ponsonby. "Hold on!"

"Something for us!" repeated Wharton, puzzled. "Do you mean a message from Courtenay?"

The four Removites faced towards the boat, coming to the edge of the bank.

"Not exactly," drawled Ponsonby. "I've got—this!"

His hand came suddenly from behind him and clapped a pea-shooter to his mouth. There was a sudden whizzing of peas.

"Ow!" roared Johnny Bull, as one landed in his eye.

"Oh!" gasped Nugent, getting one in the ear.

Pon was a good shot with a pea-shooter—and he put plenty of force on the small but annoying missiles. Peas spattered over the faces of the four Removites on the bank.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Gadsby and Monson, highly entertained.

Pon did not laugh. He could not shoot peas and laugh at the same time. He put in rapid and accurate work with the pea-shooter.

"You silly, cheeky ass!" gasped Harry Wharton.

A whizzing pea stung him in the eye, and he clapped his hand to that eye and jumped back. A pea landing in the eye was painful—very painful!

"You rotten swab!" roared Johnny Bull.

"You terrific tick!" gasped Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Gadsby and Monson.

They carefully kept the boat out from the bank. On shore, Pon & Co. would have walked very warily, with the chums of the Remove about. But a dozen feet of water between them and their victims made it quite safe.

"Come on!" exclaimed Harry Wharton hastily.

He could have kicked himself for having, for a moment, trusted to civility from Cecil Ponsonby. Pon's civility had been assumed to get them facing him at easy range, and he had got away with that little trick with complete success.

"The rotter!" gasped Johnny Bull. "He's bunged up my eye! I'm going to let him have something back!"

He stooped, with peas stinging him in the neck as he did so, and grabbed at a chunk of turf. Grabbing it loose, he stood up and took aim at the Highcliffe boat.

"Pull!" gasped Ponsonby, dropping the pea-shooter, and grabbing at the lines.

Gadsby and Monson dipped their oars in haste.

The Highcliffe boat shot away. But it did not shoot so fast as the chunk of turf from Johnny Bull's hand.

That chunk whizzed straight as an arrow and crashed on the side of Ponsonby's head.

"Ooooooh!" came a yell from Pon.

He rocked over in the boat, and his straw hat slid off and splashed into the water. It floated astern as the boat shot on.

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

It was their turn to laugh.

In the river, out of range, Gadsby and Monson rested on their oars again, and Ponsonby, rubbing his head, stared round with glittering eyes.

Pon did not seem to have expected a Roland for his Oliver. A lump of turf on the head was not, perhaps, so painful as a pea shot in the eye. But it was exceedingly unpleasant, and clearly Pon did not like it.

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And he had lost his hat!

It floated on the water, half-submerged, between the boat and the bank. Only a few minutes were required for it to soak and sink. To recapture it, the boat had to draw back within range.

Johnny Bull loosened another turf. He held it up.

"Coming back for your hat?" he shouted.

"You rotten Greyfriars cad!" yelled Ponsonby. "I've got to have my hat! If you chuck that at me——"

"Come back and see!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Ponsonby glared at the laughing Removites across the intervening water. Gadsby and Monson looked at him inquiringly. But he did not give them any sign to pull in.

He wanted his hat; but he did not want another turf on his head. And that, clearly, was what he was going to get if the Highcliffe boat pulled within range.

There was a pause—and, meanwhile, the hat soaked and sank lower in the water. It was drifting slowly on the sluggish current, but it was evidently not going to float long enough for Ponsonby to recapture it lower down the river.

"You rotters!" panted Ponsonby.

"We didn't start this game!" chuckled Frank Nugent. "You shouldn't start things, if you don't want them to go on, old bean!"

"Will you let me have my hat?" yelled Ponsonby.

"Yes—and something with it!" answered Johnny Bull.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The hat dipped under and disappeared.

"You'll have to dive for it now, Pon!" called out Harry Wharton, laughing. "Come on, you fellows!"

The Greyfriars juniors walked on up the river.

Ponsonby, bareheaded, glared after them, with a deadly glare. Not for the first time, Pon had hunted for trouble, of which he did not like the flavour when he found it.

The Highcliffe boat floated on down the river—Ponsonby hatless, and with the blackest of black scowls on his face.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Picnic at Popper's Island!

"BESSIE!"

"Oh!"

"Keep that basket shut!"

"I'm only counting the tarts!" said Bessie Bunter, with a great deal of dignity.

"Well," said Miss Clara Trevlyn, "don't! The more often you count them, the less there will be to count."

"If you think I was eating a tart behind this sunshade, Clara——"

"I believe you'd eat the sunshade, if there wasn't anything else to eat!"

"Cat!"

Clara laughed, and Marjorie Hazeldene smiled. Dolly Jobling gave a little chuckle.

Miss Elizabeth Bunter looked indignant—though a smear of jam on her extensive mouth detracted, perhaps, a little from the effect.

The four girls of Cliff House School were in a boat on the Sark. Marjorie and Clara pulled an oar each; Dolly pulled two; while Bessie Bunter, sitting in the stern, was supposed to be steering.

On the seat beside Bessie was a large

picnic-basket. Over Bessie's head was a sunshade, to keep off the glare of the sun, for which the other girls did not seem to care. But Bessie, as she would have explained, had a complexion to think of.

That sunshade not only screened Bessie from the sun. Every now and then it screened her from her fellow-voyagers. At such moments, there was a creaking sound as a wicker lid moved, and then a munching. It was not only in looks that Bessie Bunter resembled her fascinating brother, Billy, of Greyfriars. Their manners and customs were also wonderfully alike.

On that glorious afternoon, Marjorie Hazeldene & Co. had planned a picnic up the river. They had walked over from Pegg to Friardale, taken boat at the village bridge, and here they were—three of them pulling up the Sark, and the fourth pondering deeply on the contents of the picnic-basket, and every now and then sampling the same.

"There's Greyfriars!" said Bessie suddenly.

She gave a nod towards the grey old tower rising over the trees on the left bank of the Sark. But Marjorie Hazeldene & Co. had seen Greyfriars School before, many a time and oft, and they did not look round—which, perhaps, was what Miss Elizabeth Bunter wanted.

Bessie gave them a blink through her big spectacles.

"I say, you girls, look round and see if you can see any of our friends. It's a half-holiday at Greyfriars, you know."

"Bow-wow!" said Miss Clara.

"If you think I was going to take another tart while you were looking round, Clara Trevlyn——"

"Another!" chuckled Clara.

"I mean, I haven't had any at all. I don't care much for tarts, really. I'm not greedy, like my brother Billy."

"Did you have jam for breakfast, Bessie?"

"No; marmalade."

"Then you must have had jam at supper last night. There's some sticking round your mouth."

"Oh!" gasped Bessie. She jerked out a handkerchief, and dabbed. "I say, is my face clean now?"

"As near as you ever get, old thing."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Cat!" said Bessie.

The boat pulled on, past the Greyfriars raft and boathouse. Three or four Greyfriars fellows on the bank waved or raised their hats to the passing schoolgirls. None of the Famous Five were to be seen among them. Bessie Bunter blinked shoreward through her big spectacles.

"Can you girls see my brother Billy?" she asked.

"He's not there," answered Marjorie.

"I want to speak to him," said Bessie, frowning. "He owes me five shillings. Look here! Suppose we stop, while I go and see him about it. I shan't keep you waiting more than half an hour."

"You won't keep us waiting a minute, old dear!" answered Clara, pulling steadily on. "I wish Bob Cherry was in sight—we'd ask him in. We've got a lot of weight to pull."

"Yes, your feet, you mean," said Bessie, with a nod.

"Wha-a-at!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" trilled Marjorie.

Dolly Jobling chortled. Clara had not been, by any means, alluding to her own feet, but to Bessie's circumference.

"I shouldn't worry," said Bessie consolingly. "You can't help it, dear! Besides, what does it matter? Small feet set off a girl's good looks, if she's got any. But if she hasn't, people don't

notice her big feet along with the rest, see? Don't you worry."

Miss Clara's face was worth a guinea a box at that moment. Bessie Bunter had a very narrow escape from a splash.

"Now, if you had a figure like mine, it would be different," went on Bessie.

Clara's face cleared. That remark seemed to restore her good humour.

"But you haven't, you know," added Bessie, shaking her head.

"Hardly!" grinned Clara. "If I had, I should be glad of feet as big as Bob's to carry it about on."

"Plain girls are always jealous of pretty ones," said Bessie calmly.

"Oh, my only hat and parasol!" gasped Miss Clara.

"No; not always," added Bessie generously. "Marjorie isn't! You're not jealous of my good looks at all, are you, Marjorie?"

"Not a bit," assured Marjorie.

"That's right," said Bessie. "We can't all be pretty, and graceful, and lissom, and all that. There's not a lot in it, either—I forget it entirely sometimes. I say, there's your brother, Marjorie."

Marjorie looked round quickly. Hazeldene of the Greyfriars Remove was walking, or, rather, slouching, along the bank. He had his hands driven deep into his pockets, and had a moody look on his face.

"Shall we call him?" asked Marjorie. "He might like to join us in the picnic at Popper's Island."

"Looks cheerful company, doesn't he?" said Clara.

Marjorie coloured.

"If you'd rather not——" she said.

"Fathead!" answered Clara, who had picked up many boyish expressions from boy friends. "I'll give him a yell. Hazel! Here, Hazel!"

"I say, what about the tuck, though?" asked Bessie Bunter, in alarm. "We've hardly enough for four——"

"Shut up!" said Clara. "Hazel!"

Hazeldene glanced round, and raised his hat to the schoolgirls.

Marjorie Hazeldene & Co. pulled closer to the shore.

Peter Hazeldene halted.

"Coming on a picnic, Hazel?" asked Clara. "Popper's Island—and cake and tarts and buns—all that Bessie hasn't scoffed on the way."

Hazel grinned.

"No; I'm going down to Friardale," he said. "If you're looking for Wharton's mob, they passed me half an hour ago, going up the river."

"Sure you won't come?" asked Marjorie.

"Can't!" said Hazel, and he resumed his way.

Marjorie's eyes followed him, with a slightly clouded look. Bessie Bunter blinked after him through her big spectacles, while Clara and Dolly Jobling exchanged a look, not expressive of admiration for Marjorie's brother.

"I wonder if he's going down to the Cross Keys?" remarked Bessie Bunter reflectively.

Marjorie started.

"It's that way, isn't it?" said Bessie. "Wasn't there a row last term, Marjorie, through your brother going there? I mean to say—— Yarooop! You're splashing me, Clara, you clumsy chump! Yoooooogh!"

Bessie Bunter dropped the subject of Hazel, and dabbed with the handkerchief.

The Cliff House girls pulled on, and Popper's Island, thick with dark greenery, rose from the river ahead. Nothing was seen of Harry Wharton & Co. on the bank—they had long since

passed Popper's Island on their way up the river. The boat pulled in to the landing place, and bumped into the willows. The sudden bump caused a sudden gurgle from behind the sunshade in the stern.

"Urrrrrgh!"

"Bessie—"

"Gurrrrgh!" gurgled Bessie, "Yurrrgh!"

She dropped the sunshade, and half a jam tart. The other half, it seemed, was going down the wrong way owing to that sudden bump.

"Ooooooh!" gurgled Bessie. "You did that on purpose! Woooooh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

chatter over the teacups. From the fourth member of the party came a sound of steady munching. Bessie was too busy for conversation. The family resemblance among the Bunters was really remarkable.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

No Bike!

BOB CHERRY breathed hard through his nose.

"I—I—I'll slaughter him!" he gasped.

Had Billy Bunter been within reach

to see the bike. He wanted to boot Bunter all round the bike-shed and back again.

A good many fellows had bikes at the school, and on that gorgeous half-holiday a good many had them out. Fellows who hadn't them had in many cases borrowed them from fellows who had. Harry Wharton & Co., not wanting their machines that afternoon, had lent them, like good-natured fellows—which was rather unfortunate for Bob, as it left none available for him. Indeed, there were only two machines left in the bicycle-house at all—the big jigger belonging to Wingate of the Sixth, the captain of Greyfriars, and a



As the boat neared the bank, Ponsonby clapped a pea-shooter to his mouth. Next moment there was a whizzing of peas. "Oh!" gasped Johnny Bull, getting one in the eye. "Ha, ha, ha!" roared the Highcliffians.

"I'm chook-chook-chook-choking! Wurrgh!"

"I'll pat you on the back, old dear!" said Clara; and she did, with vigour.

"Urrgh! Stoppit!" shrieked Bessie. "Stop smacking me, you kik-kik-cat! Ooh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Marjorie jumped lightly ashore, and tied the painter. Clara and Dolly followed her, with the lunch-basket and the camp outfit. Bessie sat in the boat and gurgled till all was clear, and then followed on.

Small as Popper's Island was, it was thickly wooded. A path ran through tangled bushes and thick trees, to the glade in the centre of the island, shaded by a mighty oak. Under the wide-spreading branches of that oak, Clara set up a spirit stove from the camp outfit. Dolly Jobling filled a tin kettle. Marjorie unpacked the picnic-basket. Bessie Bunter sat on a log and watched them.

Bessie did not stir till all was ready. Then she became the busiest of the party.

Three girlish voices mingled in cheery

at that moment he would have been in dire danger of slaughtering.

But Billy Bunter was far away—on Bob's bike.

Detention, though seemingly endless, had come to an end at last. And the moment Bob Cherry was free he grabbed a straw hat, jammed it on his unruly mop of hair, and shot away to the bike shed.

He was more than an hour behind his friends; but, going all out on the bike, he had no doubt of overtaking them before they left the river. It was true, as Bunter had remarked, that cyclists were not supposed to ride on the tow-path. But it was equally true that cyclists sometimes relaxed that by-law in their own favour. After the stuffy Form-room, it was a sheer delight to Bob to look forward to a tearing spin on his bike in the sun and the wind.

But the local by-laws, as it happened, were safe from Bob that day, for his bike was missing from its stand.

Somebody, evidently, had borrowed it. He did not need to ask who. And, in his boiling wrath, he would have been almost gladder to see Billy Bunter than

hefty machine that was the property of Coker of the Fifth.

Borrowing a Sixth Form man's machine was hardly to be thought of. But Coker of the Fifth did not seem to want his jigger, as it was still there. It was a big machine, but Bob was a rather large size in juniors, and he could have ridden it very well. Bob, however, was a little more ceremonious in such matters than William George Bunter; he could not take a bike without permission from the owner. He remembered that he had seen Coker in the quad as he cut away from the House.

He cut back to see Coker.

Horace Coker was talking to Potter and Greene. He looked in rather a good temper. Coker of the Fifth was, in fact, pleased with himself these days.

He had recently performed a remarkable fistical exploit—nothing less than knocking out the captain of the school with the gloves on. This bucked Coker. Being happily unaware that Wingate, for certain reasons, had let him do it, it made Coker feel happy and glorious.

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It was rather a constant topic with Coker now; he never tired of it, though his pals did.

"You saw it," Coker was saying, as Bob Cherry hurried up. "Five rounds, and every one of them a bit tough—what? I—"

"I say, Coker, will you lend me your bike?" said Bob breathlessly.

Horace Coker looked round at the Removite.

Coker was a good-natured fellow. In his study in the Fifth, everything that was his was Potter's and Greene's also.

Had a Fifth Form man asked him, Coker would have nodded a careless assent at once. But such a request from a Lower Fourth junior was a very different matter. Coker looked at Bob as if he could have bitten him.

"Did you say will I lend you my bike, you cheeky little sweep?" asked Coker.

"Yes. A fathead's taken mine, and I'm in a hurry!"

"If a fag asks to be kicked," said Coker, "I'm not the fellow to say 'No'!"

"Oh, you silly ass!" hooted Bob. In his haste, he had forgotten for a moment how exceedingly "Fifth-Formy" Coker was. "I didn't ask you for Fifth Form swank, you dunny, but for a bike!"

Coker made a grab at him.

A junior who asked a Fifth Form senior to lend him a bike was, in Coker's opinion, a junior to be made an example of.

Bob dodged.

"Hands off, you potty rhinoceros!" he roared.

He turned and ran—not on account of Coker, but because, in his bikeless state, he had no time to lose.

Coker, of course, misunderstood.

Coker of the Fifth had a rare gift for misunderstanding. In the belief that Bob was fleeing from his wrath, he charged after him.

Potter and Greene exchanged a wink, and walked away in the other direction. The incident was happily timed, so far as they were concerned. They had had, though Coker was unaware of it, a sufficiency of old Horace's conversation. They proceeded, without delay, to lose themselves.

"Stop!" roared Coker, charging breathlessly after the Removite.

Bob scudded on. He heard heavy, tramping feet behind him. At the gate Coker put on a spurt and drew near. He let out his foot.

A second more, and a hefty kick would have landed. In that second Bob Cherry dodged, and Coker's boot, meeting with no resistance, swept on. Left with only one leg to stand on, Coker stumbled, and sat down quite suddenly.

"Oh!" gasped Coker.

He felt considerably jarred. He sat and spluttered.

"Oooooooooogh!"

Bob was in a hurry, but he delayed a moment to bang Coker's hat hard, crushing it down over his ears.

Coker roared.

Bang!

Bob gave it another hefty thump to drive it home. Then he sprinted. He was gone by the time Horace Coker clambered to his feet and extracted his head from his damaged hat.

"I—I—I'll—" gasped Coker.

He rushed out into the road. An active figure was disappearing into the dusty distance. It vanished into the wood as Coker glared.

Coker, with deep feelings, turned back—to tell Potter and Greene of this latest sample of Remove cheek, and

ask them what they thought Greyfriars was coming to. His feelings were deeper when he failed to find Potter and Greene.

Meanwhile, Bob Cherry was covering the ground. At howsoever leisurely a rate his friends strolled up the river, he was more than an hour after them, and on foot he had to go all out if he was to see them at all. In the circumstances, he risked taking a short cut through Popper Court Woods, hoping that he would not fall in with Sir Hilton Popper or any of his keepers.

Fortunately, he did not, and he came out of the woods on the towpath by the Sark nearly opposite the island in the river.

He noticed, in passing, a boat tied up at the island; but the picnickers there were quite hidden from sight by the thick trees and bushes, and he had no idea that the Cliff House girls were on the island.

Leaving Popper's Island behind him, he went on up the river at a steady trot. Courtfield Bridge was in sight when a boat appeared, coming lazily down with the current. Two fellows in straw hats had the oars; a third, hatless, sprawled in the stern, scowling.

A voice hailed him from the boat, and Bob, not sorry to take a breather for a minute before he resumed his trot, came to a halt, while the Highcliffe fellows pulled in to the bank.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Borrowing a Hat!

"THAT'S the other cad!" muttered Ponsonby.

Pon had noticed the running figure on the bank before Bob Cherry spotted the boat.

Gadsby and Monson glanced round at the bank.

"That's Cherry!" assented Gadsby. "After the other rotters, I suppose! I say, no more larks with that pea-shooter, Pon! Those cads are too jolly quick at hitting back!"

"Pull in!" said Pon.

"Look here, we don't want a row with that hefty brute!" muttered Monson uneasily.

"Do as I tell you!" snapped Ponsonby.

He stood up and called to Bob Cherry. It was more than an hour since Pon's encounter with the Co., but his temper did not seem to have improved since.

The Highcliffe knuts had tied up under a tree for a time to enjoy a packet of cigarettes—more or less—and possibly the cigarettes had not made Pon feel any better. He was scowling as blackly as ever when the boat resumed its way down the river, and his eyes gleamed with malice at the sight of Bob Cherry.

Of all the Famous Five, Pon honoured Bob with his deepest dislike, though towards all the members of the famous Co. his feelings were bitter enough.

Bob, like his friends before him, was willing to be civil to Highcliffe men on his way to Highcliffe to tea with fellows there. As Pon called him, he stopped and waited for the boat to pull in.

It bumped into the rushes by the towpath. In dealing with the Co., the Highcliffians had kept at a safe distance. But three to one, they ventured to come to close quarters, though Gadsby and Monson looked far from enthusiastic.

"Lookin' for your pals?" asked Ponsonby, standing up in the boat, and holding on to the bank with a boathook.

"I'm going after them," answered Bob. "Seen them pass?"

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"Yes; more than an hour ago, the upper side of the bridge. They pinched my hat!"

"Pinched your hat?" repeated Bob. "Don't be an ass! Have you lost your hat?"

"Well, they knocked it into the river," said Ponsonby. "You know what rotten hooligans they are, I suppose, being a pal of theirs?"

"I've no doubt you asked for it!" said Bob cheerfully. "And you're asking for some more now, Ponsonby, if I had time to hand it over!"

"Yes; I'm asking for your hat!"

"Eh?"

