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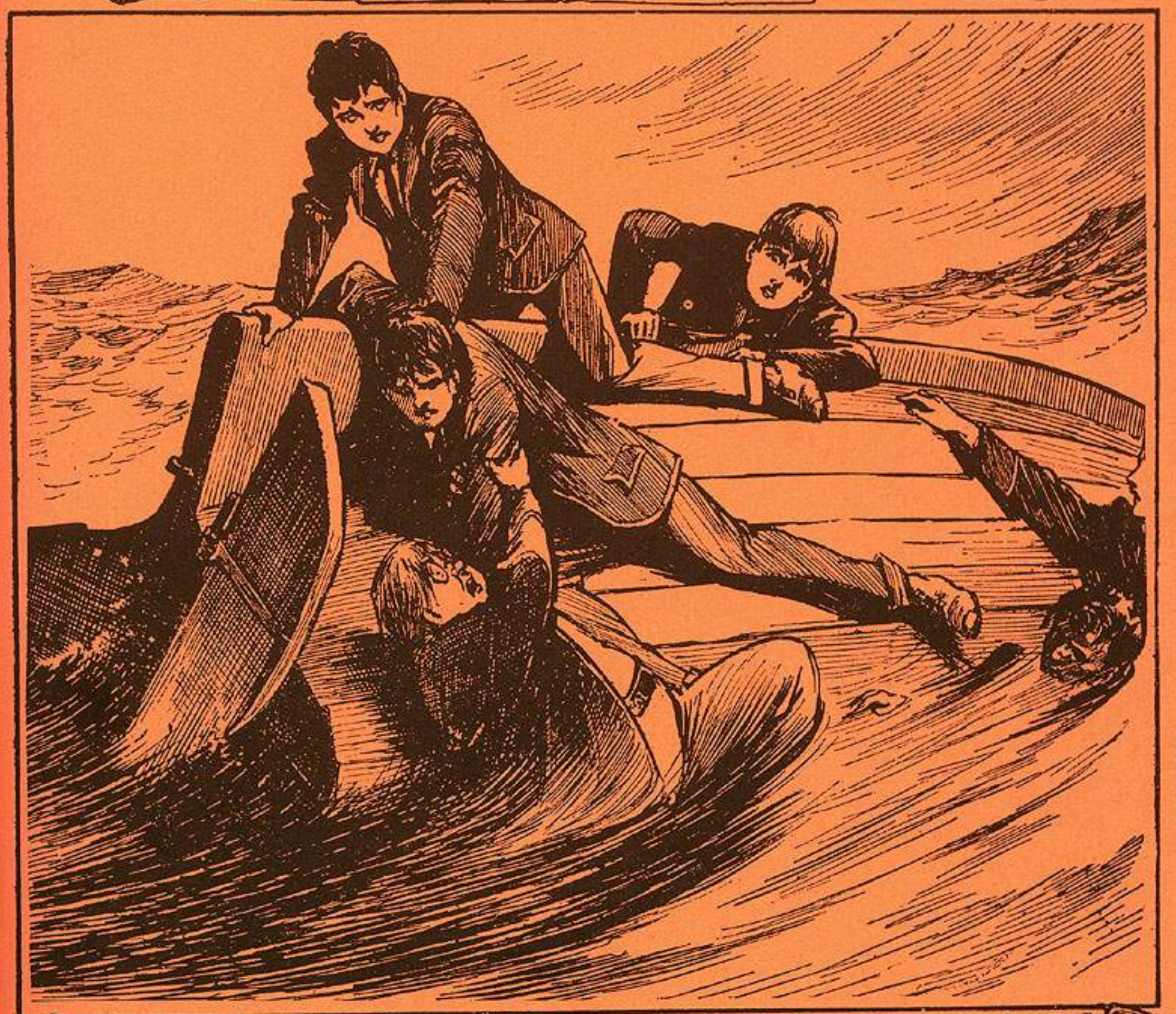
VOLUME 3.

Complete Story for All.

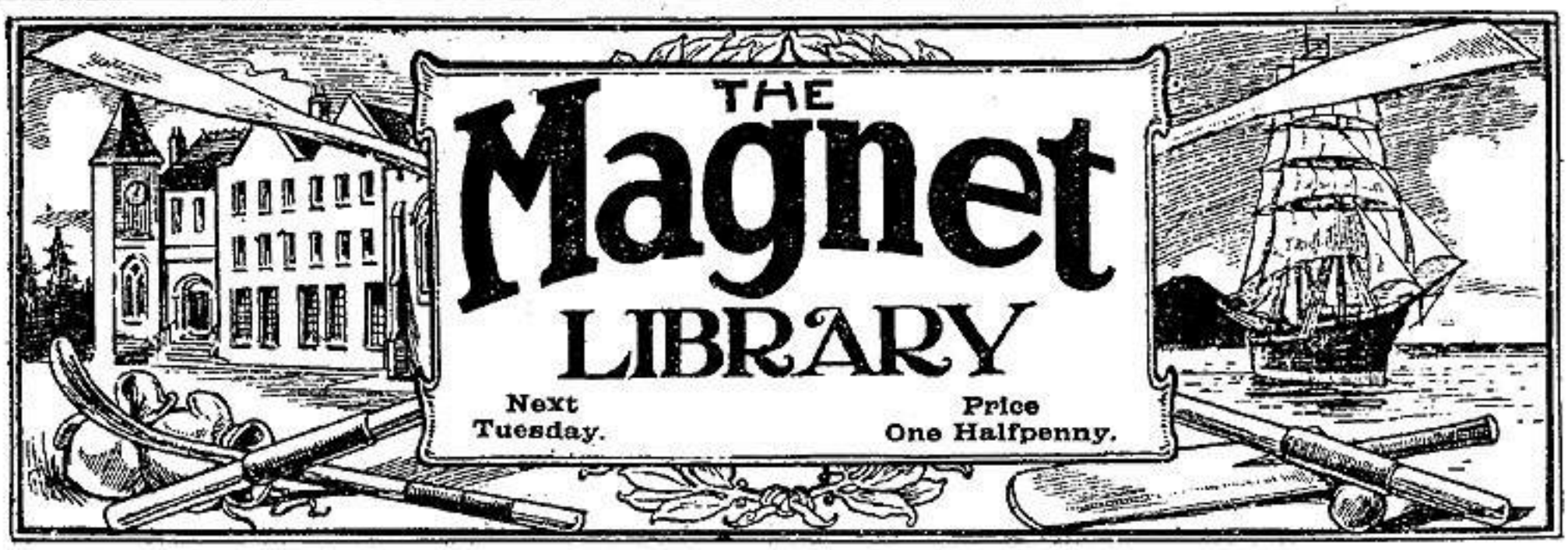
Double-Length Tale of

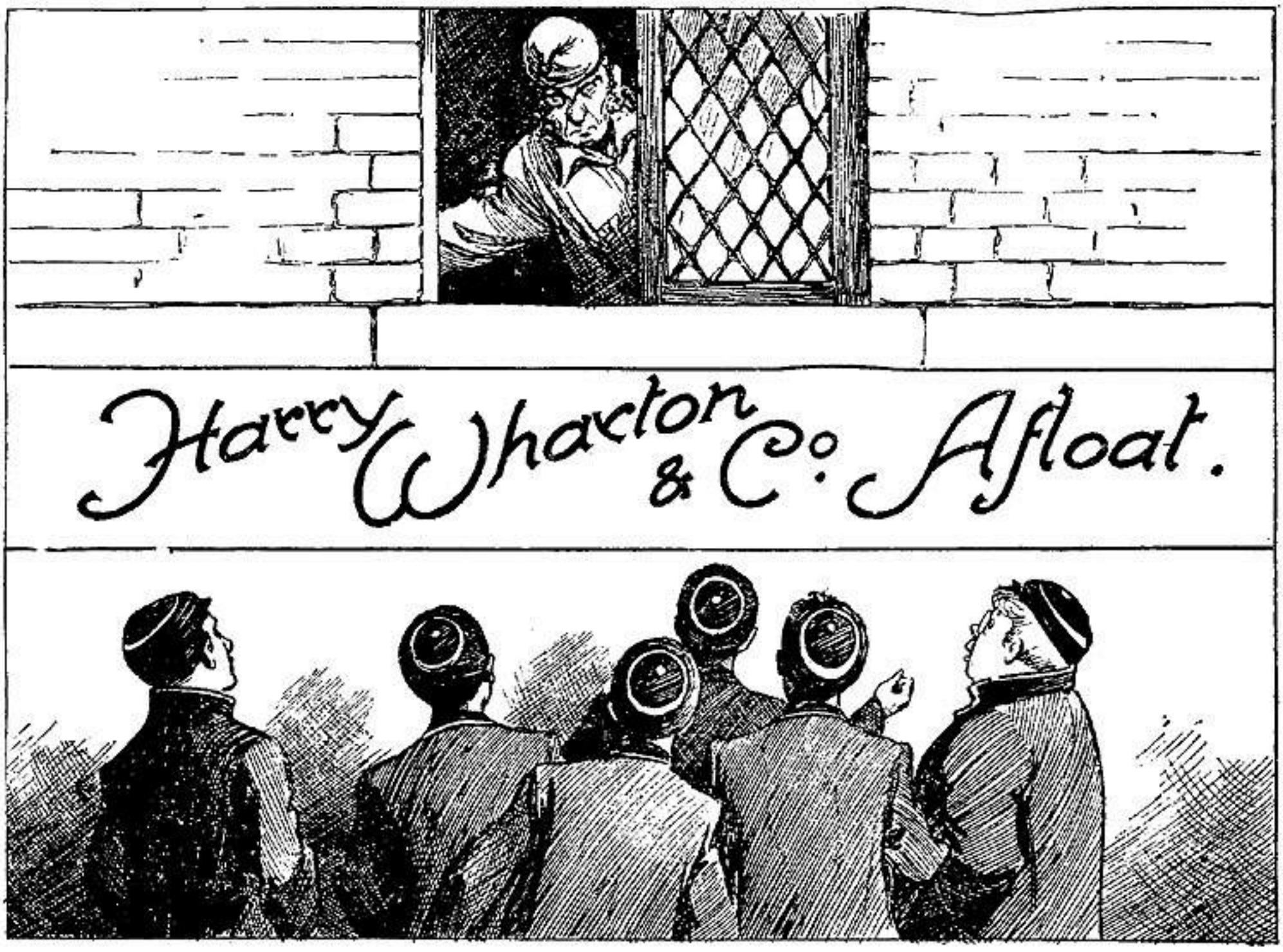
## GREYFRIARS COLLEGE.

By Frank Richards.



**CAPSIZED!** Almost before the Greyfriars Juniors knew what was happening, they were afloat in the water, with nothing but a wreck to cling to.



# Harry Wharton & Co. Afloat.

## A Special, Double-Length, Complete Tale of the Greyfriars Chums.

## By FRANK RICHARDS.

### THE FIRST CHAPTER.
### Early Rising.

BOB CHERRY jumped out of bed in the Remove dormitory at Greyfriars, and ran to the window. The hour was very early. The rising-bell was not due for an hour yet, and the wide, green Close lay very quiet in the rising sunlight.

"Hurrah!" shouted Bob, in a voice that rang through the dormitory from end to end, and some distance beyond it. "Ripping morning!"

Harry Wharton sat up in bed, and rubbed his eyes.

"Eh? What's the row?"

"I say it's a ripping morning."

"Oh!"

"And it's six o'clock."

"Is it?" yawned Wharton. "And what do you mean by making an unearthly row in a respectable dormitory at six o'clock in the morning?"

"Time to get up!"

"Yaw-aw-aw!"

"We've got to get down to Pegg Bay before seven. Captain Stump is going to have the boat ready. Buck up!"

