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By
**FRANK
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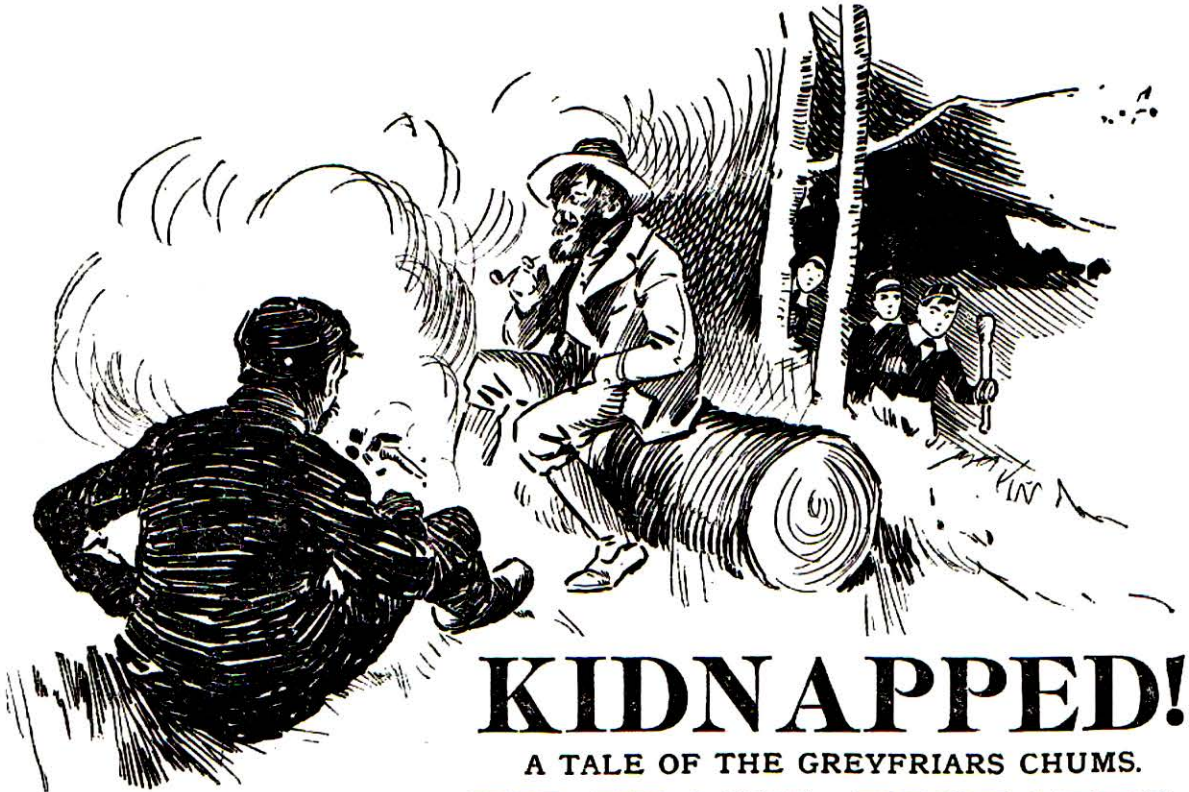


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KIDNAPPED!

A TALE OF THE GREYFRIARS CHUMS.

BY FRANK RICHARDS.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Why Wharton was Late.

"THAT'S my letter! Give it me."

"Rats!"

"You—you cad! Give me my letter!"

Harry Wharton, of the Remove at Greyfriars, heard the altercation as he came down the stairs. He glanced quickly down into the hall. There were half a dozen fellows of the Remove—the Lower Fourth Form at Greyfriars—there, and above them towered the burly form of Bulstrode, the bully of the Form. Bulstrode held a letter in his hand, high in the air, out of reach of the junior who was trying to grasp it from him.

"Give me my letter!" shouted Hazeldene furiously. "I'll—I'll call Mr. Quelch—"

There was a buzz from the Removites.

"Sneak!"

"I don't care! He's not going to take my letter! Give it me, Bulstrode!"

Bulstrode laughed.

"Perhaps I will, if you ask nicely, Vaseline, after I've done with it," he said mockingly. "Gentlemen of the Remove, is it permitted for a fellow in our Form to receive letters from a lady without showing them to the whole Form?"

"Certainly not!" grinned King. "I vote that the letter is read out in the Form-room to the whole of the Remove."

And the Removites laughed loudly. Had the letter belonged to anyone but Hazeldene, Bulstrode would have found opinion very much against him, but no one cared for Hazeldene. His oily ways had earned him the nickname of Vaseline in the Form, and his propensity for never taking the straight path when a crooked one would do, had not made him popular.

"Fancy Vaseline getting letters like this!" went on Bulstrode, with his loud laugh. "I spotted the handwriting at once. There's bound to be something interesting in this letter."

"Sure to be," said King. "Open it, and let's hear."

"Oh, shut up!" said Trevor. "You can't open a fellow's letter, even if it's Vaseline's. You must draw a line at that, Bulstrode."

The bully of the Remove sneered.

"Must I?" he said. "Look there, then!"

And he jerked his thumb into the envelope and tore it open. Hazeldene gritted his teeth.

"Give me that letter, Bulstrode!"

"Rats! I'm going to read it out to the whole Form."

"It's from my sister—"

"Then there's no particular reason why it shouldn't be read out."

"It sha'n't be! You cad——"

"Stand back, you young ass, or you'll get hurt!"

But, unheeding the warning, Hazeldene made a spring for the letter. Bulstrode gripped him by the shoulder with his left hand, and, exerting his strength, easily held him back at arm's length.

"Read the letter out, King," he said, "while I hold this young fool! It will be amusing."

"Oh, shut up!" said Trevor.

"Shut up yourself, Trevor! Read it out, King."

"Certainly!" grinned King, taking the letter.

Harry Wharton came down the last four stairs with a single bound. The next moment his grasp was on King's shoulder, just as the fellow was pulling the letter from the torn envelope.

"Give me that letter, King!"

King stared at him.

"Sha'n't!"

"Give me that letter!"

Harry's face was dark with anger, and his eyes were blazing. His fists were clenched hard, and his body quivered as though he were gathering all his strength for a blow. King changed colour slightly, and then burst into a forced laugh.

"Oh, you can have it if you like, kid!" he exclaimed.

"Give it me!"

King passed Wharton the letter without another word. There were few fellows in the Greyfriars Remove who would have cared to tackle Harry Wharton when he looked as he did now. Harry passed the letter to Hazeldene. Bulstrode, with a face aflame, made a grasp at it, but Harry Wharton pushed him back.

"No, you don't, Bulstrode!"

The bully of the Remove glared at him.

"I gave you a licking the other day," he said thickly.

"Do you want another?"

Harry Wharton's lip curled disdainfully.

"I think you will find it a bit harder a second time," he said. "But I'm ready for you any time if you want to try again. I think you're a rotten cad, if you want to know my opinion! Only a cad like you would open another fellow's letter."

"What business is it of yours?" snarled Bulstrode.

Harry Wharton gave a shrug of the shoulders.

"It's the business of every decent fellow to interfere in a matter like this," he replied.

Bulstrode looked round with a sneer on his lips.

"You hear his opinion of you, you fellows?" he said.

"You didn't interfere."

"Oh, shut up!" said Trevor.

"Perhaps they're afraid of you," said Harry Wharton, who had not learned yet to control the bitter tongue which had more than once brought him into trouble. "But I am not!"

There was the clang of a bell. The Removites, leaving the quarrel where it was—although it was reaching an interesting point—hurried away, the bell summoning them to first lesson. But Bulstrode was too infuriated to care for the bell, or anything else.

"You're not, eh?" he said, between his teeth. "One licking is not enough for you—eh? Then I'll give you another, by George!"

And his fist came out like lightning, finding Harry Wharton scarcely prepared for so sudden an attack, and Wharton went reeling along from a crashing blow on the nose. He sat down upon the flagged floor with a bump. King hurriedly put his arm through Bulstrode's and drew him away.

"Come on, Bulstrode. We shall be late, and you know what old Quelch is like when a fellow is late for class."

"But——"

"Oh, you can fight Wharton this afternoon; it's a half-holiday, and you'll have lots of time! What's the good of getting into a row and being detained, as you were last Wednesday?"

"Oh, all right!" said Bulstrode. And he hurried away with his friend towards the Remove class-room, into which the juniors were crowding.

Harry Wharton staggered to his feet. The sudden, really treacherous blow had dazed him. His nose was swelling already, and a stream of red was bursting from it. The blow had been a severe one. The blood stained his chin and his collar. He caught sight of himself in the glass in the hall, and gritted his teeth.

He hurried upstairs to a bath-room, and there bathed his nose in cold water. But it was a good five minutes before he could stop the bleeding. Then he hurried away to change his collar, and finally descended the stairs to make his way to the Remove class-room.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.**Detained.****WHARTON!**

Harry Wharton looked up at Mr. Quelch as he entered the room. The master of the Remove was looking extremely stern.

"Yes, sir."

"You are nearly ten minutes' late."

"I am sorry, sir——"

"I dare say you are," said Mr. Quelch grimly. "I suppose this is another example of your insubordinate habits, Wharton."

Harry Wharton was silent. The rebuke was undeserved, as it happened, yet he had earned it. He had come to Greyfriars chafing against all authority, and had gone out of his way to show his contempt for the school institutions. He was learning better now. But it could not be expected that his earlier scrapes would be easily forgotten by the masters. Any disregard of school discipline was certain to be regarded more seriously in Wharton's case than in the case of any other lad; and if he were misjudged sometimes, he had only his earlier recklessness to thank for it.

"Have you no reply to make, Wharton?"

"No, sir," said Harry sullenly.

"Very well. I am afraid I cannot allow the lesson to be interrupted, and the discipline of the Form to be set at naught, with impunity. You will stay in this afternoon. Wharton, until five o'clock, and occupy the time by writing out the first book of the Georgics."

Harry set his lips hard, and went to his place.

"Do you hear me, Wharton?"

"Yes, sir."

"I shall expect to see the work before tea," said Mr. Quelch. "We will now proceed with the lesson."

The lesson proceeded. Harry went through his work with a dark, angry face. He had not deserved that detention, and he had been too proud to explain. Bulstrode grinned at him along the desk. The bully of the Remove was delighted. Harry's chum, Frank Nugent, looked at him curiously. He had not witnessed the scene in the hall, and did not know the cause of Harry's delay.

"Anything wrong, old chap?" he whispered, while Bob Cherry was construing at the other end of the Form, and Mr. Quelch's attention was drawn in that direction.

"I was rowing with Bulstrode, and I had to bathe my nose before I could come in," said Harry, without taking the trouble to lower his voice.

Mr. Quelch turned round sharply.

"You were talking, Wharton."

Harry was silent.

"Wharton, were you talking? Answer me at once!"

"Yes, sir," said Harry, biting his lips, but too proud to prevaricate. With all his faults, Harry Wharton had never told a lie.

"If I had better send you in to the doctor," said Mr. Quelch.

Harry dropped his eyes to his book. To be sent in to the Head meant a flogging, as he knew. But Mr. Quelch did not want to be severe. He allowed the incident to pass with that warning, and the lesson fortunately terminated without any further trouble. But Harry's face was dark as he left the class-room with the rest, when morning school was over. It was a bright, spring afternoon, and all nature seemed to be calling the boys out of doors, and the prospect of being shut up until five o'clock in the stuffy class-room was not pleasant.

"It's too bad!" said Nugent. "If you had explained to Mr. Quelch, I don't think he would have been so rough."

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Harry shrugged his shoulders, a trick of his which even his friends found sometimes irritating.

"He would have said that I had no business to be fighting," he said bitterly.

"Well, so you hadn't!" chimed in Bob Cherry. "What did you want to row with Bulstrode for, Wharton?"

"Because I chose," said Harry, walking away.

Bob Cherry gave Nugent a significant grin.

"More tantrums," he remarked. "I really think Wharton might take the trouble to keep his beastly temper sometimes, you know. I wanted you both to come out with me this afternoon, and now he's detained."

Nugent looked uneasy.

"He doesn't look to me as if he means to stay in," he remarked. "I hope he is not thinking of breaking bounds. Quelch would be wild, and he would get reported to the Head for it."

"Cherry! Nugent!"

Hazeldene came towards the chums of the Remove, a letter in his hand. They looked at him rather curiously. Hazeldene's face was very bright, and there was a more pleasant light in his eyes than the Removites had ever noticed in them before.

"What's the trouble?" asked Bob Cherry.

"Will you fellows come down to the village with me this afternoon?"

"That's according. If you want to stand a feed at the tuck-shop, we'll come with pleasure; but if it's only the pleasure of your conversation that you're going to tempt us with, I don't really know whether we can put off our other pressing engagements."

Hazeldene grinned in a rather sickly way.

"Don't rot, Cherry. I should like you to come, and Wharton, too, if he could. My sister's coming down to Greyfriars."

Bob Cherry and Nugent looked interested. They had heard a great deal of Hazeldene's sister, and had seen her photograph—that of a bright-eyed, laughing girl of fifteen.

Vaseline, the cad of the Remove, had only been known to stand up in a fight once, and that was when Bulstrode had taken the locket containing Marjorie Hazeldene's photograph, and refused to give it up. And on that occasion Bob Cherry, Wharton, and Nugent had stood by him, and the bully of the Removes had been compelled to give in.

"I had a letter from her this morning," went on Hazeldene—"the letter that rotter Bulstrode tried to take, you know, and Wharton wouldn't let him."

"Oh!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "What's that? I haven't heard."

Hazeldene explained.

"By Jove," said Bob, looking contrite. "Wharton did jolly well, and I was wrong in thinking that he had rowed with Bulstrode out of sheer cussedness, as usual! But I don't see why he couldn't explain. So Miss Hazeldene is coming down to Greyfriars this afternoon. What can she possibly want to see you for, Vaseline?"

"Queer taste, and no mistake!" said Nugent.