"Bit sunny for a man to go hatless," explained Pon. "Of course, a chap hardly likes to be seen in a Greyfriars hat! Might be taken for a Greyfriars cad—what? But it's a case of any port in a storm—see? I hope it's clean!"

Bob Cherry stared at him, his blue eyes glinting.

Gadsby and Monson stared, too. Had Pon asked civilly Bob would hardly have thought of handing over his hat. But Pon was not asking civilly—he was making his manner as offensive as he possibly could.

"If that's all you've got to say, Ponsonby, I'll trot on!" said Bob, restraining his anger. And he turned away from the river's margin.

As he did so Ponsonby suddenly reached out with the boathook. The straw hat was neatly jerked off Bob's head, and it fluttered into the boat.

"Oh crumbs!" gasped Gadsby and Monson together. They understood now as the hat dropped at their feet. "Ha, ha, ha!"

Bob Cherry jumped as the hat left his head and spun round towards the boat. It was too close in for Gadsby and Monson to pull, but Ponsonby was pushing off with the boathook, grinning as he did so.

"Give me my hat!" roared Bob.

Pon pushed.

Bob, with flaming eyes, plunged down the bank, and grabbed at the end of the boathook, too late! Ponsonby jerked it hurriedly back out of reach—so hurriedly that he stumbled, and the boat rocked and Pon sat down in it.

The bump on the floorboards as he sat caused the boat to rock more violently, and a wash of water came over the gunwale.

"Look out!" gasped Gadsby.

"Mind what you're at!" yelled Monson. "We're going over!"

"Uggggh!" gasped Ponsonby, sitting in washing water which soaked through his elegant white flannel bags. "Oooch!"

Bob, on the edge of the bank, calculated the distance for a jump. But the shove of the boathook had sent the boat rocking out on the current, and there was no chance.

"You Highcliffe cad!" roared Bob. "Will you give me my hat?"

None of the three heeded him. The boat was rocking wildly, and another wash of water came over.

Ponsonby scrambled up, with a face of fury, his trousers dripping. He stumbled again as the boat rocked, and sat down heavily in the stern seat.

"Do you want to capsize us, you fat-head?" howled Monson.

"Oh, shut up!" snarled Ponsonby.

Gadsby and Monson got the oars out. The boat floated on a level keel again, a safe distance from the shore.

Bob Cherry stood there, shaking an infuriated fist.

"Ponsonby, you funky cad!" he roared. "Come back and I'll jolly well mop up the three of you! Come back with my hat, you rotter!"

"You'll find mine farther up the

river if you look for it!" jeered Pon. "You can dive for it if you like."

"Oh crumbs! If a fellow could get at you!" panted Bob. "Are you going to pinch my hat, you Highcliffe worm?"

"Exchange no robbery!" grinned Gadsby.

Pon squeezed water out of his flannel trousers. Gadsby and Monson pulled. The boat faded away from the angry Greyfriars fellow on the bank.

Bob Cherry breathed hard and deep as he turned away.

There was no getting the hat back, that was certain, and he had no time to go back to Greyfriars for another if he were to rejoin his chums at all that afternoon. Hatless, he trotted on up the bank.

He trotted under Courtfield Bridge, and kept steadily on. Four juniors, sitting on the bank a little distance short of Highcliffe, rose to their feet at sight of him and waved.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" gasped Bob breathlessly, as he came up. "Have you been waiting for me?"

"Yes, ass!" said Harry Wharton. "Why the dickens didn't you come on your bike, as we arranged?"

"That fat, frabjous, footling, frowsy freak Bunter bagged it while I was in detention!" growled Bob. "I've come all the way at a trot. I haven't lost a minute."

"Not even to put on a hat?" asked Johnny Bull.

"That loafing, lolling, lackadaisical blighter Ponsonby got my hat!" snorted Bob. "Hooked it off with a boathook—he said you fellows had bagged his, so he—"

Harry Wharton laughed.

"Never mind—let's get on! We shall be late at this rate. Courtenay's expecting us before this."

Bob grunted and tramped on with his friends. But his good humour was restored by the time they reached Highcliffe School, where they found Frank Courtenay and Rupert de Courcy waiting at the gates for them. And over a study tea, in the cheery company of Courtenay and the Caterpillar, they forgot Ponsonby and all his works—little dreaming how the cad of Highcliffe was occupied and what was to come of it.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Quite Like Pon!

PONSONBY'S eyes gleamed as he glanced towards Popper's Island from the Highcliffe boat. He noted the boat tied up under the willows, an indication that somebody was on the island, though nobody was to be seen or heard.

Pon was in an irritated and evil temper, and in a mood for any further mischief that came his way. He had not had the best of the exchanges with the Famous Five. True, he had bagged Bob Cherry's straw hat in place of his own, and it was on his head now as he sat steering.

In the blaze of the summer sun he was glad to have it—and it was a score over the Greyfriars fellows. But his handsome flannel bags were damp and uncomfortable, and he would have turned back from that trip down the river but for one reason. The Highcliffe knuts were going down to the Three Fishers, where they were going to improve the shining hour by playing billiards, and Pon did not want to miss that.

"Is that a Greyfriars boat, you men?" murmured Ponsonby, with a gesture towards the willows on the island shore.

Gadsby shook his head.

"I don't think so! Looks like one of

the tubs you hire at Friardale. Leave it alone, Pon!"

"Might be Greyfriars cads there, all the same."

"Not Wharton's gang, anyhow," said Monson. "Give 'em a miss!"

"Hold on!" said Pon.

Less keen on trouble than their leader, Gadsby and Monson held on rather reluctantly. They glided beside the tied-up boat.

It was easy for Ponsonby to ascertain that it was not a Greyfriars boat, but that was no proof that it was not a Greyfriars party on the island. If it were, Pon was going to leave that party stranded.

He listened. From the glade in the centre of the little island voices came to his ears, though he could see no one through the thick greenery.

He started a little and listened more intently.

"I say, you girls! Any more lemonade?"

"Oh, my hat! Have you scoffed the lot, Bessie?"

"No, I haven't, Clara! I've had hardly any! I think you might have brought some more! You know I like lemonade! Any more tarts?"

"Scoffed all the tarts, too?"

"Cat!"

"There's some more cake, Bessie!" came Marjorie Hazeldene's voice.

"Old Popper will kick up a row if you burst on his island, Bessie!" came Dolly Jobling's voice.

"I've eaten hardly anything. I'll have the cake if you girls don't want it!"

"Will it make any difference if we do?" asked Clara sarcastically.

"Cat!"

"Oh, guzzle and dry up!"

Ponsonby grinned as he listened. It was a party of Cliff House girls evidently, picnicking on Popper's Island—the schoolgirl friends of Harry Wharton & Co.

Pon was a fairly thorough cad, but he had no idea of playing a dastardly and ill-natured trick on a party of school-girls. He caught hold of the rudder lines.

But second thoughts—not always the best—supervened.

He paused.

Gadsby and Monson looked at him impatiently. They had heard the voices and saw no reason for lingering.

To their surprise, Pon drew a pen-knife from his pocket and cut the painter of the Cliff House boat.

"Pon—" began Gadsby, startled.

Ponsonby made him a fierce sign to be silent.

"Shut up, you fool!" he whispered. "They'll hear!"

"You're not goin' to strand them—a party of girls!" Gadsby lowered his voice to a whisper—an angry whisper.

"Don't be a cad, Pon!"

"Dash it all, Pon, old man!" muttered Monson. "You can't do it! Don't be such a rotter!"

"Will you shut up?" hissed Pon.

Having released the painter, he tied it on to the stern of the Highcliffe boat.

Gadsby and Monson watched him with growing disapprobation. They had a limit, though a wide one, if Pon had none.

But they said nothing more, watching in angry silence.

Ponsonby removed Bob Cherry's hat from his head. To the amazement of his friends, he dropped it into the mud among the willows.

"Get on!" he whispered.

"But—"

"Quiet, you fool, and get on!" hissed THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,528.

Ponsonby. "If they hear us, the game's up!"

"What game?" muttered Gadsby.

"Wait! I'll tell you; but don't let them hear you gabbling, you fool! Get on, I tell you!"

The Highcliffe boat went down the current. Popper's Island dropped astern. There was a bitter and malicious grin on Ponsonby's face.

At a little distance from the island, Gadsby and Monson rested on their oars.

"Now tell us what you're at!" said Gadsby gruffly. "If you're thinking of stranding those girls, you can cut it out—I can jolly well tell you that I'm not standing for such a rotten trick!"

"We can take them off later!" said Ponsonby coolly. "They may have a bit of a fright, when they find their boat gone; that can't be helped. Can't you see the game, you dunderhead?"

"Well, what's the sense—" began Monson.

"When they want to get off that island, they'll find their boat gone," said Ponsonby. "But that's not all they'll find. They'll find Bob Cherry's hat in the willows. His name's in it."

"Well?" grunted Gadsby.

"Think they'll guess that a Highcliffe man had a Greyfriars man's hat with him?" sneered Ponsonby.

"How could they? But what—"

"They'll think that the fellow who bagged their boat lost his hat there," said Ponsonby coolly. "What else could they think?"

Gadsby and Monson stared at him.

"Might easily have fallen off while he was bagging the boat," said Pon, "and he'd be in a hurry, afraid of getting spotted, and mightn't stop for it. What?"

"I suppose they couldn't think anything else!" said Gadsby. "Do you want to make them think that their Greyfriars pal has played a rotten trick on them?"

Ponsonby nodded.

"Exactly!" he answered.

"Is that what you call a jape?" asked Gadsby contemptuously.

"I'm puttin' a spoke in their wheel!" said Ponsonby. "Those Greyfriars cads beat us all along the line. It's no good makin' out that we can beat them with our fists, we can't! But there's more ways than one of killin' a cat! I've seen that fool Cherry with Marjorie Hazeldene. He would go through fire and water at a nod from her. If she cut him, it would make him feel worse than a dozen lickings rolled into one!"

"Well?"

"Well," grinned Pon, "if that lumbering fool had a choice, he'd rather I blacked both his eyes than that Marjorie Hazeldene gave him the marble eye. He's not going to have a choice, see?"

Monson grunted. Gadsby flushed.

"So that's the game, is it?" muttered Gadsby.

"That's it!" said Pon. "If that leads to trouble between Cliff House and Greyfriars, it's about the hardest knock we could give those cads!"

Gadsby breathed hard.

"I dare say!" he said. "It's the sort of thing you would think of, Pon. I'm not standing for it!"

"Nor I!" said Monson slowly. "It's too thick, Pon! I don't care so far as the Greyfriars cads are concerned, but I'm not goin' to have a hand in raggin' girls! There's a limit!"

"You can please yourselves—but you won't barge in!" said Ponsonby, with a glitter in his eyes. "Steer clear, if you like. The girls won't come to any harm."

—they'll get a fright, but we shall take them off later, in time to get back to their school. As soon as they've got it into their heads that it was Bob Cherry who stranded them, that's all I want."

"I'm havin' no hand in it!"

"Same here!"

"Nobody wants you to!" sneered Pon. "You'll stand clear and hold your tongues, though!"

"Look here, Pon, better chuck it if—"

"Don't be a fool, Gaddy!"

"Well," said Gadsby, with a deep breath, "if I'm a fool, I'd rather be a fool than a rotten blackguard raggin' schoolgirls. If you're stickin' to this game, Cecil Ponsonby, I'm goin' straight back to Highcliffe, here and now, and Monson's comin' with me, and you can have your rotten trickery all to yourself."

Ponsonby shrugged his shoulders.

"Please yourselves!" he sneered.

"I'll take the boat as far as the Three Fishers, and come back in it. They won't see me from the island, if I go round the other side. Suits me all right, you chicken-hearted fool!"

"Look here," said Monson, "you'd better—"

"Oh, shut up!"

Ponsonby pulled the towed boat alongside, and stepped into it.

Gadsby and Monson, in angry silence, turned their craft, and pulled away up the river again. They were too much under Pon's influence to intervene and put a stop to his rascally trickery; but they were fed up with it, and him. They pulled away in silence with angry faces.

The dandy of Highcliffe, sitting in the Cliff House boat, steered to the bank and held on to a branch watching them as they went. For the disapproval of Gadsby and Monson he cared nothing; but he was going to make sure that they passed the island without stopping there. Not till the Highcliffe boat had passed Popper's Island again, and disappeared up the winding river, did Pon resume his way down the Sark to the Three Fishers.

At that delectable resort the dandy of Highcliffe tied up and landed.

In the billiards-room there he found Mr. Bill Lodgey, and had the pleasure—or otherwise—of losing a couple of pound-notes to that beery gentleman. Billiards, followed by banker, quite drove the thought of the stranded schoolgirls from his mind, and he did not remember them till he left the Three Fishers, and untied to pull home to Highcliffe.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Stranded!

"ANY more cake?"

"No!"

"Any more chocs?"

"No!"

"Any more anything?"

"No!"

"Then," said Miss Elizabeth Bunter, "we may as well be getting back."

Marjorie Hazeldene smiled. Sitting on a log, under the big oak, she was reading a story aloud from a weekly paper, descriptive of the rather remarkable adventures of the celebrated Will Hay as a schoolmaster. Clara and Dolly were taking their ease in the grass while she read in her clear, pleasant voice. Bessie Bunter, having scoffed everything scoffable, was rather anxious to be back at Cliff House in time for tea!

"Pack the things, Bessie!" said Clara.

"I don't think," said Bessie, with

dignity, "that everything ought to be left to me!"

"And carry them down to the boat!" said Dolly Jobling.

"I despise lazy girls!" said Bessie.

"Well, wait till we get to the end of this, Bessie," said Marjorie Hazeldene. "Near the end now."

"We don't want to be late for tea, Marjorie."

"Oh crumbs!" said Clara. "Are you hungry?"

"Not now—but I shall be!" explained Bessie. "It's a long way down to Friar-dale, and then we have to walk to Cliff House. If we're late for tea, the good things will be gone. They're a greedy lot in the Fourth."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, I'm waiting for you!"

"Pack the things while you wait."

Grunt from Bessie!

She waited impatiently; but did not pack the things while she waited. Marjorie closed the paper at last, and three girls packed the camping things, while Bessie watched them through her big spectacles. Then they walked down the shady path to the landing-place to embark.

"Oh, my hat!" exclaimed Clara, in alarm. "Where's the boat?"

"The boat!" exclaimed Marjorie.

"It's gone!"

"Gone! Oh!"

Scream from Bessie.

"Oh dear! What shall we do? We can't get off this island now! We shall be here all night! We shall die of cold and hunger! Oh!"

"You won't die of hunger, with nine-tenths of that spread inside you!" snapped Clara. "Be quiet! Where the dickens is that boat, Marjorie?"

"Goodness knows!"

"You ought to have tied it safely!" yapped Bessie Bunter.

"I did tie it safely!" said Marjorie quietly.

"You couldn't have! It's gone!" squeaked Bessie. "Oh dear! What shall we do? I say, you girls, what shall we do?"

"I know what I'm going to do, if you don't dry up," said Clara Trevlyn ferociously. "I'm going to smack you!"

"Cat!"

"The boat hasn't drifted away," said Marjorie, in the same quiet tone. "It was tied quite safely. Besides, look here!"

She pointed to the willow branch, to which the boat's painter had been tied. The knot of the cord was still on the willow. It had been severed by a clean cut, evidently with a knife.

Miss Clara compressed her lips.

"It's been cut!" she said.

"Yes. Somebody—"

"Some awful cad!" said Dolly Jobling. "Somebody's stolen the boat!"

Squeak from Bessie.

"If that boat's stolen, it will have to be paid for. Goodness knows how much it will be! It was all your fault for coming here. I didn't want to come so far from Cliff House; you know that—"

"Dry up, Fatima!" said Clara. "I don't suppose the boat's been stolen. More like a silly practical joke. Some hooligan—"

Marjorie nodded. The boat was not likely to have been stolen from the island. A tramp might have "pinched" a boat tied up to the bank, but to get at the island required a craft of some sort. It was much more likely that it was a stupid, unfeeling practical joke on the part of somebody who had passed Popper's Island, and seen the boat tied up there.

"But that doesn't help us much,"



"Keep that basket shut, Bessie!" called out Clara Trevlyn, as she pulled at the oars. "I'm only counting the tarts!" said Bessie Bunter. "Think I was eating one behind this sunshade?" "I believe you'd eat the sunshade, if there wasn't anything else to eat!" replied Miss Trevlyn.

went on Clara. "We've got to get off somehow. We can't be late—"

"For tea!" wailed Bessie.

"For call-over," said Clara. "By gum, I'd like to see the brute that set it adrift! Wouldn't I smack him!"

Standing on the landing-place, the Cliff House girls looked across to the towpath on the bank, and up and down the river.

There was no sign of the missing boat, or of any other craft.

The spot was, in fact, rather a solitary one. Boats might come along, but, on the other hand, they might not. Stranded on the island, the Cliff House girls were in an utterly hopeless position unless some craft turned up to take them off.

Missing call-over at Cliff House was a rather serious matter; but more serious was the possibility of being stranded on the island for the night. If they were still there at dusk, there was very little chance of being taken off, unless the unknown practical joker relented and brought their boat back.

Marjorie bit her lip.

"Who could have done this?" she muttered. "What a mean, miserable trick!"

"Oh dear!" wailed Bessie. "My brother Billy was stranded on this island once. He had to stay all night! Oh dear!"

"They can't mean to leave us here," said Marjorie quietly. "Nobody could be so cruel and cowardly. Whoever they are, they will come back with the boat."

"But who?" breathed Clara. "Not anybody from Greyfriars."

"Oh, no!" said Marjorie quickly. "That's impossible. Stay here; we may see somebody on the bank. Hazel said that Harry Wharton and his friends had gone up the river, you remember. If they come back the same way—"

"If!" said Dolly Jobling.

"We shall be here all night!" wailed Bessie. "We shall be frozen with cold, and famished with hunger, and murdered by tramps—"

"Give us a rest!" snapped Clara.

"Cat!"

"Oh, wouldn't I like to scratch the brute that did this!" said Clara. "Wouldn't I like— Hallo! He's left his hat, whoever he was!"

Looking about her, Clara spotted the straw hat lying in the mud among the willows.

The Cliff House girls stared at it, recognising the Greyfriars colours on the band at once.

"That's a Greyfriars tile!" said Dolly Jobling.

"Then it was a Greyfriars boy," said Clara. "I shouldn't have thought it for a moment. Even a fellow like Skinner—no. But that's a Greyfriars straw. It must have fallen off while he was cutting the painter."

"It's odd that he should leave it there," said Marjorie.

"Might have heard us, and got off in a hurry," said Clara. "I know I'd have scratched him if I'd caught him at it. Anyhow, that's his hat."

"Yes, it must be," said Marjorie slowly. "It shows that a Greyfriars boy has been here, and it must have been he who—"

"I'll get it. They have their names written in their hats at Greyfriars," said Clara vengeancefully. "I'll pass his name on to Bob, and ask him to punch the brute. He will be glad to."

Clara fished among the wet, muddy willow roots for the hat. She retrieved at last, and the schoolgirls looked into it for the name.

When they saw it, it had rather the effect of a thunderclap on them.

R. Cherry!

"Bob!" said Clara faintly.

"Bub-bub-Bob!" gasped Dolly Jobling.

"Oh, the brute!" wailed Bessie Bunter. "Fancy Bob Cherry playing a beastly trick on us like that!"

Marjorie Hazeldene stared into the hat as if in a dream. Her face became quite pale.

"It's impossible!" she said, at last.

"Bob would never—"

"It's his hat!"

"I—I know! But—"

Clara's eyes flashed.

"Do you think somebody else was wearing his hat?" she exclaimed.

"N-no! But—"

Marjorie did not know what to say.

A Greyfriars hat was proof that a Greyfriars fellow had been there; or, at least, looked like proof. It was scarcely possible to believe that two fellows had been there while they were picnicking, one of whom had lost his hat, and the other of whom had set the boat adrift. That was altogether too unlikely.

Besides, if Bob had been there, why had he not made his presence known? He might not have seen them, but if he had been so near as to drop his hat in the willows, he must have heard their voices. He must have known they were there. And why had he gone so hurriedly as to leave the hat? Why, unless he had played that rotten trick, and was alarmed at the danger of being spotted?

It was certain—yet impossible!

Bob was a rather exuberant fellow, with a spot of taste for practical joking, but his jokes, though sometimes thoughtless, were always good-natured. He would not have hurt a fly. It was impossible.

"If it was Bob," said Marjorie, "it's not like him, and, anyway, he won't

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leave us here long. He—he may have thought it a lark, but he wouldn't keep it up very long."

"The brute!" wailed Bessie.

"Be quiet, Bessie!"

"Shan't I?" howled Bessie. "I'll ask my brother, Billy, to thrash him, so there!"

"Oh, don't let him be made into a hospital case!" said Clara sarcastically.