Wharton gave a final yawn, and jumped out of bed.

"Right you are!"

Nugent and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh followed his example. The Famous Four were usually early risers, and they had a little scheme on for this morning which made unusually early rising a necessity.

They were allowed out of gates as early as they liked for bathing in the river, and it had occurred to them that a sail on the bay in the early September morning would be a very pleasant experience.

To spend an hour in skimming over the blue waters of the bay, and to turn up again at Greyfriars in time for breakfast was an idea that appealed to the chums of the Remove.

Bob Cherry crossed over to Mark Linley's bed, and shook him by the shoulder. Linley was sleeping soundly; even Bob Cherry's war-whoop had not awakened him. From under his pillow the edge of a book peeped out, for the Lancashire lad was accustomed to begin his day's studies in bed if he happened to wake very early. This morning he did not wake till Bob shook him.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" roared Bob, in his tremendous voice. "Time to wake up!"

"Hallo!"

"Aren't you coming down to the sea?"

"Oh, yes! All right!"

"Up you get, then!"

Mark Linley tumbled out. The five juniors dressed themselves quickly. A fat junior sat up in bed, and regarded them with blinking eyes. It was Billy Bunter. He groped under his pillow for a spectacle case, extracted a pair of big spectacles from it, adjusted them on his little, fat nose, and stared at the chums again.

"I say, you fellows——"

"Shut up, Bunter!"

"But I say——"

"Go to sleep!"

"You chaps going out?"

"No; we're dressing ourselves to go to bed!"

"Oh, really, Cherry! If you're going out, I don't mind coming with you. I like the idea of an early-morning picnic!"

Harry Wharton laughed.

"It's not a picnic, Billy. Better stay in bed."

"What are you going out for, then?"

"A sail on the bay."

"You'll get jolly hungry on the sea," said Bunter, with a wise shake of the head. "You won't be able to hold out till you get back to breakfast. You'll have to take some grub with you."

"Well, we shall have some grub in the boat."

Bunter blinked.

"I thought so. It's a picnic."

"It isn't a picnic."

"I'm sincerely sorry to see you descend to prevarication, Wharton, for the sake of keeping your own study-mate out of a picnic."

"Eh?"

"I've noticed this sort of thing about you before—— Oh—ow! Leggo!"

Harry Wharton seized the fat junior by the shoulders and shook him. Billy Bunter shook like a jelly in his strong grasp.

"Now then," said Wharton wrathfully, "what do you mean? Who's prevaricating?"

"I—I—I'm sincerely sorry! I—I meant that a chap like you wouldn't prevaricate under any circumstances!" gurgled Billy Bunter. "That's what I really meant to say. Leggo!"

"Well, if that's what you really meant to say, you had a very unfortunate way of putting it," said Harry, laughing, as he released the fat junior.

"I—I say, you fellows——"

"Oh, go to sleep!" said Nugent.

"But I say, you know—I don't mind coming. If you've got grub on the boat, I suppose you'll want some cooking done, and I should be willing to——"

"It's cold grub."

"I'm very fond of cold grub."

"Look here," said Wharton, laughing, "you can come if you like, Billy, only you take the consequences. The last time we went for a sail you smuggled yourself into the boat, and we were wrecked on Seagull Island, and you groused and complained all the time as if it were our fault. If anything happens this morning, you'll only have yourself to thank!"

"I don't see what can happen on a fine morning, Wharton."

"You never can tell."

Bunter appeared to reflect.

"What grub have you got in the boat?" he asked.

"Bread-and-butter——"

"H'm! I don't think I'll trouble to get up so early!"

"And ham——"

"Oh!"

"And hard-boiled eggs——"

"Good!"

"And saveloys——"

"I'll come!"

"And a pot of jam!"

Bunter hopped out of bed.

"I'm coming! Wait a tick while I get my things on!"

"Rats!" said Bob Cherry. "Catch us waiting! If you're not ready when we are, you can go back to bed!"

"I—I'll be ready! I won't trouble to wash; I'll wash when I come back, if I have time! I had a wash yesterday afternoon, anyway! Sha'n't be a tick!"

Bunter's ablutions never delayed him long. He dressed quickly this morning, too. He was ready to leave the dormitory by the time the others were ready.

Several sleepy faces looked out of the other beds as they departed.

"Shut the door after you!" called out Ogilvy.

"Right-ho!"

"Anything you'd like me to do if you get drowned?" asked Bulstrode sympathetically.

"Yes," said Bob Cherry; "get drowned, too! It would be a benefit to Greyfriars, anyway!"

"Oh, go and eat coke!"

"If you don't come back, Nugent, may I have your pocket-knife?" sang out Skinner.

The chums of the Remove laughed as they quitted the dormitory, and closed the door behind them. From the remarks of their Form-fellows, it might have been supposed that they were going on a dangerous expedition.

They passed the door of the Upper Fourth Form dormitory on their way to the stairs. Bob Cherry was in high spirits, and he showed it in his usual way. He opened the door of the Upper Fourth dormitory, and roared in at the sleepers:

"Wake up—quick! Temple! Dabney! Wake up!"

"What's the matter?" came in Temple's sleepy voice.

"Wake up—quick! You're in danger!"

"Great Scott!"

Temple bounded out of bed. Half a dozen of the Upper Fourth followed his example, and most of the others sat up in bed, rubbing their eyes and blinking.

"What is it?" gasped Temple. "Fire?"

"No."

"What is it, then?"

"What's what?"

"The danger, you idiot!"

"Oh, the danger, you idiot! You're in danger of getting a thick ear if you don't treat the Remove with proper respect, that's all!"

And Bob Cherry slammed the door and departed.

As the Removites went chuckling down the passage, the Upper Fourth door opened again, and Temple, Dabney, and Fry and some more Upper Fourth fellows looked out after the juniors, and the remarks they made were emphatic. They made personal references to Bob Cherry's defects, both physical and mental, and gave him sweeping promises of the kindly attentions they would pay him later in the day.

Whereat Bob Cherry only chuckled, and walked on with his chums, leaving the Upper Fourth, as he elegantly expressed it, to stew in their own juice.

Harry Wharton opened the door, and a burst of sunshine from the Close greeted the juniors. In high spirits they went down to the gates.

## THE SECOND CHAPTER.
### Getting Out.

GOSLING, the porter of Greyfriars, was not yet up, and the gates were not open. The juniors halted at the porter's gate, and hammered on the door.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" roared Bob Cherry. "Time to get up, Gossy!"

There was no reply.

"The excellent Gosling is asleep," said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "He sleeps the sleep of the justful person."

"We can't get the gates open unless he turns out," remarked Nugent. "Better make a row."

"The rowfulness ought to be terrific to wake the worthy Gosling!"

Bang, bang, bang!

Kick! Crash!

There was a sound of a window being opened, and a night-capped head was thrust out into the early morning air.

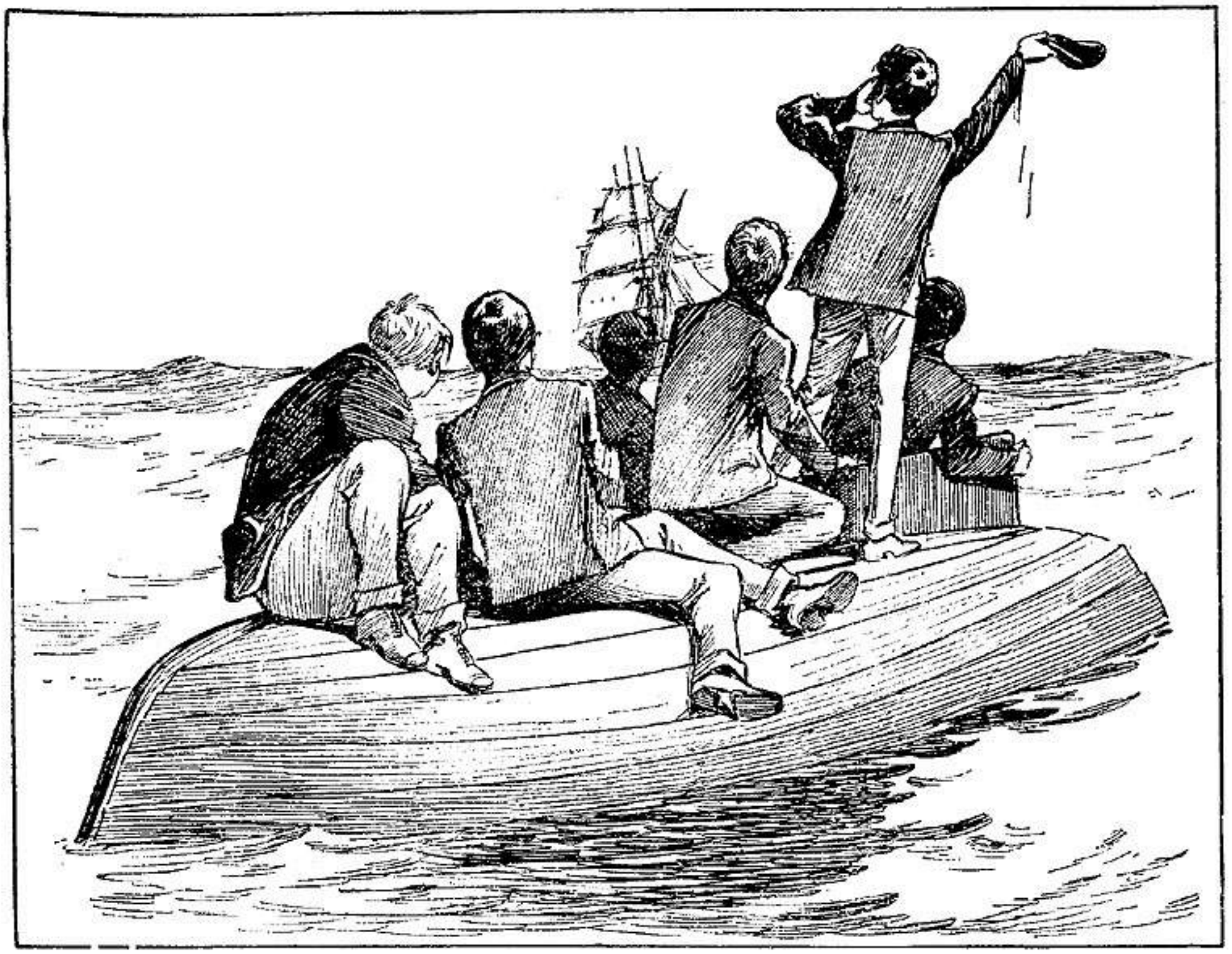
Gosling, the porter, looked down with wrathful eyes upon the group of juniors.

"Whatcher want?" he demanded.

Harry Wharton took off his cap with a polite bow.

"We want to go out," he said.

"'Tain't time to get up!"



**Harry Wharton stood upright on the overturned boat. He waved his cap and shouted "Ship ahoy! Help!"**

"But we're up!"

"Wot I says is this 'ere, you ain't no business to disturb a honest man at this time of the morning!"

"But we haven't disturbed any honest man," said Nugent. "We've only disturbed you, so far, Gossy."

Gosling snorted.

"Come down and open the door!" sang Bob Cherry pleadingly. "We could climb over the wall, Gossy, but we'd rather you came and opened the gate, for the sake of your beaux yeux!"

Another snort.

"Come down, Gossy!"

"Wot I says is this 'ere——"

"We want to go out!"

"Go back to bed!"

"Rats!"

"I ain't gittin' up early on your account! Which my private belief is that all boys oughter be drowned at birth!"

"Well, that's right in some cases, I suppose. Your parents ought to have done it!" said Bob Cherry. "Are you coming down?"

"No, I ain't!"

"But we can't get out."

"Go in, then!"