Hazeldene coloured.

"I'd rather you left off rotting on that subject," he said. "If you don't want to come with me, don't; but—"

"Sorry!" said Bob Cherry impulsively. "It was a slip. We'll come down with pleasure—to meet the train, I suppose you mean?"

Hazeldene laughed.

"Well, she's a girl, you know, so she's forgotten to mention which train she's coming by; but I think it's pretty certain to be the three o'clock. If it's a later one we can put in the time at the tuck-shop."

"Jolly good idea!"

"Marjorie's coming down to see the school," explained Hazeldene. "I'm going to show her round Greyfriars. She's never been here yet. She'll be glad to see you, and it will look like a welcome to meet her at the station."

"Quite thoughtful of you, Vaseline, and—"

"And look here," said the other, colouring again, "don't call me Vaseline, please, before her! She will wonder."

"Oh, all right; unless it slips out, you know."

"Don't let it slip out."

"I won't, if I can help it."

"Then you'll be ready to start at half-past two," said Hazeldene. "It will take about half an hour to walk it. So-long!"

And he walked away. Bob Cherry looked after him curiously.

"There's some good in that chap," he said. "His sister's a jolly nice girl, to judge by her photograph, and he seems to be awfully fond of her. I'm sorry about Wharton being kept in, especially as he didn't deserve it this time. But it's no good speaking to the Quelch-bird. Wharton annoyed him by the way he answered in the class-room, and Quelch will be as hard as nails. See you at dinner."

Nugent nodded, and went slowly upstairs, and along the passage upon which the Remove studies opened. No. 1 was shared by Nugent, Wharton, Bulstrode, and little Billy

Bunter. Harry Wharton was in his study, oiling a cricket-bat, when Nugent came in. He looked up with an unbending face.

"I'm sorry about that, Wharton!" said Nugent. "You'll have to stick it out, that's all. Vaseline's sister is coming down to Greyfriars this afternoon."

"Is she?" said Harry indifferently.

"Yes, and Vaseline has asked Cherry and me to go down to the station with him to meet her. I wish you could come."

"I will come," said Harry.

"Has Quelch let you off?" asked Nugent hopefully.

"No."

"Are you going to ask him?"

Harry's lips set in a tight line.

"No."

"Then how can you come?"

"I shall come."

"You mean—"

"I mean that I shall come," said Harry Wharton. "I'm not going to spend the afternoon in the class-room by myself. I'm coming out. If you don't want me, I dare say I can find somewhere else to go."

"You know it's not that," said Nugent quickly. "We do want you; but you will get into a fearful row!"

"I don't care!"

"I wish you'd think over it, and—"

"I have thought over it, and I'm coming. Do you want me to come with you?"

"Yes, of course!"

"Then that's settled."

Nugent was silent. It was useless to argue with Wharton when his mind was made up, as he knew by past experience; but there were misgivings in his mind.

THE THIRD CHAPTER. The Gipsies.

BOB CHERRY stood at the gates of Greyfriars, his cap on the back of his curly head, his hands in his pocket, whistling. Hazeldene came down to the gates, and Bob gave him a cheery nod.

"Ready?" he asked. "I've put a clean collar on, and tied my necktie straight, in honour of the occasion."

Hazeldene grinned.

"Then it's got crooked again since," he remarked.

Bob Cherry made a grimace.

"Has it? It's always going so. Give it a shove for me!"

Hazeldene gave the troublesome necktie the required shove. Bob Cherry never could get his necktie straight, or wear his cap on the top of his head. There was frequently a button missing from his waistcoat, and a spot or two of ink on his collar. But with all his careless ways there was not a more likable or a more popular fellow at Greyfriars than Bob Cherry of the Remove.

"Hallo, here's Nugent!" he exclaimed. "Wharton's with him. Come to see us off, I suppose. He doesn't look particularly amiable, though."

Nugent and Wharton came up. Harry had his cap on, and was evidently going out. Bob glanced at him inquiringly.

"Are you coming with us, Wharton?" he asked.

"Yes."

"What about the detention?"

"Never mind that, now."

"There'll be a row."

"Let there be."

Bob Cherry looked grave, and made no motion to start. Hazeldene looked at his watch with rather an anxious expression.

"Here, come along!" he exclaimed. "We don't want to be late for the train, you know. Get a move on you!"

"I don't think Wharton ought to come," said Bob Cherry. "There will be a row, and he will get into trouble. Better—"

"I don't want to come," said Harry, flushing. "I can go somewhere else."

"I don't mean that—"

"You've said quite enough." And Harry was turning savagely away, when Nugent slipped an arm through his, and detained him.

"Don't be an ass, Harry," he said quietly. "You know that Cherry doesn't mean to hint that he doesn't want your company. He's worried about what will happen afterwards."

"I suppose that's my business, not his."

"Oh, very well, if you put it that way!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "I don't care. Come along!"

And the four juniors quitted the gateway. A voice hailed them as they came out into the lane.

"I say, you fellows!"

Bob Cherry stopped. Billy Bunter of the Remove, the smallest boy in the Form, came towards them, blinking through his spectacles, which had earned him the nickname of the Owl. Billy was very short-sighted, and his glasses did not seem to assist his vision much, judging by the blunders he frequently made.

"What do you want, Billy?"

"If you're going down to the tuck-shop I'll come with you, if you like," said Billy Bunter generously. "They have a fresh lot of jam-tarts in on Wednesdays, you know. I should like to stand treat to all of you—"

"Hallo! Have you come into a fortune?" asked Nugent.

"You don't understand—"

"Who have you been robbing?"

"What I mean is—"

"Oh, we won't refuse your treat, Billy; no fear!"

"You won't let me finish. I say I should like to stand treat to all of you, but I happen to be broke this afternoon. A postal-order I was expecting hasn't arrived; so if you like to treat me instead—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I can't see anything to laugh at in that, Bob Cherry. Of course, I shall stand a feed in return when my postal-order comes."

"Ahem! You can come along, if you like, Billy—or, rather, you must ask Hazeldene, as he is head cook and bottle-washer on the present occasion."

"Oh, you can come," said Hazeldene; "but we're not going to the tuck-shop—at least, I don't suppose we shall."

Billy Bunter reflected.

"But you may?" he asked.

"We may—yes, there's a chance."

"I'll come, then."

And the Owl walked on with the party. The afternoon was bright and fresh, the hedges springing into green. A breath of spring was in the air, exhilarating and invigorating. The juniors felt in buoyant spirits as they walked down the leafy lane. Even from Harry Wharton's brow the cloud was lifted, and he was soon laughing and chatting, as cheerily as the rest.

"Hallo, get out of the way!" said Bob Cherry suddenly.

Two huge caravans came lumbering along the road, and a couple of rough-looking fellows were walking beside the shaggy horses. They were evidently gypsies, and equally evidently not of the best class of the Romany. Their dark faces were sullen and heavy, and their black eyes glittered furtively under heavy dark brows. They glanced at the schoolboys, and one of them muttered to the other in a tongue strange to the lads as they heard it.

The juniors stepped out of the road to let the caravans go by. They went lumbering past, with a clanging of hanging pots and household utensils. A growling voice was heard in the leading van, but the words were indistinguishable. As the vans passed on and the juniors resumed their way, a sudden cry came from the foremost vehicle.

The boys turned round again quickly.

"What was that?" cried Harry Wharton, with a flash in his eyes.

"It sounded like somebody crying out," said Bob Cherry, looking intently after the gipsy vans. "Listen!"

The two gipsies walking with the horses had looked back quickly towards the boys. They evidently feared that the lads had heard that strange cry from the van. Harry Wharton's brow darkened.

"There's something wrong there," he muttered. "Whoever is in that van did not cry out for nothing."

"Perhaps it's a kid being whacked," suggested the Owl.

"Kids cry when they're whacked. I used to howl like anything when I was whacked, you know."

"It didn't sound exactly like a child," said Wharton slowly.

"I hardly made it out, it was so sudden," Bob Cherry remarked. "What did you take it for, Wharton?"

"I hardly know; somebody calling out and getting a hand suddenly clapped over his mouth in the middle of it," said Harry. "That's what it sounded like."

"My idea exactly," said Hazeldene. "I— But where are you going, Wharton?"

"Come along," said Harry, without answering the question. And he started running after the vans. The juniors hesitated for a moment. But they could not fail to back up a comrade, so they followed Harry.

The two gypsies who were walking with the horses were still looking back. They scowled darkly at the sight of the juniors running after the vans, and whispered together for a moment, and then one of them fell back towards the rear of the leading van. The vehicles clattered to a halt as the juniors came up, and each of the gypsies reached a short, thick cudgel from the van.

"What do you want with us?" asked the man who had fallen behind the van, evidently with the purpose of preventing any attempt to enter it.

Harry Wharton looked him full in the eyes. The man was a short, but powerful fellow, and the cudgel in his strong hand looked dangerous. But Harry Wharton was not afraid.

"Who was it cried out in that van just now?" he demanded imperiously.

The gipsy stared at him.

"What's that to do with you?" he demanded harshly.

"Answer my question!"

"Answer him, Melchior!" called out the gipsy who had remained near the horses; and then he added something in the Romany dialect.

"Be it so," said Melchior sullenly. "If you are curious, young gentlemen, it was my son who cried out, because he was being beaten. Is there any more you wish to know?" he added, with a savage sneer.

"Yes," said Harry steadily. "I do not believe you. Let us see into the van, and we shall be satisfied!"

"Bah! Away with you!" cried the gipsy savagely. "Shall I be dictated to by a boy? Be silent, Barendro, I tell you I will have my way! If these insolent young fools trouble us I will use my cudgel!"

And the heavy cudgel swung aloft menacingly.

The juniors looked at one another dubiously. They had no right to inquire into what might be passing inside the gipsy van, and violence was a risky and certainly unjustifiable proceeding in the circumstances. Nugent caught Harry Wharton's arm and pulled him away.

"It's nothing to do with us," he said. "Come on! We should be in the wrong, and we can't tackle a pair of hooligans like that, anyway!"

It went against the grain with Harry Wharton to give way. But he realised that Nugent was right. He stood with a clouded brow while the gipsy vans lumbered on, and disappeared round a bend of the lane. The cry had not been heard again. It was quite probable that the matter was as Melchior stated, and in any case, interference, with nothing to go upon, was impossible. The juniors resumed their walk to the village, hurrying their steps now to make up for lost time.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Missing.

"THREE!" exclaimed Bob Cherry, as the strokes boomed out from the village church. "We shall be in time!"

The five juniors had just reached the station. They could hear the snorting of the engine within as they hurried into the building.

Hazeldene ran on eagerly. He stopped at the barrier as the passengers began to come out. There were not many of them, and they were mostly country people returning from market. Hazeldene looked in vain for the slim, girlish form he expected to see. The last figure passed, and still Marjorie Hazeldene had not appeared.

Hazeldene looked worried.

"It's all right, old fellow!" exclaimed Bob Cherry, slapping him on the shoulder. "It will be the next train!"

"I suppose so," said Hazeldene slowly.

"It's all right. Come along!"

"Let's get to the tuck-shop," said Billy Bunter. "It will be an hour before the next train comes in, and it's no earthly good waiting here!"

Hazeldene did not move. Harry Wharton looked at him quietly.

"You are uneasy," he said, in a low voice.

"Yes; I suppose it's all right. But it's strange for Marjorie to leave it till the four o'clock train. She will have to go home by the six o'clock."

"Perhaps she is staying on the platform—"

"Nobody on the platform, sir," said the porter. "You can go and look if you like."

Wharton slipped a shilling into his hand, and the juniors went on the platform.

But the man was right. There was no one there. Marjorie Hazeldene had evidently not come by that train.

"It's all right," said Billy Bunter; "she's not come. Let's get along to the tuck—"

He caught Harry Wharton's eye, and ceased speaking suddenly.

"I suppose it's not possible Miss Hazeldene came by the earlier train?" Harry suggested.

"The two o'clock? But in that case she would have reached Greyfriars before we left it," said Nugent.

"Unless perhaps she lost her way."

"Lost her way on a straight road?"

"Well, Hazeldene says that she has never been to Greyfriars before, and you know how easy it is to go astray in a strange place."

Hazeldene nodded.

"It is possible," he said. "Anyway, I may as well inquire of the ticket-collector. He would have noticed if she came. She's not much like the usual run of people who travel on this line."

"Let's ask him, then."

The ticket-collector was quite willing to give information, and quite able to, as it happened. He had observed a girl of about fifteen who had come by the two o'clock train, and had asked him which way to turn on going out of the station to get into the road to Greyfriars.

"That settles it," said Hazeldene, changing colour a little. "I suppose you directed her and she went?"

"Yes, sir; I told her it was about a half-hour's walk, and to keep straight on up the lane till she came in sight of the school."

"Thank you!"

The juniors left the station. They halted outside to consider the matter. Their faces were serious enough. It was certain now that Marjorie Hazeldene had arrived at the station and set out for Greyfriars. Why had she not reached the school? She might have stopped to rest, but then why had not the juniors met her as they came along the same road that she must have followed? Something had happened. That much was certain, and even Billy Bunter had ceased to talk about the tuck-shop now.

"You see, she ought to have reached Greyfriars about the time we were leaving," said Hazeldene. "If she was slow on the road, we ought to have met her in the lane. She must have taken the wrong road."

Harry Wharton shook his head.

"The lane runs right on to Greyfriars," he said; "there are two turnings, but at each there is a sign-post, plainly directing you to the school. I thought that at first, Hazeldene, but now I've thought it over I can't believe she has wandered from the road."

Hazeldene turned white.

"Wharton, what do you think, then?"

"I think we'd better get along the lane as quickly as we can," said Harry Wharton abruptly, "and not lose a second."

"You suspect something? What do you mean—?"

"Never mind; there may be nothing in it—but come along."

Hazeldene grasped him almost violently by the arm.

"Tell me what you mean?" he cried. "Wharton! Tell me what you mean?"