"I can't believe it was Bob!" said Marjorie.

"Don't be a fathead!" said Clara. "Think he lent a fellow his hat to leave here to make it look as if he did it, when he didn't?"

Marjorie was silent.

"Well, if it was Bob, we've only got to wait," said Dolly Jobling. "Even if he is a fool, he isn't a brute. He will come back with the boat."

Whatever the truth was, there was nothing to do but wait.

The four Cliff House girls waited, watching the bank and the river. But as the afternoon grew later there was less and less likelihood of a boat coming along. No one appeared on the towpath. Tea-time at Cliff House was past; but even Bessie Bunter ceased to think of tea-time in the dreadful possibility of not getting off the island at all.

Miss Clara found a momentary satisfaction in spinning the straw hat out into the water, and watching it soak and sink. She would have been glad to smack the head that had worn it, little guessing whose head it was.

Marjorie compressed her lips in a harder and harder line. If it was, indeed, Bob Cherry who had played that insensate trick, he could not mean to leave them there. He could not! But, in that case, why did he not come? A long, long hour passed, and there was no sign of him.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

Coker to the Rescue!

"LOOK here, Coker—"

"Don't jaw, Potter!"

"We shall be late for tea at Courtfield."

"Whose fault is that?" asked Coker. "I was looking for you fellows more than an hour before I found you. If you go and lose yourselves, you can't blame me, I suppose!"

"We didn't know—" began Greene, and paused.

"You didn't know what?"

"Oh, nothing," said Greene hastily.

Potter and Greene could hardly explain to old Horace, that if they had known that he had planned a spread at the bunshop in Courtfield, they would not have got "lost" that afternoon.

When Coker stood a spread, his pals stood Coker—manfully. At other times, they often felt that they required a rest from him.

It was like Coker, of course, to tell his pals that they were going for a pull up to Courtfield Bridge, without mentioning that the pull was to be followed by tea at the Courtfield bunshop.

Coker did not even know that that was a special attraction. His own attractiveness ought to have been enough.

Far from keen on watching Coker catch crabs all the way from the Greyfriars raft to Courtfield Bridge, Potter and Greene had eluded the great Horace for a considerable time. When he found them at length, he walked them down to the school boathouse—but would probably not have got them as far as a boat had he not mentioned what was to follow the pull.

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So here they were—three men in a boat—Coker pulling. Coker was no slacker, to sit idle while other men pulled. His friends wished that he had been.

For progress was slow—fearfully slow. Coker's style of rowing, masterly in his own eyes, looked, to a spectator, like digging up the river. There was a lot of splashing, but not a lot of headway.

By the time Popper's Island came in sight, Potter and Greene were wondering dismally whether they would ever reach Courtfield at all. At the best, they seemed likely to reach the bunshop by about the time Mr. Prout would be calling their names in Hall.

But it was futile to argue with Coker. Gladly they would have relieved him of the oars. Coker declined to be relieved.

"You see," Coker condescended to explain, in the intervals of catching crabs, "you fellows can't row!"

"And you can?" asked Potter, with savage sarcasm.

"Well, watch me!" said Coker calmly. "Keeping an eye on me, you can pick up tips how to— Blow! Catch that oar! Quick!"

Coker had dug deep that time, and the way of the boat pulled the oar from his grasp. Leaving one oar to float; Coker missed the Sark with the other, and whisked the blade of it into the boat, rather unfortunately catching Potter on the side of the head.

"Woowoo!" roared Potter.

"If you lose that oar—" hooted Coker. "Didn't you hear me say catch it? Deaf, or silly?"

The oar floated astern. With one oar, Coker toiled the boat round. Greene, luckily, was able to reach the floating oar with a boathook, and jerked it in. He grabbed it.

Coker grabbed at the same moment. He bumped into Greene, who had a narrow escape of being pitched over the gunwale. As it was, his arm went in up to the shoulder. He drew it out, dripping, holding the oar.

"Clumsy!" said Coker witheringly.

"What?" hissed Greene.

"What did you dip your arm in for?" asked Coker. "Like getting wet?"

Greene did not reply to that. No adequate reply could be made vocally. Only by braining Coker with the oar could Greene have expressed his feelings.

"Give me that oar," said Coker. "Looks like getting in to tea, at this rate! First you go and wander about and I can't find you; then you have to waste time like this! I don't want to be unpleasant, but I must say that a pair of bigger fools than you chaps would want a lot of finding."

Coker pulled on, the boat gliding between Popper's Island and the Popper Court bank.

There was a sudden call from the island.

"Boat ahoy!" shouted Miss Clara.

"I say—" squealed Bessie Bunter.

"Please take us off!" called out Marjorie Hazeldene.

The three men of the Fifth stared round. Potter and Greene raised their hats to the Cliff House girls. Coker, with an oar in either hand, could not do so, but he ducked his head and grinned politely.

"Hallo!" said Coker. "Want to be taken off?"

"Yes, please!" said Marjorie.

Coker pushed in to the island landing-place.

"How the dickens did you get there without a boat?" he asked, quite mystified.

Marjorie smiled.

"We didn't! Somebody has taken our

boat away—we don't know who—and left us stranded!"

"Oh, my hat! What a rotten trick!" exclaimed Coker indignantly. "If you know who it was, tell me, and I'll look for him and smash him into little pieces!"

"We jolly well know who it was!" squeaked Bessie. "It was Bob Cherry. You know it was, Marjorie, as well as I do!"

"The young rotter!" exclaimed Coker. "Young Cherry of the Remove! I know he came up the river this afternoon—he had the cheek to bang my hat in. By gum, I'll wallop him for this!"

"Beastly little tick!" said Potter. "What a putrid trick to play!"

"We'll scrag him, Miss Hazeldene!" said Greene.

"Please don't!" exclaimed Marjorie hastily. "We don't know who it was, really—at least, we can't be sure."

"Rubbish!" snapped Miss Clara. "It was Bob Cherry, Coker!"

"I—I think, if it was Bob, he would have come back—"

"Rot!" said Clara. "We've been waiting more than an hour since we missed our boat. We're afraid of being late in at Cliff House. If you'll take us across to the towpath—"

"Oh dear!" wailed Bessie Bunter. "I can't walk those miles back to Cliff House! Oh dear!"

"We're lucky to get off the island!" said Clara.

"My dear kids," said Coker—Coker was a chivalrous fellow where girls were concerned—"you're not going to walk. We'll take you down to Friardale in our boat, if you like. It's a short walk from there."

"But you were going up the river," said Marjorie.

"We'll go down, instead!" said the chivalrous Horace.

Potter and Greene exchanged a glance. They saw that spread at Courtfield bunshop fading away like a mirage in the desert. They were more than ready for that spread, and not quite so keen as old Horace, perhaps, on rallying to the aid of beauty in distress to that extent.

However, they could not very well object, especially as Coker would have taken no heed of objections. So they grinned their politest grins, and helped the Cliff House girls into the boat.

Glad indeed were Marjorie & Co. to get off Popper's Island. Potter and Greene had one satisfaction, at least—Coker relinquished the oars to them and let them row, while he made himself agreeable to the fair ladies.

Coker's way of making himself agreeable was very Cokerish, so to speak. He pointed out how rottenly Potter and Greene were rowing, and then mentioned that he would have been playing cricket that afternoon if that ass, Wingate of the Sixth, had known a good cricketer when he saw one.

Next Coker entertained his company with an account of his late exploit in the gym, when he had knocked the Greyfriars captain out, with the gloves on. Thus the time passed pleasantly—at least, to Coker—while the boat glided swiftly down the river, past the Greyfriars boat house, and on to the village.

But Marjorie & Co. were so grateful and relieved at being taken off the island, that they could have stood any amount of Cokerishness. When they landed at Friardale, they thanked Coker very gratefully and graciously.

Coker's rugged face was thoughtful as the Fifth Form boat pulled back up the Sark to Greyfriars.

"This won't do, you men!" he said.

"Eh? What won't do?" asked

Potter wearily. Potter was very hungry.

"Greyfriars fags ragging schoolgirls," said Coker. "I'm going to make an example of that young cad Cherry! As soon as we get in, I'll jolly well give him the licking of his life!"

And Coker sat grimly reflecting on the punishment he was going to administer to Bob Cherry of the Remove, while Potter and Greene tugged wearily at the oars, wondering whether they were ever going to get anything to eat.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

A Boat for a Boater!

"HALLO, hallo, hallo!"

"That cad again!"

"That esteemed and disgusting Pon!"

The Famous Five were walking back from Highcliffe, along the river, when they sighted Cecil Ponsonby. They had passed Popper's Island—never dreaming of what had happened there that afternoon—and were nearly as far as the Three Fishers, when they spotted the dandy of Highcliffe.

It was, by that time, an hour since Coker had taken the stranded schoolgirls off, and there had been nothing about Popper's Island to draw their attention as they passed.

Pon, with his back to them as he pulled, did not see them coming down the towpath. But they saw Pon, and gave him inimical looks.

"He's got my hat!" said Bob. "At least, he had it—he's not wearing it now. If a fellow could get at him——"

"He won't come near enough for a jump!" said Harry Wharton. "You won't get anywhere near him, old bean."

"Pon will take care of that!" grunted Johnny Bull.

"The carefulness will be terrific, my esteemed Bob!"

Bob Cherry did not reply. He was watching the dandy of Highcliffe with a calculating eye.

Pon was in a different boat, and his pals, Gadsby and Monson, were no longer with him. The Greyfriars juniors noticed those circumstances, without specially heeding them. What Bob specially noticed was that Pon was only about twelve feet from the bank—and that, quite near at hand, a giant oak that grew by the towpath jutted a branch out high over the river to a distance of more than fifteen feet. Pon, when he had pulled on a little farther, would be passing under that extended branch.

"Cover, you fellows!" said Bob abruptly. "Don't let the cad spot you, if he looks round."

"But what——" asked Nugent.

"Get behind that oak!"

"But what the thump——"

"That cad's bagged my hat," said Bob. "He's chucked it away, I suppose—you can see he's not got it with him. I'm going to bag his boat in exchange, and give him a walk back to Highcliffe."

"But how——"

"Easy!" said Bob. "Keep in cover, and don't let him spot you, that's all!" He clambered up into the oak.

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Wharton.

The juniors grinned, catching on to Bob's idea at once, as the active junior crawled out along the massive branch over the towpath.

"By gum!" breathed Johnny Bull. "Pon's going to get a surprise!"

Keeping in cover behind the big oak,

they peered round the thick trunk, watching, with grinning faces.

Pon, hatless under the setting sun, pulled on. He did not look round, and he would have seen nothing of the Famous Five had he done so.

High over the towpath Bob crept along the thick branch, out over the water.

Thick and strong as it was, it drooped under his weight as he approached the extremity.

Had Pon been facing it, he must have noticed it; but with his back to it, he, of course, saw nothing.

The boat pulled on, the bows gliding under the long branch. Bob, holding to it with his hands, was ready to drop.

The drooping of the branch, as he hung, brought his feet down to within a yard of the water. If he missed the boat when he dropped, he was booked for a deep plunge—but he was not going to miss the boat!

Pon glided under him.

Bump!

The Highcliffe junior uttered a yell of surprise and alarm as something heavy dropped into the boat from above, and it rocked and shipped water.

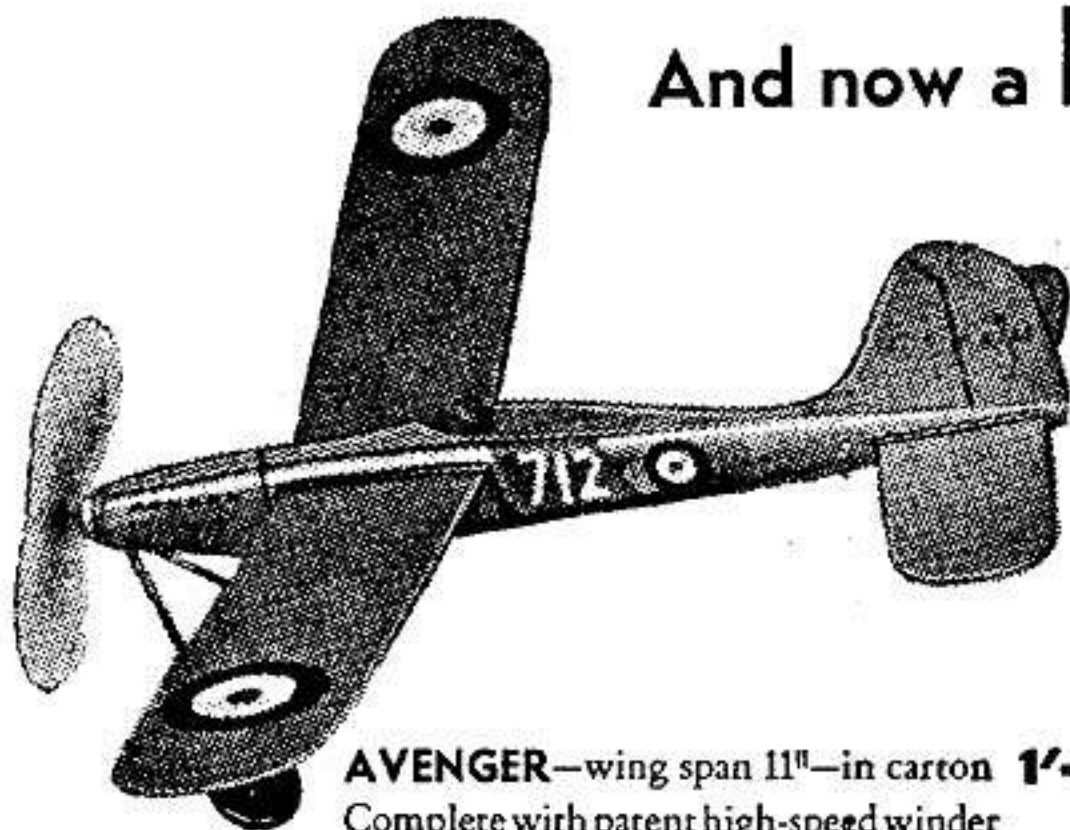
He started up, stumbling.

The next moment he saw that it was Bob Cherry, and he stared at him with almost starting eyes.

Bob, landing in the boat, rolled over. Ponsonby, with a face rather like a demon, drew in an oar, to lift it and strike. But he had no time for that. Bob Cherry was up again like an india-rubber ball.

A moment, and his grasp was on Ponsonby. Another, and the dandy of Highcliffe was down on his back on the floorboards, the oars clattering in the boat.

(Continued on next page.)



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He glared up at Bob in speechless fury.

"Now, where's my hat?" asked Bob breathlessly.

"You—you Greyfriars cad—you—you—" spluttered Ponsonby.

"What have you done with my hat, you worm?"

"What did your friends do with mine, you fool? You can look for it in the river!" snarled Ponsonby. Certainly he had no idea of telling Bob precisely what he had done with that hat.

"Right ho!" said Bob grimly. "You've chucked away my hat! I'm going to bag this boat. A boat for a boater—see?"

"Wha-at?" gasped Pon.

"You can walk back to Highcliffe! We'll be jolly glad to rest our legs for the rest of the way back to Greyfriars!" grinned Bob. "Like the idea?"

"You cheeky fool!" spluttered Ponsonby.

"You can stop me, if you like, you know!" grinned Bob. "If you like, we'll scrap for the boat, and the winner takes the prize—what?"

Ponsonby sat up, and Bob picked up the oars and pushed the boat in to the bank.

The Co. came out from behind the oak, grinning.

The dandy of Highcliffe gave them a savage scowl. He stumbled to his feet, breathing furv.

"Scrapping" for the boat was not an idea that appealed to Pon. Bob Cherry was altogether too hard a hitter for that. But the cad of Highcliffe was almost tempted to hurl himself at Bob and take the chance.

"Getting out?" asked Bob cheerfully. Ponsonby gave him a glare of hate.

"Do you think you can steal this boat?" he hissed.

"Do you think you can steal my hat?" asked Bob.

"You fool——"

"We'll tie the boat up at the Greyfriars raft, Ponsonby!" said Harry Wharton, laughing. "You can come and fetch it when you like."

"You silly fool, I've got to get back to Highcliffe!" yelled Ponsonby.

"What's the matter with walking?" asked Johnny Bull.

"You fool, it's miles from here——"

"Do you good!" suggested Johnny. "Getting out, Pon?" Bob asked again.

"No!" yelled Ponsonby.

"I'll help you, then!"

Ponsonby did not require much help. The first impulse of Bob Cherry's boot started him scrambling through the rushes in hot haste. He was on the towpath in quick time.

"All aboard for Greyfriars!" sang out Bob cheerily.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Famous Five packed into the boat.

Pon, from the towpath, glared at them, crimson with rage.

"I'll complain to your headmaster, if you pinch my boat," he yelled.

"Go it!" said Bob. "I'll complain to yours about pinching my hat!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Still time to scrap for the jolly old boat!" chuckled Bob. "Last time of asking, Pon! These men will stand round and see fair play!"

"The fair-playfulness will be terrific!"

Pon, glaring with rage, thought of it for a moment. But it was only for a moment. Then, gritting his teeth, he turned and tramped up the towpath.

Harry Wharton & Co., laughing, pulled away down the Sark in Pon's boat—the Cliff House boat, if they had only known it. They had done plenty

of walking that afternoon, and were glad to sit down for the remainder of the journey home. Pon was not feeling so cheery as he tramped the weary miles home to Highcliffe.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

Who Did It?

"I SAY, you fellows!"

"Oh, here you are!" said Bob Cherry grimly. "I'm going to boot you——"

"Oh, really, Cherry——"

Billy Bunter backed away warily.

"Your bike's all right, old chap!" he said. "If you fancy I borrowed it this afternoon, you're quite mistaken. Besides, I came to the Form-room to ask you, and jolly well got fifty lines for it. I never had it, you know—if you missed it, I fancy Smithy had it—I saw him sneaking round the bikeshed——"

"You saw what?" asked the Bounder's voice over Billy Bunter's fat shoulder.

"Oh! I didn't see you, Smithy!" gasped the fat Owl. "I—I—I meant to say, I saw Peter Todd sneaking round the bikeshed, Bob, old chap! If you find that you've got a puncture, you can put it down to Toddy!"

"You've punctured my tyre?" hooted Bob.

"Not me—Toddy, old chap! I never had it! And you jolly well know that I had to get out, as Bessie might have come over. You needn't make a fuss about a fellow borrowing your bike, if I don't make a fuss about you playing rotten, low-down tricks on my sister Bessie!" said Bunter severely.

"Wha-a-at?" ejaculated Bob Cherry.

Billy Bunter met the Famous Five as they came in. It was nearly time for call-over, and fellows were heading for Hall. But Bob had a minute or two to spare, to boot the borrower of bikes.

But as the fat Owl made that startling statement he gazed at him in wonder instead.

"Dirty trick!" said Bunter. "You wouldn't have done it, if a fellow could lick you, either. Still, Coker's going to, that's one comfort."

"Mad?" asked Bob blankly.

"Yah!" retorted Bunter.

"The madfulness seems to be terrific," remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"What bee has that potty porpoise got in his bonnet now?" said Johnny Bull. "We've been over to Highcliffe, you fat frump, and we haven't seen your sister Bessie this term at all, since the first day!"

"What do you mean, Bunter, if you've got sense enough to mean anything?" asked Bob Cherry quietly. "If you're trying to make out that I've ever played low-down tricks on a girl, I'll burst you all over Greyfriars!"

Billy Bunter favoured him with a contemptuous sniff.

"I suppose you never expected to be found out," he said. "I don't know how they found you out, but they jolly well did, as they told Coker!"

"Who found out what?" shrieked Bob.

"They did, what you did!" retorted Bunter. "Everybody knows now—Coker's been asking for you all over the school, since he came in an hour ago. He says he's going to give you a jolly good hiding, and I hope he will!"

"That ass!" said Bob. "I hanged his hat this afternoon! I'll bang it again, if he's keen on it. But what do you mean by 'they'?"

"You don't know!" sneered Bunter.

"Pretty thick, I call it, if Coker's got it right!" Skinner of the Remove

put in. "I thought you fellows were friendly with the Cliff House girls."

"The Cliff House girls!" repeated Harry Wharton blankly. "So we are! What do you mean, Skinner?"

"Looks like it," grinned Snoop.

"Dirty trick!" said Stott.

"Oh, chuck it!" exclaimed Vernon-Smith. "Coker's got it all wrong—you know what a fool he is! I don't believe a word of it!"

"Same here!" said Squiff.

Harry Wharton & Co. looked at one another and looked at the Removites gathering round them.

They could see now that a good many of the Form were interested in them, for some reason.

Some of them were looking contemptuous, others curious. Obviously, there was something up; the Famous Five, or one member of the Co., at least, were connected, in the minds of the juniors, with some happening of which they had not yet heard.