And Gosling withdrew his head. Bob Cherry chuckled.

"I hold you responsible if I break my neck climbing the wall, Gossy," he said. "I shall appear to you as a sheeted ghost of a night after your tenth glass of gin-and-water!"

The window slammed down.

Kick! Crash!

Bang!

"Gossy! Gossy! Pretty one, open thy window!"

"Gosling!"

But Gosling declined to be drawn.

"We shall have to get over the wall," remarked Harry Wharton. "It's all right, now that we have given official notice that we're going out. If we hadn't, some suspicious prefect might have surmised that we'd been making a night of it when we came in."

"Ha, ha! I shouldn't wonder! Carberry, for instance!"

"The possibility is terrific."

"Well, it's all right now. Let's get over the wall."

There was a spot on the school wall where climbing was easy, aided by the thick, hanging ivy. The juniors knew it well. They were soon upon the spot, and Bob Cherry gave Harry a hand up, and then passed up a well-filled bag to him. Hurree Singh, Bob, Nugent, and Mark Linley followed, assisted by a hand from above. Then Harry leaned down for Billy Bunter.

The fat junior eyed the wall dubiously.

The climb would have been nothing to any other fellow at Greyfriars, but Billy Bunter was a heavyweight, and he was not active or inclined to exertion.

He blinked at the wall, and he blinked at the juniors above.

"Come on!" said Harry.

"Oh, really, Wharton——"

"Give me your hand."

"Ahem! Do you think you can pull me up?"

"I can if you climb as well."

"The ivy won't bear my weight."

"It will if you take hold of the thick tendrils, and I help you. Come on, for goodness' sake! We don't want to stay here to hear the rising-bell!"

"I'm blessed if I can do it! Look here, you fellows, come down again, and I'll climb up over your shoulders, and you can help me."

"What-ho!" said Bob Cherry. "I don't think!"

"The don't-thinkfulness is terrific."

"I say, you fellows——"

"Give me your hand, duffer!" said Wharton impatiently.

And Bob Cherry immediately began to chant an air he was learning for the operatic society:

"'Give me your hand, oh, fairest,
Whisper a gentle yes,
Come, if for me thou carest——'"

"Shut up, Bob! You'll wake the whole school!"

"I suppose I can sing if I like?" said Bob Cherry warmly.

"Something wrong with your supposer, then," said Nugent, shaking his head. "You can't."

"Look here, Cherry——"

"Here, lend me a hand with Bunter! Take his old paw!"

"Oh, really, Wharton——"

"Shut up, and come on!"

The chums of the Remove took a hand each of the fat junior, lying with their chests on the wall. They dragged, and Bunter's feet swept off the ground. He banged into the ivy, and gasped:

"Ow! Oh! Gerrooh!"

"Climb, you ass!"

"Ow! How c-c-c-can I c-c-climb when you're holding my hands?"

"Leggo his fist, Bob."

"Right-ho!"

Bob let go, and Bunter swung by one hand.

"Now catch the ivy! Oh, crumbs!"

Bunter swung from Harry's grasp, and went down to the ground in a sitting posture, with a terrific bump.

He gave a gasp like escaping steam.

"Ow!"

"My hat! Was ever anybody bothered with such a duffer?" exclaimed Harry Wharton. "I think you'd better stay there, Bunter."

"Ow! I've broken a leg, and sprained my arm!"

"Then it's impossible for you to get over the wall. Good-bye!"

"Hold on!" Bunter jumped up with remarkable activity for one whose leg was broken, and whose arm was sprained. "I'm coming!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I can see anything to cackle at! I think I can climb the ivy if you help me. Why can't you lend a chap a hand?"

And Bunter essayed the climb again, and this time he succeeded in reaching the top of the wall.

He sat there, straddled, puffing and blowing.

"Oh, dear! Jolly lucky I'm an athletic chap, or I couldn't have done that. I feel rather winded. Oh!"

"Come on!"

"Do hold on a minute, and give a chap a chance to get his wind!"

"Buck up!"

"I won't buck up! I'm going to get a breath first. Wait for me. I sha'n't keep you more than five minutes."

The juniors chuckled.

"You jolly well won't keep us more than five seconds," said Bob Cherry. "Come on, my sons! Bunter can sit on the wall and ornament the landscape."

"Here, give me a hand down, you beasts!"

Bob Cherry caught hold of Bunter's ankle.

"Come on, then!"

"Leggo! You—you'll make me break my neck! I—I—I——"

"Oh, come on!"

"Oh! Leggo! Ow!"

Bunter scrambled wildly down the wall. Wharton caught the back of his collar to help him, and Billy gasped for breath.

"I—I say, you fellows, you're beasts, you know; you are, really! Hold on a minute! You know that exertion always makes me hungry. Give me a snack out of the bag."

"Rats!"

"I suppose you don't want me to expire of hunger at your feet, Bob Cherry?"

"Come on!" said Harry. "You shall have some grub in the boat. Get a move on. You're making us waste too much time!"

"Oh, really——"

"Shut up, and come on!" said Wharton tersely.

And Bunter thought he'd better do so.

— — —

### THE THIRD CHAPTER.
### On the Sea.

THE wide bay was rolling and glinting in the early sunlight, as the juniors of Greyfriars came down upon the sands at Pegg. Wide and blue lay the bay, stretching out to the wider German Ocean.

To the left, the great rock called the Shoulder rose, jutting against the blue sky. To the right, the sands shelved away along lines of rugged cliffs. Seaward, sails and patches of smoke dotted the water.

From the yellow sands of the bay the juniors had often seen great ships passing from Hull or Newcastle, bound on voyages to the far corners of the earth. Often their thoughts had followed the great ships to their unknown destinations. To the British boy, it comes as natural to love the sea as to breathe.

Harry Wharton and his friends had formed a corps of Naval Cadets at the school, and they spent many a busy holiday on the salt water. They could swim like ducks, with the exception of Billy Bunter, who usually came on the expeditions as cook, and declared that he would rather risk drowning a dozen times than take the trouble to learn. Bunter, however, could float a little, and Bob Cherry declared that it was his fat that kept him up.

A wooden-legged sailorman was standing by a boat on the beach, and he removed a black pipe from his mouth, and touched his cap to the boys as they came up.

It was "Captain" Stump.

"Mornin', gentlemen!" he said.

"Good-morning!" said Wharton. "I see you're ready."

"Been ready ten minutes, sir."

"We've been delayed by a silly ass," said Harry. "We're ready now. Get in, you chaps, and Captain Stump will shove us off."

The boat was pushed into the water, and the juniors jumped in. Captain Stump blinked at them in a hesitating way.

"You're goin' alone, young gents?" he asked.

Wharton laughed.

"Yes, certainly!"

"Better let an old sailorman come and take care of you," said Captain Stump, squirting a stream of tobacco-juice over the glowing sands.

"That's all right. We won't bother you."

"The wind's going to rise."

"Looks calm enough now."

The old sailorman shook his head.

"I've sailed the sea forty year, man and boy," he said. "I reckon I know the weather by this time, Master Wharton. There's going to be a blow in the mornin'."

Harry Wharton looked at the sky. It was clear and blue.

Away to the northward, behind the great Shoulder, a ragged edge of clouds showed on the blue, but that was all.

"Sure about that, skipper?" said Bob Cherry.

"I reckon so."

"But you reckoned there was going to be a storm yesterday, and there wasn't," said Harry Wharton.

The old sailorman turned his quid.

"It's held off, sir."

"And the day before you told us to look for rain, and it was as dry as a lime-kiln all day."

"They had rain over to Lindale."

Harry Wharton laughed.

"Well, I dare say they had a storm somewhere yesterday, too, and there may be a blow to-day somewhere. So long as it's not at Pegg, I don't mind."

Captain Stump shook his head.

"It may come on, and it may keep off," he said. "I reckon it will come on."

"I think we'll chance it."

And Wharton jumped into the boat.

"Shove off, skipper!"

"Ay, ay, sir!"

The boat rocked off into deeper water.

Captain Stump looked after the juniors, turned his quid in his mouth, and then slowly and solemnly stumped away towards the Anchor Inn.

The juniors, in high spirits, shook out the sails.

There was a steady breeze off the shore, and the mainsail and jib filled at once, and the boat fairly walked through the water.

"By Jove, this is ripping!" exclaimed Bob Cherry.

"The rippingfulness is terrific."

"First-rate!" said Nugent. "I suppose old Stump was talking out of his hat, as usual. The weather's perfect."

Bob Cherry gave Linley a sounding slap on the shoulder, as he detected a thoughtful expression upon the Lancashire lad's face.

"What's the worry, Marky?"

Mark Linley smiled.

"I'm not worrying. But——"

"But what?"

"I was thinking about what Stump said. I suppose he knows the weather signs."

"Stuff! He's always predicting bad weather, but it doesn't come off once in a blue moon," said Nugent. "You can't rely on a weather prophet."

"No; I suppose not. It would be a pity to have the sail mucked up on spec, anyway," agreed Mark.

"I should say so. It's all right. We shall have a splendid run down to the end of the Shoulder, and then we can tack and beat back to Pegg, and get in in splendid time for breakfast at Greyfriars."

"Good!"

"I say, you fellows——"

"Shut up, Bunter."

"But I say, speaking of breakfast, reminds me that I'm jolly hungry. I should like to have a snack out of the bag."

"Oh, ring off! You're not going to begin eating at once."

"But I say, I haven't eaten anything at all this morning, and——"

"Dry up! Look there, you chaps!" exclaimed Bob Cherry, pointing up at the cliffs as the boat sped onward. "There's Cliff House!"

Among the big cliffs rose the green of the trees and the red roofs of Cliff House, the girls' school, where Marjorie, their girl chum, dwelt under the eye of Miss Penelope Primrose. Early as the hour was, a figure in a white dress could be seen on the verandah, and a handkerchief was waved as the boat shot by.

Bob Cherry gave a shout.

"It's Marjorie!"

The juniors all swept off their caps, and the handkerchief was waved again from Cliff House.

Then the boat rushed on, and the house was hidden by the great grey cliffs.

"My hat, we're getting along!" exclaimed Nugent, while Bob Cherry, unusually silent, was glancing back towards Cliff House. "The boat's fairly humming."

"It's a splendid breeze."

"The humfulness of our worthy craft is terrific. We shall be past the Shoulder in the next to no timefulness," remarked the Nabob of Bhanipur.

Wharton looked ahead through the gleaming water.

The boat was going splendidly, and covering the bay in half the time he had expected, and an idea of extending the sail came into his mind.

"I don't see why we should turn back at the end of the Shoulder!" he exclaimed. "We might as well have a run right on, and turn back in a wider sweep outside the bay."

"Good wheeze!"

"At this rate we shall have plenty of time."

"Good! Let's keep on."

The boat rushed forward gaily, the sails bellying out before the breeze. The huge Shoulder, jutting seemingly into the skies, with seagulls screaming round the dizzy summit, rose high on the port side of the boat.

Higher and higher, till it seemed to tower over the boat, and then it faded away astern, and the little craft was in the wider waters of the sea.

It was calm, and sailing was easy.

The juniors laughed as they remembered Captain Stump's warning of bad weather. Like many of his other weather prognostications, it was likely to come to nothing.

But once past the Shoulder, and fairly out into the open sea, the ragged edge of cloud could be seen more plainly.

A shade crossed Mark Linley's face.

"I don't like the look of that," he remarked.

"What's the matter?"

"I've seen the clouds like that at the mouth of the Mersey, when I've been out on the water," said the Lancashire lad quietly.

Harry Wharton glanced across at him, from where he was holding the sheet.

"Do you think we ought to get into the bay, Linley?"

"Well, I don't want to look funky, but I think it would be a good idea."

"I say, you fellows——"

"Oh, you don't know anything about it, Bunter! You shut up."