Wharton looked at him steadily.

"It may be only a suspicion," he said. "But it's come into my mind. Was your sister likely to be richly dressed?"

"Oh, no, only just ordinary; she always dresses rather well! Why on earth do you ask a question like that?" exclaimed Hazeldene, bewildered.

"Had she any articles of jewellery about her?"

"A gold watch, and a locket probably."

"Quite enough!"

"What are you driving at?" cried Bob Cherry.

Harry Wharton's face was stern and grave.

"You remember the gipsies who passed us on the road?" he said slowly. "They must have passed Hazeldene's sister if she was in the lane."

"You remember the cry we heard from the caravan—?"

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Bob Cherry.

"I don't like to suggest such a thing," said Harry hastily, "but it's possible. And if Marjorie Hazeldene is in the hands of the gipsies—"

"But—come on!" cried Bob Cherry.

Hazeldene had not waited for Wharton to finish. He was tearing away like a madman up the road. The chums of the Remove followed him at top speed.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

At Close Quarters.

HARRY WHARTON and Bob Cherry were two of the best runners in the Remove at Greyfriars, but they were hard put to it to keep pace now with Hazeldene. He ran like a deer, his hands clenched hard at his sides, his gaze directed straight ahead. On either side of him ran Wharton and Cherry.

Nugent had fallen a little behind. And far behind Nugent came Billy Bunter, running as hard as he could, holding his hat on with one hand, and his spectacles on with the other.

The juniors covered the ground quickly. Hazeldene made the pace, and the others kept to it. The green hedges flashed past them. The school came in sight, with the long, white road stretching away past the great, bronze gates. They did not halt at Greyfriars. The gipsy vans had evidently passed the school, and the fact that they had gone so

far proved that the gipsies had increased their speed after the meeting with the boys. The vans had been going at a mere walking pace when the meeting had taken place in the lane.

Hazeldene was panting terribly now. He was not in good condition, and his heart was thumping against his ribs, his face white and drawn. But he ran on as if impelled by some inward spell that would not allow him to stop, in spite of physical exhaustion.

Harry Wharton caught him by the arm, as the breathless juniors came out on top of the hill past the school.

Hazeldene shook himself free.

"Don't stop me!"

"Stop! Stop, I tell you!"

And Wharton pulled him to a halt. Hazeldene turned upon him with a furious face.

"What is it? What are you stopping me for?"

"We are off the track."

The juniors gathered breathlessly round Wharton at the words. Over the hill ran the long, white road, and from the top the lads could see miles of winding road beyond. But on the bare road was no trace of the gipsy caravans.

Harry Wharton's hand rose to point.

"Look for yourself!"

Hazeldene gasped painfully.

"Where are they, then?"

"What asses we were!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "Of course, they turned off by the road to the left at the foot of the hill—that's it."

Harry Wharton nodded.

"I should say so; anyway, they never went over the hill, or we should see them there. I should say that they turned off, to get towards Braye Common. You know lots of gipsies encamp there."

"Let's turn back."

"Wait a bit. If we could climb one of these big trees, we could see—"

"That's soon done!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. And he swung himself into a big beech, and was soon scrambling like a monkey from branch to branch.

The juniors watched him anxiously from below. Higher he went, till he disappeared among the foliage, and then they saw his curly head come out of the twigs at the top of the tree. Holding on to a branch that seemed hardly able to support his weight, and which swayed under his grasp, Bob Cherry swept the surrounding country.

His comrades below heard him give an excited shout.

Then he came scrambling down the tree, and bundled out of the branches and dropped lightly to the ground, considerably soiled all over, but excited and cheery as ever.

"Have you seen them?"

"Yes!" gasped Bob.

"Where are they?" exclaimed Hazeldene, grasping his arm.

"On the lower road; they turned off at the foot of the hill, and they're making for Braye Common."

"Good!" exclaimed Hazeldene; and he started running down the hill.

"Stop!" exclaimed Nugent.

"Why? Don't waste time!"

"I want to save it. Keep cool. We can cut across here through the wood, and get ahead of them in Braye Lane. If we follow them by road we shall never do it!"

"Good!" said Harry Wharton. "You know the country. Nugent. Lead the way!"

"Follow your leader, then!"

Nugent plunged through a hedge, and the juniors followed. Billy Bunter came panting up in the rear. During the delay on the hill top he had regained lost ground, and was now close behind.

"I say, you fellows," he gasped, "I—I'm out of breath, you know. And this running makes me fearfully hungry. Have you got a sandwich in your pockets, any of you?"

But Billy Bunter's question was not even heard.

The juniors, following the lead of Nugent, who knew the country well, were dashing at full speed through a woodland path.

The woods were thick and green on either hand, the flowers of spring glimmering among the fern, and the scent of the reawakening life of the woods in the air. But the lads had no eyes for all that. They were thinking only of the scoundrels into whose hands they believed Marjorie Hazeldene had fallen, and of the struggle that lay before them when they overtook the gipsies. They were ready for it!

Out of the green woods at last, and into the lane, swept by the breeze. Away on the right lay the green, rolling stretches of Braye Common, on the left the winding, rutty lane, and in the lane was heard a clatter of hoofs, of rickety

wheels, and of hanging pans clanging under clumsy vehicles.

The juniors were ahead of the gypsies!

They had only barely done it. As they halted in the lane, panting, breathless, the vans came in sight, swinging along with their clatter. Melchior and Barengro were walking at the head of the leading horse, talking together, as when the boys had met them an hour or more ago.

Melchior caught sight of the Greyfriars lads standing in the lane, and a change came over his dark face.

Harry Wharton ran towards him, followed by the others.

"Stop!" shouted Harry.

"Stand out of the way, you young cub!" yelled the gipsy, swinging his cudgel aloft.

"Stop, I say!" Harry Wharton dragged at the horse, and the animal, nothing loth to stop, came to a standstill, and the second van mechanically halted. Melchior made a savage cut at the boy, but Bob Cherry shoved him back in time.

The vans were halted. For a moment the two parties stood glaring at one another, the two savage-faced gypsies and the panting juniors.

It was Melchior who spoke first. His swarthy hand was gripping his cudgel convulsively.

"What do you want?" he hissed, showing his yellow teeth in a snarl like a savage dog. "Hang you, what do you want with us?"

"I want my sister!" said Hazeldene.

The gipsy stared at him.

"Where is she?" cried Hazeldene fiercely. "Open the door of that van. You hound, you cur, she is in there!"

Melchior grinned.

"You young fool! Why should you fancy that your sister is in that van?"

"You kidnapped her! Don't tell us lies! We know it!"

Although the juniors' suspicions were by no means certainties as yet, there was something in Melchior's face at that moment which convinced them that they had not made any mistake.

Whether Marjorie Hazeldene was in the gipsy van or not, Melchior knew what had become of her.

"Open that door!" shouted Hazeldene furiously.

"I will not!"

"Then I will open it!"

Hazeldene sprang towards the van. The two gypsies sprang into his way.

"Stand back!" hissed Melchior.

"Come on!" shouted Harry Wharton.

He dashed forward. The cudgels in the gypsies' hands looked dangerous enough, and the boys were unarmed, but they were not afraid.

The odds, at least, were on their side. Harry Wharton dodged the savage blow Melchior aimed at him, and closed with the gipsy. They struggled furiously, and Harry, lad as he was against a powerful man, gave a good account of himself. Nugent dashed to his aid, and wrenched the gipsy's weapon away, and then clutched him round the neck.

Meanwhile, Bob Cherry was fighting furiously with Barengro. Hazeldene sprang up the steps and dragged at the door of the van. It came flying open, and a hideous creature appeared in the doorway. Her savage face glared out at Hazeldene.

She did not speak, but she dashed a foul mop against the junior's chest, and sent him flying from the steps. Hazeldene came with a thump into the road, and lay dazed.

"Help!" gasped Bob Cherry.

Barengro was too much for him. Billy Bunter was still lagging behind, too far away to render aid. Harry and Nugent were too busily engaged with Melchior to render assistance. Crash went Bob Cherry into the hedge, hurled there by the gipsy's powerful arms.

Then Barengro turned to aid his companion.

Harry and Nugent had no chance against the two men. They were dragged to the earth, and left gasping there, dazed and dizzy under savage blows.

Melchior looked at them with a savage grin. He picked up his cudgel, and twirled it in his hand, and seemed inclined to use it upon the Greyfriars lads; but his companion, who seemed the more cautious scoundrel of the two, pulled him by the arm. Melchior scolded, and the gypsies swung on their way.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

On the Track of the Kidnappers.

HARRY WHARTON staggered to his feet.

He was still dazed by the savage blows of the gypsies, and his face was cut and his lip bleeding.

Bob Cherry scrambled out of the hedge, torn and scratched. Nugent was still gasping in the road.

"My word!" murmured Bob Cherry. "This is a ripping go!"

"They're gone!" said Hazeldene, with a half sob. "I am certain that Marjorie is there. Why should they be so determined to keep us from seeing into the van?"

Harry Wharton nodded.

"There's no doubt about it now," he said. "Your sister has been kidnapped by the gypsies, and—"

"We must save her!"

Wharton caught him by the arm

"No good now; let us think it out. Look!"

He pointed after the vans. Melchior and Barengro were mounted on the vehicles now, and whipping up the horses. The gipsy vans were lumbering on at a pace which the boys could not hope to keep up with, even if they had been in better condition. But as a matter of fact, the hard run and the fight at the end of it had left them utterly spent.

Hazeldene realised it, and he stopped, with a groan.

"What's to be done?"

Harry Wharton stooped and helped up Nugent. The latter was reeling, and very white as Harry held him on his feet. He had suffered most of all. Billy Bunter came panting up.

"I say, you fellows, has there been a row?"

"Yes," said Harry shortly.

"Really? I say, have you found her? I thought very likely you were mistaken all along, you know, and the best thing we can do is to get back to the village and have a feed at the tuck-shop. Running always makes me hungry—"

"Hold your tongue!"

"I sha'n't hold my tongue, Wharton. You're not going to bully me. I am fearfully hungry, and you as good as promised to stand treat—"

Bob Cherry shook him.

"Shut up, Bunter!"

"I wish you wouldn't shake me like that, Cherry. It's inconsiderate. My glasses might fall off, and if they broke, I should be stranded, because I haven't a second pair, and one of you would have to lead me home—"

"Oh, do leave off talking!" said Nugent. "Can't you see the matter's serious?"

"It would be serious enough if my glasses got broken. I think you are all very inconsiderate. Here I've been running—"

Bob Cherry shook him again, and this time his glasses did fall off, and Billy Bunter groped about blindly in the dust for them. Harry Wharton's brows had been wrinkled in thought, and his eyes were gleaming. Harry Wharton was not popular in the Remove at Greyfriars, and even with his chums he sometimes had little difficulties. But they unconsciously realised that his was the strongest character there, and in a moment of doubt and difficulty, they instinctively turned to him as the leader, without even thinking about it.

"I think Bunter had better go back to the village," said Harry, speaking at last; "he is of no use in a fight."

Bunter looked up from his groping in the lane.

"I don't think you ought to talk about a fellow like that, Wharton, because he happens to be short-sighted. I should be able to fight as well as any of you if I could see whom to hit. But when a fellow can't see—"

"Dry up, Billy," said Nugent.

"I sha'n't! You might help me to look for my spectacles, some of you!"

"There they are, just by your hand."

"So they are! Thank you; that's better!" said Billy, putting on his big glasses and getting up. "Now, Wharton, I don't mind going back to the village, if you like. It's no good telling them to chalk it up to your account, because they don't know you—"

"What is he talking about?"

"So you had better give me the cash at once!"

"Are you dotty?"

"No, I'm not dotty, Bob Cherry; I'm talking sense, and I wish some of you fellows could do the same! I say it's no good telling them to chalk up what I have at the tuck-shop to Wharton's account, because they don't know him well enough there. I shall have to pay for all I have, so Wharton had better fork over the tin!"

"You greedy young rotter!" said Nugent, in disgust. "Do you think we are bothering about feeds now?"

"I know I'm jolly hungry, and I should think that you fellows were—"

"Bunter had better go back to the village," said Harry impatiently, "and go to the police-station and explain to them there about Miss Hazeldene and the gypsies. He can bring a constable here; or, rather, send one, as he's no good at running—"

"Well, I like that, after—"

"Shut up! Then he can go to the tuck-shop, or go and

hang himself, for all I care! You understand, Bunter? You're to go to the police-station and explain about this—"

"I understand, but—"

"And here's a two-bob bit; you can get a feed for that at the tuck-shop!" said Harry Wharton. "I suppose you're hungry?"

"Hungry's not the word for it," said Billy Bunter, slipping the two-shilling piece into his pocket; "I'm famished! I always get famished when I'm out-of-doors; so I do indoors, as well! I'll remember this, Wharton, and when I get my postal-order I'll let you have it back!"

"Hang your postal-order, and you, too! Buzz off, and don't forget the message to the police-station!"

"Certainly not."

"Get off, then!" howled Bob Cherry.

"All right! I suppose I can stop to breathe first?"

"Go, you utter ass!"

"Oh, very well, I'm off!" And Billy Bunter went at a trot down the lane; his plump little figure disappeared round a bend, and the hedges hid him from sight. Harry Wharton was thinking hard.

"We can't overtake the gipsies," he said; "but we must try to keep them in sight, if possible. After all, those vans are too big to be hidden easily. Probably the police will send some vehicle, and it will overtake us on the road. Anyway, the only thing we can do now is to follow the vans."

"We're not in much trim for a fight," Nugent remarked.

Harry shook his head.

"No good tackling them again as we did before," he said.

"We must have help first. The thing is to see that they don't escape."

"Right-oh; let's get on, then! We've rested a bit, and I feel up to a walk," said Bob Cherry; "though I don't think I could put up a run to save my life!"

Hazeldene's face was dark and gloomy. Harry Wharton touched him gently on the arm.