"Do you know what all this is about, Smithy?" asked the captain of the Remove quietly.

"It's all over the shop," answered the Bounder. "Coker's been gassing it out at the top of his voice ever since he came in. He found them on the island and——"

"He found whom?"

"The Cliff House girls—Marjorie and Clara, and Dolly Jobling, and Bunter's slim sister——"

"I say, you fellows, what's the good of gammoning?" hooted Bunter. "I jolly well wish I could lick you, Bob Cherry! You punch him for me, Smithy!"

"So I jolly well would, if I believed a word of it," said Smithy, "but I don't! Bob's the last chap at Greyfriars to do it."

"Thanks for that, at least," said Bob sarcastically, "but I'm still in the dark about what I'm supposed to have done."

"That won't wash!" said Skinner. "Coker may be a fool, but he's not a liar, and he says he had it from the girls themselves."

"He had what?" roared Johnny Bull.

"What Cherry did!" answered Skinner.

"I've done nothing, that I know of," said Bob, his eyes beginning to look like blue flame. "I want to know what I'm supposed to have done. Any fellow here who says I've played low-down tricks, especially on girls, had better order a fresh set of features—he'll want them!"

"So you did!" yelled Bunter, dodging behind the Bounder. "You keep him off, Smithy! So you did! Yah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, I won't punch Bunter," said Bob. "I don't want to smother the school with lard. I want a fellow who can put up his hands to say the same."

He fixed his glinting eyes on Skinner. Harold Skinner judiciously decided to remain silent.

"Nobody's told us yet what's happened," said Harry Wharton. "Hasn't anybody got sense enough to tell us that?"

"Dirty trick!" yapped Bunter, from behind the Bounder. "Sneaking swab! Yah!"

"Shut up, you fat ass! Smithy, what——"

"For two pins I'd wipe up the floor with you!" said Bunter. "Only a cad would play such a low-down trick on a party of girls——"

"You blithering ass——"

"Somebody stranded the Cliff House girls on Popper's Island this afternoon," said the Bounder. "Their boat



"You fellows can't row!" said Coker calmly. "Watch me, and pick up a few tips how to— Blow!" He broke off suddenly as one oar was pulled from his grasp, while the other missed the Sark and swept through the air, catching Potter on the side of the head. "Wooooooch!" roared the unfortunate Potter.

was taken away, and doesn't seem to have been seen since. Coker took them off in a boat, and he came in asking for Cherry—

"And why me?" demanded Bob.

"He says you did it."

"By gum! Let him say it to me!" said Bob, his eyes in a blaze. "Let the potty idiot say it to me, that's all!"

"But it's jolly queer," said Smithy. "We all know what an idiot Coker is, but he says the Cliff House girls told him so."

"That's impossible."

"Well, I suppose so, but—but it's rather weird," said the Bounder. "It's only you, from what I can make out—your friends are not in it, so far as I've heard. And I suppose they know what you've done this afternoon, as they've been with you."

"They haven't," said Skinner. "Cherry was in detention for an hour after they went out."

"Oh! So he was!" said the Bounder. He whistled.

"I went after my friends, when I got out," said Bob. "I had to walk it, as that fat fool, Bunter, had taken my bike. I joined up with them near Highcliffe. We've been together since then."

"Did you go near Popper's Island—while you were on your own?"

"Yes; I passed it, going."

"Oh!"

"What do you mean by that 'oh,' Smithy?" asked Bob, in a dangerously quiet tone. "I never saw anything of the Cliff House girls on the island when I passed it; and certainly should never have dreamed of playing any rotten trick on them, if I had. If you think I did—"

"I don't," said Vernon-Smith, but there was a rather curious expression on his face now. "Coker says you did, and that he got it from the girls. That's all I know."

"So you jolly well did!" squeaked Bunter. "And I'd jolly well whop you for it if—if I could!"

"Whoever did it ought to be thrashed within an inch of his life!" said Harry Wharton quietly. "And he will be—if I can get hold of the cur. Coker must be mad to think that they suppose that Bob did it."

"That's what he says."

"I'll see the fool about it," said Bob Cherry. "Fifth Form man or not, I'll jolly well show him that he can't talk about me like that."

The bell was ringing now, and the juniors went into Hall.

Bob Cherry went in with a flushed and angry face; his friends looked worried and perturbed. It was impossible—or so they thought—that Marjorie & Co. could have told Coker anything of the kind. Yet how even a fat-head like Coker of the Fifth could be under such a misapprehension was a puzzle. It was easy to read doubt in a good many faces round them.

While Mr. Prout was calling roll, Bob's eyes sought the ranks of the Fifth, picking out Horace Coker. He found that Coker's eyes were seeking him.

Coker was giving him a glare of angry contempt that caused the red to deepen in Bob's cheeks. He clenched his hands.

Horace Coker of the Fifth was a hefty proposition to tackle, even for a strong and sturdy fighting man like Bob Cherry, but when Bob went out of Hall with his friends, after call-over, his one desire was to get within hitting distance of Horace Coker's rugged features.

It was time, Bob thought, that Coker of the Fifth had some sense knocked into his head—and he was ready and keen to do his very best to knock some in.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

Coker Wakes Up!

"COKER!" "Eh? Oh! Yes, Wingate!" "What's that cricket-stump for?"

"I'm going to whop that young cad, Cherry, of the Remove!"

"I thought so!" said Wingate of the Sixth grimly. "Well, you're not! Take it back to your study!"

Coker of the Fifth stood where he was, his rugged brow darkening.

He had gone to his study for a cricket-stump, the same to be used with vigour on the junior he believed to be guilty of the trick on the Cliff House girls. Wingate met him on the landing, as he came by the games-study, evidently having had an eye open for Coker!

A dozen Fifth Form men in the games-study looked out—and grinned.

Coker of the Fifth was always persuaded, somehow, that he was a law unto himself. Since that celebrated occasion when he had knocked the captain of the school out, with the gloves on, Coker had been more firmly persuaded of this than ever.

Not that Horace was the man to "crow"! He could be kind and considerate to a fellow he had licked. But he made it clear that he—Horace James Coker—was not a man to be trifled with.

His look made it clear now. His glare at the Greyfriars captain expressed defiance, mingled with scorn. But he kept his temper.

"Now, don't you butt in, Wingate!" he said. "I dare say you've heard what that young scoundrel did—"

"I've heard what you've been bawling over the school," said Wingate.

(Continued on page 16.)

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(Continued from page 13.)

"I'm not deaf. You've made some mistake. But, mistake or not, it's not for a Fifth Form man to whop juniors. That's a prefect's business. See?"

"No," said Coker firmly. "I don't see!"

"Then take my word for it!" suggested Wingate. "Take that cricket-stump back to your study, Coker, and don't play the goat!"

"Rot!" said Coker.

"You won't do as I suggest?"

"No, I won't!"

"Then I order you, as a prefect!" said Wingate. "Go back to your study at once, and leave the cricket-stump there."

Coker did not stir. His rugged face grew grimmer; his defiance more pronounced.

Potter touched him on the arm.

"Better chuck it, old chap!" he murmured.

"Don't be a fool, Potter!"

"Prefect, you know," hinted Greene.

"Don't be an idiot, Greene!"

Coker's friends gave it up.

Wingate lifted his hand, and pointed up the Fifth Form passage.

Coker remained rooted.

"Now," he said, "I don't want any more trouble with you, Wingate. We had the gloves on, and I knocked you out, fair and square. I'm not the man to rub it in, but there it is. See?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" came from the Fifth Form men, crowded in the doorway of the games-study.

Coker stared round at them.

"What are you men cackling at?" he demanded. "I did lick Wingate fair and square, didn't I?"

"I don't think!" chuckled Blundell.

"Don't be a silly ass, Blundell! You saw me!" said Coker. "Get out of the way, Wingate, will you? I'm going to look for young Cherry."

"You're going back to your study, and you're going to stay there till prep!" said Wingate. "I order you, as a prefect! Do you want me to cane you?"

Coker laughed.

"You caned me once," he said. "I let you, because the Head backed you up. I made you put on the gloves afterwards, and knocked you out. If you're asking for another thrashing, I won't say no."

"Ha, ha, ha!" came from the fellows in the games-study.

Wingate gazed at Coker of the Fifth thoughtfully.

"Now, look here, Coker," he said quietly, "you can't help being a fool, but you've got your good points. You helped me out of the water the other day, when I went in to fish Bessie Bunter out. As you can't swim, you ran a lot of risk, and I can't forget that—"

"Don't be a silly idiot, if you can help it!" suggested Coker. "I'm the best swimmer at Greyfriars. I fancy!"

"Oh! Well, never mind that—but don't let's have any trouble, if we can

help it!" said Wingate quite amicably. "Now, be a good chap, Coker, and remember that you're not a prefect, and don't play the goat, see?"

"I'm going to thrash Cherry!"

"If Cherry needs thrashing, you can leave it to me. Now chuck it!"

"Rats to you!" said Coker.

Wingate's eyes gleamed. It was really difficult for a fellow to go easy with Coker of the Fifth!

"Now, look here, you silly chump," said Wingate, in measured tones. "I let you have your silly way about a scrap in the gym, because of what you did for me, see? I let you get by with it, because I didn't want to punch you. Now you know! So don't play the fool any more!"

Coker laughed again.

"Bit too thin, old chap!" he said.

"Now, take your own tip, and don't play the fool! That's my advice! If you come the prefect, I shall make you have the gloves on again! I mean that! Now get out of the way!"

"I'm afraid," said Wingate regretfully, "that I shall have to make it clear to you, Coker! Just for the moment, forget that I'm a prefect, and treat me as a Greyfriars man. Go it!"

There was a buzz of excitement and hilarity in the crowd of Fifth Form men. If Coker accepted that invitation, it was going to be made quite clear to him, that that celebrated scrap in the gym had been a comedy which only old Horace had taken seriously.

Coker accepted at once.

"You mean that?" he asked.

"Oh, yes!"

"Hold that cricket-stump, Potter! See me shift him!"

Coker rushed on, to shift Wingate.

How he came to be sitting down on the landing, the next moment, Coker did not know! It was a great surprise to him.

"Oh!" gasped Coker.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Coker staggered up. He blinked. He put his hand to his nose. There was a trickle of red through his fingers.

"Oh!" repeated Coker.

Wingate smiled.

"Let it go at that, what?" he suggested.

"I'll watch it!" gasped Coker. "Look out, I'm coming!"

Coker came. He sat down again. This time he was not in such a hurry to get up. He clasped both hands to his chin, and nursed it.

"Oooogh!" gasped Coker.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Will that do?" asked the Greyfriars captain, smiling.

"You wait a tick!" spluttered Coker. "I'll show you!"

He heaved himself up, and came on again—not with a rush this time, but with considerable caution. But his caution did not avail him. How all his terrific drives missed Wingate, and how Wingate's right came through and landed on his manly chest like a sledge-hammer, Coker did not know. But he knew that he sat down on the landing again, with a heavy bump.

"Urrrgh!" gurgled Coker.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Go it, old man!" chuckled Hilton of the Fifth. "You're frightfully entertaining, Coker!"

Coker picked himself up. He eyed Wingate very dubiously. This was nothing at all like that great scrap in the gym. It was awfully unlike it! Still, Horace Coker was a stickler. He came on again.

This time, Wingate walked round Coker, tapping him here and there. First his nose, then either eye, then either ear, then his chin, then his chest, received taps—rather hard taps! Coker, in a state of complete bewilderment, staggered and tottered, and gasped and panted, amid yells of laughter. Finally, a rather harder tap on the chin sat him down again.

He sat and gurgled for breath.

Wingate smiled genially.

"That all right?" he asked.

Coker did not reply. He had very little breath left, with which to reply. And it had now penetrated Coker's almost impenetrable intellect, that he had not the remotest chance of tackling the Greyfriars captain.

He seemed tired of being used as a punch-ball. When he got on his feet once more, he gave Wingate a dizzy look, and walked back to his study.

Wingate smiled, and went down the stairs.

Coker, in his study, rubbed a lot of places that needed it, and gasped for breath. He was still rubbing, and gasping, when Potter and Greene came in to prep.

They smiled. Coker did not smile.

But Coker did not go to the Remove with a cricket-stump. On second thoughts—proverbially the best—the great Horace had decided not to hunt for any more trouble.

Bob Cherry—rather to his disappointment—did not see Coker of the Fifth that evening.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

O.K. for Pon!

"PON! Oh, here you are!"

Gadsby came into Ponsonby's study at Highcliffe.

Ponsonby, seated in his arm-chair, was smoking a cigarette. He was tired after his walk home; but his thoughts had been busy since he came in, and there was a malicious, sardonic expression on his face. He glanced up at Gadsby, with a sneer.

"Well?" he drawled.

"I waited for you at the boat-house, with Monson," said Gadsby. "Didn't you come back in the boat, after all?"

"Those Greyfriars cads got it off me," said Pon, with a shrug of the shoulders. "I had to walk—and let Wharton's mob take the boat."

"Oh! Did you tell them—"

"Don't be a fool, Gaddy!"

"Well, somebody's got to be told about those girls on the island," said Gadsby savagely. "It's too late now for us to go down in a boat. You're not rotter enough to think of stranding them for the night, I suppose."

"I said, don't be a fool, Gaddy! They must have been taken off, long ago—Wharton's crew must have passed the island, from where I saw them—and if the girls had been still there, they'd have known. They'd be on the look-out for anybody on the towpath, after missing their boat."

"Very likely!" said Gadsby, after a moment's thought; "but we can't leave it at that, Pon! We can't take chances, with a party of schoolgirls—"

"I know that, you fool! I'm pretty certain they're off the island long ago—they must have been, before Wharton's crew passed, but I'm going to make sure. Mobby will let us have his phone to ring up Cliff House."

"The sooner the better, then," said Gadsby. "I can tell you this, Pon—if those girls ain't safe, I'm going to shout

out the whole thing, and you can take your chance."

"Oh, shut up!" snapped Pon. "They're safe enough—anyhow, they'll tell me at Cliff House." He grinned maliciously. "Those cads got the boat off me—they're going to tie it up at the Greyfriars raft to be called for. Now I've thought it over, nothin' could have happened better. That cad Cherry will be sorry for havin' dropped into the boat, I fancy—and havin' put up proof that it was the Remove cads who bagged it off the island. What are the girls goin' to think when they hear that their boat has been found, tied up at Greyfriars, and that it was Wharton's gang that brought it there?"

Gadsby whistled. "Well, I don't care about them," he said. "But the girls—"

"I'm goin' down now to phone." Ponsonby rose and threw his cigarette into the grate. "By gum! They've played right into my hands, as it turns out. I fancy I've put a spoke in their wheel this time."

Quite bucked by that happy reflection, Ponsonby went down to his Form-master's study.

Mr. Mobbs was not there, but it was Mobbs's custom to let his dear favourite—Ponsonby—use his telephone when he liked.

Pon shut the door and rang up Cliff House School.

The voice of Miss Penelope Primrose, the principal of that scholastic establishment came through.

"Cliff House School?" asked Pon.

"Yes, Miss Primrose speaking."

"I've rung up to ask whether Miss Hazeldene and her friends got back safe, madam."

"Who is speaking?"

"William Jones, from the boathouse at Friardale," answered Ponsonby with perfect coolness. "Miss Hazeldene and her friends hired a boat here to-day to go up the river, and this boat was afterwards seen in the possession of some Greyfriars boys. It is not yet known what they have done with it, but we are rather anxious about the young ladies who hired it."

"Dear me!" said Miss Primrose. "Thank you very much for ringing up, but the girls are certainly safe back, for everyone here answered to her name at calling-over as usual."

"Thank you, madam. That is all I wished to know," said Ponsonby, and he rang off.

He strolled out of Mr. Mobbs' study. Miss Primrose undoubtedly would speak to the Fourth Form girls on the subject. They were not likely to tell her that they had been stranded on Popper's Island and thus cause a tremendous row. If they did, all the better—but, whether they did or not, they would know that the purloined boat had been "seen in possession of some Greyfriars boys."

If the evidence of Bob Cherry's hat, left on the island, had not convinced them, that piece of information was sure to have a convincing effect.

Ponsonby went back to his study in quite a cheery mood. He fancied that he had scored over his old enemies at last—and in a way that they could not counter.

In the Fourth Form passage he passed Courtenay and De Courcey, and the latter gave him a very keen and curious glance. The Caterpillar knew that look on Pon's face.

"Who was the happy man, Pon?" he asked.

Ponsonby looked round. "Eh, what? What are you burblin' about, Caterpillar?" he asked.

"You're lookin' so merry an' bright," explained the Caterpillar urbanely, "that I guessed at once that you've played somebody a dirty trick. Who was the happy man, old bean?"

"You silly ass!" snapped Pon, and he went on to his study.

The Caterpillar looked puzzled.

"Pon's been on the river this afternoon, Franky," he remarked, "and our jolly old Greyfriars friends walked home that way, I believe. Pon can't have done anythin' to five stout fellows, any one of whom could knock him into a cocked hat, can he?"

"Hardly," said Courtenay, laughing. "He's been up to somethin'," said the Caterpillar. "I know that look in his eye. Nice feller—Pon!"

Ponsonby found Gadsby and Monson in his study.

"Well?" they asked together.

Pon carefully closed the study door before replying.

"O.K.!" he said. "The girls were back at Cliff House for call-over; they're all right. Somebody must have come along and taken them off. Official from the faded primrose. And the next time they meet that Greyfriars gang I rather fancy they'll give them the marble eye. What?"

"It's rather caddish," said Gadsby.

"Too thick altogether," said Monson, shaking his head.

Pon sneered.

"So glad to hear your opinion," he said. "Why not shut up if you can't talk sense? What about a smoke before prep?"

And the young rascals had a smoke before prep, and the subject was dropped.

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

A Row with the Fifth!

THE following morning Bob Cherry of the Remove was not looking his usual cheery, sunny self.

He was, in fact, looking worried and cross.

The mere fact that Marjorie & Co. had been stranded on the island in the river by some malicious young rascal was enough to disturb Bob's serenity. He would have given a term's pocket-money to get within punching distance of the fellow who had done that.

But to be suspected himself of having played that rotten, malicious trick was the limit.

His friends did not doubt him, but they were puzzled. That was not surprising, as Bob was deeply puzzled himself.

Coker had not carried out his loudly announced threat of thrashing him for it. That mattered little; Bob had been more than ready for Coker, his friends more than ready to give him any assistance required. But everybody had heard Coker's statement on the subject.

Bob would not have been surprised if he had been called up by a prefect or by his Form-master on the subject. But no official notice had been taken of the matter so far. Unofficially, plenty of notice was taken of it.

Whoever had played that trick on a party of schoolgirls was an absolute, out-and-out rotter—the outside edge in swabs. All the fellows agreed on that; and a good many of them believed that it was Bob.

Two of the girls concerned had brothers in the Greyfriars Remove—Marjorie Hazeldene and Bessie Bunter. Hazeldene had expressed no opinion on

the subject so far; Billy Bunter had expressed one—loudly.

Bunter announced to all whom it might or might not concern that he was going to lick that cad for stranding his sister Bessie on the island.

The fat Owl seemed to have developed into an affectionate and chivalrous brother all at once. The previous afternoon he had cleared out on Bob's bike lest Bessie should blow in in quest of the five shillings he owed her from the first day of term. Now, however, Billy Bunter was full of indignation, and a dozen times at least he announced in an emphatic squeak that he was going to lick that cad Cherry. It was noticeable, however, that Bunter made these warlike announcements only when Bob was not present.

Skinner & Co., who were up against the Famous Five on principle—or want of principle—made the most of it. They did not want to hear any evidence; they brought in a verdict of guilty on the spot.

But other fellows, much better fellows than Skinner and his set, looked at Bob very queerly that morning.

When the Remove came out in break the Co. made it a special point to gather round Bob, making it clear that they were standing by him—which, however, was more to their own harm than to Bob's good, for the amiable Skinner was already suggesting that they had all been "in it."

Temple of the Fourth, passing the Famous Five in the quad, carefully turned up his nose at Robert Cherry, and his friends Dabney and Fry sniffed audibly as they passed.

Bob's face crimsoned.

"I'm going—" he began.

"Hold on," said Harry Wharton quietly. "No good punching those Fourth Form fatheads. We've got to get at this and knock it on the head. That fool Coker seems to have misunderstood something the girls told him—"

"It's rather weird," said Frank Nugent. "I've heard that Potter and Greene said the same—and they're not fools like Coker."

"Did they?" said Bob, his eyes burning. "Well, three of the Fifth are about a match for five of the Remove. Let's go and smash them!"

"Don't be a goat, old chap!" said Johnny Bull in his quiet, stolid way. "They ain't cads like Skinner, glad to get hold of anything against a fellow. If they say it they believe it."