"I wasn't going to speak about the weather, Wharton. It looks all right, as far as I can see. I was thinking about the grub."



"For goodness' sake give him a saveloy and keep him quiet!"

"Oh, really, Wharton——"

"Here you are! Now dry up!"

Billy Bunter grunted as he received the saveloy. One saveloy was not likely to last him long.

Wharton took a keen look at the sky.

"We'll get back," he said.

He went to the tiller. The sails were trimmed to run back into the bay, and as long as the boat was under the shelter of the Shoulder, it ran easily enough. But as it passed beyond the great rock, the wind off shore caught it with greater force, and even in the short time that the juniors had been on the sea, it seemed to have doubled in strength.

Harry Wharton's face set grimly.

"We shall have our work cut out to beat back into the bay," he said. "It's lucky we didn't leave it any later."

## THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

### A Good Wash.

HARRY WHARTON could sail a boat with any lad at Greyfriars, where there were many good sailors. When, out of the shelter of the great cliff which had been keeping off the wind to a great extent, the boat attempted to enter the open bay, he knew that the task would be a hard one. Captain Stump had been right, after all. The wind had been freshening ever since they started, though, running easily before it, the juniors had hardly noticed the fact. It was a very different matter when they came to tack into the bay with the wind almost in their teeth.

To get across the bay, and back to Pegg, by a series of long tacks, was what Harry Wharton intended; but this seemed to be more and more difficult every moment.

"Looks like being kept out all the morning," said Bob Cherry, with a grunt. "There won't be a wreck this time, though. Remember the time we were shipwrecked on Seagull Island?"

"What-ho!"

Billy Bunter groaned.

"Sick, Bunter?"

"N-no. I was thinking of that awful time. I was nearly starved to death. I feel as if I hadn't had really enough to eat ever since."

"Go easy with the saveloys," said Bob Cherry. "The sea's getting rougher, and you know what you're like in a rough sea. No good wasting the saveloys."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, really, Cherry——"

Harry Wharton was looking shoreward, with the wind lashing his face, and blowing out his hair. He looked very handsome as he stood there, holding to a sheet, his face stung red by the wind.

The stretch of sandy shore, and the cluster of little houses that marked the fishing village of Pegg, were further and further off.

In the teeth of such a wind tacking was of little avail, and it soon became clear that the juniors had no chance of getting back into the bay.

"Well, we are asses!" said Nugent. "We ought to have known better. None of the fishermen came out this morning—I can't see anything of the boats."

"Captain Stump was right, after all."

"Just by chance, I expect."

"We're all right," said Harry Wharton abruptly. "It's only a question of staying away from school for a few hours. I expect Dr. Locke will overlook it when we explain, if we're in time for afternoon lessons."

"But if the wind doesn't change, I don't see how we are to get back into the bay," said Mark Linley.

Harry shook his head.

"No. I was thinking of landing lower down the coast—that's the only chance now, unless we're prepared to spend perhaps a whole day at sea."

Bob Cherry grinned gleefully.

"What ripping fun! It will make the Upper Fourth wriggle when we tell 'em!"

"The Head may make us wriggle when we tell him," said Nugent. "But I suppose there's nothing else to be done."

"Nothing else," said Wharton quietly.

And the boat, keeping as close to the wind as possible, ran down the coast.

Pegg Bay vanished behind—even the great Shoulder sank into the sky. Away on the right ran the line of the coast, on the left, the German Ocean.

In spite of their pluck, the hearts of the juniors were beating hard. They could not help remembering the

occasion when they had been blown to sea and shipwrecked, and had lived a Robinson Crusoe life on a rocky islet till they were rescued.

But the risk now was not nearly so great. So long as the sea grew no rougher, and the boat was well handled, there was no reason why they should not be safe. And Harry Wharton was handling the boat as well as the most experienced sailorman could have done it.

The only trouble was that they would have to miss morning lessons at Greyfriars; but perhaps the fun of the adventure was worth the "lines" that would probably fall to their share.

"Blow, blow, thou winter wind," said Bob Cherry. "Thou art not so unkind as—— Bunter, you young pig, let that bag alone."

"Oh, really, Cherry——"

"Let it alone!"

"I'm hungry!"

"We shall have to look after the grub," said Nugent, jerking the fat junior away from the bag. "It would be no joke to be hung up for a whole day with nothing to eat."

"Bunter would be the first to go, if it came to casting lots," said Bob Cherry, giving the fat junior a hungry look. "He would cut up into beautiful steaks. The only trouble would be that he wouldn't be alive to cook himself."

"Oh, really, Cherry——"

"Oh, that's no good!" said Nugent. "I couldn't tackle Bunter raw. I'm not a particular chap, but I bar Bunter raw."

"Oh, really, Nugent——"

"Look out!" called out Mark Linley.

"What's up?"

"The steamer."

A huge steamer was passing seaward, within a quarter of a mile of the boat, churning on steadily through the green waters. She left a black blur of smoke behind on the sky as she churned on, and heavily from her sides came the wash of the water.

"What about the steamer?" said Nugent. "She's too far off to hurt us."

"The wash isn't."

"Ye gods! I forgot the wash!"

The wash was coming down heavily upon the boat—in great, green, rolling waves. The boat rocked violently, and the juniors held on for their lives as it was tossed up and down like a cork.

There was a choking gasp from Billy Bunter. He was devouring a saveloy by the primitive method of gnawing it from the end, and he had his mouth full when he received the shock of the first roll of the boat. He tumbled into the bottom of the boat, and gasped and choked.

"Ow! Help! Gerrooh! Help!"

"Hold him!"

"Groo—gerooh!"

Mark Linley caught the fat junior by the ankle with one hand, holding on to a thwart by the other. A wash of green water came over the side, and Bunter spluttered afresh.

The big steamer passed on, and the wash gradually subsided. Bunter sat up in a pool of sea water, as red as a freshly-boiled lobster.

"I say, you fellows——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I can see anything to cackle at! I'm wet!"

"Why didn't you hold on?"

"I was eating."

"Well, you shouldn't have been eating. If you eat all the time, accidents are bound to happen while you're eating."

"I'm jolly well not going to stand it. You fellows got me in for this," said Bunter, staggering up. "You ought to have known better."

"Did we ask you to come?"

"You shouldn't bring a chap out in a boat if you don't know how to handle it. I think one of you ought to change clothes with me."

"Ha, ha! You might as well ask a winkle to change shells with a tortoise," grinned Bob Cherry. "You couldn't get into our clothes, Bunty."

"Groo! It's chilly."

"Jump up and down and keep yourself warm."

"I'm too tired. I think I should feel better if I had some ham and eggs."

Nugent pushed the bag under a seat.

"Then you jolly well won't feel better," he said. "We've got to take care of the grub, and you've had the lion's share already."

"Oh, really, Nugent——"

"Ring off, you young pig!"

And Bunter sat down, looking very sulky. But presently a gleam came into his little round eyes behind his spectacles. Bunter was feeling spiteful; and when he was spiteful he generally called to mind his powers as a ventriloquist.

## THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

### An Unfortunate Ventriloquist.

BILLY BUNTER knew very little about sailing, and very little about the sea—very little about anything, in fact, excepting provisions, and the cooking of them.

How to manage a boat was an art far beyond his intellectual powers. Bob Cherry always declared that he had just sense enough to be mischievous. And his proceedings now really seemed to bear out that statement.

"Port, Nugent!"

Nugent had taken the tiller, and as he heard Wharton's voice give that order—or, rather, a voice that he took to be Wharton's—he gave the tiller a turn.

It was the steersman's business to obey his skipper's orders without question, and that was what Nugent did, and he had no time to think out that it might be the Greyfriars' ventriloquist playing a reckless trick.

The change brought the boat for an instant fairly against the wind, and the jib whipped off her like a rag, and fled away across the water like a great bird.

The shock to the boat made the juniors roll over, and Bunter once more found a resting-place in a slop of water.

"My hat!"

"What's the matter?"

"The jib's gone!"

Harry Wharton pushed Bob Cherry off his legs, and struggled to his feet. He stared at Nugent in blank amazement. Nugent had realised instantly that the order was a wrong one, and done his best to rectify it.

"What did you do that for?" roared Wharton, in great wrath.

"What did I do what for?"

"Shove the tiller, you ass."

"I only obeyed orders."

"What!"

"What did you give such a fatheaded order for?" demanded Nugent, with equal excitement. "You ought to have had more sense."

"I! What do you mean?"

"Yes, you. You said port."

"I said port!" exclaimed Wharton dazedly.

"Yes."

"I didn't say a word."

"Oh, don't be funny!"

"You must be dreaming. I never spoke."

"I appeal to the fellows," exclaimed Nugent. "You're off your rocker; that's what's the matter with you."

"Did I speak to Nugent, you chaps?" demanded Harry, looking round.

"I didn't hear you," said Bob. "Precious hard to hear anything in this wind."

"I didn't," said Linley.

"I am sorrowful to express the disagreeableness with my worthy chums," murmured the Nabob of Bhanipur softly, "but I heard the esteemed Wharton."

"You heard me, Inky?"

"I must sayfully declare that I did. He said 'Port!'"

"I?"

"Yes, my worthy chum. I have no doubt that the word was uttered in the fit of absentfulness of the esteemed mind, and that the memoryfulness of it is non-existent."

"Look here, I never said a word."

Bob Cherry uttered a sudden exclamation.

"Bunter!"

"Blow Bunter! I say——"

"It was Bunter!"

"What was Bunter?"

"This is some more of his giddy ventriloquism."

"Oh!"

The juniors understood in a flash. They fell upon Billy Bunter, and dragged him up. They surrounded him with wrathful faces.

The fat junior blinked at them.

"Ow! I'm wet."

"Was that you, Bunter?"

"I'm hurt, too."

"Did you imitate Wharton's voice?"

"I have a pain in my back."

"Did you speak to Nugent just now?"

"And a pain in my side."

"Look here, you fat young beast——"

"A—and another in my leg."

Bob Cherry took the fat Removite by the collar, and knocked his head with gentle deliberation against the mast.

"Now, then, you fat bounder——"

"Ow!"

"Was that some of your giddy ventriloquism?"

"Yow!"

"Was that——"

"Wow!"

"Look here, I don't want to damage the mast with your

head, but I'm going on knocking it till I get an answer. Was it?"

"Let him alone, you bully!"

"What?" roared Bob Cherry, swinging round upon Mark Linley. "What?"

"I didn't speak."

"You said——"

"Ha, ha, ha! It was Bunter again."

"It wasn't. I—I mean, I didn't—wasn't—couldn't——"

Knock, knock, knock went Bunter's head against the mast.

"Ow! Yow! Wow!"

"Was it you that time, Bunter?"

"You've hurt my head."

"Was it you?"

"It's aching now."

"Will you answer me?"

"I feel so confused by your roughness that I feel I can't think of anything clearly."

"You fat worm——"

"Lemme alone!"

Bob Cherry jerked Bunter over and flopped him down into the slop of water in the bottom of the boat.

"Sit there!" he growled wrathfully. "If you move, I'll jab you with a boat-hook."

"Ow! I'm wet."

"Then tell the truth for once, and get it over. Was that you playing your rotten ventriloquial tricks?"

"Ow! I'm sitting in the wet."

"Serve you right."

"My bags are getting soaked."

"I don't care a rap for your bags."

"Lemme gerrup."

"Rats!"

"I—I—I was ventriloquising. I—I thought it would amuse you."

"You lying young porpoise!" roared Bob Cherry, flourishing the boat-hook. "You didn't think anything of the sort."

Bunter spluttered.

"I—I mean I didn't think so."

Bob burst into a laugh.

"Oh, it's no good talking to him. He couldn't tell the truth once if it were to save his life."