"Buck up!" he said. "After all, you know, those scoundrels won't dare to hurt her; they can only mean robbery! Keep a stiff upper lip!"

Hazeldene nodded without speaking.

"Come on, then!" said Harry. Then he gave a start. "What's that?"

It was the sound of rapidly running feet round the bend of the lane whither Billy Bunter had gone. The juniors looked in that direction, and a running figure came in sight—a little, plump figure, trotting along with a staccato patter of boots on the hard road. It was Billy Bunter himself!

Harry Wharton knitted his brows.

"What the dickens is he coming back for?" he muttered angrily. "Hallo, Billy, what is it? Why have you come back?"

"I—I—I forgot!" gasped Billy. And then he stopped for want of breath.

"What is it?"

"Something important! I—I—I—"

"Get it out, for goodness' sake; we're wasting time!" cried Harry testily. "What is it, confound you?"

"I—I—I ought to have thought of it, you know!" panted Billy. "I forgot! You—you don't want me to come back with the constable?"

"It's not necessary."

"Yes. Well, then, shall I—I—I—"

"Shall you what?"

"Shall I ask him to bring you some sandwiches in a bag? You will be fearfully hungry, you know, and—and—"

The next moment Billy Bunter was sitting down in the lane, with his hat jammed on his head, and four juniors were striding away on the track of the gipsy vans. Billy Bunter removed his hat and stared after them in amazement.

"Well, my word!" he gasped. "This is a nice way to be treated for my considerateness! The silly asses will be fearfully hungry, and this is how they treat me for being so thoughtful! Blessed if I'll ever care for anybody's appetite again! They can be as hungry as cannibals for all I care!"

And Billy Bunter disconsolately picked himself up and trotted away. Harry Wharton and his comrades were already out of sight, on the track of the gipsy vans.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Hazeldene's Sister.

THE juniors were mostly silent as they tramped along the lane in pursuit of the gipsy vans. They needed all their breath for walking, for the efforts they had made had told upon them. Hazeldene's face was dark and gloomy.

The vans were long out of sight. It had probably been Melchior's intention to camp on Braye Common—a favourite camping-ground for gipsy wanderers. But doubtless the pursuit had made him change his intention. The vans had gone along a narrow country lane, leaving the common on the right. There were many paths by which the gipsies

could return to it when they had shaken off their pursuers. But they were not likely to shake off the chums of the Remove. The juniors stuck to the chase doggedly. But although they were thinking of the gipsies, and of the prisoner of the caravan, they had eyes for other things. The sound of a sob from under the trees by the wayside struck on their ears suddenly, and they glanced into the shadow of the beeches.

"Hallo!" muttered Bob Cherry. "Look! What's the matter, I wonder?"

A girl was seated on a stone there, her face in her hands, crying. She was dressed in old and foul rags, and her bare feet were cut and bruised by the stony road; her hair hung down over the ill-covered shoulders.

The boys halted. The sight of a girl in tears naturally troubled them. Hazeldene left the road and stepped into the grass under the trees and touched the girl lightly on the shoulder.

"What is the matter?" he said.

The girl looked up. A very pretty, tear-stained face was revealed.

Hazeldene gave a shout.

"Marjorie!"

The girl gazed at him amazed.

"Marjorie!" repeated Hazeldene, in wonder. "I say, chaps, this is Marjorie—this is my sister!"

The juniors gathered round in amazement. It was a startling discovery!

"How did you come into this rig, Marjorie?" exclaimed Hazeldene.

The girl's face brightened up at sight of him. She had evidently doubted the evidence of her eyes at first. Now she flung herself upon Hazeldene's breast, sobbing:

"The gipsies!"

The juniors' faces grew very dark.

It was clear enough now what had happened. The girl had been kidnapped, and carried off in the van. The ruffians and the old crone in the caravans had robbed her, and then abandoned her heartlessly by the wayside. She had been compelled to change her clothes for the foul rags she now wore, and even her shoes had been taken.

"By George," muttered Bob Cherry; "we'll make those rotters sit up for this!"

Harry Wharton gritted his teeth.

"We will," he said quietly.

"It's all right now, Marjorie!" said Hazeldene softly.

"I say, these chaps are my friends; they've come with me to look for you!"

"Thank you all very much," she said, smiling through her tears. "It—it was you who were fighting the gipsies, was it not?"

"Yes," said Harry Wharton; "did you see us?"

"No; I heard you. But when you passed in the lane before, I saw my brother through the little window in the van, and I cried out; but that terrible old woman put her hand on my mouth!"

"Then it was you, as I suspected!"

"It was Wharton who guessed what had happened to you, when we didn't find you at the railway-station," explained Hazeldene. "Have they hurt you, Marjorie?"

She shook her head.

"No, but the old woman threatened to beat me if I did not change my clothes; and I did so, and they gave me these horrible things. They have taken my watch and locket, too. I was so frightened! It was some time after I heard you fighting with them that I was put out of the van. They left me here, in the lane, and I walked a little way; but I did not know which way to go, and I met no one, and—and I sat down here to rest—"

And the girl's tears began to flow again.

"Don't cry, dear," said Hazeldene; "it's all right now!"

"Yes, yes, I know it is, but—"

The girl wiped away her tears. It was the sense of loneliness and helplessness that had overcome her, but now that she had unexpectedly found herself among friends she could smile again.

Harry Wharton's brow was dark.

"Those scoundrels shall not be allowed to escape!" he exclaimed. "And Miss Marjorie's property must be recovered, too! They will have to be arrested!"

"They have taken my watch and locket."

"They shall return them!" said Harry determinedly.

"But the question now is, what is Miss Hazeldene to do? She cannot walk either to the village or the school like this!"

Hazeldene shook his head.

"But she cannot remain here," said Bob Cherry.

"No, that is impossible. But it is miles to the village from here, and she could never do it. We must find a vehicle of some sort."

"Oh, dear, now I shall be giving you more trouble!" the girl exclaimed. "And it was so kind of you to come and look for me!"

Harry Wharton smiled.

"The trouble is nothing, Miss Hazeldene. We are here to look after you, and I'm jolly glad we came along with Vas—with Hazeldene, I mean!" He coloured at the slip of the tongue. "Do you know whether there's a village near here, Nugent? You know this country better than I do, as you've been longer at Greyfriars."

Nugent reflected.

"Yes; if we keep on we shall come to Ferrydale," he said. "I dare say that was why the rascals set Miss Hazeldene down here, because they will be passing through the village. We can get something there."

"Good! And Hazeldene can drive back to the school while we go on after the gipsies."

"That I won't!" said Hazeldene. "I'm going to be in at the death with the rest of you! Marjorie can remain at the inn in Ferrydale, and wait for us there. I know the people, and they will look after her, and get her some better things to wear, too. That's a good idea, isn't it, Marjorie?"

"I will do anything you think best," said the girl simply.

"Right!" said Harry Wharton. "Let's get on, then. Keep on the grass, and it won't hurt your feet so much."

The girl smiled, and they set out again, Marjorie holding on to her brother's arm. Nugent and Bob Cherry dropped a little behind, with Harry Wharton.

"I say, what a nice girl!" murmured Nugent. "Curious thing she should be Hazeldene's sister, isn't it?"

Wharton laughed.

"Well, yes; he doesn't give you the impression of being a chap who has such a stunning sister," he said. "But it's a good point about him that he knows she's nice. I'm jolly glad we came with Vaseline to meet the train. Fancy her being left here all by herself! The brutes!"

"But, I say, I don't know about tackling them to get the watch and locket back," said Nugent dubiously. "Don't think I'm funky—"

"I shouldn't think that, old chap!"

"But we had a rough time of it when we tackled them before," hinted Nugent. "It's no good taking on a bigger job than we can tackle, is it?"

"I was thinking the same," Bob Cherry remarked. "I'm as ready for a row as the next fellow, but when they've licked us once, you see—"

"I have been thinking about that. They are savage brutes, and might easily brain a fellow with those cudgels."

"That's just it."

"But now that Miss Hazeldene is safe, we needn't be in such a hurry," said Harry Wharton quietly. "We can take our time, and get ready for the scoundrels. We shall have cudgels, too, when we tackle them again, and we are three to two, or four if Hazeldene leaves his sister at the inn and comes with us."

"Well, there's something in that," said Bob Cherry. "I never thought of that. Of course, I'm as eager as anybody to make the brutes smart for the way they've treated Hazeldene's sister."

Nugent was glancing at the sky. The sun was sinking red in the west, and already the shadows were lengthening.

Harry understood what was in his mind.

"Yes; we shall be late for calling-over at Greyfriars," he said quietly. "But we're in for this now, and we're not going to turn back, Frank."

"Well, you were in for it, anyway," grinned Bob Cherry. "You've got an account to settle with the Quelch-bird as soon as you get in, early or late."

"I don't care! Bother Quelch now! It will be dark pretty soon after we leave Ferrydale, I expect; but that's all the better."

"How so?"

"Why, the gipsies are certain to camp at dark, if not before. We shall overtake them, and get to close quarters."

Bob Cherry's eyes sparkled.

"By Jove, yes; this will be a real adventure! We'll rush them all of a sudden, and make the fur fly."

"That's my idea. You are ready to follow my lead?"

"Yes, rather!"

"Then it's settled."

Hazeldene turned his head, and beckoned to the juniors, and then pointed down the lane.

"Ferrydale!" he said.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER. The Pursuit.

THE Green Man at Ferrydale was a comfortable little country hostelry. Mine host was a comfortable little man with a rubicund face and a white apron. His wife was a comfortable little woman with an almost equally ruddy countenance, and a whiter apron. There was an air

of homelike comfort about the inn that is sometimes found in old-fashioned wayside hostelries. And at the Green Man in Ferrydale the tired wayfarers received a warm welcome.

They had only to explain the circumstances, and mine host and his wife were busy about their comfort at once. Marjorie Hazeldene was carried off at once by the buxom landlady, while the boys were provided with a much-needed wash, and were able to brush off some of the mud and dust left on them by the late encounter. Marjorie was beaming with smiles when she rejoined the lads in the comfortable, oak-panelled room where a meal had been laid.

Outside the inn the dusk was coming on, but in the shadowy little room, in which the bright lights never quite extinguished the shadows of the old oak, all was pleasant gaiety. The juniors were hungry, and so was Marjorie, a fact of which she made no secret. And the fare, though not particularly delicate, was good and wholesome. Bread and fresh butter and good cheese, cold boiled bacon, and new-laid eggs, were quite appetising enough for hungry schoolboys.

And the tea, too, was fragrant and grateful to the nostrils, as its scent was wafted through the room. Marjorie poured out the tea, and very gracefully, too. The cheerful faces round the oak table waxed merry and mirthful.

Marjorie was clad now in a brown holland frock belonging to one of the innkeeper's children, and, plain as the garb was, she looked very charming in it. Her face was very bright, and her eyes seemed always laughing. The way she presided at the table enchanted the juniors, and Hazeldene looked so proud of her that the others sometimes smiled to see it.

And over Hazeldene himself had come a change. Even among fellows who were friendly to him he could never avoid saying things that had a sting in them; but on this occasion he seemed to have quite turned over a new leaf. He was cheery and chatty as the rest, and, as Bob Cherry said afterwards, during the whole course of the "feed" nobody felt inclined to wring Vaseline's neck once.

"You won't see much of Greyfriars to-day, Marjorie," Harry Wharton remarked. They were all calling her Marjorie now, at her own request, and the name seemed to fit her more than any other could. "When you get to the school it will be dark."

Marjorie looked alarmed.

"But I have to go home by the six o'clock train!" she exclaimed. "Mother will be alarmed!"

"That is all right, Marjorie," said Hazeldene; "I shall wire from here. There is a telegraph-office in Ferrydale. I can send a wire to say that you are staying at the school all night; and, of course, that's what you'll have to do!"

Marjorie looked rather uneasy.

"We'll explain to the Head as soon as we get back," said Hazeldene. "Mrs. Locke will take jolly good care of you. She's the Head's wife, you know. She told me to be sure to take you in to see her this afternoon while you were at the school."

"That was very kind of her!"

"You will have to stay. Why, you couldn't catch that train home if you started now! We are miles from the station. The telegram will make it all right."

Marjorie was still looking troubled.

"You are going after the gipsies?"

"Yes, rather!"

"Why not let them go, and come to the school? You will get into trouble for staying out after dark, you know."

"That's nothing. I expect the Head will let us down lightly when he knows the reason," said Bob Cherry. "Anyway, we're going to risk it."

"Marjorie is uneasy about us," said Harry Wharton quietly. "Isn't that it?"

The girl nodded, with a slightly tremulous smile.

"Yes," she said frankly; "I am afraid they will hurt you. They are such great, hulking ruffians, and you—you—"

Harry Wharton laughed.

"And we are only boys, you mean?"

"You are very brave," said the girl. "You have proved that. But if they hurt you—"

"We shall take care of ourselves. We promise you not to run into danger," said Harry reassuringly. "Now, would you rather remain here, and wait for us to return, or would you prefer to be driven over to the school at once? They have a trap here that we can have."

"Oh, I shall wait!" exclaimed the girl—"I shall wait here! You are going?"

"Yes; it's already getting dark."

"You will come back as soon as you can?" cried Marjorie anxiously.

"You may rely upon that."

The girl was evidently uneasy, but she did not try to dissuade them. The juniors had made up their minds to make it a fight to a finish with the two ruffians who had kidnapped her, and nothing would have turned them from their purpose.



"I say, what a nice girl!" said Nugent to his two chums.

Besides, there were Marjorie's watch and locket to be considered.

The four juniors said good-bye to the girl, and she watched them go from the door of the inn. The lads had easily been able to find four stout oak cudgels to take with them, and, thus armed, they felt fully a match for Melchior and his companion. The next meeting with the gipsies was not likely to end so badly for them.

They set out from the inn, and the gathering dusk swallowed them up from the sight of the anxious girl.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

Catching a Tartar.