"If you mean to say that you think—" roared Bob.

"Didn't you hear me say don't be a goat?" asked Johnny. "Bellowing like a bull won't buy you anything. If there's some silly mistake we can set it right. Let's look for those Fifth Form chaps and ask them what the dickens they mean. And keep your temper. See?"

Bob did not look much like keeping his temper, but he nodded; and the Famous Five looked round for Coker & Co.

They were easy to find. Coker's bull-voice was a guide; it was heard at quite a distance.

"Dirty little swab!" Coker was saying to a dozen fellows. "I was going to thrash him for it. Wingate's come the prefect and taken it out of my hands. Well, I hope their schoolmistress will send over a complaint to the Head. If ever a young scoundrel ought to be flogged—"

He broke off as the Famous Five marched up.

"Look here, Coker—" It was Wharton who spoke.

"Don't talk to me," snapped Coker. "If you're sticking to that young cad, after what he's done, you're as bad as he is!"

"You babbling blockhead!" roared Bob. "What have I done?"

"You know what you've done!" said Coker contemptuously. "Suppose I hadn't gone up the river in my boat yesterday? Those girls might never have been taken off the island. If they'd been stranded there all night, you'd most likely have had a bobby coming to see you about it to-day."

"Quiet, Bob, old man! Coker, you ass, what makes you think that Cherry pinched the boat from the island and left the girls stranded there?" asked Harry.

"I know what they told me!" "That's a lie!" bawled Bob. "They never said anything of the kind."

Coker's rugged face became purple.

"Cut that out, Cherry!" interposed Potter. "I was there, and I heard what they said. So did Greene."

Bob almost staggered.

"You heard the Cliff House girls say that I took their boat away and left them stranded!" he gasped.

"Yes!" said Potter.

"That's what they said, and I suppose they know," said Greene. "Of all the rotten, dirty tricks—"

"You must be mad!" gasped Bob, his face going from red to white. "They can't have said so. Why should they?"

"Why should they?" repeated Coker. "Why shouldn't they? Did you expect them to keep it dark, when they might have been left out all night—"

"No, you fool! No, you idiot! But what made them think—what put it into their heads—" Bob gasped helplessly.

That the statement had been made, admitted of no doubt now. Potter and Greene confirmed what Coker said; and that settled that. But it was utterly and hopelessly bewildering to the hapless Bob.

"I suppose they saw you," said Potter.

"They couldn't, as I wasn't there! I never went near the island yesterday—only passed it walking on the towpath by Popper Court Woods—"

"I don't think they saw him," said Greene. "I remember Miss Hazeldene said she didn't, at any rate. But they knew."

"Some of them saw him," said Coker. "Must have! I remember Marjorie Hazeldene didn't seem sure about it, but the others—"

"They couldn't have known who the fellow was, if they didn't see him!" said Harry Wharton. "How could they?"

"Well, they did know," said Potter. "They said so. Are you going to say that they were telling lies, or what?"

"No, you fathead! But if they think it was Bob, they made some mistake."

"It's plain enough," said Coker. "Some of them saw him, I suppose. Miss Hazeldene didn't want to say anything, but Bessie Bunter blurted it out—"

"She's rather a duffer, like her brother Billy—"

"Clara Trevlyn said the same," said Coker. "Is she a duffer?"

"No! You're sure—"

"Think I fancied it?" sneered Coker. "Think Potter and Greene fancied it, too? If you had any decency, you'd turn that young cad down, and give him a jolly good ragging. Stranding a lot of girls on an island—"

"I did not, you fool!" roared Bob.

"You did, you young rascal!" retorted Coker. "And I've a jolly good mind to thrash you for it now, prefects or no prefects."

"I'll give you a chance, then!" bawled Bob, and he rushed straight at Horace Coker, hitting out with both fists.

Coker caught one with his nose, and the other with his chin, and staggered. The next moment, Potter and Greene had hold of Bob. The Co. jumped to the rescue—and four or five big Fifth Form men closed in on them at once, spinning them right and left.

Bob struggled frantically in the grasp of Potter and Greene. But hefty as Bob was, for a junior, he was powerless. They swung him round, and Coker planted a boot on him.

Bob flew.

"Boot him round the quad!" roared Coker.

"Go it!"

"Boot the little beast!"

Again the Co. essayed to rally to the rescue, and again they were barged off by the big seniors.

Coker and Potter and Greene booted the hapless Bob. They booted him hard, and they booted him often.

It was seldom that Potter and Greene saw eye to eye with Coker, but in this matter, they were quite at one with the great Horace. A fellow who played a miserable, cowardly trick on a party of schoolgirls was a fellow to be booted, and they had no doubt that Bob had done so. They booted him with vigour.

"Stop that!"

Wingate of the Sixth came up. The booting ceased—and Bob Cherry stood panting and gasping, as the Greyfriars captain intervened.

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.

Dark Doubts!

WINGATE slipped his ash down into his hand, his eyes grimly on Coker.

Coker, panting after his efforts, glared defiance.

"I warned you, Coker!" said Wingate. "Now—"

"Do you think I'm going to let a Remove swab punch my face?" shrieked Coker.

"Oh! Have you been punching Coker, Cherry?"

"Yes, I have," panted Bob, "and I'll punch the silly fool again, if he says—"

"You won't!" cut in Wingate tersely. "And you'll get six if you shout at me. Keep your temper, and don't be a little ass! You can clear off, Coker, and leave this to me!"

"I'll jolly well—"

"You'll jolly well shut up, and clear off, or you'll hit trouble. That's enough—get out of it!"

Coker breathed hard and deep. But Potter and Greene walked him off. The other Fifth Formers followed, Hilton saying over his shoulder as he went:

"You ought to whop that young rotter, Wingate, for what he did."

"Don't be a fool, Hilton!" retorted Bob. "If Wingate wasn't here, I'd punch your silly face like Coker's."

Cedric Hilton shrugged his shoulders and walked away.

"That will do, Cherry!" said Wingate quietly. "This is a queer business. If you did what those fellows think, you ought to have the skin taken off your back. And there's no doubt that the Cliff House girls said so."

"I can't understand it, if they did!" answered Bob.

"Well, they did!" grunted Wingate, eyeing him.

"There's some mistake, Wingate!" said Harry Wharton, setting his rumpled collar straight. "Bob never did anything of the kind."

"You young sweeps are generally in a bunch on a half-holiday," said Wingate. "If you all say the same—"

"Bob wasn't with us till tea-time; but—"

"Oh!" exclaimed Wingate. "Look here, Cherry, it's dashed queer that the Cliff House girls should think you'd done it, if you hadn't. Well, did you do it?"

Bob glared at him.

"Don't be a fool, Wingate!" was his reply.

The Greyfriars captain gasped. Probably it was the first time that a Lower Fourth junior had told him not to be a fool!

"Do you understand that you're talking to a prefect, Cherry?" he asked grimly.

"I'd tell the Head himself not to be a fool, if he asked me that question!" roared Bob.

Wingate gazed at him.

"Well," he said, after a pause, "I'd advise you not to, if the matter comes before Dr. Locke. You mightn't find the Head so patient as me. I gather from your polite answer that you deny it?"

"I don't take the trouble to deny it!" snapped Bob. "I'll hit any fellow who says I played a dirty, rotten, cowardly trick!"

Wingate smiled.

"Then we'll take it that you deny it," he said. "I can't quite believe it of you—I'd be sorry to believe it of any Greyfriars man. But it's dashed queer that the girls should think you did it, if you didn't! You'd better find out what put the idea into their heads, and set the matter right."

"I shall go over to Cliff House on my bike, after class, and speak to Marjorie about it," said Bob. "She can't think so! She can't! I can't understand it—but she can't believe such a thing of me."

"Well, leave it at that," said Wingate, "and in the meantime, no more punching of Fifth Form men, or I'll have you up in my study."

Wingate walked away, frowning and puzzled.

The Co. were left in a rather disconsolate group—all of them breathless and untidy after the tussle with the hefty men of the Fifth.

Bob was most disconsolate of all. He could not see Marjorie Hazeldene till after class, at the earliest. The mystery of it perplexed and bewildered him. He clung to what Greene had said, that Marjorie had not seemed sure about it. But the others had been sure—why, and how?

"I suppose—" said Johnny Bull slowly. He paused.

Bob looked at him. For once in his life, Bob Cherry was quick to take offence.

"You suppose—what?" he snapped.

"Let a fellow speak, without biting his head off!" said Johnny calmly. "You're a bit of an ass, Bob—a practical joking ass. You know that. I shouldn't have supposed that you were idiot enough to play fool tricks on girls; but—"

"Go on!" said Bob, his tone quiet, but his eyes glittering dangerously as Johnny paused again.

"Well, you might have done a silly thing without thinking," said Johnny. "If you did—"

Harry Wharton grasped Bob just in time. Another second, and war would have started in the Co.



Bump! Ponsonby uttered a yell of surprise and alarm as something heavy dropped into the boat from above. The boat rocked and the Highcliffman lost his seat. "You—you Greyfriars cad—you—you—" spluttered Ponsonby, glaring at Bob Cherry.

"Stop that, Bob, you ass!" panted Harry, dragging Bob backwards. "Let me go, you fool!" roared Bob, struggling.

"Take his other arm, Frank!" "Keep your wool on, old chap!" said Johnny stolidly, as Wharton and Nugent held the enraged Bob back. "I only want to have it clear. You're a bit of an unthinking ass at times, and you know it as well as I do. You wouldn't have been in detention yesterday, if you hadn't sailed down the banisters, and landed right under Quelch's eyes, and if you hadn't been in detention you'd have been with us all the afternoon, and we'd be witnesses. The trouble with you is that you don't stop to think! Well—"

Johnny paused again. "Chuck it, Johnny, old man!" said Harry. "Bob's word is good enough for us, I suppose?"

"Oh, yes!" agreed Johnny. "But Bob hasn't given us his word—he's only roared and bawled and blown off steam, so far!"

"Fathead!" said Nugent. "Well," hooted Bob, "I won't give my word, see? Any fellow who thinks me a sneaking, cowardly swab can think what he jolly well likes, and keep his distance from me!"

"Well, I don't think that, old man!" said Johnny agreeably. "I think you're a thoughtless ass, as I've said, and you jolly well know you are! I think—"

"My esteemed Johnny," murmured Harree Janset Ram Singh, "speechfulness is silvery, but the cracked pitcher is the stitch in time that goes longest to the well."

"I say, you fellows—"

"Here's Bunter," murmured Harry Wharton. "Let's kick Bunter!" Bob Cherry was released. He gave Johnny a black look. Billy Bunter did not come near

enough to be kicked. He blinked warily at the Co. through his big spectacles.

"I say, you fellows, it's all out now!" he jeered. "No wonder you're sticking to that cad Cherry, when you were all in it with him!"

"What?" roared Johnny Bull. Bob Cherry burst into a sarcastic laugh.

"Oh, good!" he exclaimed. "Will you give me your word, Johnny Bull, that you hadn't a hand in playing a dirty, sneaking, rotten trick yesterday?"

"I'll boot that fat rotter all over Greyfriars!" roared Johnny Bull.

"Who's roaring and bawling now, and blowing off steam, instead of giving his word?" inquired Bob.

"Oh, for goodness' sake don't rag!" exclaimed Harry Wharton. "Bunter, you fat frog, what do you mean?"

"I've been down to the boathouse," sneered Bunter. "I've jolly well found you out now! Yah!"

"You frabjous idiot, what was there to find out at the boathouse?" howled the captain of the Remove.

"I got it from the boatkeeper!" grinned Bunter. "They've sent for the boat."

"What?" "Who?"

"Oh, of course you don't know!" sneered Bunter. "You must have had a nerve to tie up that boat at the school raft, after sneaking it! Didn't you care if it all came out?"

The Famous Five gazed at Bunter. "That boat!" said Harry. "If they've sent for it, what about it?"

"They've sent for it from Jones', at Friardale. It's the boat they hired out to the Cliff House girls yesterday."

"What utter rot!" "Oh, draw it mild!" sneered Bunter. "I thought it was only Cherry at

first, but it comes out that the lot of you were in it! Precious set of cads!"

Billy Bunter departed rather hastily after that. He rolled away, to spread the news, far and wide, that, by their own act, the Famous Five had been proved to be the fellows who had purloined the Cliff House boat.

Harry Wharton & Co. looked at one another blankly.

"Is that fat fool mad?" said Nugent. "It can't have been the same boat—how could it?"

Wharton uttered a sharp exclamation.

"Unless—unless it was that Highcliffe cad pinched it from the island. If it's the same boat, he must have."

"Why should he?" said Nugent. "That cad loathes us, but he's got nothing against the Cliff House girls."

"Blessed if I make it out! If that Highcliffe cad did it, why should they fancy that Bob did?" said Harry, utterly puzzled.

"It can't be the same boat—"

"We can soon find that out; but—"

The bell for third school interrupted. The Famous Five joined the Remove going in. The looks of some of the juniors showed that they had already heard the latest news—from Bunter! Skinner's sneer was more pronounced—and Bolsover major favoured the Co. with a contemptuous snort.

Vernon-Smith tapped Harry Wharton on the arm.

"You've heard?" he asked. "Bunter's gabble—yes!"

The Bunder gave him a keen look. "If it turns out to be gabble, all right!" he said. "I fancy there'll be a crowd on the scent after this class; but it jolly well begins to look—"

"Don't be a fool, Smithy!" Smithy shrugged his shoulders. "Fool or not, I'd rather be in my

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shoes than yours, if it comes out that your gang played that rotten trick on Hazel's sister," he said. "And if Hazel chooses to take it up, he'll find plenty of men in the Remove to give him a backing—me among them!"

Wharton's eyes glinted.

Mr. Quelch came along just then to let his Form in, and no more was said. But there was a good deal of suppressed excitement in the Remove during third school, and there was no doubt that, as soon as they were dismissed, there would be a rush to find out whether Billy Bunter's latest news was well-founded—a fact easy to ascertain. And if it proved to be so, there was not much doubt what the Greyfriars Remove would think of the Famous Co. who had always been the leaders of the Form.

THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER.

Proof!

MARJORIE HAZELDENE shook her head.

"What's the use, Clara?" she said, in a low voice.

Miss Clara sniffed.

"Lots!" she answered. "I want to know! Look here, are you coming or not?"

"I'll come; but——"

"Well, come."

Miss Clara Trevlyn's face was as grim as so pretty a face could be, as she walked out of Cliff House gates. Marjorie's was troubled and very thoughtful. It was not a long walk from Cliff House School to Friardale Bridge; but it was one that Marjorie Hazeldene was unwilling to undertake; but she gave in to her more determined chum.

"You know it was Bob, and you don't want to make sure!" said Clara. "Isn't that it, Marjorie?"

Marjorie coloured.

"No, no! I can't believe it, Clara! I wish it hadn't been mentioned to Coker. What's the use of it? Bob wouldn't, and couldn't——"

"He did!"

Marjorie shook her head again. Bob's honest, rugged face rose before her mind's eye. She could not and would not believe it!

"We shall know for certain at the boathouse," said Clara. "They must have got the boat back by this time. Somebody phoned to Miss Primrose last night, and said that Greyfriars boys had been seen with it, so she asked us. Lucky she didn't ask Bessie, or that little ass would have babbled it all out. We don't want to get them into a row at their school; but——"

Miss Clara's eyes flashed.

"Wait till we're sure, at any rate, before you go off at the deep end, Clara," said Marjorie, with a faint smile. To which Clara replied with a sniff.

The schoolgirls arrived at the boat-builder's yard by the village bridge.

Mr. Jones, in a jersey and a battered old straw hat, was sitting on an up-turned boat, smoking his pipe. He touched the battered straw to the girls from Cliff House.

"Boat, miss?"

"No," said Marjorie. "We want to inquire about that boat we had yesterday. We explained to you——"

"That's all right, miss," answered Mr. Jones. "We got it back all right. No extra charge to you young ladies," he added reassuringly. "You couldn't 'elp them young rascals taking it away, and I'm sorry it 'appened. I was think-

ing of going up to their headmaster about it."

"Don't do that, Mr. Jones!" said Marjorie hastily. "But please tell us how you got the boat back, and who had it."

"That was easy enough, miss," answered the boat-builder. "You see, it's my nephew who's boat-keeper up at the school. He sent us word that one of our boats was tied up there."

"Tied up at Greyfriars!" exclaimed Marjorie, her heart sinking.

"Yes, miss. Some boys of that school brought it in last evening and tied it up, and told him it would be called for some time. He didn't take much notice then, but he noticed that it was one of our boats, so he let us know, and I sent young Jim up for it this morning."

Clara gave her friend a glance. Marjorie did not meet her eyes. Clara had said that they would know for certain at Mr. Jones' yard. It looked like certainty now. Greyfriars boys had tied up the purloined boat at the Greyfriars raft. What could be clearer than that?

"I jolly well knew!" said Clara, setting her lips. "Cads!"

Marjorie drew a deep breath.

"Is it quite certain that Greyfriars boys left the boat there, Mr. Jones?" she asked. It was like clinging to straws, and she knew it.

"Oh, yes!" said Mr. Jones. "Young rascals larking on a 'arf-oliday, I s'pose. But they haven't 'eard the end of it." The village boat-builder shook his head, with a rather grim look. "Them boats is 'ired by the hower," he went on. "I ain't going to ask you young ladies to pay nothing, but I'm going to ask them young rascals, and I'm going to see that they pay, too!"

"Do you know their names?"

"'Course I do," answered Mr. Jones. "I told young Jim to inquire, careful. I know them all by sight; seen 'em on the river often enough."

"What are their names?" faltered Marjorie.

"One's Wharton, another's Nugent, and Bull, and Cherry, and the other's a darky, with a funny name—Jampot Wallop, or something."

Miss Clara gave a very audible sniff—almost a snort. Marjorie's face was a little pale.

The Famous Five of Greyfriars had had the boat. With what looked like cynical indifference to what might be thought of their conduct, they had left it tied up at the school raft, to be sent for. It was hard to believe, but it was the fact, and it had to be believed.

"They're going to pay," said Mr. Jones. "don't you worry! If they chooses to keep a boat out without using it, leaving it tied up, that's their look-out. We charges by the hower all the time it's out. That boat's going to be paid for, from the time you young ladies missed it, up to the minute young Jim brought it back to this 'ere yard!"

"Good egg!" said Clara. "Quite right!"

Marjorie did not speak.

"If I'd caught 'em with it," said Mr. Jones, breathing hard, "I'd 'ave warmed 'em, so I tell you! Leaving young ladies stranded on an island. Why, s'pose you hadn't been took off? I mightn't 'ave noticed that the boat wasn't back, and you'd 'ave been fair landed! They ought to go up to their 'eadmaster for it, miss, they ought really!"

"No, no!" said Marjorie. "Please don't let anything be said at their school. We don't want to complain."

"Jest as you say, miss," said Mr.

Jones. "But I'll give 'em a piece of my mind when I see 'em, and I'll make 'em pay up—you trust me!"

The two girls walked out of the boat-builder's yard in silence. Marjorie's face was deeply clouded. Miss Clara's lips were tightly set.

"I knew it," she said, "and so did you, Marjorie. When we found that hat on Popper's Island, we both knew. And it wasn't only Cherry—it was all of them. I'd never have believed——"

"I can't quite believe now," said Marjorie miserably. "But—but I suppose there can't be any doubt."

"Oh, don't be duffy!" snapped Clara. "One of them leaves his hat behind, and all of them run the boat down to Greyfriars when they've done with it. If you want more proof than that, what do you want? I'll never speak to any of them again. Will you?"

Marjorie's lip quivered.

"No!" she said.

Bessie Bunter met them as they came in at Cliff House. She blinked at them through her big spectacles.

"Have you found out——" she began.

Marjorie made her friend a sign to be silent; but the angry and indignant Clara did not choose to be silent.

"Yes, we've had it all from Mr. Jones," said Clara. "It was Wharton and his friends who took the boat, and Jones is going to make them pay for all the time it was away from the yard. That's one comfort!"

Miss Bunter's eyes gleamed through her spectacles.

"Let's go over to Greyfriars and smack their faces!" she suggested.

"Oh, my hat!" said Clara.

"I say, you girls, I'll go if you will!" said Bessie. "I rather liked Bob Cherry. He punched Skinner for saying I was fat, one day last term. Now I'd like to smack his face!"

"Don't be a little idiot, dear!" suggested Marjorie.

"I'd ask Billy to wallop them," said Bessie, "but very likely he wouldn't. What about asking your brother, Marjorie?"

"Nonsense!" said Marjorie.

"Well, I shall write to Billy and ask him," said Miss Bunter.

At which Miss Clara chuckled, and Marjorie's clouded face broke into a smile. If the punishment of the offenders had to wait till Billy Bunter "walloped" them, it looked rather probable that they would escape scot-free.