"Oh, really, Cherry——"

Bob gave him a jab, and he broke off with a splutter.

"Now, listen to me," said Bob Cherry severely. "If you start any more of your rotten ventriloquism, there will be a casualty in the Bunter family. Do you understand?"

"No. Oh! Yow! Yes."

"Do you fully understand, or shall I give you another jab with the boat-hook?"

"Ow! I fully understand."

"Then bear it in mind, Tubby."

Bunter growled, and picked himself out of the water. Harry Wharton was looking anxiously seaward. The boat, with the jib blown away, was harder to keep close to the wind, and the faulty steering had caused it to take a wider sweep seaward. Coming down from the north was a huge steamer, and Harry, as he looked at it, prepared for another wash, that would be more dangerous than the previous one.

"Hold on, all!" he said abruptly.

## THE SIXTH CHAPTER.
### Wrecked!

THE boat rose rocking on the wash from the big steamer as it passed, and the faces of the Greyfriars juniors were serious as they clung on. The boat was not large, and the wash of the steamer was tremendous. The boat danced like a cork, and more than once it seemed about to topple right over from the crest of a surge. Billy Bunter, too terrified to know what he was doing, rolled into the bottom of the boat, gasping, and gasping worse than ever as a slop of salt water went into his mouth.

"Hold on!" shouted Wharton.

"Help!"

"Catch him!"

Wharton saw Bunter's danger, but he was too far from him to help him. Bob Cherry plunged towards the fat junior, missed him, and rolled to the side, clutching desperately to keep himself from going overboard.

Mark Linley dragged at Bunter in time, or the fat junior would have slipped into the sea. Bunter clung to the Lancashire lad, dragged him over, and they both rolled on Bob Cherry.

"Hold on!" gasped Bob.

The boat was rocking dangerously already. The weight of the three juniors at the side, as it trembled on the surge, was too much.

Harry Wharton shouted a warning, but a warning was useless then.

Almost before the juniors knew what was happening, the boat was gunwale under, and a great green wash of water came swooping in.

"Hang on!" shrieked Nugent.



There was a crash as the mast cracked off, and the boat plunged under. Almost in a second it was keel upwards, and the wet sail dragging in the water below kept it so.

Harry Wharton clung to the upturned timbers with one hand, and with the other dashed the water from his eyes. He looked round in wild anxiety for his comrades. Nugent was hanging on grimly—Bob Cherry was clambering upon the keel—and Mark Linley was clinging on and holding Bunter. Hurree Jamset Ram Singh was swimming like a fish, close to the boat.

The disaster had been sudden and overwhelming.

The Greyfriars juniors were afloat in the water—with nothing but a wreck to cling to—nothing but that between them and sinking into the depths of the sea.

And the land was far away—a grey blur to the west.

Wharton set his teeth hard.

The Greyfriars Naval Cadets had had some perilous adventures, but nothing quite so perilous as this.

It was Bunter's fault—but it was useless to utter a word of reproach. Nor would the fat junior have heard or heeded. He was nearly fainting with terror. The others kept their courage splendidly.

"My only chapeau!" gasped Bob Cherry. "This is a ripping go!"

"The rippingfulness is terrific," murmured the Nabob of Bhanipur, as he swam closer to the upturned boat and laid his dusky hand on the timbers

"It's a giddy wreck."

"My hat! It is!"

Wharton did not speak.

He was trying to think it out.

What was to be done?

The boat was a wreck—there was no chance of righting it. The juniors could only hope to cling on till they were picked up. And what chance was there of that?

What an ending to a morning's sail!

Wharton glanced at the sky. The sun was high in the blue, and he knew that it must be about half-past ten.

At Greyfriars the fellows would be all busy in the classrooms—Mr. Quelch would be taking the Remove, and wondering at the absence of six members of his class. No doubt he was frowning over it, and mentally resolving that the six truants should have reason to repent their escapade.

If he could only have known where they were!

Out at sea, a good four miles from land, clinging to an upturned boat, at the mercy of the waves!

"My only hat!" said Harry, at last. "This is the biggest go of all, I think. How on earth shall we get out of it."

Mark Linley swept his glance seaward.

"We shall be picked up!"

"I hope so."

"A good many ships pass here. The question is to make them see us. They aren't likely to notice a little boat, especially now it's upside down. We ought to make some signal or other."

"I suppose it's no good trying to get the boat upright," said Bob Cherry.

Wharton shook his head.

"Couldn't be done. We might get a spar off, though, and stick it up somewhere with a rag on top to attract attention."

"Good!"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! There's a sail!"

The juniors looked anxiously in the direction pointed out by Bob Cherry.

A splendid ship was coming down, under almost full sail, bearing along gallantly in the wind. She was likely to pass about a mile seaward of the upturned boat.

"It's a chance!" said Harry Wharton.

"Let's try it."

Wharton clambered on top of the boat timbers, maintaining a footing there with very great difficulty.

He waved his cap and shouted, and the juniors clinging on below shouted, too, with all the force of their lungs.

"Ship ahoy!"

"Help!"

"Hallo-o-o-o!"

There was not the slightest sign from the great ship that they had been seen or heard. Under a press of sail it bore on, and passed them, and faded away into the blue of the south.

A rougher surge of the sea sent Wharton reeling from his insecure foothold, and he plunged headforemost into the sea.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" ejaculated Bob Cherry, and he left his hold on the boat to swim to his comrade's assistance.

He caught Harry's collar and dragged him back to the boat.

Wharton, panting and gasping, clung on to the timbers.

"It's no good," he gasped, "they won't pick us up."

"Looks like it."

"We shall have to take our chance."

The boat drifted on in the rough sea. It was bearing seaward under the force of the wind, and the grey line of the coast was fading into the blue.

Round the juniors rolled the wide sea.

Ere long land would be quite lost to sight, and then——

Brave as they were, they could not help feeling a tremor of dread. They had no food; their provisions were in a locker in the boat; still there, but quite inaccessible now that the craft was floating keel upwards.

They were already hungry in the keen sea air. Fortunately, a drift of clouds kept the heat of the sun from them.

"I—I—I say, you fellows——"

"What is it, Bunter?"

Wharton's voice was unusually kind to the fat junior; he could not be impatient even with Billy Bunter when the shadow of death was upon them all.

"Are we in d-d-danger, Wharton?"

"Well, something like it, Billy."

"Oh, dear! Oh, dear!"

"Buck up! We shall be picked up!"

"Oh, dear! You oughtn't to have brought me with you," grumbled Billy Bunter. "You really ought to have known better. Look here, couldn't one of you fellows hold me, so that I shouldn't have to cling to the boat. It makes my arm ache."

"Our arms are aching, too, old chap."

"Well, I don't see how I can hold on. It will be your fault if I get drowned, anyway."

Wharton shifted the grasp of one hand from the boat to the collar of the fat junior. His patience seemed inexhaustible now.

"Is that better, Bunty? You can let go now—I have you safe. Float on your back; you'll be all right."

"Sure you've got me safe?"

"Oh, yes!"

"Don't squeeze my neck like that—it hurts."

"That better?"

"Ye-es. Mind you don't let me go."

"All serene!"

And Billy Bunter floated with Wharton supporting him It was much easier for Bunter. It was much harder, too, for Harry; but that was a trifle which Bunter was not likely to take into account.

## THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

### Adrift!

THE sun rose higher and higher in the sky. The wind died down—and with the dying of the wind the sun came out more brightly. A blaze of sunlight fell upon the blistering faces of the juniors as they floated by the boat.

They had made one desperate effort to get it righted. But it was useless. The wet sail dragging beneath acted as ballast, and the sea was too rough in any case. They made the one attempt, and gave it up. But it seemed more possible that they might be able to reach the locker containing the provisions. Bob Cherry dived under the boat and remained there so long that his comrades grew very anxious. He came up at last, puffing and blowing—unsuccessful.

Billy Bunter blinked at him through his wet spectacles.

"Got anything?"

"No."

"Ow! I'm famished!"

"Can't help it. I couldn't get at the locker—I was nearly drowned as it was," panted Bob Cherry. "It can't be worked."

"If you get it open, most of the stuff will shift out into the sea," Nugent remarked. "It wouldn't be of much use."

"Well, a bite each would be welcome."

"The welcomefulness of the esteemed bite would be terrific."

"I'll have a try," said Harry.

"Good; it won't do any harm, anyway."

Harry Wharton stopped his breath, his face setting grimly, as he plunged under the overturned boat. There was danger of being caught in the dragging sail and entangled, and drowned as helplessly as a rat in a cage.

The junior groped his way to the locker under water.

He found it, by the sense of touch, and groped over it; but it seemed jammed somehow. He knew that it was not locked. He strove to get it open, while his ears were singing, and his lungs seemed to be bursting under the pressure of the water.

Another effort—and another!

He felt that he must give it up—he could not stand the strain any longer. But it came open then, and he blindly groped for the contents.

His hands closed upon something—he did not know what. He grasped both hands full—it was all he could do—and plunged away from under the boat.

He shot up to the surface, bursting for air.

As he came up, Bob Cherry grasped his collar and held his head above water, and Harry gasped and gasped as if he would never have another breath.

In a couple of minutes, however, he was himself again.

Billy Bunter was blinking at him hungrily.

"What have you got, Wharton?" he asked, two or three times before the captain of the Greyfriars Remove could reply.

Harry brought up his hands from the water. There was a jar of jam in one, and a bottle of ginger-beer in the other.

Bunter looked disappointed.

"Haven't you got any of the ham?"

"That's all."

"Or the saveloys?"

"I tell you that's all."

"Well, I think you might have been a bit more careful. Jam's not much good; though I suppose it's better than nothing. Give me the ginger-beer."

Wharton laughed breathlessly. It seemed curious to him that Bunter should calmly assume that he was to have all the provisions that had been saved.

"How am I going to get the bottle open, though?" said Bunter. "I suppose I shall have to drink it from the bottle. Anybody got a corkscrew?"

"Yes, I have an esteemed corkscrew."

"Hand it over. Give me the ginger-beer, Wharton. I'm sorry there isn't any for you fellows. I dare say you're as thirsty as I am."

"I dare say we are," grinned Nugent, "and I dare say we're going to have as much of the ginger-beer as you, too, you greedy young rotter!"

"Oh, really, Nugent——"

"I'll open the bottle, and we'll take a pull each," said Bob Cherry.

Wharton handed him the bottle, and he opened it, Billy Bunter watching him the while with hungry eyes and an injured expression.

"I suppose you're going to let me have first pull?" he said aggressively.

"I suppose we're not," grinned Bob Cherry. "You've got altogether too big a throttle."

"Oh, really, Cherry——"

"Oh, dry up!"

"I'm thirsty. This beastly hot sun makes me thirsty."

"Go and eat coke!"

"Well, give me the jam, Wharton. I suppose you greedy rotters aren't going to collar any of that."

"Oh, shut up!"

The gingerbeer was sipped by all in turn. There wasn't much to go round among six, but it was a "wet" to six thirsty throats.

Then the jar of jam was opened. It was flimsy food for hungry boys, but when it had been shared out, it took the keen edge off their hunger.

And their spirits, which had been sinking, rose as they ate it. The depression which is the result of want of food or lateness of meals had been settling upon them; but after they had eaten, the prospect seemed much brighter.

But still round them rolled the wide sea; still over their heads stretched the blue sky, far-reaching—limitless.

The shore had faded away now; they were alone on the North Sea.

On the wide waters, here and there, were dotted sails and smoke patches. But the vessels were too far off for the boys to hope to attract attention.

Once a big steamer came swooping down from the north, so close that the boys could make out the figures of the passengers on the promenade-deck.

Wharton's heart beat hard as he saw a group looking over the side, and he was certain that he saw a parasol pointing towards them.