THE dusk on the country road grew thicker. Harry Wharton had obtained some information at the inn regarding the gipsies. They had halted the caravans at the Green Man to give the horses water, and themselves something stronger. Then they had passed on down the road, and there was little doubt that they would take the

turning to Braye Common, to camp upon the wide-stretching grassland.

"We'll try the common first, at all events," Harry Wharton remarked as they reached the turning. "If they're not there, we'll look further; but there's little doubt, I think, that they've camped for the night."

"Pretty certain," Hazeldene agreed.

And the juniors tramped on steadily down the lane towards the wide common. The rest and the refreshment at the inn had revived their strength, and they were feeling quite fit again. The lane gradually changed into a footpath, leading over the furzy common. The juniors kept their eyes open on all sides for a trace of the gipsies.

It was now quite dark. A few stars glimmered in the wide, deep heavens, but blackness lay like a pall upon the common. The bushes and trees rose dim and ghostly through the gloom. Harry Wharton uttered a sudden exclamation:

"Look there!"

A red glimmer came through the gloom from some distance ahead, and back from the road over the common.

"A fire!" said Nugent quietly.

"Yes; a fire on the common. They have camped there, I should say. It was just as I expected."

"We shall soon see."

The juniors pressed on. Their faces were very serious now, and they were grasping their cudgels. They had plenty of pluck, but they knew that it was no light matter to attack two powerful and unscrupulous ruffians in that lonely place. But they never thought of turning back.

The glimmer of the fire grew ruddier and steadier as they advanced. It glimmered a hundred yards or more from the lane, beyond thick furze-bushes which shut the gipsy camp off from view.

The juniors halted on the grass by the roadside. There was little or no doubt that the caravans were camped on the other side of the bushes, and that they were now close upon the foe.

Through the dark bushes and trees came weirdly the red glimmer, but the boys could see nothing else. A vague sound or two was wafted through the silence of the night.

"Wait here!" Harry Wharton whispered. "No good blundering into a thing like this. I'll go through the bushes first and spot them, and see how matters stand."

"They may spot you."

"I shall take care. I'll come back for you."

"You may get a crack on the head."

"Well, if I don't come back in a quarter of an hour you can come on, and do as you think best," said Harry.

"Good! You're leader. We'll wait," said Bob Cherry.

Harry nodded, and disappeared into the dark bushes. Under the trees the darkness was thick, and he could not see an inch before him. Damp, clinging leaves brushed his face, and he stumbled over trailing roots.

Once he caught his foot, and went down heavily. The noise he made was considerable, and he lay for a couple of minutes listening, wondering whether the gipsies were alarmed.

But no sound came from the camp beyond the thickets. He rose and pushed on again, more cautiously now. The red glimmer of the fire had disappeared for a moment; but now he caught it again through the bushes. He drew closer and closer, till only a mass of thicket intervened between him and the camp.

He crouched close beside the bush, feeling secure in the darkness, and watched the scene before him with keen and eager eyes.

It was, as he had fully believed, the camp of the gipsies. The two vans were drawn up close to the trees, with the shafts in the air, and the shaggy horses had been turned loose to graze. The fire was fed by branches torn from the trees, and blazed up brightly against the darkness of the common.

Beside it, on a log, Barenegro was sitting, eating bread and cheese with a knife. On the steps of one of the caravans was the old crone they had seen in the van, and she was also eating, and seemed to have no attention for anything else.

These two seemed to be the whole party. If there were others belonging to it, they were absent for the time.

Harry keenly scanned the place. He could not see Melchior, and he wondered where the leader of the two ruffians was. He might be in one of the vans, and if so, it was now a favourable moment for the attack, so that the soundrels could be taken separately.

Harry Wharton had already made up his mind that a thrashing was not a sufficient punishment for the kidnapers. If they got the worst of the fight, there was no reason why they should not be arrested; and the junior was not insensible to the thought of the eclat the chums would win at Greyfriars if they were able to get these two dangerous ruffians to the lock-up unaided.

Harry was just making a movement to rise to return to his chums, when Barenegro made a movement. He laid down his knife, and took something from his pocket—something which flashed and glistened like gold in the firelight.

The greed in the man's swarthy face was sufficient to tell Harry what it was, although he could not see the object clearly. It was undoubtedly the gold watch that had been stolen from Marjorie Hazeldene.

"You won't keep that long, you hound!" Harry Wharton muttered grimly.

Suddenly Barenegro thrust the watch into his pocket again, and stood up. He stared at the thicket, directly towards the spot where Harry was crouching in the shadow of the bush.

The boy's heart stood still for a moment. Had the ruffian seen him? Surely that was impossible in the dense shadow of the bush, so far from the fire!

Yet why was he staring towards the thicket so intently? A sudden feeling of uneasiness smote Harry, and he turned his head to look behind him. As he did so, there was a rattle, and a strong hand grasped his shoulders from behind,

and a knee was planted in the middle of his back. He was crushed down, face downwards, to the ground, and the knee planted upon his back pinned him there. There was the sound of a low chuckle.

"So you are spying, are you?"

It was the voice of Melchior, the gipsy! Harry writhed more with rage than the pain he was suffering, which, however, was acute, for the gipsy's knee was hard and heavy upon his back. His position made him absolutely helpless to struggle.

"Ha, ha! I think I know you. You are the leader of those young'fools," the gipsy's harsh voice went on. "I thought I heard a noise in the thickets, and I have found you. What are you doing here?"

"Release me, you hound!"

The gipsy laughed again.

"That is hardly likely. Where are your friends?"

"Find out!"

The knee ground cruelly into his back, and Harry Wharton gasped with pain. He gave a cry, but his face was jammed into the grass, and the cry was stifled.

"Ha, ha! Are they near at hand, then?"

Harry gasped, but could not speak.

"So you have still followed us. Why?"

"To hand you over to justice, you ruffianly brute," gasped Harry, "and it shall be done yet!"

"We shall see. At least, you shall never give us trouble again," said the gipsy. "If I do not crack your skull with my cudgel, it is because you would be more dangerous to me dead than alive."

"You are afraid."

The knee jammed harder on the boy's back, and he could scarcely breathe. The gipsy laughed again—a harsh and savage laugh.

"Perhaps I am," he said. "But if I do not venture to take your life, I shall not spare you otherwise, you spying whelp! You shall not give information that would cause us trouble. You shall lie till morning bound and gagged in a van, and to-morrow we will abandon you without money or clothes in the heart of the common. How do you like that?"

Harry did not reply; but, in spite of the pain he was suffering, a smile that the gipsy did not see came over his face.

His chums were to wait a quarter of an hour for him, and already that time was nearly up. It would not be long before Nugent, Hazeldene, and Bob Cherry came upon the scene. There was a surprise waiting for the gipsy ruffian, for it was evident that Melchior did not believe that his friends were at hand.

"Come!" added the ruffian; and he rose, and dragged Harry to his feet.

Harry Wharton could have cried out then for aid had he wished; but he did not do so. The cry would have warned Melchior that his chums were there, and Harry's hope was that the juniors would be able to take the kidnapers by surprise.

With the ruffian's powerful grip on his collar, Harry was dragged to the camp. Barenegro showed his yellow teeth in a savage grin as he came into the light of the fire.

"He was alone, Melchior?"

"Yes, spying upon us."

Barenegro's hand slid into his ragged coat, and came out with a clasp-knife in it. He opened the knife slowly with his teeth.

Harry's eyes met his calmly, without flinching. He knew that the ruffian was only seeking to terrify him; but had the gipsy been in earnest, Harry Wharton would not have trembled.

"Shall I finish him now, Melchior?" asked the ruffian, coming closer to Harry, the open knife glistening in his swarthy hand.

"Bah!" exclaimed Harry. "You dare not, and you know you dare not! Do you think that you can frighten me with this child's-play?"

Barenegro gritted his yellow teeth.

"Put up your knife, Barenegro!" exclaimed Melchior, with a laugh. "You cannot use it now. Get a rope and bind this insolent whelp fast with it!"

"Ah, I will bind him fast enough!" muttered Barenegro.

He kept his word. He dragged a coarse rope from one of the vans, and Harry was flung to the ground, and Melchior held him there while the other ruffian bound him. Barenegro drew the cords so tightly that the boy winced with pain, but he would not allow a sound of it to pass his lips. He set his teeth hard to endure it. Melchior watched him with a savage grin.

"Make the knots secure, Barenegro."

Barenegro chuckled gnomishly. He was making the knots very secure. The flesh rose in ridges on Harry Wharton's wrists and legs as the cruel ropes drew tighter. The ruffian was finished at last, and he rose from his task. The boy

lay, white and panting, on the ground, unable to move a limb. Still his dark eyes were flashing and undaunted.

"Throw him into the van!" said Melchior, sitting down on the log and taking out his pipe, and slowly filling it with tobacco. "Perhaps some of his spirit will be gone by the morning. A night in those bonds would break most spirits, I think."

Barengro chuckled again, and dragged Harry to the van. He was flung in, and fell heavily on the hard floor, and lay there, unable to help himself, just where he fell. The door clattered shut, and he was left alone in intense darkness.

But where were the chums of the Remove?

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

To the Rescue.

BOB CHERRY, Nugent, and Hazeldene were waiting under the dark trees by the side of the road over the common. The time dragged by on leaden wings, and still Harry did not return, and they heard no sound from the thickets that lay wrapped in silence and darkness close by them.

Uneasiness was growing in each heart. Bob Cherry was the first to break the heavy, anxious silence.

"It must be a quarter of an hour now," he whispered.

"I should say so," muttered Nugent.

There was no means of correctly computing the time. It was too dark to see their watches, and the striking of a match might have betrayed them to the gipsies.

"Wharton ought to be back by this time," said Hazeldene.

"We had better go and look for him. He may have fallen foul of the gipsies."

"But we should have heard something," Nugent observed.

"Not if he got a sudden crack on the head."

Nugent shuddered. When he thought of Harry lying in the damp underwoods, senseless, perhaps murdered, under a savage blow from a gipsy's bludgeon, he realised how much his friendship with the new boy at Greyfriars had come to mean to him.

"It is possible that that is what has happened," said Bob Cherry abruptly. "Harry Wharton is not the fellow to run into danger recklessly, but he may have blundered into the gipsies. I think we had better go and look for him."

"Come on, then!"

The juniors gripped their cudgels hard, and with beating hearts plunged into the darkness of the thickets. They made their way slowly and cautiously through the tangled bushes, keeping the ruddy gleam of the gipsy's fire before their eyes as a guide.

The light of the fire grew stronger, and they came out at last into the open, close by the spot where Harry Wharton had watched the gipsy's camp, and where he had been seized by Melchior.

The three juniors looked eagerly towards the camp in search of any sign of their missing chum.

Melchior and Barengro could be seen sitting by the fire smoking their pipes. The old woman was invisible, and had doubtless retired to sleep in one of the vans.

Melchior and Barengro were talking, and in the stillness of the night the sound of their voices came to the boys crouching on the edge of the thicket. But the words could not be distinguished, for they were in the Romany dialect.

There was no sign of Harry Wharton.

Bob Cherry's brow contracted. He was uneasy, yet it was possible that Harry was still in the thickets, safe and sound. He might have missed the light of the fire, and gone astray.

Hazeldene uttered a sudden low exclamation.

Bob pressed a warning hand upon his shoulder, fearing that the gipsies would hear. But the two ruffians did not look up, and the low level murmur of their voices continued uninterrupted.

"What is it, Vaseline?" whispered Nugent. "Be careful!"

"Look!" muttered Hazeldene.

He pointed to a small object lying in the grass a few yards from the thicket in the shadow of which the boys were crouching.

Cherry and Nugent started violently as they saw it. There was no mistaking it, dimly as it lay in the grass on the verge of the circle of light cast by the flickering fire. It was a school cap!

"Harry's cap!" muttered Nugent, under his breath.

"Harry Wharton's cap, right enough!" said Bob Cherry.

"He has been here. They have done something with him, that's certain."

The boys were silent for a few moments with chill horror creeping into their veins and their faces. It was certain now that Harry Wharton had fallen foul of the gipsy ruffians. What had they done with him? Was it possible that a murdered lad lay with upturned face in the shadow of the dewy thickets? The thought was too terrible. Bob Cherry sprang to his feet.

"Come on!" he said, between his teeth.

"We're ready!"

"And hit hard!" muttered Bob. "It doesn't matter how much you hurt them, only knock them out before they can knock us out, that's all."

"That's right!"

The three juniors, with teeth set and their determination screwed up to the sticking-point, dashed towards the gipsies, their cudgels firmly gripped in their hands. The light was dim, and their footsteps made no sound on the grass, and so for the moment the two ruffians did not observe them.

The juniors were close upon them before Melchior and Barengro saw their danger, and sprang to their feet.

Melchior hissed out a savage oath as he faced the rush of the Greyfriars juniors. His cudgel was out of his reach, but he looked a dangerous foe as he stood, his huge fists clenched, his powerful frame quivering like a tiger's about to spring. Barengro made a spring for his weapon, which was lying in the grass where he had carelessly tossed it.

But the juniors gave the gipsies little time. The attack was sudden and determined. Bob Cherry and Hazeldene rushed straight at Melchior, while Nugent gave his attention to Barengro.

The latter had reached the spot where his cudgel lay, and was stooping to recover it, when Nugent's stick descended with terrific force. It caught the stooping gipsy on the back of the head, and he pitched forward helplessly with his face in the grass.

Nugent's arm whirled up for a second blow, but it was not needed. Barengro neither stirred nor groaned. The blow had stunned him. And Nugent, realising that one foe was disposed of, turned to aid his comrades. And, two to one as they were, they needed it.

Melchior had received Bob Cherry's blow on his left arm, and although his arm dropped numb to his side, he struck out savagely with his right, and Bob went reeling into the grass from the blow.

Melchior, gritting his teeth, sprang at Hazeldene. And Hazeldene faltered. He was not of the stuff that heroes are made. He had shown himself in a new light that day, and surprised his comrades. But at a critical moment like this his courage failed him.