THE SIXTEENTH CHAPTER.

Hazel in a Hole!

"WHARTON, hold on a minute!" Hazeldene of the Remove caught at Harry Wharton's sleeve, as the Famous Five came out with the Form after third school.

He was, in point of fact, the only Remove fellow who came near the Five.

Even fellows who had always liked them did not seem very keen on their company at the moment.

Almost all the Remove were going down to the boathouse as soon as they got out of the Form-room. Harry Wharton & Co., as keen as anyone to ascertain whether Bunter's news was correct, were going with the rest; but they noted, with grim faces, that the Removites gave them rather a wide berth.

Wharton, however, looked impatient as Hazel caught his arm.

"What is it?" he asked. "Look here, I want to get out and speak to the boat-keeper——"

"Oh rot!" muttered Hazel. "Let the other fellows go. I want to speak to you. I'm the only fellow that does, it seems," he added, with a sneer.

Wharton coloured angrily, but he stopped, his friends going on with the crowd of juniors. He was accustomed to keeping his temper with Marjorie's brother, and less than ever did he want trouble with Hazel now.

Indeed, in view of the present state of affairs, it was something to be thankful for that Hazel was not on the war-path. He was a hasty and passionate fellow, liable to go off at the deep end without cause, and he might have fancied that he had cause now.

It was clear that many fellows in the Remove had made up their minds that the Co. had been guilty of the dastardly trick of the day before. Hazel, apparently, did not think so—or, more probably, he was too deeply occupied with his own affairs to think of the matter at all.

"Well, what?" asked Harry, as patiently as he could. "I suppose you're not ass enough to fancy that it was us who stranded your sister and her friends on the island yesterday?"

"No—what rot!" said Hazel. "I expect some tramp pinched the boat. I wasn't going to speak about that. Look here—" He paused.

Wharton waited. Hazel's face was red, and his eyes lowered. Seemingly he had something to say that he found difficult to utter.

"Go it!" said Harry.

Hazel glanced round in the quad—an uneasy and almost stealthy look. The captain of the Remove breathed hard. He knew what to expect now. The scapegrace was in some sort of trouble, and wanted help out of it.

"Come this way!" muttered Hazel.

In silence the captain of the Remove followed him, reluctantly, under the elms. Out of earshot of fellows in the quad, Hazel stopped, and stood with his hands in his pockets, his eyes furtively on Wharton's face.

"I—I hate asking you," muttered Hazel uneasily, "but—but I'm in a hole, and there's nobody else I can ask that I know of." His colour deepened. "You needn't look at a fellow like that! It's not nice to have to ask a fellow for money, as I dare say you know."

"I don't remember ever having asked any fellow for any, so I can't say," answered Wharton dryly.

Hazel crimsoned.

"Oh, rub it in!" he said savagely. "I've got to ask a favour of you, and you can take it out of me, I suppose."

Harry Wharton stood silent. Hazel was in a money trouble for the umpteenth time. He had no more claim on Harry Wharton than on any other fellow at Greyfriars. But his manner was resentful, as if the unpleasantness of what he had to do was somehow Wharton's fault.

"It's like you, I suppose, to make it as hard as you can for a fellow," said Hazel bitterly.

"I've not asked you to speak to me at all, that I know of," answered Harry quietly. "Suppose you chuck it at that?"

"You mean that you don't want to lend me anything? If that's what you mean, can't you say so plainly?"

Wharton drew a deep breath.

"How much?" he asked curtly. "I've still got something left over from the hols. If seven-and-six is any good—"

"Oh, don't be a silly ass!"

Seven-and-six, it was clear, was no good to Hazel. It was some good to Harry Wharton, as it was all the cash

(Continued on next page.)

The STATELY HOMES of GREYFRIARS

A HOUSE IN THE HILLS

By

The Greyfriars Rhymester



This week our clever Greyfriars Rhymester gives you a pen picture in verse of the Nugent family, whose home is situated on Salisbury Plain.

(1)

Frank Nugent is handsome and slim,
Although now and then he is grim
When dealing with tricky
And cunning young Dicky,
He has to be careful of him!
The fag's full of dodges and shams,
A bit of a dunce in exams,
But clever at writing
Those breathless, exciting
And hair-raising tales of St. Sam's.

(2)

The pair have two sisters as well,
They're jolly nice girls, I can tell,
And when you are staying
With Franky, you're paying
A visit you'll think of as swell.
His father and mother are kind,
And take it from me, you will find
Your welcome is hearty
To join in the party
And do whatsoever inclined.

(3)

At Amesbury, Wiltshire, it's plain
That Amesbury stands on a Plain,
(Those rhymes are too fearful,
But I am so cheerful
For twopence, I'd do it again!)
Yes, Salisbury Plain's very wide,
It stretches for miles on each side,
With wild windy spaces
Renowned as the places
Where soldiers manoeuvre and hide.

(4)

And people still gather at dawn
And meet at Stonehenge, so forlorn;
Their reason's surprising,
To see the sun rising
Like Druids, on Midsummer morn.
For Wiltshire's the Land of the Past,
With earthworks and barrow o'ercast
One feature, of course, is
The famous "White Horses,"
Cut out where the chalk hills are grassed.

(5)

This county of ancient romance
Is worth a whole book full of chants,
And many a sonnet
I'd write you upon it,
If but the Ed. gave me a chance.
Says he: "Just stick to your guns,
The town of the two Nugent sons,
With Amesbury Abbey,
Now old, but not shabby,
Where Avon, the cool river runs."

(6)

Though ancient, the house cannot boast
A legend or even a ghost,
No dark and unpleasant
Old dungeons are present,
No bad baronet for your host.
No owls in the chimney pots call,
No sinister sounds in the hall,
No blood-rusted sabres
Or odd-looking neighbours,
The house is—a house, and that's all.

(7)

The garden's a beautiful scene
With apple-trees, rather too green,
Don't eat 'em too quickly
Or else you'll be sickly
With pains in—you know where I mean!
Behind the old house all around
The huge rolling hillsides abound,
They're not to my liking
For rambling or hiking,
When lost you're not easily found.

(8)

The rooms of the house, as a rule,
With Nugents and servants are full,
So Franky makes merry
With Wharton or Cherry,
Or goes up to Yorkshire with Bull.
At Christmas the caller prepares
To make up a bed on the stairs,
Or else, if he's able,
To bag a spare table,
But, dash it—at Christmas who cares?

Next Week: THE LAND OF THE LEEK.

he had left. But Hazel was not thinking of him.

"Well, that's my limit!" said Wharton.

"I want four pounds."

"You want—what?" ejaculated Wharton blankly. In the palmiest days a Remove junior was seldom in possession of that sum.

"Four pounds!"

Harry stared at him, and then laughed.

"Well, I've had as much as that, once in a blue moon," he said. "Look here, don't be an ass, Hazel! There aren't more than three fellows in the Form who've ever got four pounds in their pockets. Mauly and Smithy and Newland—nobody else that I've ever heard of!"

"Fat lot of good asking Smithy!" sneered Hazel. "He's reeking with money, but he's not the man to part with it!"

"Why should he?" Harry was about to ask, but he refrained.

"I can't ask Mauly, you know that," muttered Hazel. "He would know what it was for, and—and—" He broke off. "Lot of good asking Newland for four pounds—when he's a Jew!"

"I don't think either Jew or Christian is called on to give four pounds to a fellow simply because he asks for it!" said Harry Wharton, with a contempt he could not keep out of his voice. "What the dickens claim have you got on Monty Newland that he should give you his money?"

"He wouldn't, anyhow," sneered Hazel.

"You've been in funds a good many times," said Harry. "I've never seen you giving it away that I remember."

"I suppose I shouldn't have asked you," said Hazel. "I might have known that I should only get jaw from you. You're not the fellow to help a lame dog over a stile, I know that."

Wharton breathed hard.

"Well, I can't give you what I've not got," he said.

"I'm not asking you to give me anything, as you jolly well know. If you could lend me four pounds I'd let you have it back in a week or two. You know I only mean a loan."

"If you've got four pounds coming in a week or two you're a lucky man," said Harry. "I haven't, and very few fellows in the Remove have."

"Well, I could manage it by then—never mind how; I could. Look here, I've got to have four pounds—immediately. Can you help me?" asked Hazel sullenly.

"I've told you my limit."

"Mauleverer would lend it to you if not to me."

Wharton's eyes sparkled. He was trying hard to keep his temper, but he came near failing at that.

"Are you potty?" he asked. "Do you think I can go and borrow money of a Remove man, that I couldn't possibly pay, to give it to you?"

"I've told you I could settle in a week or two."

"I should want something a bit more definite than that before I asked a chap for money!" snapped Harry. "You mean you hope you could settle. Where are you getting it from if you come to that?"

"That's my business."

"Is it? I think it's mine when you're asking me to stick a fellow for a loan on the strength of it!" said Harry. "Not that I'd think of doing it. If you want to cadge in the Remove you can do your own cadging."

"You cheeky rotter—"

Harry Wharton turned on his heel

and walked away. He had had enough of Hazel—rather more than enough. But he had not gone more than a dozen yards when there was a patter of feet after him, and Hazel rejoined him, panting.

"Hold on, will you?" breathed Hazel. "Look here, Wharton, this isn't a light matter. I've got to get the money somehow. I tell you I'm in an awful hole!"

"Oh, rot!" snapped the captain of the Remove. "For goodness' sake give me a rest!" But he stopped and looked at Hazel's harassed face sharply. "What do you mean, Hazel? What foolery have you been up to now?"

"It was rotten luck!" muttered Hazel. "I—I went to see a man yesterday afternoon, and he wasn't there—Lodgey, if you want to know—"

"I don't!"

"You've just asked me," sneered Hazel. "I thought he would be at the Cross Keys, and looked in to speak to him about—about something. But he wasn't there. But—but I got talking to some men there, and then—then—well, to cut it short, I owe a man four pounds. I've got to pay him."

"You fool!" breathed Harry. "You worm! After nearly getting sacked last term you've gone playing the giddy ox again—and you've got the neck to ask me to borrow money for you to give to a blighter at a pub! You're asking to have your cheeky head punched!"

"Two can play at that game!" sneered Hazel. "Better stick to ragging schoolgirls—you'll find it safer!"

"Why, you rotten worm!" gasped Wharton. He clenched his hands and made a stride towards Hazeldene.

"Go it!" said Hazel mockingly. He could see that the case was hopeless now, and he was in a mood for a quarrel.

Harry Wharton did not "go it." He restrained his anger, dropped his hands, and turned and walked away. This time Hazel did not follow him.

The Co. were coming back from the boathouse, and Harry went to meet them—to hear the news that was now known to all the Remove.

THE SEVENTEENTH CHAPTER.

Called to Account!

BOB CHERRY wheeled out his bike after class that day and rode down Friardale Lane.

He was heading for Cliff House—to see Marjorie Hazeldene and learn what the dickens it all meant. His friends saw him off, and then walked back to the House in a worried and troubled mood.

Hazel passed them as they went in, and favoured them impartially with a black scowl.

Johnny Bull stared after him.

"Does that fool think—" he began.

"I've no doubt he does—now!" said Harry Wharton dryly.

"Looks to me as if most of the fellows have made up their minds about it," said Frank Nugent ruefully. "But I suppose it will clear up all right when Bob's seen Marjorie."

"Sure to!" agreed Harry.

"The surefulness is terrific!"

"Oh, here you are!" The Bounder called to them. "Will you fellows come into the Rag?"

"Anything on?" asked Harry.

"Yes!" answered the Bounder briefly.

Wharton gave him a sharp look. However, he followed Smithy, and his friends went with him—rather suspecting what was "on"—and certainly not afraid to face it, whatever it was.

Nearly all the Remove were gathered in the Rag. There was a buzz of excited voices, which died down as the Co. came in with Smithy.

"I say, you fellows, here they are!" squeaked Billy Bunter.

"Yes, here we are!" Harry Wharton glanced round coolly and with a tincture of contempt in his look. "If we're wanted, here we are!"

"High and mighty, as usual!" grinned Skinner. "Perhaps we're going to give you something to cure all that."

"Get on with it as soon as you like, Skinner! With gloves or without?" asked Harry.

Skinner did not answer that question.

"Never mind Skinner, Wharton!" said the Bounder. "We're all here to hear what you fellows have got to say for yourselves. I don't believe in condemning any man without giving him a chance."

"So we're up for trial?" asked Harry sarcastically. "What are you fellows playing the giddy ox about, if a fellow may ask?"

"Look here—" began Peter Todd.

"You jolly well know—" began Wibley.

"I guess you're wise to it!" said Fisher T. Fish. "I calculate—"

"I say, you fellows—"

Harry Wharton held up his hand.

"One at a time!" he suggested. "If it's going to be a chorus we'll step outside till you've finished."

"Play up, Smithy!" said Russell.

Evidently the Bounder was taking the lead. Outside the ranks of the Famous Five he was the fellow with most influence in the Greyfriars Remove.

"Leave it to me, you men!" he said. "It's no good mounting the high horse, Wharton! If any other fellow were suspected of playing a rotten, sneaking, cowardly trick on a party of schoolgirls you'd—"

"If any fellow here suspects us of that he's a fool, and a rotter, too!" said the captain of the Remove, with icy coolness.

There was a deep murmur from the Removites.

Skinner's voice broke in mockingly.

"Wharton's above suspicion, like jolly old Cæsar's wife," he said. "Evidence doesn't count."

"Shut up, Skinner!" said the Bounder. "Leave it to me. Look here, Wharton, it's come out that you fellows had the Cliff House boat yesterday—the one that was pinched from Popper's Island, leaving the girls stranded there."

"It's the same boat, old chap!" said Tom Redwing. "But I'm sure that you can explain it."

"Thanks for that, old bean," said Harry. "Yes, we've found out that it was the same boat, though we hadn't the faintest idea of it till to-day."

"Let's have it clear!" said Vernon-Smith. "A lark is a lark, and if you'd stranded Higheliffe chaps, or Greyfriars fellows, it would be a bit thick—but it could pass as a jape. But you know as well as I do, that giving a party of girls a fright was a cowardly trick. More than that—as you never took the boat back, they might have been left out at night. A fellow who could play a trick like that ought to be smashed up!"

"I quite agree," assented Harry, "and if I find out who did it, I'll smash him fast enough!"

"You've admitted that it was the Cliff House boat you had yesterday. Do you mean that you didn't know who was on the island when you took it away?"

"I mean that we did not take it away from the island at all, and never knew that it had been there."

The Bounder stared at him.

"What are you getting at?" he asked. "You know that that boat was sneaked away from Popper's Island while the girls were picnicking there."



Thud, thud, thud! Every time Coker lagged, a boot thudded. The Famous Five chuckled and chortled as they chased the Fifth-Former. They were enjoying themselves. But Coker wasn't! Old Joyce, the woodcutter, almost fell off his cart at the startling sight. "Ooooh!" gasped Coker, as he bounded on.

"I suppose it was," agreed Harry, "as it turns out to be the same boat, it must have been. But it was nowhere near Popper's Island when we bagged it; and from what Coker says, the girls must have been taken off the island long before we ever saw the boat."

"I knew it was something like that," said Redwing. "The rotter who took it left it adrift, and those fellows picked it up."

"Was that it?" asked Smithy dubiously.

"No, that wasn't it, as it happens," answered Wharton, "though it might have been, as Reddy suggests."

"You don't deny that you had the Cliff House boat?"

"Not at all!"

"And you didn't find it drifting?"

"No, we did not!"

"Well, that settles it!" growled Bolsover major. "They sneaked it away from the island. I jolly well knew it!"

"You know an awful lot, old bean," said Harry. "With a brain like that, you really ought to do well in Form, instead of making Quelch tear his hair!"

"Look here——" bawled Bolsover major.

"Rotten cads!" said Snoop.

"Dry up!" said Vernon-Smith. "Look here, Wharton, if you didn't sneak that boat away from Popper's Island, as it looks, can you explain how you got hold of it?"

"Quite easily."

"Well, do it, then!" snapped the Bounder.

Harry Wharton paused for a moment. His friends, silent, left it to him to speak. Both his pride and his temper were roused, and he was tempted to refuse to utter a single word of explanation. But he realised that the Remove fellows were taking a line that

he himself would have taken, had suspicion fallen on another. After that brief pause, he answered quietly.

"We got that boat away from that Highcliffe cad Ponsonby."

"Ponsonby!" repeated the Bounder.

"We had rather a row with that cad going up the river yesterday," said Harry. "He shot peas at us, and Johnny heaved a turf at him, and knocked his hat into the water. Later, when Bob came after us, he grabbed Bob's hat with a boathook. When we saw him on the river, coming home, we bagged the boat off him in exchange for Bob's hat! We never had the faintest idea that it was the Cliff House boat—never thought anything about Cliff House at all. That's the lot."

The Remove fellows looked at one another.

"You mean that it was Ponsonby of Highcliffe who played that rotten trick at the island, then?" asked Smithy, after a long pause.

"I mean that it looks like it to us!" answered Harry. "But we're not jumping to conclusions quite so fast as you fellows. Ponsonby's cad enough for that, or anything else; but I don't see why he should want to hurt a party of schoolgirls who've never offended him. He might have found the boat adrift, as Reddy thought we might have. Anyhow, it was Ponsonby we got the boat from."

"Well, that explains about the boat," said the Bounder slowly.

"It doesn't explain about the Cliff House girls telling Coker that Cherry took their boat away!" sneered Skinner.

"It doesn't!" said Peter Todd.

"I say, you fellows——"

"Shut up, Bunter!"

"Beast!"

"That will be explained, I hope, when Bob comes back," said Harry.

"He's gone over to Cliff House now to see Marjorie Hazeldene. If you're frightfully keen on getting on the track, Smithy, you'd better hike over to Highcliffe and ask Ponsonby where he got that boat. You're on speaking terms with the cad—we're not."

"I'll do that!" said Vernon-Smith slowly. "This matter isn't going to rest till we've spotted the man. Pon's a bit of a corker, but I can't imagine him ragging schoolgirls—why should he? But, if he had the boat, he's got to explain how——"

"If!" repeated Harry, his eyes blazing. "I've told you he had!"

"Hoity-toity!" said the Bounder coolly; and he walked out of the Rag to go down to the bike-shed.

Harry Wharton glanced round at the Removes. Many of the faces were very doubtful. Skinner was openly sneering—obviously regarding the mention of Pon as the thinnest of thin stories.

In silence the Co. left the Rag and went out into the quad with clouded faces. They could only hope that the matter would be cleared up when Bob Cherry got back from Cliff House—and they waited anxiously for his return.

THE EIGHTEENTH CHAPTER.

Condemned!

"BOB!"

"What the thump——"

"My esteemed Bob——"

"Bob, old man——"

Four juniors spoke at once as Bob Cherry got off his bike and wheeled it in. The expression on his face startled them.

Bob's face, generally ruddier than the

cherry, was quite pale. There was a deep wrinkle in his brow. His eyes had a bewildered, almost dazed look. It was only too clear that matters had not gone well at Cliff House.

He did not speak as he wheeled his bike in. Two or three fellows were there, and they looked at Bob, and exchanged significant glances. His friends led him away to the quad before they spoke again.

"For goodness' sake what's the row, old chap?" asked Harry Wharton anxiously. "What on earth's turned up at Cliff House?"

"I—I—I can't understand it!" stammered Bob helplessly. "I'm all in a muddle!"

"You've asked Marjorie——"

"No!"

"Why not?"

"She wouldn't speak to me."

"Bob!"

"No good asking me what it means," said Bob. He ran his hands through his mop of hair, making it stand almost on end. "I'm beaten! Everybody's gone potty, I think!"

"Tell us what's happened, anyhow!" said Nugent.

"Nothing!" answered Bob. "I sent my name in at Cliff House, and asked to speak to Miss Hazeldene. Nobody's ever had any objection before—Miss Primrose knows us well enough. And—and I suppose Marjorie does. The page kid—young Boker—came back to tell me that Miss Hazeldene could not see me."

"Might have been in detention, or something——"

"No! I saw the girls in the garden, at a distance. I—I saw Marjorie, and she looked round and saw me at the gate, and—and——"

"And what?" growled Johnny Bull.

"She turned her back at once, and went into the house," said Bob. "I—I couldn't believe my eyes! She saw it was me, and walked straight into the house."

"But—but why?" stammered Harry.

"No good asking me," mumbled Bob. "I've not done anything that I know of. I—I hung about a bit, and saw Clara and Dolly Jobling, and—and they looked down their noses, but never came near me. That little idiot Bessie Bunter put her fingers to her nose." Bob grinned faintly, in spite of his distress. "Silly little ass! What the dickens does it mean, you fellows? They've got it into their heads that we played that rotten trick yesterday—that I did, at least! What does it mean?"