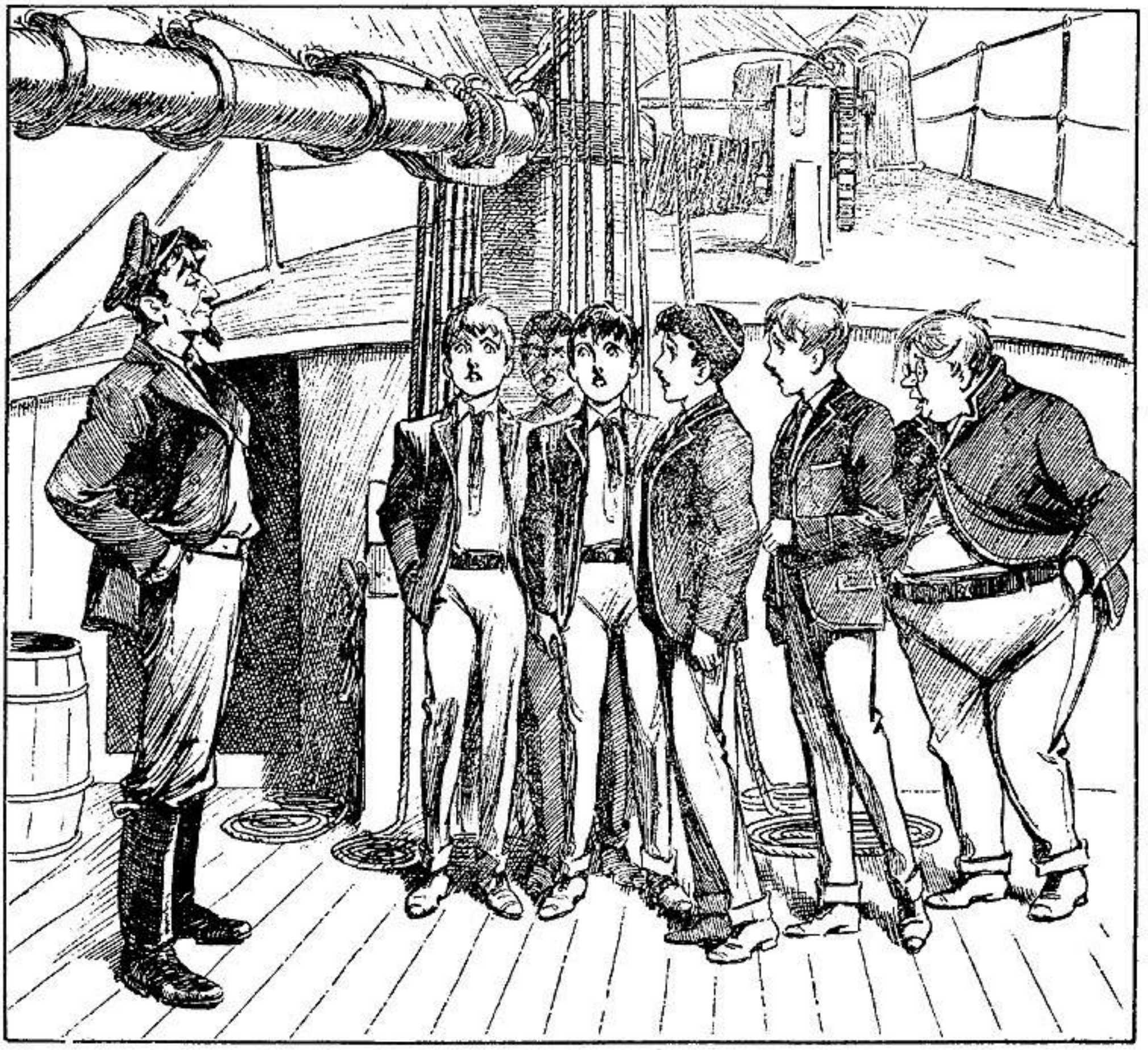
But if the boat had been seen, it had not been noted; no one on the big steamer guessed that it was an upturned boat with six boys clinging to it for life.

The steamer passed on, with a throb of engines that came to the ears of the juniors, and dropped down from view in the distance.

Black despondency settled upon them again. They were hungry, fatigued, aching to the bone. The long time they had been in the water, and the glaring of the sun, blistered them and dazed them

Billy Bunter had ceased to complain and grumble. He was too exhausted.

Wharton's eyes grew almost haggard as he swept his glance round the wide waters. Would they never be picked up? It was two o'clock. At Greyfriars the fellows were going in



**"Will you tell us what port you are making for, sir?" asked Harry Wharton. "Certainly," drawled the skipper. "What do you think of Rio?" "South America!" The Greyfriars Juniors stared at one another in blank dismay.**

to afternoon school. Would the boys ever see Greyfriars again? Had they trodden their last upon the green earth?

Mark Linley uttered a sudden exclamation.

"Look! There's a sail!"

With eyes from which repeated disappointments had banished almost all hope, the juniors glanced towards the new sail.

It was that of a small vessel—a schooner, as near as Wharton could make out at the distance—at all events, fore-and-aft rigged. It was a heavy vessel for its kind, but it came along at a spanking rate before the breeze. Wharton's face brightened.

If the schooner kept on its present course, it must pass within easy hail of the drifting boat.

Surely it was a chance at last.

"It's the last chance!" Mark Linley muttered.

Harry Wharton nodded.

"I believe you're right. Ready, you chaps, to yell your loudest when she comes within hearing. If she passes us ——"

"She mustn't—she sha'n't! They're bound to see us."

With burning eyes the juniors watched the approaching vessel.

Closer and closer it came, till the great sails looked like big white birds swooping down upon the floating boat.

The juniors' eyes never left it. They saw a muscular form in jacket and peaked cap come to the rail and look over in their direction. It moved back again, and reappeared, and they caught the glint of the sun on the metal rims of a pair of binoculars.

Wharton gave a gasp of relief.

"He's seen us!"

The man in the peaked cap, evidently an officer, kept the glasses fixed upon the boat, which must have been rising into clearer and clearer view as the schooner bore down upon her.

The juniors looked at one another with jubilant faces.

"They've seen us!"

"We're saved!"

"Thank Heaven!"

A second figure, much the same in appearance, joined the first. The first man handed the glasses to the second, who looked at the drifting boat through them. Then both disappeared.

The Greyfriars lads waited in an agony of anxiety. No further sign was made by the men on the schooner, but the



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vessel did not change her course. Almost directly towards the drifting boat, she swooped on and on.

Bob Cherry licked his dry lips.

"They've seen us. They must mean to pick us up."

"They must!"

"Why don't they wave—or shout—or something?"

"Blessed if I know!"

"The blessfulness is terrific."

"I—I say, you fellows——"

"Shout!" exclaimed Harry. "Shout! They're near enough to hear!"

"Help!"

"Hallo!"

"Ahoy!"

"Help!"

"Help!"

And still no sign from the schooner.

What did it mean?

The juniors were as much mystified as alarmed. It seemed impossible that human beings could intend to pass them by, especially after taking the trouble to deliberately ascertain, by the binoculars, that they were there, clinging to the boat, in momentary danger of death.

The schooner could not intend to desert them. Then why did not some of the crew show themselves? Why was not a hand waved as a sign of encouragement to them?

At the thought that perhaps the vessel did not intend to stop to pick them up, the boys felt their hearts like lead in their bosoms. But surely it was impossible.

With sinking hearts, they sent their voices into the air again, with all the strength they still retained.

"Help!"

— —

## THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.
### Picked Up.

HARRY WHARTON gritted his teeth.

He had shouted till he was hoarse, and the schooner was coming steadily nearer. If she did not change her course, she would pass the drifting boat within almost a biscuit's throw. What was the use of further shouting? The schooner's crew knew that they were there, and if they did not choose to pick them up——

"Oh, the brutes! The cowardly brutes!" muttered Wharton bitterly.

Bob Cherry turned an almost scared look upon him.

"They can't mean to abandon us!"

Wharton did not reply.

It was borne in upon his mind that that was exactly whet the schooner's skipper did intend.

"Good heavens!" muttered Nugent. "This—this is horrible!"

"The horribleness is terrific."

"They can't desert us!"

"Help!" yelled Bob Cherry desperately.

Mark Linley uttered an exclamation.

"Look!"

He pointed to the schooner. The two men in peaked caps were visible again now, as well as a sailor looking from the forecastle. The latter was a dark-faced, black-eyed fellow, evidently a foreigner of some sort. And now that the juniors could see the schooner closely, it struck them that it was not an English ship.

Their eyes were fixed imploringly upon the two men in peaked caps. Life or death for the Greyfriars juniors lay in the hands of those two men. What would they do?

One of them—the skipper, Wharton could see now—called out something to the helmsman, and the schooner swung nearer the drifting boat.

Bob Cherry gave a long gasp.

"It's all right; they're going to pick us up."

The schooner swung steadily towards the drifting boat. The two men looked down at the juniors. One of them had a coil of rope in his hands.

"Thank Heaven! That's for us!"

"It's all right, you fellows."

The schooner shortened sail, and slackened down, as the boat began to rock upon the washing waves. The man with the rope looked over the side at the boys, who met his glance with eager eyes.

"Catch!" he called out.

"Ay, ay!" shouted Wharton.

The man grinned as he looked at him. His face was not a pleasant one. The eyes were deep set and shifty, hard grey in colour—the brows black and heavy. His mouth was like a gash, and the thin lips showed uneven teeth within. His look, as Harry caught it, was strangely reminiscent of a dog and a wolf combined.

The rope came uncoiling into the sea, and Harry Wharton caught it. The schooner had now scarcely any way upon her, and it was easy for Harry to secure the end of the rope to the boat. The pull of the rope brought them nearly alongside.

The hard face under the peaked cap looked down at them.

"Do you want to be picked up?"

"Yes."

"Who are you?"

"Schoolboys of Greyfriars."

"Blown out to sea, I guess."

"Yes."

"You can come aboard, if you like."

It was a strange remark for the skipper to make. There was not likely to be much picking and choosing about coming on board.

"How are we to get on?"

"I guess you can climb."

"Not all of us."

"Let the others stay there, then."

"What do you mean?"

"I've no time to lower a boat, I reckon."

Wharton set his teeth. The man was not hospitable, or kind. But after all, the chief thing was to be picked up.

"We can all climb except Bunter," he said. "We'll fasten the rope to him, and pull him up. It's all right, Bunter."

"I—I say, you fellows, don't leave me!"

"You're all right. We must climb first, because we're going to pull you up with the rope," said Wharton patiently. "You first, Bob."

"Right you are!"

"Oh, really, Wharton, you oughtn't to desert me—a chap in your own study! I know I shall let go if I am left alone."

"Oh, hold on!"

Bob Cherry clambered actively up the rope. Nugent followed him, and then Mark Linley and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. They were taken one by one on board the schooner. The skipper, evidently an American, and not a favourable specimen of his race, watched them coolly, with a big cigar in his mouth, without offering them the slightest aid, or calling any of his hands to do so.

Harry Wharton remained with Billy Bunter to the last.

Now, then, Bunter, I'll fasten this under your arms——"

"Don't leave me!"

"They can't pull up two of us together, Billy."

"Then let me go first."

"Then I shall have nothing to hold. Will you try to climb?"

"You know jolly well I can't climb a loose rope."

"I know it's not easy."

"I can't do it, of course."

"Then there's nothing for it but for me to go first and pull you up," said Harry. "Let me fasten it round you."

He did so, while Bunter whimpered and complained. Then he climbed actively up the rope, Bunter calling after him in vain not to "desert" him.

"I guess you'd better hurry," said the skipper, removing the cigar from his mouth. "I ain't no time to waste."

"Very well, sir."

"You have wasted a lot of time already."