The powerful, savage-faced gipsy, springing at him like a tiger, made him falter, and he aimed an ineffectual blow, and receded. But it was the worst step he could have taken. Melchior was upon him in a moment, and in a moment more had wrenched the cudgel out of his faltering hand.

A harsh, mocking laugh fell from the gipsy's lips as he swung up the cudgel. The next second Hazeldene would have dropped in the grass under a fierce blow; but Nugent was on the spot. His weapon crashed on Melchior's shoulder, and with a yell of pain the gipsy dropped the cudgel to the ground.

Bob Cherry was on his feet again now, dazed but dauntless, and as ready for a fight as ever. He rushed to Nugent's aid.

Melchior retreated before the juniors, his face contracted with pain, his black eyes blazing with rage.

"Surrender!" shouted Bob Cherry.

The gipsy snarled.

"To a boy! Bah! Never!"

"Give in, you fool, or—"

Melchior sprang back, and turned to run. But the juniors were too quick for him. Bob Cherry's cudgel descended with a crash upon his shoulder, and he reeled. And as he reeled, Nugent struck fiercely. Melchior pitched over, and fell, and the juniors sprang upon him ere he could rise.

He struggled feebly under their weight, but he was dazed by the blows, and almost helpless. Bob Cherry shouted to Hazeldene.

"Get a rope, or something, quick, Vaseline!"

Hazeldene started. He was bewildered by the rapidity of events, and his face was burning with the consciousness of the show he had made in the fight. But he obeyed Cherry, and quickly found a rope hanging to one of the vans, and brought it to the spot. Melchior, in spite of his desperate resistance, was bound hand and foot, and the juniors did not neglect to draw the knots tightly.

Then they rose from their prisoner, panting and breathless. Melchior lay in the grass, breathless, too, unable to stir hand or foot. His swarthy face was convulsed with rage, his black eyes scintillating like a snake's. From his lips poured a continuous stream of imprecations.

"Now the other," said Bob Cherry.

Barengro had raised himself on his elbow. His senses were returning, but he was too dazed to realise clearly what had happened, or where he was. Three juniors flung themselves upon him at once, and he was pinned to the ground. Another rope was soon found, and he was bound as Melchior had been.

The Greyfriars juniors had won. But they felt as yet

none of the elation of victory. Where was Harry Wharton? If he were lying insensible or murdered in the thickets, their success would have been dearly bought.

Bob Cherry returned to Melchior. The savage gypsy was still cursing. Bob bent over him with a threatening brow.

"Where is Harry Wharton?"

A savage oath was the only answer he received.

"Tell me, you beast! Where is he?"

But the gypsy replied only with curses. Bob Cherry was greatly inclined to use his cudgel upon the blackguard, but he refrained.

"Let's shout for him!" exclaimed Nugent. "If he's within the sound of our voices, he will answer."

"Right-ho! Yell, then!"

And the Greyfriars juniors yelled:

"Wharton! Hallo, hallo, hallo! Wharton! Hallo-i-o-ooo!"

The shout rang far over the dark common, echoing away into the shadows. And to the joy of the Greyfriars lads, a voice replied:

"Hallo!"

"He's in the van!" exclaimed Nugent, dashing towards the caravan, from which the answering cry had come.

"By Jove, so he is! Wharton!"

"Hallo! Help!"

"We're coming!"

The juniors tore open the door of the van. In the darkness within two eyes could be seen. Nugent struck a match, and Harry Wharton was revealed, lying on the floor of the van, bound hand and foot.

He gave them a cheery grin.

"Jolly glad to see you!" he exclaimed. "Get me out of these ropes, for goodness' sake! I'm nearly dead with cramp!"

Nugent scrambled into the van. His pocket-knife was brought into play, and the ropes were soon sawn through. Harry Wharton was free.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

The Triumph.

BOB CHERRY gave a cheer that might have been heard from every quarter of the great common, and slapped Hazeldene on the back with an energy that made him stagger.

"Hurrah for us! Hurrah!"

"Hurrah!" gasped Harry Wharton. "Oh, my hat! Don't move me, Nugent!"

"Better get out of the van!"

"Oh! Don't! I'm being tortured! Ow!"

The returning circulation in the cramped limbs was making Harry Wharton writhe with pain. Nugent understood, and he chafed the junior's ankles, while Bob Cherry did the same for his wrists. Harry twisted with the pain, but it was soon abated. Then his chums helped him out of the van. Harry was looking rather white, but he was rapidly becoming himself again.

"Where are the gipsies?" he asked. "You have licked them, of course; but—"

Bob Cherry pointed to the two bound figures lying dark in the grass.

"There they are!"

"Both prisoners!"

"Yes, rather!"

Melchior's stream of eloquence had ceased. Perhaps he had realised that cursing could not help him, or perhaps he was out of breath. He lay silent now, his swarthy face sullen, his black eyes glinting in the firelight. Barenegro, who was evidently the weaker scoundrel of the two, began to whine.

"Let me go, young gentlemen! I will give you back what I took from the girl. The watch is in my pocket, and Melchior has the locket, and the clothes are in a bundle in the van. Let me go!"

Harry Wharton smiled grimly.

"Not likely!" he said. "You are going to prison, you scoundrel! If it were only for the tussle with us, we might let you off; but fellows who kidnap a girl and rob her, ought to get the worst we can give them; and you're going to get it."

"But—"

"Hold your tongue!" growled Melchior. "We will take a terrible revenge for this. They cannot keep us in prison long, and then there will be revenge!"

Harry Wharton laughed scornfully.

"You shall see how little we care for your revenge!" he exclaimed. "We have got to get these fellows to the police-station, now!"

Bob Cherry looked round in a doubtful way.

"How are we going to do it, Wharton? It's a jolly long walk from here, you know. I suppose we could make them walk, but—"

"My sister is waiting for us at Ferrydale," said Hazeldene. "I, at least, must return there; but you—"

"We shall all return there," said Harry Wharton, "and take these rascals with us. The landlord of the Green Man will take them in charge, and send them over to the police-station, as there is not one in Ferrydale."

"That's a good idea."

"Good!" said Bob Cherry. "But it's a long walk, and to drive those two brutes along won't be easy."

"There's no need for us to walk," said Harry Wharton. "We can harness up a horse to one of these vans, and shove the gipsies inside."

"Bravo! I never thought of that."

"That will be an easy way of getting them to Ferrydale. Then the landlord of the Green Man can send them over in the same van to the police-station. See if you can catch one of the horses."

Bob Cherry and Nugent hurried away to get one of the grazing horses. The door of the van into which the old gypsy crone had retired had opened now, and the woman was staring out at the boys and blinking her black eyes evilly. But she did not venture to make any attempt to release the gipsies. That would have been useless, and with her, so long as she remained quiet, the juniors had no intention of interfering. Harry Wharton walked towards her.

"Where are the things stolen from the young lady to-day?" he asked quietly. "If you give them up we shall not interfere with you."

The old woman grunted, but made no other reply.

"Do you hear?" exclaimed Harry sharply. "Do you want to be sent to prison along with those two scoundrels?"

The old crone blinked evilly at him, and withdrew into the van. Then a bundle was flung out, and it fell at the boys' feet. Hazeldene picked it up.

"These are Marjorie's things," he said. "Let the old wretch escape! Hallo, Nugent has got the horse!"

Nugent and Cherry were returning with the animal they had caught. The boys soon had it harnessed into the shafts of the empty caravan, and then the two gipsies were dragged into the latter, and the door fastened upon them. Barenegro was whining and his comrade cursing furiously. Harry Wharton led the horse away towards the road, and the rumble of the jerking wheels drowned the voices within the vehicle.

The van turned into the road. Then the juniors climbed up in front, and Harry took the reins.

"Bravo!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "If this isn't a regular triumph, I don't know what is. We ought really to take this rig-out to Greyfriars, and arrive there at a gallop. That would make a sensation."

Harry Wharton laughed.

"I fancy the horse would fall down dead before we got there," he remarked. "And how's he to gallop with this heavy van behind him—"

"What a practical fellow you are—"

"If he drags us as far as Ferrydale we'll be satisfied," said Nugent, laughing. "And we'll go home in a trap. By Jove, we have had a day out, and no mistake!"

"After the feast comes the reckoning," said Hazeldene. "What are you going to say to Quelch, Wharton?"

"Nothing," said Harry.

The caravan lumbered and clattered along the dark lane. The lights of Ferrydale came in sight at last. Harry drove the van up in good style to the Green Man, and brought it to a halt. Two men in uniform rushed out instantly. A constable sprang to the horse's head, and an inspector came close up by the van.

"Got you—eh?" exclaimed the latter. "Of all the cheek, driving up openly like this— Why, it's a boy!"

Harry Wharton burst into a ringing laugh.

"Inspector Snope!" he exclaimed.

"You—why—you are Greyfriars lads, surely!" exclaimed the amazed inspector. "What are you doing with this van?"

"We've captured it," said Harry coolly. "Did you get our message from Billy Bunter, inspector?"

"Yes," said Inspector Snope. "He came to the police-station, and the story he told us made us come out at once. There have been other complaints against the gipsies, but this was a definite charge we could arrest them upon, you see, so we lost no time. We lost you, however, and arrived here, and learned that you had gone in search of the gipsies."

"And we found them!" grinned Bob Cherry.

"I see you have, as you appear to have captured their van. But where are the gipsies?"

"Inside!"

"What!" yelled the amazed inspector.

"They're inside."

"Are you joking?"

"Not at all. Look for yourself."
The inspector dashed to the rear of the van, and tore open the door. The constable flashed his lantern within, and there, sure enough, were the two gipsies, lying bound. Inspector Snope grinned with satisfaction.

"Ah, I've got you now, you beauties, have I?" he exclaimed. "You won't get away in a hurry, either. You may as well remain there till we get to the police-station."

And he closed the door again and fastened it. The Greyfriars juniors descended from the van. They were feeling, and looking, very pleased with themselves.

"You can hand this over to me," said the inspector, indicating the van, with a great deal of satisfaction. "I'll see that your services to the law are properly recognised. We will take charge of the van and the prisoners, and I think you lads had better be getting back to Greyfriars."

"I think so, too," said Harry Wharton. "You are welcome to those rotters. They have some articles of jewellery belonging to Miss Hazeldene—"

"I will take care of that. Miss Hazeldene will have to appear at the prosecution. By George, I am glad to have my hands on these scoundrels!"

The caravan lumbered off, with the inspector driving, and the constable sitting by his side. They were looking extremely satisfied, as they had every reason to be. Marjorie Hazeldene was standing in the door of the inn, and she greeted the juniors with a bright smile.

"I have been so anxious," she said. "But never mind. Are we going to Greyfriars now?"

"Yes, I'll see about the trap," said Harry. Hazeldene was carrying the bundle restored by the gipsy crone. He gave it to Marjorie, much to her delight, and the girl retired to prepare herself for the journey. By the time the trap was ready she reappeared, and Harry Wharton having settled the bill with the host of the Green Man, the Greyfriars juniors drove off in high spirits.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

The Return.

"GREYFRIARS!" exclaimed Harry Wharton.

The great gates set in the arch of stone, with the two lamps burning over them, loomed up in the gloom, as Harry Wharton drew the trap to a halt. The drive had been a pleasant one. The four juniors and Marjorie Hazeldene had kept up a cheery chatter all the way, and the distance had seemed as nothing to them. The gates of Greyfriars loomed in sight all too soon.

"Here we are!" said Bob Cherry. "And, by George, it's really time! Listen!"

The great clock of Greyfriars was booming out. One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten!

"Ten o'clock!" said Nugent. "What will the Head say?" He jumped down and clanged at the bell. The gates were quickly opened. The school porter was evidently on the look-out for the returning juniors, who had failed to turn up at calling-over, and had, of course, been missed. A lantern glimmered out in the darkness. Harry Wharton shook the reins.

"Stand aside, there!"

"My heye!" grumbled a voice in the darkness. "Nice goings hon, I must say—very nice goings hon! My heye!"

"Get out of the way! I want to drive in."

"Oh, certingly! Nice goings hon."

The porter stood aside. Harry Wharton toiled the trap through the gateway, and drove on up to the School House. The light was burning in the Head's study, and the hall door was open, a glimmer of light falling into the gloomy close.

The trap came to a halt before the house. In the light of the hall appeared the form of Wingate, the school captain. He came out and looked grimly at the juniors.

"So you've come back?" he said.

"Yes, turned up again like the bad penny you've heard about," said Bob Cherry cheerily. "Here we are, as large as life and twice as natural."

"Why—who—what—who is this?"

"My sister," said Hazeldene.

Wingate helped Marjorie down from the trap. He was looking amazed.

"You're all to go in to the Head's study," he said. "You had better come, too, Miss Hazeldene. Where did you get that trap, Wharton?"

"It's from the Green Man in Ferrydale."

"And pray what are you going to do with it now?"

"I promised to have it sent back in the morning."

"Then it will have to be put up for the night."

And Wingate called to the school porter, who grumblingly led away the horse. Harry Wharton slipped a shilling into his hand, however, which somewhat mollified him.

Several Sixth-Formers came out to stare at the juniors as they made for the doctor's study. The Lower Forms at Greyfriars were in bed. Dr. Locke rose from his seat, an awe-inspiring figure in cap and gown, with an awe-inspiring frown upon his face, as the juniors entered his study. In

spite of the excellent excuses they had to make, the youngsters felt a slight sinking of the heart.

"And so," said the Head, in a deep voice which seemed thunderous to the ears of the Removites—"so you have returned, young gentlemen?"

"Yes, sir," said Harry Wharton quietly.

The doctor adjusted his pince-nez.

"But—er—who may this be, pray?" And his eyes dwelt in amazement upon Marjorie Hazeldene.

"My sister, sir," said Hazeldene. "If you will allow me to explain—"

"Bless my soul! But how comes she here?"