Harry Wharton shook his head hopelessly.

"I—I don't mind so much about their being offended," mumbled Bob, "but Marjorie would be hurt, too—that's the worst of it. We've been friends so long, and now something or other has made her think me a rotten worm—why? She's not hot-headed, like Clara, or a fool like Bessie Bunter—what reason can she possibly have——"

"May have heard about our having the boat——" said Nugent.

"She couldn't have heard that yesterday, when they told Coker——"

"No! It's a blithering mystery!"

"We shall have to sort it out," said Johnny Bull. "All those fatheads in the Rag will think only one thing when they hear that Marjorie won't speak to Bob any more. If she won't see Bob, I suppose she won't see us. But she will have to see her brother. We'll get Hazel to go over."

"Oh, good egg!" exclaimed Bob, his face brightening. "That's all right."

"Right as rain!" said Nugent. "Even if Hazel is fool enough to think like

the other fellows, he can get the facts from Marjorie. We can prove that we were at Highcliffe most of the afternoon, if necessary. They could hardly fancy that we pinched their blessed boat while we were having tea in Courtenay's study."

"Let's hunt up Hazel," said Bob.

Harry Wharton opened his lips, but closed them again. After his altercation with Hazel that day, he did not think it likely that Marjorie's brother would be available as peace-maker. Still, it was worth trying, and the Famous Five proceeded to look for Hazeldene.

They found him slouching under the elms, with his hands in his pockets and a moody scowl on his face. As they came up he stared at them, turned, and walked away.

Johnny Bull gave a growl, rather like an irritated bulldog.

"That means that he thinks it was us!" he grunted. "By gum——"

"Stop a minute, Hazel!" called out Nugent.

Hazel walked on.

The chums of the Remove were not likely to leave it at that. They broke into a run, overtook Hazel, and surrounded him.

He came to a sullen halt, eyeing them blackly.

"Will you fellows leave me alone?" he snarled. "I don't want to speak to you! I don't suppose any man in the Remove does now—I, least of all! A set of cowardly, sneaking rotters——"

"Cut that out!" said Harry curtly. "You spoke to me after third school, and you've had no reason to change your opinion since then. Look here, Hazel, Bob's been over to Cliff House——"

"Like his cheek, after what he did!" sneered Hazel.

"I've done nothing!" roared Bob.

Hazel shrugged his shoulders.

"Marjorie wouldn't let him speak to her," went on Harry, keeping his temper with difficulty.

"Did he expect her to?" asked Hazel, with another sneer.

"Well, she didn't. She's got it into her head somehow that we pinched that boat yesterday—we don't know why."

"I can tell you why! It's because you did it!" said Hazel. "I dare say they saw you! Anyhow, they know!"

"If you'd been in the Rag an hour ago, you'd have heard me explain how we got hold of that boat," said Harry patiently. "We got it away from Ponsonby——"

"What rot!"

"Look here," roared Johnny Bull, "if you don't believe us——"

"I don't!" said Hazel coolly. "Not a word of it! It's quite bright of you to put it on a fellow at another school—fellow everybody here dislikes! But it won't wash with me!"

"Look here, Hazel," said Harry. "There's some ghastly mistake in the matter. A few words from you would set it right. If you'd cut over to Cliff House, and ask Marjorie why she fancies——"

"You're so keen on obliging other fellows, aren't you?" asked Hazel. "You'll do nothing for me; but when you want something, you ask fast enough!"

"This is a rather different matter," said Harry. "It's pretty rotten for us to have everybody thinking we've done a rotten thing——"

"You shouldn't do rotten things, then! What do you expect everybody to think if you do? Isn't it a rotten thing rotten if you do it?"

"We were at Highcliffe yesterday

afternoon, Hazel," said Frank Nugent. "We couldn't have done it, even if we'd wanted to."

"You didn't go by way of the river?" sneered Hazel. "Why, I passed you on the towpath, and passed the girls in the boat afterwards. You couldn't have been very far off, I fancy, when it happened."

"Will you go over to Cliff House?"

"No, I won't!"

"Hazel, old man," said Bob, "you can't believe——"

"Oh, chuck it!" said Hazel rudely. "You played a rotten, cowardly trick on my sister! You dared not have done it if I were a hulking brute like yourself, able to thrash you for it! Well, I can't thrash you, though I'd like to; so you can go about bragging that you've ragged a party of girls and got by with it! Much good may it do you!"

Bob's face became crimson.

"You—you—you awful rotter!" he gasped. "I've a jolly good mind to knock you spinning, you—you measly worm!"

Hazel gave him a taunting look.

"Go it!" he said. "You're twice my weight, but I'm not afraid of you—you bully!"

"Oh, come away!" exclaimed Harry Wharton. "That fellow makes me sick! Let's get out of this!"

The chums of the Remove went in to tea—a rather silent and dismal tea. They were all worried and puzzled and bewildered, unable to make head or tail of the strange affair. While they tea'd in Study No. 1, they heard footsteps and voices in the passage outside, among them the voice of Herbert Vernon-Smith. The Bounder had come back from Highcliffe.

The buzz showed that a crowd of fellows was gathering outside Study No. 1. There was a bang on the door at last, and it flew open.

Vernon-Smith looked in, and the sardonic scorn in his face caused the red to rush into the faces of the Famous Five. Smithy's mind, evidently, was now made up.

"I've been to Highcliffe!" he rapped.

"Well?"

"I've seen Ponsonby."

"Well?" repeated Harry icily.

"He says that he never met you at all yesterday—any of you. He was out with Gadsby and Monson in a Highcliffe boat, and they went back to Highcliffe in it. What about that?"

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Nugent.

Harry Wharton drew a deep breath.

"That settles it," he said.

"I think it does!" sneered the Bounder. "You're going to own up now—what?"

"Don't be a fool! It settles that Ponsonby played that rotten trick; he could have no other reason for telling lies!" said Harry Wharton quietly. "We know now who did it, at least!"

"Oh, can it!" said Smithy. "Do you think anybody here is going to believe that? The Cliff House girls say that you pinched their boat; you're spotted with it, and you say that a Highcliffe man had it, and he says he never had. I know Pon can do some hard lyin' when he wants to, but I think you've got him beaten in this study!"

Wharton rose to his feet.

"You can think that, if you like, Vernon-Smith, but you won't say so here! Get out!"

And as the Bounder did not move, he grasped the door and slammed it in his face. There was an angry roar outside from a dozen fellows, and the Famous Five half-expected a rush. But it did not come, and they sat down to finish tea in glum and gloomy silence.

THE NINETEENTH CHAPTER.

Up to Coker!

"IT'S a bit thick!" said Coker, frowning.

Coker of the Fifth was in the quad, after class the following day, with his friends, Potter and Greene. His eyes turned on five juniors who had come out of the House.

"Those young cads—" said Coker.

"Eh—what?" Potter glanced round carelessly. "Oh, let 'em rip, Coker! No good getting mixed up in fag rows."

"They don't seem very popular in their own Form," remarked Greene.

That was a circumstance that few could have failed to notice.

As Harry Wharton & Co. walked down to the gates they passed a group of Remove fellows—Peter Todd and Russell, Ogilvy and Newland—all of whom deliberately looked another way.

A little farther on they came on Herbert Vernon-Smith. He did not look another way—he stared at them, with cool contempt in his look, keeping his eyes fixed on them till they had passed.

Johnny Bull paused a moment, but went on.

Billy Bunter was the next to demonstrate. He rolled up to the Famous Five and stood a few feet away, expressively turning up his fat little nose and curling his lip in a tremendous sneer.

"Yah!" came from Bunter, in tones of scorn. He blinked watchfully through his big spectacles, ready to dodge. "Yah! Cads!"

Johnny Bull paused again, and Bunter did a sudden backward jump.

Unluckily for Bunter, his weight overbalanced him, and he stumbled and sat down with a heavy bump.

The Famous Five, who had been looking quite serious, ceased to look serious for a moment as Bunter bumped. They grinned as they walked on.

"Ooooooh!" gasped Bunter. "Swabs! Worms! Ooooooh!"

"That's all very well," said Coker. "But I told those girls the other day that I'd thrash young Cherry for that rotten trick! He ought to be jolly well whopped—you fellows know that!"

"Oh, quite!" agreed Potter.

"Wingate had to butt in, of course," said Coker, frowning. "I don't see how a man can back up against a prefect, with the Head backing him up."

Potter and Greene exchanged a wink, unseen by Coker. The great Horace had learned at last, it seemed, that a man could not back up against a prefect. Celebrated hunter of trouble as old Horace was, he had given up the idea of hunting for any more trouble with Wingate of the Sixth.

"If I grabbed those young scoundrels this minute, and walloped them, bet you Wingate would barge in!" said Coker morosely.

"Bet you he would!" assented Potter. "But there's more than one way of killing a cat!" said Coker. "See where those young cads are going?"

"Out of gates," said Greene.

"Exactly! Well, suppose a fellow walked after them, with a stick under his arm?" suggested Coker astutely. "Catch 'em in a quiet spot—what? It's up to me."

"But Wingate—"

"Blow Wingate!" said Coker. "A man can't very well blow him, being head prefect, here in the school, but outside the gates it's rather different. You fellows can come along—in case the other young rotters barge in—"

"Better give it a miss, old man," said Potter. "Prefects don't like Fifth Form men doing their work for them."

"I'm not asking you for advice, Potter! I'm telling you what I'm going to do," said Coker coldly.

"Oh!" said Potter. "Then I'll tell you what I'm going to do—I'm going down to the nets. Coming, Greeney?"

"You bet!" said Greene.

"Look here—" hooted Coker.

Instead of "looking there," Potter and Greene departed.

They agreed with old Horace in theory that the young rascals who had stranded the schoolgirls on the island in the river ought to be jolly well whopped. But they were not prepared to risk a row with Wingate for that

(Continued on next page.)

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purpose. Neither were they keen on a rough-and-tumble combat with a mob of juniors. Coker could talk in an airy way of "walloping" the offender, but it was fairly certain that, whether he deserved it or not, the offender would not take the walloping like a lamb.

Coker gave a snort, went into the House, and came back with a cricket-stump tucked under his arm. Thus equipped, he hurried down to the gates.

Looking out, he spotted the Famous Five, in the distance, going down Friar-dale Lane. He cut after them at a rapid walk.

Quite unaware that Coker of the Fifth was on their trail, the chums of the Remove walked on, and turned at the stile into the footpath through the wood.

Coker, astern, grinned.

They could not have served his ends better. Once in the wood, they would be out of the general view; and then Coker could close in on them and administer the walloping without danger of interference from meddling prefects or anybody else.

Harry Wharton & Co. were heading for Cliff House School.

Exactly what to do in the present peculiar state of affairs the chums of the Remove hardly knew. Most of the Remove fellows were down on them—and some were hinting at a Form ragging, others at sending the Co. to Coventry.

Irritating and disagreeable as it was, they could hardly blame the fellows for the view they were taking, as matters stood. Nobody in the Remove would have taken Pon's word against Wharton's unsupported. But it was supported by what Marjorie & Co. had told Coker. That settled it, for most of the juniors. The matter could only be set right by convincing Marjorie Hazeldene of her mistake—which could not be done without seeing Marjorie.

It was useless to call at Cliff House, and be rebuffed as Bob had been. But a chance meeting was quite probable; and for that purpose the worried Five were going over to Pegg.

They walked almost in silence through the wood by the leafy, shady footpath. Half-way to Pegg Lane they became aware of hurrying footsteps behind them.

Coker was coming on at a run.

Harry Wharton glanced back. He saw Coker of the Fifth, but did not for the moment suspect that Coker's presence had anything to do with himself and his comrades. He walked on regardless.

"Stop!" panted Coker.

He came up, rather breathless. The chums of the Remove stopped and looked round at him. Then they noticed the cricket-stump under his arm.

Coker slipped it down into his hand, just like a Sixth Form prefect with an ashplant. At which sight five faces grew grim. The juniors understood then that Horace Coker was at his favourite occupation—hunting trouble.

"So I've got you!" said Coker grimly.

"What do you mean, fathead?" grunted Bob Cherry. No member of the Co. was in a mood to be very patient with the ineffable Horace.

"I mean what I say—I've got you!" said Coker. "No prefects to barge in here! I've got you, you young scoundrel!"

"The gotfulness may be a boot on the other leg, my esteemed and idiotic Coker!" remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, with a dusky grin.

"I promised those girls," said Coker, "to wallop you, Cherry, for that rotten trick you played on them—"

"Oh, shut up!" said Bob gruffly. "Come on, you men—we're not staying here to listen to that potty chump's gabble, I suppose."

"Stop!" roared Coker.

"Fathead!"

Bob Cherry swung on, so openly contemptuous of Coker and all his works that the great Horace reddened with wrath.

But Bob did not get very far. Coker rushed, grabbed him by the shoulder, and jerked him to a halt.

Bob faced round, his fists clenching.

"Look here, you dolt!" he said. "I've

punched your silly face once. I'm ready to punch it again, if you want me to. Will you shut up, and mind your own bizney? We've no time to waste on you now!"

"Chuck it, Coker!" said Harry Wharton impatiently.

"You're going to have what you've asked for!" said Coker. "You can't hide behind Wingate here, young Cherry—see?"

Harry Wharton laughed.

"If you play the giddy ox, Coker, I fancy you'll soon be wishing that Wingate was here, for somebody to hide behind," he said. "Now chuck it!"

"Will you let go my shoulder, Coker?" asked Bob, in a sulphurous voice.

Coker let go the shoulder, changing his grasp to the back of Bob's collar. Gripping that collar, he swung the junior over with his left, lifting the cricket-stump with his right. The next moment something that seemed like a mule's hoof jarred on Coker's chin, and he staggered.

"Ow!" he gasped. "Why, you cheeky little beast—"

"Collar the silly idiot!" growled Johnny Bull. "Give him what he's asking for, and a bit over!"

And almost before Coker of the Fifth knew what was happening he was down in the grass of the footpath, bellowing, and five juniors were standing on him to keep him there.

THE TWENTIETH CHAPTER.

Helping Horace Home!

"SCRAG him!" hooted Johnny Bull. Coker roared and struggled.

He had arrived there to thrash Bob Cherry—which, he considered was up to him. He had, perhaps, foreseen that Bob's pals might have something to say about it—but that had not deterred Coker.

His chief idea was to get going, out of sight of the school, and out of the reach of the official eye of a prefect. That was all right—there was no prefect at hand—nobody to intervene. But in less than a minute Coker was wishing that there had been.

He was rolled and rumped and bumped and banged. His cricket-stump was jammed down the back of his neck, and his cap after it. Collar and tie, jerked out, were crammed down the same way.

Coker was struggling all the time. Even five fellows did not find it easy to handle the hefty Horace. He gave them a lot of trouble.

Every now and then they all rolled over together, clinging like cats. Then they staggered up, struggling wildly. But every time Coker went under again, and he was getting more and more dishevelled, more and more winded, and more and more damaged.

Quite out of patience with Horace, the Famous Five "scrapped" him with vigour. They had enough trouble on hand, without any from Coker of the Fifth—and it was time Coker learned where he got off. He was learning it now, by a very painful course of instruction.

For nearly ten minutes it went on; and then Horace James Coker lay in the grass, winded to the wide, moaning for breath, and utterly done.

The Famous Five stood round him panting.

They were nearly as dishevelled as Coker. Collars were crumpled and dusty faces wet with perspiration. They

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had been through it hard—though not nearly so hard as Coker.

"Urrrrrggh!" came in moaning accents from the hapless Coker, strewn breathless on the grass.

"Have you had enough, fathead?" snorted Bob.

"Wooooorrrgh!" moaned Coker feebly. "Ooooooh!"

"I've a jolly good mind," said Bob, in concentrated tone, "to kick the silly chump all the way back to Greyfriars! We can't go on to Cliff House—like this!"

Harry Wharton shook his head.

They had left the school looking their usual neat and natty selves. Now they looked more like a gang of tramps—far from the state in which they wanted to present themselves at a girls' school.

"Well, if we're going back we'll take Coker with us," growled Johnny Bull, "and we'll jolly well make him sorry he barged in!"

"Yes, rather!" gasped Nugent.

Frank Nugent was dabbing a streaming nose, where one of Coker's fists had landed in the tussle. Hurree Jamset Ram Singh was rubbing an eye that persisted in winking.

"Make an example of him!" agreed Harry Wharton. "Now, Coker! Get up!"

"Urrrrgh!" mumbled Coker.

"Help him up!" said Bob. "You take one ear, and I'll take the other! Lots of room to take hold. Then we'll help him home!"

Coker was winded; but he found breath enough to yell as he was heaved to his feet by his ears. He hit out wildly.

But he was too far gone for even his leg-of-mutton fists to do any execution. He stood tottering when he resumed the perpendicular.

"Start!" snapped Bob.

"You—urrgh!—young scoundrel—wurrgh!—think you can order me about?" gurgled Coker. "I'll smash you!"

"You look like doing it!" grinned Bob. "You're going back now—and we're going to boot you all the way! Better hop it lively!"

"The liveliness is the proper caper, my esteemed Coker."

"I'll jolly well—yoo-hooop!" roared Coker, as a boot landed.

He spun round at Bob; and as he spun Johnny Bull's boot landed. Turning on Johnny, he received Harry Wharton's boot—hard.

"Going?" asked the captain of the Remove cheerfully.

"You young—ooogh! I'll—urrgh!" gasped Coker. "I'll—Keep your hoofs away, you young scoundrels! Think you can boot a Fifth Form man and—Oh, my hat!"

"Sort of!" grinned Bob.

Clearly, the Removes thought that they could boot a Fifth Form man, for they did—hard!

Coker, spluttering with rage and breathlessness, essayed to put up a struggle. But there was no struggle left in Coker!

Gathering round the hapless Horace, the Famous Five booted hard, and booted often. It was not easy for Horace Coker to assimilate the fact that he was beaten—that he had to back out of a combat with mere juniors. But that fact was borne in upon his mind at last, and with inexpressible feelings Coker of the Fifth started on his homeward way.

The chums of the Remove accompanied him.

Coker did not want their company—far from that! He had it without



COME INTO the OFFICE, BOYS—AND GIRLS!

Your Editor is always pleased to hear from his readers. Write to him: Editor of the "Magnet," The Amalgamated Press, Ltd., Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

WELL, chums, there's not very much space at my disposal this week. But I don't grumble, providing I can get a little pow-wow with you fellows. There's nothing like a friendly chat with my readers, what? When I think of the vast number of old friends I've got, this verse always comes into my mind:

"A friend that is new
May be all that is true;
But there's never a friend like the old.
The former is held by a silver thread;
But the latter by anchors of gold."

Very nice words, those, chums. If at any time your pal wants you to write something in his autograph album the above verse will always suffice.

As usual, my postbag contains quite a number of interesting letters, chief among them being one from Lorne Henry, of Victoria, B.C., Canada, who writes me at regular intervals.

Thank you for your greetings and salutations, my Canadian chum, and don't run away with the idea that I'm getting tired of receiving so many letters from you. The more the merrier!

Some time ago I published a number of peculiar place-names. Lorne Henry has been busy looking up more, and wishes me to pass his findings on to you fellows.

Here they are:

No-yes, Manitoba; Red Apple, Washington; Bad Axe, Michigan, Tomahstone, Sugar Loaf, Arizona; Kissimmee, Florida, Social Circle, Georgia; New Harmony, Rising Sun, Indiana; Cherryfield, Maine; Lime Kiln, Maryland; Sleepy Eye, Minnesota; Bowling Green, Missouri; Round-up, Montana; Broken Bow, Nebraska; Broken Arrow, Oklahoma; Friendship, New York; Cow Pens, South Carolina; Rural Retreat, Virginia, and Red Jacket, West Virginia.

wanting it! Every now and then they accelerated him with a thudding boot!

Coker's idea had been to walk off, with as much dignity as possible, in the circumstances—which was not, indeed, very much. But dignity had to be thrown to the winds now.

He walked very fast. He walked faster. Finally, he trotted. After him trotted the five Removes. Twice, thrice, Horace turned desperately on his tormentors; and each time he was collared, bumped, rolled, and rumped. After which he grew tired of turning on them, and his trot quickened to a run.

Had Coker of the Fifth been told that he would ever run, with a mob of juniors booting him on his way, he would have laughed the idea to scorn! Now, alas, he was doing it.

He was fairly sprinting by the time he emerged from the footpath into Friardale Lane. He headed for Grey-

MODEL FLYING.

Lots of fellows I know are model-flying enthusiasts, and I expect there are heaps of you who have already taken advantage of the coupon on page 11. If not, you should lose no time in sending it for the "Frog" coloured leaflet with particulars of the "Frog" Flying Club, and how to obtain handsome enamelled Air Force Pilot Badges. In nearly every district there is a Model Flying Club, which holds competitions under S.M.A.E. regulations, and for those of you who find as much interest in building your own machine as flying it, there is a large range of "Frog" scale model construction kits at prices as low as half-a-crown.