"I am sorry."

"That's all right, if you hustle now!"

The juniors dragged the fat Removite up the side. Several sailors looked on, but they did not offer to help.

That there was something strange and unusual about the ship Wharton could not help seeing, even in that moment of hurry and anxiety.

But the business then was to save Bunter, not to worry about what kind of craft it was that had picked them up.

They dragged Bunter on board, and landed him on the deck, gasping and floundering like a great fat fish.

"I—I say, you fellows——"

"You're all right."

"Ow! I'm not all right! I—I—I feel all wrong!"

And Bunter gasped and spluttered and grumbled as the sails filled again, and the schooner bore on her course. The skipper looked at the juniors with a grim expression.

"Thank you very much for picking us up, sir!" said Harry, touching his cap.

"I guess I've saved your lives."

"Yes, sir. If you could set us ashore somewhere——"

The skipper chuckled.

"I guess not."

"Will you tell us what port you are making for, sir?" asked Harry, his heart sinking as it occurred to his mind that the schooner might have some foreign destination.

"Cert'n-ly!" drawled the skipper. "What do you think of Rio?"

"Rio—— South America?"

"I reckon!"

The Greyfriars juniors stared at one another in blank dismay.

## THE NINTH CHAPTER.

### Bound for Rio!

"BOUND for Rio!"

The Greyfriars juniors repeated the words with blank looks.

Bound for Rio!

Greyfriars—the old school and the old associations—seemed to fade into immeasurable distance behind them.

Rio, in the Brazils!

A voyage of weeks—months!

The schooner's skipper looked at the boys, and gave a grim chuckle as he noted the expression his words called up to their faces.

"I guess you're surprised, some," he remarked.

"Yes," said Harry Wharton, with a deep breath. "We hoped you would be able to set us ashore somewhere in England."

"Or Europe, at least," said Cherry. "Great Scott! What will they think at Greyfriars?"

"And there's no way of letting them know," said Nugent slowly.

"The wirefulness is impossible," remarked the Nabob of Bhanipur, with a sigh.

The skipper chuckled again.

"We haven't a wireless installation," he remarked; "otherwise I'd be glad to send any messages for you. But you can cable from Rio."

"Weeks from now," said Harry.

"I guess so."

"I suppose it can't be helped. You're not touching at any port nearer than Rio?"

"I guess not."

"Very well. We are much obliged to you for saving our lives, sir. Rio is better than the bottom of the sea, anyway."

"I guess you're right." The skipper removed his cigar from his mouth. "You younkers can go below, and cook'll give you a change of things. I'm short-handed on this craft, which is the reason I——" He checked himself. "You'll have to work for your grub. You understand that?"

Wharton flushed.

"We're perfectly willing to work, sir."

"Good! You'll find Peter Jex all right if you work hard, and don't grouse. I'm Peter Jex. Cooky!"

"Ay, ay!"

"Cooky, tumble up!"

"Can't come for a minute; I'm busy."

The juniors exchanged glances again.

They had had little experience of sea life, but they knew that it was decidedly odd for a ship's cook to address his captain in that manner.

Captain Jex stamped on the deck.

"Cooky!"

"Ay, ay!"

"If you don't tumble up, I'll come down and yank you up by the scruff of your neck!"

"Oh, come off, Pete Jex!"

The skipper turned red with rage.

But the next moment the cook appeared on deck. He was a fat man, with a single eye, and his face, red and gross, was not very prepossessing. He looked at the juniors, and nodded coolly to the captain.

"I'm hero!" he remarked.

"Look here, Bill Fillot——"

"I'm looking!"

"If you want to go overboard for mutiny——"

The man grinned.

"Mutiny! Ha, ha, ha!"

The skipper bit his lip.

"Look here, you obey orders, or you'll get a belaying-pin round your head," he said. "I've picked up these boys, to make them useful."

"Ay—ay!"

"Take 'em into the galley to dry themselves, and find 'em some dry things. You hear me?"

"Ay, ay!"

"Then do as I tell you!"

The cook grinned again.

"I reckon you're getting into the way of it," he remarked, with a sneer.

"What do you mean, you fat swab?"

"Dead men's shoes!" said the cook, laughing.

The skipper changed colour.

He gave a glance round, picked up an iron belaying-pin, and made a quick step towards the cook.

The latter stood his ground without flinching.

"Belay it, skipper!" he said quietly. "There's been enough of that, and we're short-handed already. The ship can't do without a cook, or without a captain."

Captain Jex gave a short laugh, and dropped the belaying-pin with a clang to the deck.



"I shall brain you one of these times!" he said threateningly. "Get below and look after the younkers."

"Ay, ay!"

The fat cook turned grinning to the amazed juniors. A sense of strange uneasiness was creeping over the boys. What kind of a ship had they boarded? What did it all mean?

"This way, sonnies," said the cook.

They followed him below.

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## THE TENTH CHAPTER.

### In Strange Company.

HARRY WHARTON was very silent.

Till then he had been troubled about Greyfriars, about the long distance they were travelling from the school, and the impossibility of sending news of their safety to their friends and relations.

He was beginning to realise now, however, that there was something nearer to concern himself about:

What kind of a ship were they on?

On deck they had seen few hands. A schooner like this certainly did not require many, especially in these days of undermanning, and of making one sailorman do the work of two. But surely more than the half-dozen men he had seen would be wanted to look after the schooner.

The skipper, and the cook, too, had spoken of being short-handed. Where were the other hands, then?

It was borne in upon Harry's mind that the schooner's skipper had not intended to pick them up at all, but that the consideration of being short-handed had weighed with him. He had taken the trouble to pick the boys up for the use they would be to him on his half-manned craft.

Work the juniors had no objection to—in fact, full of enthusiasm for their Greyfriars Naval Cadets' scheme they would be glad enough of picking up a practical knowledge of seamanship, even at the cost of hard work and short commons.

There was nothing to complain of in that, but where were the other hands? The schooner could not have sailed from port so short-handed.

If Captain Jex had intended to get as far as Rio with so small a crew he would not have spoken in the way he had done of being short-handed. Yet could anything have happened to some of his men since they had left port? From where the juniors had encountered the ship, it looked as if she came from some port on the north-east coast—some English or Scottish port north of the Humber. In that case, she could not have been long at sea.

There was some strange mystery about the schooner.

Harry Wharton could not help thinking about it as he stripped off his dripping clothes and rubbed down his chilled limbs with the rough towel the cook gave him.

The one-eyed man seemed to have a rough kindness about him. He brought out a variety of sailor clothes for the juniors to choose from while their own were ranged round the galley fire to dry.

But all the time he seemed to be struggling with a suppressed desire to laugh, as if something particularly humorous was tickling his fancy all the time. At times a fat chuckle escaped him.

The juniors looked at him several times.

Their surprised looks only seemed to tickle cooky the more.

"What kind of a ship is this, cooky?" Bob Cherry asked. "Trading to Rio?"

Cooky chuckled.

"That's it!" he said. "Trading to Rio."

"Is Captain Jex a captain you can get on with?"

"I guess so."

"An American, isn't he?"

"I reckon. Same here."

"And the crew?"

"Dagoes, mostly."

The juniors knew that the term "dago" covers anybody of the Latin race. They had seen for themselves that the few sailors on board were mostly, if not all, of the southern races of Europe.

"You haven't many men forrard," said Harry Wharton.

Bill Fillot shook his head and blinked with his single eye.

"No; we're short-handed."

"That's curious."

"I guess so."

"I suppose that chap who was speaking with the skipper was the mate?" asked Nugent.

"I guess so—Joe Prye."

"American, too?"

"I reckon."

"Then this is an American ship?"

"I guess it is now."

And the cook laughed uproariously, as if there were some secret humorous side to his remark hidden from his listeners.

The juniors fell into silence as they dressed themselves.

They could not make the matter out, and they felt instinctively that there was something uncanny, ghastly, almost cruel about the strange merriment that cooky seemed hardly able to suppress.

Billy Bunter was the only one who was not thinking about the strangeness of their new surroundings.

Bunter was thinking of something that was, to him, of infinitely greater importance. There was an appetising smell proceeding from a simmering pot on the galley stove, and Billy Bunter sniffed at it, each sniff louder than the last, till the fat cook could not help observing him.

He grinned as he removed the lid of the pot.

A savoury smell of a rich stew rose, and the famished juniors sniffed appreciatively. Billy Bunter's expression was ecstatic.

"I—I say, you fellows, that chap can cook!"

"The cookfulness is terrific!"

"Hungry?" said Fillot.

"What-ho!" said Bob Cherry, with deep feeling in his voice. "I could eat a horse, or a lump of Chicago tinned beef, or—or anything, now."

"I guess I won't starve you."

Tin plates were set out in a row, and the cook gave them liberal helpings of the savoury stew. They ate—and ate! They were not greedy, but for the greater part of a day they had been without food, and exposed to the keenness of the sea air. It seemed as if their hunger would never be satisfied.

Billy Bunter in particular distinguished himself.

The one-eyed cook looked at the fat junior with great interest, and seemed to take a pleasure in filling and refilling his plate, as if amused by a mental calculation as to exactly how much Bunter would eat if given his head.

Between the fat junior and the fat cook, in fact, there was probably a great similarity of tastes and a secret sympathy of soul.

Bob Cherry murmured in Wharton's ear as he watched them:

"Two souls with but a single thought, two hearts that beat as one!"

"I say, you fellows——"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!"

"This is ripping!"

"First chop!" said Mark Linley, who was doing very well indeed.

"The first-chopfulness is terrific!" murmured the Nabob of Bhanipur. "The second helpfulness would be the very welcome kindness."

"Here you are, nigger!"

The cook slopped some more stew carelessly into the plate of the Hindu junior.

Hurree Singh's eyes flashed.

"The observefulness of the esteemed cook is incorrectful," he remarked. "The ignorefulness must be terrific when he does not know the distinctness between a native of India and an esteemed nigger."

"All nigs are nigs, I guess," said the cook. "But never mind. I don't object to nigs, not even in my own galley. Feed."

"But I must remark——"

"Oh, feed, and shut your head!"

"The politely expressed wishfulness of my worthy host is equal to the command of the law," said the nabob gracefully.

The big meal over, the juniors nodded in their seats. They were sleepy, which was not to be wondered at, considering what they had been through that day.

Billy Bunter yawned over his seventh helping, and nodded off to sleep with a potato in his mouth.

The fat cook chuckled.

"He, he, he! You'd like a snooze, I suppose, kiddies?"

"Yes, if we may," said Harry.

"I guess you can lie on them sacks."

And the Greyfriars lads gladly took advantage of the permission. There was a fat smile on the cook's face as he watched them fall instantly asleep. A rough voice shouted down from the deck.

"Cooky!"

"Ay, ay!"

"Where are those younkers?"

"They're here."

"Tumble them up."

"They're snoozing."

"Great snakes! There ain't any time for kids to snooze in the afternoon watch on my ship. Tumble them up."

"Oh, come off!"

"Shall I come down and fetch 'em?" roared the skipper.

"You'd better—if you want a pail of suds over you!"

"You mutinous dog!"

"Ha, ha, ha! Dead men's shoes, skipper!"

And the voice of the skipper was heard dying away in a growl on deck. Cooky chuckled, lighted a big cigar, and smoked it with an air of great contentment.

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## THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

### Bunter Requires Rest.

"YAW-AW-AW!"

That was Bob Cherry's first remark as he woke.

He was the first of the Greyfriars juniors to wake, and when he opened his eyes, and yawned, and looked around him, he could not at first realise where he was.

The stuffy room was lighted by a swinging oil-lamp and the glow of a stove, and there was a smell of cooking in the close atmosphere.

Near at hand was a sound of snoring—a snore that could only belong to William George Bunter.