"She came down to Greyfriars to see me this afternoon, sir."

"Ah, yes, I remember!" said the doctor, recalling that his wife had spoken to him about Hazeldene's sister. "But at this time of night—"

"She was kidnapped by gipsies, sir."

"Eh?"

"Kidnapped—"

"Are you romancing, Hazeldene?"

"No, sir. The fellows will tell you—"

"Tell me what has happened, Wharton," said Dr. Locke, who knew Hazeldene of old, and was far from trusting to his word; though, as it happened, on the present occasion he would have been safe in doing so.

"Certainly, sir! Miss Hazeldene was found in the lane by a set of rascally gipsies, as she was walking to the school, and they forced her into a van and carried her off. We found out what had happened, and followed—"

"Dear me! I am sure you are telling me the truth, Wharton, but this story is really most singular. Go on."

"We had a tussle with the rotters, sir—I mean, with the rascals—and got the worst of it. After that they robbed Miss Hazeldene, and left her by the roadside, where we found her."

"Dear me! They must be brought to justice."

"That is already done, sir."

"Ah, good! The police—"

"The police didn't do it," said Bob Cherry, with a grin.

"You see, sir, we left Miss Hazeldene at the inn in Ferrydale, and went after the rotters—"

"That was very, very rash."

"And we found them camped on Braye Common, sir,"

said Nugent, taking up the tale, "and we collared them."

"There was a fight," said Hazeldene, "and they were licked." He coloured a little at the remembrance of the part he had played in the fight. "They're in the hands of the police now, sir, and the things they stole from my sister have been recovered."

The doctor rubbed his chin thoughtfully.

"My dear boys, you appear to have acted in an exceedingly rash but very brave manner indeed. I can only say that I am overjoyed to find that you are not hurt. Under the circumstances, I shall, of course, overlook your being absent from call-over, though I have been very anxious about you."

"We are sorry, sir."

"And surely this little girl's parents will be anxious, too?"

"I sent dad a wire from Ferrydale, sir," said Hazeldene.

"I told him Marjorie would be staying at Greyfriars for the night, and would explain when she returned to-morrow."

"That was well. You may go to your dormitory now, boys, and I will overlook this matter, in consideration of your brave conduct; but remember—the Head went on in a very significant tone—"no more running after gipsies. One adventure of this kind is quite enough."

"Certainly, sir!" said the juniors together.

"Mrs. Locke will look after Marjorie," said the Head, taking the girl by the hand. "Come with me, my dear. Good-night, boys!"

"Good-night, sir! Good-night, Marjorie!"

"Good-night!" said the girl, with a sweet smile. Hazeldene kissed his sister for good-night, and the other juniors really looked as if they would have liked to be her brothers also.

Then the Removites went up to their own quarters. They found one or two fellows awake in the dormitory, among them Billy Bunter.

"We're well out of that," Bob Cherry remarked; "but you've got to face the Quelch-bird in the morning, Wharton."

"Yes, I suppose so."

"Perhaps he'll let you off, in view of what has happened."

"I don't want to make capital out of that," said Harry Wharton. "If there's going to be a row, I can face it. I suppose I was wrong to go out against orders," he added,

in a lower voice. "I was in a temper, I suppose. But I'm not afraid to face the music."

"I say, you fellows," said a voice from Bunter's bed, "you've come home, have you? I say, you know, I've had a rotten time. I gave your message in at the police-station after I had been to the tuck-shop."

"What!" howled Bob Cherry. "You went to the tuck-shop first?"

"Of course!" said Billy Bunter innocently. "I was so fearfully hungry, you know."

"You—you—you—"
"Now don't call me names, Cherry. I don't like it; and besides, it isn't polite. And I've had a rotten time. I went to the tuck-shop, and they took the two-bob bit that Wharton gave me, and then they said I owed them one-and-nine-pence."

"Ha, ha, ha!"
"It's no laughing matter, Cherry. I did owe them one-and-nine-pence, as a matter of fact, and I was going to settle it when my postal-order arrived, but it was mean of them to take it out of the two-shilling piece, don't you think so?"

"Awful!"
"That's what I thought, and I remonstrated; but they did it all the same. I was only able to get three penny buns to eat. And I lost quite a lot of time over the matter, before I was able to go to the police-station and deliver your message. Ooh! Whatever are you doing, Bob Cherry?"

Bob Cherry was slamming a pillow upon his head.

"Stop it! Ooh! Ooh! Stop it!"

Billy Bunter yelled and struggled, and squirmed out of the bed and took refuge beneath it, still yelling.

"Keep him off!" he roared. "Wharton! Nugent! I'm surprised at you standing there laughing, after all I've done for you to-day. I look on it as ungrateful."

"There, you greedy young rotter," gasped Bob Cherry, "that will teach you to think of grub before everything else! I mean, it will teach you not to. Come out from under that bed, so that I can give you another buff."

"I won't! I certainly shan't do anything of the kind. I shall stay under this bed as long as I like, Bob Cherry."

"Ha, ha! Well, stay under there all night if you like," laughed Bob; and he threw the pillow down.

The Removees undressed and got into bed. Not till Bob Cherry was safe between the sheets did Billy Bunter crawl out from under his bed. He grambly turned in himself, but before he went to sleep he cast several suspicious glances in the direction of Bob Cherry, as if fearful of another outbreak.

Harry Wharton was the last to go to sleep in the Remove dormitory.

In spite of the carelessness he assumed about the matter, he was really feeling a considerable amount of anxiety as to the result of his interview with the Remove master on the following morning.

It was not that he feared punishment. But he had acted hastily, and reflection had shown him that he had done wrong, and with that feeling in his breast he did not like the prospect of the coming interview. Feeling himself in the right, he could have faced anything. But this was quite different. It was not the first time that his intractable temper had forced him into a false position.

But it was useless to think about it, and he fell asleep at last. The afternoon had tired him, and he did not open his eyes again till the rising-bell clangled in the morning.

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

Better Friends.

"YOU will come into my study before prayers, Wharton," said Mr. Quelch, with a dark, stern brow, as he met Harry Wharton going down with the Remove.

"Yes, sir."

And Mr. Quelch turned away. The Remove master was evidently very angry, and Wharton's chums looked sympathetic. As Bob Cherry remarked, he had known what to expect when he deliberately disobeyed a master, but it was hard cheese, all the same.

After breakfast Harry Wharton slowly made his way to the study of the Remove master. He tapped at the door, and Mr. Quelch's voice bade him enter.

He opened the door and went slowly in. Mr. Quelch was standing by the table, evidently awaiting him. A cane lay on the table. Harry breathed quickly as he saw it, and a harder look came over his face. The thought of punishment was always sufficient to harden his heart, which kind words would undoubtedly have softened. His was a nature which could always be led, but could never be driven.

"Come in, Wharton!"

The Form master's tone was unexpectedly cordial. Harry glanced in surprise at his face. Mr. Quelch was no longer

frowning, and as he met the boy's glance he nodded with a pleasant smile.

Wharton's surprise showed in his face. The Form master noticed it, and laughed slightly.

"No, I am not angry with you, Wharton," he said. "I was very angry indeed yesterday, and had made up my mind to punish you severely for what I could not but regard as a deliberate disobedience of my orders. So I still believed when I spoke to you this morning; but I have since seen the Head, and he has explained to me."

Harry Wharton was silent. That Mr. Quelch's mood had changed was clear, but what had changed it was not equally so. He waited for the Form master to go on.

"I understand now," resumed Mr. Quelch, "why you left the school yesterday afternoon. It was to help to rescue the little girl who had fallen into the hands of the gipsy kidnappers. Now, I cannot say that you should have gone without asking my permission, but, under the circumstances, considering your gallant conduct, I am willing to overlook that. It must not occur again, but you are pardoned this time. You may go."

Harry Wharton coloured deeply. He understood the Form master's misapprehension now, and he was strongly tempted to thank Mr. Quelch and walk out of the study, and so let the matter end. But the meanness of such an action occurred to him at once. He did not stir, and the Remove master looked at him in surprise.

"Well, Wharton? Is there anything you wish to say?"

"Yes, sir," faltered Harry.

"You may go on."

"I—I did not leave the school yesterday to help Miss Hazeldene. I was already gone when—that is, I did not know she had been kidnapped till I was in the village," blurted out Harry.

A very curious look came over Mr. Quelch's face.

"Then you did actually disobey my orders, Wharton, without the excuse I have imagined you to have had."

"Yes, sir."

"And why do you tell me so, when by simply holding your tongue you might have escaped a very severe punishment?" Wharton was silent. "Was it," said the Remove master, in a gentler tone—"was it because you would rather take your punishment than escape it by a falsehood?"

"Yes, sir."

"You acted very wrongly, Wharton. But I shall not punish you for telling the truth, and that is really what it would amount to if I caned you now. I am glad, very glad that you have the honesty to speak out. You may go."

Harry Wharton turned towards the door.

"If you please, sir—"

"Well, Wharton?"

"I—I am sorry that I disobeyed you yesterday, sir," said Harry falteringly. "I really acted without thinking, sir. I—I will try to do better in the future, sir. I know I have been wrong—"

He broke off. Mr. Quelch smiled quietly, and held out his hand to the junior.

"I am more glad than I can say to hear you speak like that, Wharton," he said, in a kindly voice. "Give me your hand, my boy. We are getting to understand one another better now, and I think that in future we shall be better friends."

And he gave Harry's hand a cordial grip. The boy left the study with a new look in his face and a new determination in his heart.

"I knew there was good in that lad from the beginning, in spite of appearances," Mr. Quelch murmured to himself. "I was right! Unless I am greatly mistaken, he will be a credit to Greyfriars yet."

Harry Wharton went down the passage, and was startled by receiving a slap on the shoulder that made him stagger forward. He turned and saw Bob Cherry.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" said Bob Cherry coolly. "I can see that you haven't been licked, and I'm glad. It's turned out all right?"

"Yes, quite all right. Quelch is a brick."

"Marjorie is going now; are you coming to say good-bye?"

"Rather!" said Harry hastily.

They ran out quickly enough. The trap was there, and Hazeldene was just helping his sister into it. Marjorie waved her hand as the vehicle was set in motion.

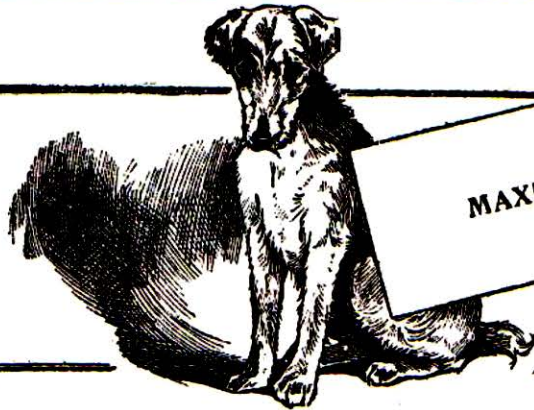
"Good-bye!" she cried.

"Good-bye, Marjorie!"

The juniors stood cap in hand as the trap drove off. Marjorie waved her hand as the trap passed the gateway, and the chums of the Remove waved their caps in return. Then she was gone.

THE END.

(Another Tale of Harry Wharton next Tuesday. Please order your copy of THE MAGNET in advance, and let me know what you think of these stories.—Editor.)



NEW STORY SHOWING HOW TWO BOYS BECOME DETECTIVES.

By LEWIS HOCKLEY.

GLANCE OVER THIS FIRST.

Frank Dennis and Bob Lomax, two City clerks, are thrown out of employment. But Grip, their dog, finds a purse containing certain heirlooms, the owner of which the chums are fortunate in finding. They are well rewarded for their labour and decide to make the detective business their profession.

Their landlady does not like the idea of the chums being in uncertain employment, and gets rid of them. While sitting in one of the Parks, a woman tells them a strange story, and Maxennis offers to solve the mystery. Lomax obtains her address, and they part company for the time being.

The Beginning of Maxennis' Career.

Lomax and Dennis were eating a frugal lunch in one of the A. B. C. shops; Dennis would have preferred a more substantial meal at a restaurant, but his chum reminded him that they had already eaten a breakfast of considerable solidity, and that, considering their insecure financial condition, it would be advisable not to be spendthrift of the little capital they possessed. A decent meal, he said, could be made off bread, butter, a couple of cold sausages, and a cup of coffee, at a cost of eightpence apiece, whereas the restaurant charge for a lunch no more filling would be at least double. Dennis had given way to such profound logic; and, while the chums ate, they discussed the event which was, they hoped, to start "Maxennis" on his career.

"D'you really think, Bob, that it is all right?" Frank inquired. "That the old girl isn't a trifle cracked?"

"I do think it's all right; and it's going to be all right for us, too!" Lomax answered emphatically. "There's not a bit of doubt that someone is attempting to threaten her into parting with her money. It's a real, genuine case of blackmail. Look at all those postcards she showed us; same handwriting on every one of 'em!"

"That is so," Dennis admitted; "but it looks to me that it's very much like a silly joke on somebody's part!"

"Not a bit of it! Where's the point of it if it is?"

"Well, people do some tom-fool's things sometimes."

"Yes, but you've got to take the other circumstances into consideration. There's her late husband's brother she told us of; from what she said of him, it strikes me that he's just the sort of chap who'd do this kind of thing!"

"Might be," Dennis said doubtfully.

"Well, anyway, it's our business to find out! The woman is in a most awful funk; anyone can see that. She takes it seriously enough, and we're going to take it seriously, for it'll be a good thing for us. We ought to get a rattling good fee!"

"If she'll engage us!"

"Oh, she will, right enough!"

"Well, we'll hear more about it to-morrow, if she turns up. And say, Bob, where is she going to turn up? You told her to come and see us at our office, and we haven't got an office! What the dickens were you thinking of, Bob? I thought you were cracked when I heard you say it, but I wasn't going to give you away!"