I take it you have read this week's school yarn of Harry Wharton & Co. and the girls of Cliff House. Well, and what do you think of it? Isn't it the real goods? I said in my last week's chat that I'd eat my best Sunday topper if you didn't enjoy it. No need to undertake that indigestible task.

Now that the feud between the two schools is "on," I guess you are all wondering what will happen next week. Well, you'll find out when you read:

"THE BOY WHO WOULDN'T SPLIT!"

the next yarn in this super series. Nothing, apparently, will alter the opinion of the girls of Cliff House that Bob Cherry has served them a dirty trick. And they're out to get their own back. Their action lands Bob Cherry in serious trouble with the Head of Greyfriars. But Bob is true blue all through, and prepares to take what's coming sooner than "split" on the girls. You're on another good yarn here, boys, so be sure to order your MAGNET in good time!

YOUR EDITOR.

friars as fast as he could go. Quite as fast the Famous Five followed on.

Every time Coker lagged, a boot thudded; and it thudded every now and then when he did not lag, just to keep him up to it.

The Famous Five chuckled and chortled as they chased Coker. They seemed to be enjoying themselves now, Coker was not.

They passed several people in the lane. Old Joyce, the woodcutter, almost fell off his cart at the startling sight. People stopped, and stared, and grinned. It was really awful, for Coker. He put on speed. So did the Famous Five.

Just then Coker would have given a great deal for the sight of a Sixth Form prefect. His eyes would have been gladdened by a view of Wingate of the Sixth, with his ash under his arm.

But Horace had laid his plans too
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well. He was far from the sight of a Greyfriars prefect!

He bounded on.

Some Greyfriars fellows came in sight. But they were only Shell fellows, and they stood and roared with laughter as Coker swept by them, dribbled up Priardale Lane by the choiry five.

Near the school gates a fat figure hove in sight, and a big pair of spectacles turned on Coker.

"He, he, he!" cackled Billy Bunter. "I say, you fellows—he, he, he!"

Coker had just energy enough to smack Bunter's head as he careered by.

Billy Bunter's cackle was changed to a roar of anguish as he sat down in a bed of nettles.

Coker charged on. Right up to the school gates the Famous Five chased him, and then, breathless, they came to a halt. Coker hurtled in at the gates and vanished.

"Oh crumbs!" gasped Bob Cherry, fanning his face with his hat. "Oh scissors! Think Coker will want to corner us again in a lonely spot without any prefects about?"

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

It seemed improbable that old Horace would lay such strategic plans again. His strategy had been successful, so far as that went; but one such success, it was probable, was enough for Coker.

THE TWENTY-FIRST CHAPTER.

Cut!

"**W**AIT here!"
"There's the jolly old crocodile!"

It was Saturday afternoon.

That afternoon was a half-holiday at Greyfriars, and at Cliff House School. The Famous Five had plenty of occupations on a half-holiday; but all other things had been set aside to make one more attempt to set matters right with their schoolgirl friends at Cliff House. Even cricket was neglected for the nonce.

The present state of affairs was getting intolerable. It was not pleasant to be regarded in the Remove as a gang of young hooligans—and still more unpleasant to be so regarded by Marjorie & Co.

It was still a complete mystery to them why they were so regarded. They felt sure that a few words with Marjorie would clear the matter up. But the difficulty was to get those few words. Had Hazel been willing, he could have acted as ambassador—but he was not willing. Hazel had his back up—and he was, moreover, wholly and solely concentrated on his own dingy troubles.

But on half-holidays, it was frequently the custom of Miss Bellew, the mistress of the Fourth Form at Cliff House, to take her Form for a "walk"; and the juniors had heard, before the trouble began, that such a "walk" was booked for that Saturday afternoon. So immediately after dinner, they headed for

Cliff House—and if Coker of the Fifth spotted them going, he did not follow on this time!

Now the chums of the Remove were posted in Pegg Lane, at a little distance from the gates of Cliff House School, on the watch for the "crocodile"—otherwise the Cliff House Fourth in marching order.

"There they come!" murmured Frank Nugent.

"There's Clara!" said Harry.

"And the esteemed and beauteous Marjorie!" murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"And Dolly Jobling!" said Johnny Bull. "And Fatima! They'll have to see us now, whether they like it or not!"

Bob Cherry did not speak. His rugged face was worried, and his eyes fixed very earnestly on Marjorie Hazeldene, in the distance.

That charming face had always greeted him, hitherto, with a friendly smile. He was wondering, with dismal

As the four came by the spot where the Greyfriars juniors were standing, five straw hats were raised as one.

"Marjorie!" muttered Bob.

"Esteemed and beauteous misses—" began the Nabob of Bhanipur.

Marjorie's face was turned away. Clara and Dolly looked straight ahead, as if unseeing. Bessie Bunter could not turn her fat little nose up higher than it was turning already. But she put the thumb of her right hand to it, and extended the fingers! That elegant gesture made the Greyfriars fellows gasp.

"Marjorie!" exclaimed Harry Wharton, his cheeks crimson. "Won't you let us speak a word?"

Marjorie Hazeldene seemed deaf. The colour deepened in her cheeks a little, but she gave no sign.

"Clara!" exclaimed Nugent.

Clara walked on, unseeing.

Only one word came from the crocodile. It was uttered by Bessie Bunter. The word was:

"Yah!"

Then the Cliff House girls were past, and the tail of the crocodile wound on past the Famous Five. They stood dumbfounded. They were rather glad when the crocodile had wound past and left them standing.

"Well!" said Frank, with a deep breath.

Grunt from Johnny Bull.

"That does it!" he said. "We've done all we can—and we've been cut in sight of a crowd of girls! I'm fed-up!"

Crimson and uncomfortable; the juniors gazed after the disappearing crocodile. Only Bob Cherry's face was pale. It was a heavy blow to poor Bob, for Marjorie to pass him with idly averted eyes.

"I think," said Harry quietly, "that we shall have to leave it at that. I'm not going through anything of that kind again."

"Same here!" grunted Johnny Bull.

"The samefulness is terrific!"

Bob did not speak.

He drove his hands deep in his pockets, and tramped away, and his friends followed him. They walked back to Greyfriars in silence. Four of the Co. were feeling angry and resentful. They had been condemned, on what evidence they could not even guess, and without being heard in their defence. The cut direct was enough for them—and that was that!

But there was no room for anger in Bob's heart. He was only feeling distressed and bewildered. To his friends, it was the end—but to Bob it seemed that there was only one thing to be done—to sort out this strange tangle somehow, and set matters right. But how it was going to be done was like a puzzle to which there seemed to be no answer.

THE END.

(The next yarn in this super series is entitled: "THE BOY WHO WOULDN'T SPLIT!" It'll be your loss if you miss it. Be sure and order your copy of the MAGNET in good time! —ED.)

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trepidation, how it was going to greet him now.

"Hats off, when they come along," said Harry Wharton. "Let 'em see that we're just as pally as ever! Miss Bellew won't mind us speaking to them for a minute or two—she knows us all right!"

"Hallo, they've spotted us!" murmured Nugent.

Standing in a group at the side of the lane, the Famous Five were spotted by most of the crocodile as it wound along.

Many eyes turned on them.

Miss Bellew glanced at them, and gave them a smiling nod, and the chums of the Remove raised their hats very politely to the mistress of the Fourth. But the Form-mistress' nod was the only one they received. Not one of the Cliff House Fourth Formers gave them a sign of recognition.

Marjorie Hazeldene's glance turned on them for a moment, as if in surprise—and was immediately averted. Clara Trevlyn looked at them coolly, and turned her head away. Dolly Jobling gave an audible sniff, and transferred her attention elsewhere. Bessie Bunter fixed her big spectacles on them and turned up her little fat nose expressively.

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DOCTOR BIRCHEMALL'S BULLFIGHT!

By DICKY NUGENT

"Spare a minnit?" Doctor Alfred Birchemall poked his head into the Junior Common-room at St. Sam's and asked that question.

"Two, if you like, sir!" Jack Jolly answered, readily. "We're only packing up the Fourth Form Stage Club's costumes till next term."

"Good!" said the Head, who had a somewhat crafty look on his skollary face. "Mind if I borrow one of them for the afternoon?" "Plezzure, sir!" larfed Jack Jolly. "But mind you choose the right one. Romeo's costume would look pretty commical on you; but you'd look quite all right as Bill Sykes!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" "Oh, rats!" grinned Doctor Birchemall. "I'm not going to wear the costume myself, anyway. I want you and Fearless to wear it between you!" The Fourth-Formers stared.

"What is it, then, sir?" asked the kaptin of the Fourth. "An animal costume?"

"Just that!" nodded the Head. "The costume I have in mind, as a matter of fakt, is that costume of a bull which you used in the bullfighting scene in the opera called 'Tram-drivers'!"

"Don't you mean 'Carmen,' sir?" chuckled Frank Fearless.

"That's it, Fearless—'Carmen'!" said Doctor Birchemall, nodding eagerly. "I knew it was something to do with trams or cars! Now, what about it, boys? All I want you to do is to dress up as a bull and gallop across a field towards me when I am escorting a lady from the station this afternoon. What do you say?"

"Anything for a lark, sir!" grinned Jack Jolly. "But who's the lady? And what's the idea?" Doctor Birchemall culled slightly.

"Ahem! It's rather a konfidential matter, boys; but I know I can rely on you to keep it to yourselves. As a matter of fakt, the lady is my wealthy old maiden Aunt Jane."

"My hat!" grinned Bright. "It's a wonder an old fogey like you has any aunts left!"

The Head frowned.

"You're talking out of the back of your neck, Bright!" he said, with dignity. "I'm only ninety-nine next birthday, and if you'd like to know, I've got several aunts! But Aunt Jane is the one that really matters. She's simply rolling in oof—or, as the vulgar would put it, she is in a prosperous financial position!"

"Is she going to leave you in her will, sir?" asked Jolly.

"I'm afraid she won't—unless something happens to change her opinion of me! But that is just where you come in!" said Doctor Birchemall eagerly. "You see, boys, my Aunt Jane has always looked on me as a cowherd."

"You don't say so, sir!" "It's too—ridiculous as it may sound!" said the Head, with a shrug. "Years ago, when we were on the river together at Oxbridge, she fell into the water. I was as brave as a lion. Instead of sitting there to watch her drown, I punted



back to the shore and hurriedly fetched a perlice-man, who soon saved her. But, despite my curridge and presence of mind, Aunt Jane has always chosen to look on me as a cowherd since that day. She won't leave me a penny in her will, boys, after all these years—unless you change her attitude to-day!"

"Us?" "Both of you!" nodded the Head, his grimy four-finger pointing first to Jolly and then to Fearless. "If you'll only dress up as a bull and pretend to attack Aunt Jane and myself when I escort her from the station on her visit to St. Sam's, then I can shield her and drive you away. And her opinion of me will change immediately!"

"Oh, crums!" "What's the verdict, boys?" asked Doctor Birchemall, his brow farly rinkled with anxiety.

Jolly and Fearless looked at each other. Then they both bust into a larf.

"All serene, sir. We'll oblige," said Jack Jolly. "You're a terribul twister; but we'll do you a turn!"

"Thanks, awfully!" beamed the Head. And he galloped away, grinning all over his dial with releef.

As soon as Doctor Birchemall had had his dinner that day, he trotted off to the station to meet his aunt. Jolly and Fearless and Merry and Bright followed

him out of gates soon after, carrying the costume between them.

In a secluded spot behind a hedge in one of the fields near the station Jolly and Fearless got into the costume, Jolly taking the front legs and Fearless the back. Then Merry and Bright stood guard to watch for the return of the Head with his sellybrated Aunt Jane.

Meanwhile, at Muggleton

ing across the fields towards St. Sam's.

As they walked along, the Head talked on a toppick of never-ending interest to him—namely, himself.

So interested did he become in what he was saying that he almost forgot about his little arrangement with Jack Jolly & Co. He failed to notice Merry of the Fourth peep round from behind a hedge and give the signal to the bogus bull to prepare for action.

But Doctor Birchemall's Aunt Jane, who was not so rapped up in the subject of Doctor Birchemall, spotted the "bull" the moment it appeared. While the Head marched on, talking cheerfully about himself under the fond impression that his female relative was still beside him, Aunt Jane stopped and stared back at the weird-looking creature that was approaching.

"Bless me!" she eggs-claimed. "What is it?"

Then the "bull" came charging down on her.

Aunt Jane grasped her umbrella firmly in her hand and stood her ground.

A few seconds later, Jolly and Fearless, in the interior of the "animal," had a rare old shock. It hadn't occurred to them that the old lady would start lashing out with her umbrella. But the idea struck them forcibly when they got within striking distance of her!

"Thwack! Thwack! Thwack!" "Yarooooo!" "Ow-ow-ow! Stoppit!" The front legs and the back legs of the "bull" jumped about wildly—then tried to run off in different directions! The result was simply disastrous for the body. It came apart with a frightful tearing sound and Jolly and Fearless hit the hard, unsimperthettick earth with an awful crash.

"Just as I thought!" ejaculated Doctor Birchemall's Aunt Jane.

She turned round to address her nephew. And then she received a real shock! Charging towards her from the opposite direction was another bull—but this time, it was a real one!

It took a lot to frighten Doctor Birchemall's Aunt Jane. But the site of that grate beast charging across the field did the trick. A shock of terror left her lips.

"Help! Save me!" she shrilled.

"Don't worry, amty!" chortled a calm, reassuring voice in front. "I'll save you!"

It was Doctor Birchemall! Blissfully unaware of what had been going on behind him, he rolled back his cuffs and ran to meet the leest.

Bang! Crash! Gallop! With a whole series of crashes, the Head and the bull met in combat.

Doctor Birchemall was fairly determined to impress his aunt this time. He seized the bull's horns and twisted them savvidgely, he pulled its tale with fearful force and he used every ju-jitsu trick he knew—and all the time he imagined that he was struggling with Jolly and Fearless.

Jolly and Fearless on their feet again, now, watched the struggle in sheer amazement. Merry and Bright, from the hedge, simply blinked.

But it was Doctor Birchemall's Aunt Jane who was most surprised of all. She stared at the struggling figgers of the Head and the bull in open-mouthed wonderment.

The fight was over at last! With a final bellow of woe, the bull struggled to its feet and fled for its life.

Doctor Birchemall, methless and perspiring, turned to his aunt and boughed.

"Nothing to worry about, after all, amty, was there?" he simpered. "To a man who's as brave as I am, fighting a mad bull is a meer—"

Then, suddenly, the Head spotted Jolly and Fearless in the remains of their costume. And a gasp of utter dismay escaped him.

"What the thame—" "Don't be alarmed, dear Alfred!" cried Aunt Jane. "It's only two of your skollars who dree—"

"I—I—" stutered Doctor Birchemall.

"When I first saw them," went on the Head's female relative, "I thought it was a little ruse of yours for making me think you were brave when you really weren't! But after what I have seen, my dear Alfred, I no longer think that!"

The Head's face, which had turned garstly white now he realised that he had fought a real bull, rinkled up into a smile.

"D-d-don't you, amty?" he gasped.

"Certainly not! I can see now," said Aunt Jane. "that I have been doing you an injustice all this time!"

The Head started to brighten up wonderfully.

"Well, well! I'm glad you rockernise me for what I'm worth at last, amty," he said. "I've always told you I was as brave as a lion. Now you've seen for yourself. As for you boys, I'm surprized at you, dressing up as a bull like this here!"

"Sorry, sir!" grinned Jolly and Fearless, getting their cue from the tremendous wink the Head gave them.

"You report to me later on," went on Doctor Birchemall. "I'll give you something to remember this by, then!"

And later on, when they reported to him, he kept his word.

He gave them each a bright new penny!

GOLF IS SIMPLE Says COKER

Walking across Courtfield Common (writes Johnny Bull), I stopped for a couple of minutes to look at a strange scene. A weird-looking scarecrow, togged up in a leather jacket and plus-sixteens or thereabouts, was showing two novices how to drive at golf.

It was only after a close examination that I recognised the scarecrow as Coker of the Fifth and his two companions as Potter and Greene.

As I stopped, I heard Coker remark: "There's no need for you chaps to get nervous. Golf is simple. Just do what I do and you'll do right. Now, this is how you drive."

Coker then made a terrific slash at the ball with his club. Potter and Greene and I gazed into the distant scrub to see the ball arrive.

After a few seconds we looked back again and found that the ball was still at Coker's feet untouched!

Coker muttered something about even the best coming unstuck sometimes. Then he had another smack at it. Still the same result. He tried a third and a fourth time. Still there was nothing doing.

Game to the last, Coker kept on slashing. But he didn't hit the ball.

Eventually, tired out from my long ordeal, I came away. The last I saw of Coker, from the road half a mile farther on, he was still slashing away—and still missing.

That was three days ago, and I haven't seen him since. Probably he's still trying!

Peter Todd Discovers That— POSH PEOPLE PATRONISE POPSHOPS!

If you'd been down at the gates the other day, you might have seen a furtive-looking youth sneaking sheepishly out of the school and squirming with embarrassment at every step he took.

It was me!

I was doing a thing I had never done before. A financial blizzard had driven me to extremities, and I was going down to Courtfield to pawn my watch!

I never felt more hot and bothered in my life, chaps, believe me! The mere thought that anyone might spot me dropping in at the sign of the three brass balls made me blush to the roots of my hair!

Of course, when you want to dodge people, you're bound to run into them. I did! I met Temple down the lane. Usually, Temple doesn't hobnob with Remove fellows. This time, he did. He would!

Then we both met Stewart and Temple were both there, calmly popping their watches, as though it

was an everyday transaction!

They looked only mildly interested in my arrival. Temple asked me why I hadn't told him I was calling there.

I popped my watch and we all went out together. Temple hired a Daimler and ran me back to the school in it. He was taking Dabney and Fry to a cricket match at Canterbury. Stewart went off to an aerodrome where he's taking an expensive course of instruction in flying.

Seems that popping must be done in the best circles. Next time I visit old Lazarus, I shall advertise it a bit. It ought to earn me quite a lot of kudos!



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HOSKINS AND THE NIGHTINGALE!

By JAMES HOBSON

You Remove kids ought to thank your lucky stars you haven't a musical genius in your Form like Hoskins!

He's the bane of our existence in the Shell. Every spare minute he's thumping out exercises on the piano. Sometimes we feel we shall all go off our rockers if it doesn't stop!

But his latest stunt is one degree worse than exercises on the piano.

He has started waking us up in the middle of the night to listen to the nightingale!

He did it last Monday. He did it again on Tuesday and again on Wednesday.

The song of the nightingale may be frightfully beautiful and all that, but its beauties fade a little when a musical maniac wakes you up night after night to listen to it.

I became so fed up about it in the end that I decided to track the blessed nightingale to its lair and trap it and transfer it to another part of the district where Hoskins wouldn't be able to hear it at night!

So on Thursday I slipped out after lights out to investigate. Sure enough, the usual warbling began at the usual time. I went in the direction of the song and tracked it down to its source.

But there the plan broke down. I didn't trap a nightingale and transfer it somewhere else, as I had intended. Instead I went back to the dorm and fetched Hoskins—and showed him.

And that worked out just as well!

We haven't heard a word about nightingales from Hoskins since!

You see, I'd found out what the warbling really was.

It wasn't a nightingale, as Hoskins had thought.

It was only Gosling, whistling for his pet Persian cat to come in for the night!

Would Girls Improve Greyfriars?

H. VERNON-SMITH Says "Yes!"

I have a high opinion of girls, myself. I think on the average that they're more intelligent and sensible than fellows.

The company of girls would improve most of us. We're a pretty untidy lot at times; girls would tone us up and make us more careful of our appearance. Some of us are much too gawky and tongue-tied in the presence of ladies. The co-education idea at Greyfriars would bring out such shy youths!

And think how useful girls would be for taking girls' parts in Dramatic Society's productions!

HARRY WHARTON SAYS "NO!"

Boys and girls are as different from each other in their mental make-up and outlook as chalk is from cheese. I think it's quite right for them to go to separate schools.

What the dickens does it matter if some chaps are shy and awkward with girls? Most of the worst offenders in that respect are jolly good sportsmen and that's more important while they're in the schoolboy stage.

My idea is that if girls came to Greyfriars, we might be in danger of becoming softies. Boys have to face a tougher world than girls when they grow up and they ought to be trained accordingly.

I think, too, that girls might undermine the school-boy code of honour that's so strong at Greyfriars and introduce petty jealousies that don't exist at present.

Like Smithy, I admire girls. But I think we're better without them at Greyfriars!