"That's all right," Lomax answered composedly; "I know we haven't got an office, but we're going to have one, and we'll have it all ready for our client—our client, my lad; think of it!—to see us in to-morrow. I'm not cracked, Frank; far from it. We're going to hustle around after lunch and find an office, and we'll have it fitted up O.K. when she turns up. She's not the sharpest of old parties, and if things do look a bit rough-and-ready she won't feel hurt."

"She's not over bright," Dennis agreed. "Didn't she take down easily what we said about being detectives?"

"Well, and why shouldn't she?" demanded Lomax, a trifle indignantly. "We are detectives; we weren't humbugging! Why, you talk as if we'd been playing tricks on the woman! We're the regular article, even if this is our first case!"

"All right, old chap," was the good-humoured answer; "don't get mad; I'm not suggesting anything! But she is a bit dull. Why, she never even asked where our office is—which is lucky!—never occurred to her, apparently, to inquire the address!"

"No; and I was afraid she would every minute!" And Lomax actually laughed. "But we've got her address all right, and, when we've found a place to pitch our tent, we've got all the afternoon and evening to do it—we'll drop her a line, regretting the oversight of not furnishing her with the address and giving it to her. By Jove, though, we would have been stuck up if she'd only thought to ask for it then!"

"I don't reckon, Frank," the Yorkshireman went on, "that we'll have any difficulty. There's plenty of places about the City where a room for an office can be rented pretty cheaply; and it doesn't matter very much where we go, so long as it isn't out of the way. We'll go and buy a lot of second-hand furniture, just to make the place look all right, and one of us can get out a board to go on the door with the name of our firm on it. We'll get along all right, my lad, you can bet on it!"

"We will!" returned Dennis, catching his chum's enthusiasm. "By Jove, Bob, this is turning out quite as exciting as anything that the story-book detectives ever did! And it's to old Grip we're indebted again! If he hadn't made himself so officious we wouldn't have got on with the old dame! That terrier's going to be worth his weight in gold!"

Getting up, the two friends paid their checks, and with Grip—who had sat within the doorway while they dined, complacently viewing the never-ending stream of traffic that passed along Holborn—at their heels, they sallied forth to discover the office where "Maxennis" was to be located.

After having simmered down; thanks, no doubt, to the soothing effects of the contents of the black flask; the owner of the many picture-postcards—Mrs. Brewer by name, as she informed "Maxennis," a widow, and living—queer place!—in two rooms over a shop in Great Turnstile, Lincoln's Inn—had given her two new acquaintances some information relative to the trouble that was disturbing her mind. She had not for a moment suspected the young men of being anything different from what Robert Lomax had said; had accepted their statements without hesitation or question, and had accepted their offer of help without any thought or consideration of what its value might be.

The woman was, in fact, in a state of mind really pitiable; she was full of fear, and would have jumped at any offer of assistance. And it was the postcards—of which she had allowed Lomax and Dennis to make a cursory inspection—that had brought her to such a condition. Each and every one of them contained, in carefully-chosen words, a veiled threat to destroy her if she did not hand over a sum of money.

Her husband had died some eight months earlier, and, within a week of the funeral, the first of the postcards had arrived. Since then, with the regularity of clockwork, twice a week, every Monday and every Thursday, another had reached her. She was sure somebody wanted to put her out of the way, so that the little money she had might be obtained. Who it was she didn't know; the writing on the cards was not familiar to her; but she suspected her late husband's brother.

So much she had related, not very coherently, and not according to the sequence of events, but enough it was to

cause Lomax to make the most of the sudden inspiration that had come to him, and urge upon the frightened woman the necessity for seeking expert aid to assist her in dealing with the matter, and such as he and his partner were willing—for a suitable consideration, as he delicately hinted—to give. She had consented, and the arrangement made before they parted was such as the foregoing conversation between Lomax and his chum has indicated.

It was seven in the evening before Lomax and Dennis found an office to their liking. It was situated in one of those courts in the rear of the City side of Fleet Street, where some of the still standing houses erected over a century ago are let out in rooms and offices at moderate rentals not beyond the friends' means. Seven shillings a week was to be paid for the sole use of a fair-sized room on the top floor, lighted by one window, and thick with dust and cobwebs. The caretaker protested that the previous tenant had vacated it but a fortnight before; and if such was the case Dennis decided that he must have been an individual uncommonly easily satisfied, for the walls, floor, and mantelshelf were covered with a layer of dust a quarter of an inch thick.

The landlord, proprietor of a coffee-house in Shoe Lane, was unearthed, a bargain struck, the first week's rental paid in advance, and both youngsters set to work to make their tenement habitable. And work they did; when they did go to bed they were both feeling more tired than if they had been engaging in a two hours' bout on the wrestling-mat.

Dennis first of all borrowed a broom from the caretaker and gave the interior a thorough sweeping down. Water, soap, and a scrubbing-brush were procured, and, while Dennis tried to remove some of the grime from the window-panes, Lomax scrubbed the floor and woodwork. They bought coal and wood, lighted a fire, got the gas-jet into working order, and then sallied forth to obtain some furniture. It was a night's work—their labours were not completed before one o'clock in the morning—neither ever forgot. But they went through it manfully; Dennis with a laugh and a joke ever on his lips, Lomax with a grim resolution that could not have been excelled if his life had depended upon a successful termination of the job.

They were indefatigable; went here, there, and everywhere, without the slightest diffidence or modesty, trying to get what they needed, and willing to pay down on the nail, if not at a very lavish rate for those articles they obtained. A table, a worn desk, and three chairs found their way into the office; an ancient inkstand, with pens and ink and a small stock of sheets of foolscap were obtained; a few pegs were driven into the walls, a ledger and memorandum-book bought and conspicuously placed upon the mantel-shelf, and a few other odds-and-ends such as they deemed necessary as proper accompaniments for the character and work they had undertaken. And when everything had been brought into the office, Dennis sat down, and, having fastened on a small piece of board a sheet of clean paper, he inscribed on it, in letters large enough to be read six feet away, the following:

"MAXENNIS."

Private Detective, and Investigator of All Cases Requiring Ability, Tact, Scrupulous Secrecy, and Despatch. 3rd Floor.

With the pride of the creative artist, he showed this notice to Robert Lomax, who granted.

"Well, if that doesn't fetch 'em, nothing will!" the Yorkshireman remarked. "And now let's go to bed, for I'm dog-tired, and I guess you're about the same!"

"I am!" Dennis agreed, rubbing his eyes. "I'll fasten this board up on the door-post first thing to-morrow morning; we're not going to hide our shining light under a bushel!"

Lomax had spoken of going to bed; but, as a matter of fact, they had no bed to go to. Whatever they might

arrange for the future, that night had to be spent where they were within a stone's-throw of a very good hotel, where a bed-room would have been surely obtainable, but the expenditure on the fitting up of their office had made a big hole in a sovereign, and it was necessary to be economical. Not a penny could be spent on luxuries, and so they passed the night in the office. Lomax slept on the table, in a half-reclining position, with his shoulders up against one of the walls; Dennis made of the three chairs as comfortable a bed as such unresisting things as chair-seats will permit. For covering, the latter had his overcoat, while Lomax was content with a big woolen rug, a parting gift from his mother when he had left his north country home.

There is nothing like physical weariness for inducing sound sleep; and had the two chums been tucked up on the softest down beds, their slumbers could not have been sounder. Once, it is true, Lomax slipped down from the wall, but the fall didn't awaken him, and he was blissfully unconscious that he spent the better part of the short night with his feet and legs dangling over the end of the table. And though the chair-seat edges made grooves in Dennis's flesh, he was insensible of the fact, until the morning came and he awakened.

When that happened both he and his chum became painfully aware that a wooden mattress possesses quite unexpected disadvantages. Both were as stiff and sore as if someone had thrashed them thoroughly the evening before. Lomax's legs were cold and numb; Dennis could hardly bend his back, and both had acquired a disagreeable crick and stiffness in the neck.

Still, such inconveniences, disagreeable as they are at the time, are fortunately only temporary, and their pains and stiffness were speedily dispelled by a few minutes of brisk exercise, followed by a round or two of pleasant sparring, wherein each was careful to do no damage to his opponent's physiognomy; for "Maxennis" to have faced his first client with a discoloured eye or a swollen proboscis would have been distinctly "off."

Their boxing bout over, the young men sought out the caretaker, and a few complimentary words procured permission to use, for washing purposes, the sink in the cellar, which the lady declared was a scullery. This necessary part of the day's work accomplished, another was commenced—they went out to breakfast.

Plain food, no matter how simple, providing it is clean and wholesome, never yet hurt anybody, and the budding detectives were not fastidious in other respects. They got what they wanted at an eating-house not far from their office, and after a stroll along the Embankment returned thereto. The all-important letter to Mrs. Brewer had not been forgotten during the multifarious duties of the night before. The lady had been acquainted at what address Maxennis might be consulted; ten o'clock had been fixed for the time of the appointment with her, and after their stroll the friends had nothing to do but kill time for an hour and a half by discussing their prospects.

Dennis had hung up the name-plate when they went out to breakfast, and it was with no small pride both looked at it as they returned.

The caretaker, another woman, and two men and a boy were examining it as they entered. They looked curiously at the young men as they passed in, but said nothing. Once within their office, Dennis wrote out the firm's name on a sheet of paper, fastened it with drawing-pins to the outside of the door, and re-entered.

Ten o'clock came at last, but not Mrs. Brewer. At twenty-five minutes past the hour, however, a heavy step sounded on the staircase; there was a pause for several seconds, and then a rattling of the handle.

"Our first client!" Lomax said solemnly.


(Another long instalment next Tuesday. Please order your copy of THE MAGNET in advance. Price 4d.)

For Next Week

The Editor, "MAGNET" Library, 2, Carmelite House, Carmelite Street, London, will be glad to hear from you.

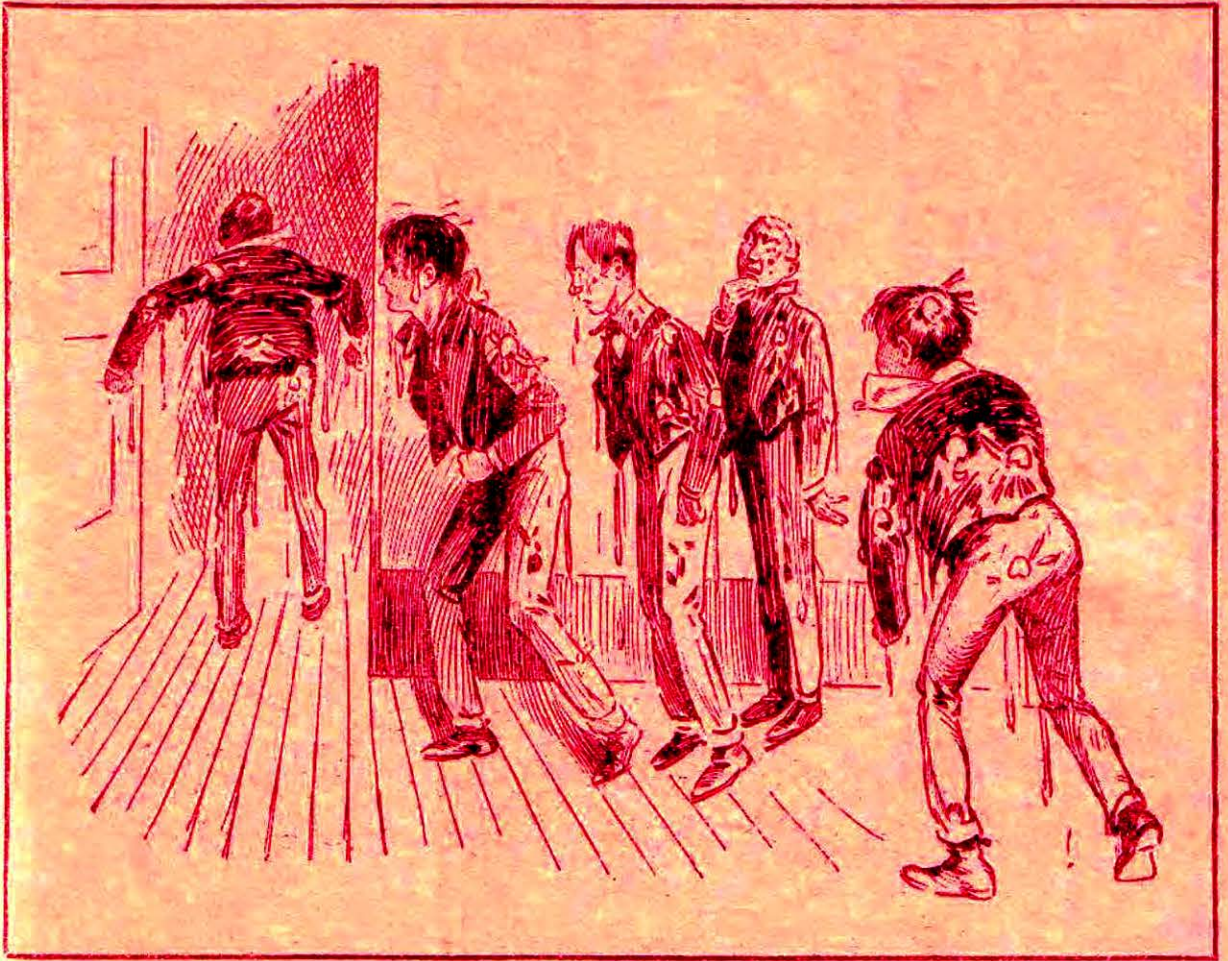
"ALIENS AT GREYFRIARS."
 The calm of the old college is rudely disturbed.
 The sacred precincts are invaded by a rough unruly crowd of— But wait and read next Tuesday of how Harry and his chums deal with the intruders. &
 Thanks for the postcards.

THE EDITOR.



Next
Tuesday's
Cover!

THE
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The new arrivals at
Greyfriars were shown
into the Head's study.

(An amusing incident from next Week's Story, "ALIENS AT GREYFRIARS!")

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