"My hat!" muttered Bob Cherry.

It was night—the lighting of the lamp showed that. There was a sense of motion under him; he was on a ship. As he realised that, recollection came back. He had not awakened out of a dream in the Remove dormitory at Greyfriars; it was all real. He was on the schooner, lying on the sacks, and his comrades were asleep round him, one of them snoring most unmusically.

"By George!" said Bob Cherry.

He sat up and looked round him.

The cook was gone; the boys were alone. As Bob Cherry moved, Harry Wharton and Mark Linley opened their eyes and sat up.

Harry rubbed his sleepy eyes.

"Hallo!"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" said Bob Cherry. "Here we are again!"

"It's like a dream."

"Blessed if I feel quite certain that it isn't a dream," said Bob Cherry. "Shall I pinch you, to see if you're asleep?"

Harry Wharton laughed.

"No, thanks! Where's the cook?"

"He's gone."

"I've had a jolly good sleep," said Wharton. "I feel better. It was a ripping feed we had, too."

"Yes, rather."

"I say, you fellows——"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Are you awake, Bunter?"

"Yes. I'm hungry."

"My hat! You ate enough for a regiment of dragoons!"

"I get very hungry at sea." Billy Bunter rose to his feet, and made his way towards the stove, upon which the pot was simmering. "I say, you fellows, this is soup. That fat chap can cook! I wonder whether I could take a snack?"

"Better ask."

"Well, the chap isn't here, you see. He's a jolly good cook, though he's only got one eye. I'm nearly famished, you know. After what I've been through, I'm afraid I shall be ill unless I'm kept up by constant nourishment. I suppose it won't matter if I help myself to a plateful?"

And Billy Bunter ladled out a large plateful of the soup, which was very nearly done, and began to eat.

His fat face glowed with enjoyment over the meal.

He was busily engaged with it when the cook came in.

The cook blinked at him with his single eye, which was strangely bright and expressive, and Bunter blinked back through his big spectacles. He was half-afraid that Fillot was going to be angry, but the one-eyed man only gave one of his peculiar chuckles.

"Hungry again?" he said.

"Yes, if you please," said Bunter. "The sea air makes me hungry. And this is such ripping stuff! I'd like you to show me how to make soup like this. I do a bit of cooking myself at Greyfriars."

"The skipper wants you on deck, young 'uns," said the cook, turning to Harry Wharton & Co. "Time for you to lay a hand."

"We're quite ready," said Wharton.

"Yes, rather!"

"I'm feeling very tired," said Bunter plaintively. "I've got a weak constitution, and anything like hard work is

very likely to throw me into a decline. I'd rather rest till to-morrow morning, Mr. Fillot, if the captain doesn't mind."

Mr. Fillot chuckled.

"You'd better ask him," he said.

"Certainly, sir."

The clothes round the stove were quite dry now. The juniors changed into them, and ascended to the deck.

Night was on the sea—a clear, starry September night. Captain Jex and Mr. Prye, the mate, were talking together and smoking. They both turned and looked at the juniors.

Harry Wharton touched his cap.

"We're ready, sir, if you want us."

The skipper looked at him grimly.

"Do you know anything about ships?"

"A little, sir."

"Can you haul and reef?"

"Yes. I have handled a sailing boat, and I dare say I can soon pick up enough to make myself useful, sir."

"Well, that shows willing," said the skipper in a more mollified tone. "I dessay you'll turn out to be worth the trouble of picking up."

"I hope so, sir," said Harry, with a smile.

"Waal, I reckon," said Mr. Prye, with a nod.

"May I speak a word first, though?" added Harry. "You told me you were bound for Rio, and were not touching at any port before that."

"I guess so."

"If you could put us on a homeward bound ship——"

The captain grinned at Mr. Prye.

"I guess I ain't speaking any homeward bound ships this journey," he said.

"But——"

"I reckon!" said Mr. Prye.

"If you could put us on a homeward bound ship, or take us into a port, my uncle would be willing to pay for loss of time," said Harry. "He would pay very well for what you did for us. It would be only a question of naming the figure."

The skipper looked at him curiously.

"I guess it would be worth a hundred pounds," he remarked.

"I am sure he would pay that to have us go back safe and sound," said Harry.

The skipper grinned.

"Then I guess I'm sorry it can't be did," he remarked.

"But, sir——"

"'Nuff said! I ain't speaking any ships or touching at any ports. You hear me? Jim Preece, take these younkers in charge, and tell 'em what to do."

A big, loose-limbed Yankee came forward. He seemed to be the only man of Anglo-Saxon race on board in addition to the two officers and the cook. There were four sailormen, as far as the juniors could see, and they were all Italians or Spanish. Preece did not look a pleasant character. His face was heavy and hard, his jaw a great deal like that of a bulldog, and his whole countenance showed that he was in the habit of indulging in strong drink.

"Kim on!" he said roughly.

"I—I say, sir——" began Billy Bunter.

Captain Jex looked at him sharply.

"What do you want?"

"I—I want to speak to you, sir."

"Go ahead, and cut it short!"

"Yes, sir. I'm sincerely sorry, sir, but I'm not strong enough to work. You see, sir, I have a very delicate constitution, and it can only be kept going by constant nourishment and frequent intervals of rest."

"Waal, I swow!" said Captain Jex.

"So you see, sir, it will be quite impossible for me to work on the ship. I'm sincerely sorry, because if I were strong enough I should like very much to lend a hand."

"Not strong enough—hey?" said Captain Jex. "Too fat, perhaps."

"Too delicate, sir."

"I guess we can cure that."

"Oh, no, sir," said Billy hurriedly. "I—I'm afraid it can't be cured, sir. It's all right so long as I have plenty of nourishment and lots of rest, sir."

"Perhaps a little medicine——"

"Oh, no, sir; medicine isn't any good, sir. The best thing for me is plenty of rich food and lots of rest, sir—plenty of sleep, and anything I fancy to eat and drink."

"I guess we'll try medicine."

"Oh, no, sir! I really only require rest."

"Medicine's the thing," said the skipper briefly. "Jim Preece!"

"Ay, ay, sir?"

"You hear what this younker says?"

"Ay, ay, sir."

"He can't work unless he has some medicine."

Preece grinned.

"Take him forrard, and give him some."

"Ay, ay, sir."

"Follow that man, young 'uns; he'll set you to work."

"If you please, sir——"

"Be off!" roared the skipper.

And Billy Bunter jumped, and followed Preece forward.



## THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

### Some Medicine for Bunter.

BILLY BUNTER blinked at Preece through his big spectacles, and blinked at his comrades, who were grinning. Preece grinned as he tramped forward.

Harry Wharton tapped the fat junior on the arm, and Bunter looked at him peevishly.

"What do you want, Wharton?"

"Don't be a young ass," said Harry, in a low voice. "You've got to work while you're on board, and it's no good playing the slacker here."

"Oh, really, Wharton——"

"If you don't lend a hand when you're told, you'll get rough usage. You ought to be able to see that."

"I suppose I can't do rough work when I'm not strong enough, Wharton? You know jolly well that I've got a delicate constitution."

"Be sensible! You've got to work here, I tell you, and you'll get licked if you make a fool of yourself."

"I'm surprised at you, Wharton. I don't like to tell a chap so, but I really must say that I'm surprised at you. You know how delicate I am——"

Harry turned away impatiently.

It was useless to argue with Bunter, and the only thing to do was to let the selfish fellow go ahead his own way, and learn better by the troubles he brought upon himself.

Billy Bunter watched Preece rather curiously. He was a little anxious, too. Preece had taken up a rope, and was cutting off a length of it with his clasp-knife—a piece about eighteen inches long.

The other juniors knew perfectly well that he was making a rope's-end, and what he was making it for, but it had not dawned upon the obtuse brain of Billy Bunter. Preece went about his work deliberately, and finished off his instrument of punishment in a very leisurely manner. Then he turned to Bunter.

"I guess you can't work?" he remarked.

"No. I'm sorry, but, you see, I'm delicate——"

"And I'm to give you some medicine to cure it——"

"Thank you very much; but I do not really require any medicine. I would take it to oblige the captain, if you give me something sweet to take the taste away. But I've found out by experience that what I need is plenty of nourishing food, and twelve or thirteen hours' sleep."

"You're going to take your medicine, I guess."

"You see, I——"

"Kim here!"

Bunter looked at him nervously without stirring. The rope's-end looked very businesslike, and it began to dawn upon Billy what it was intended for, and what kind of "medicine" it was that he was to take.

"I—I say, you know——" he began.

"Kim here!"

"I—I—I——"

Preece stepped over to the fat junior, and seized him by the collar. Bunter squirmed like an eel in his grasp.

"Ow, yow, wow! Leggo!" he shrieked.

"Why, I ain't touched you yet!" exclaimed Preece in amazement.

"Ow! Leggo! Don't you dare to hit me! I'll—I'll have you prosecuted for assault and battery!"

"Haw, haw haw!"

"Ow, ow, ow! I—I say, you fellows! Rescue—rescue, Greyfriars!"

Harry Wharton shrugged his shoulders.

"Don't be an ass, Billy. I told you you would be licked if you didn't work, and it serves you jolly well right, too!"

"Oh, really, Wharton——ow!"

Smack!

The rope's-end descended upon the fat junior's trousers, and Bunter jumped clear of the deck. He let out a howl that rang from one end of the schooner to the other:

"Yow! Help!"

Smack!

"Ow! Help! Murder!"

Smack!

"Fire! Murder! Help!"

"Stow that row!" roared Captain Jex along the deck. "Do you want me to come along there to you, you fat swab?"

"Ow! Help!"

Smack, smack, smack!

"Yow, ow, wow!"

The man was raising the rope's-end again, when Harry Wharton touched him on the arm. Preece looked at him in angry surprise.

"Hasn't he had enough?" said Wharton.

"Mind yer own business."

"He's only a silly kid. Can't you let him alone now?"

"I'll give you a taste of it, I guess, if you give me any of your chin."

Wharton's eyes gleamed.

"You won't," he said quietly.

"Stand back!"

"He, he, he!"

The sudden sound of a chuckle came from the cook, who had come out of his galley. He blinked at the scene with his single eye, and came rolling forward.

"Let him alone, Jim Preece."

"What's it got to do with you, Bill Fillot?"

"Let him alone, you scum!"

Preece hesitated. He was a much larger man than the cook, and much more active, but he seemed somehow afraid of the man with one eye—the man with the fat figure and fat, red face. In the single eye of the sea-cook there was a glint of red—a glint that told of a nature it would not be well to rouse to anger.

The skipper's voice came booming along the deck.

"Bill Fillot!"

"Ay, ay?"

"Get back to your cooking."

"Scat!"

"Do you want me to come there?"

"I guess you can come if you like."

The skipper muttered something, but he did not come. It was already clear to the juniors that the cook was as great a power on board the schooner as the skipper was.

Preece flung down the rope's-end.

"Waal, I guess he's had enough," he remarked.

"I guess so, Preece."

The long-limbed sailor stamped away. Billy Bunter blinked at the cook.

"Thank you very much, sir," he said.

"Stuff and rubbish!" said the cook. "I won't see a kid lammed, I guess. Don't be a lazy swab, though, or I may lam you myself."

"I—I—I'm sincerely sorry. I—I'm delicate, you know, and——"

"He, he, he!"

"I say, sir," exclaimed Bunter, struck by a sudden idea, "would you like me to help you in the galley, sir? I'm a good cook, and very useful at that sort of work. You wouldn't mind me taking a snack every now and then, I know."

The single eye winked at him.

"I guess that's a good snap," said the cook.

"Will you take me, sir?"

"I reckon. Kim on."

Bunter joyfully followed the cook. There was one kind of work he did not object to, and that was cooking, with frequent pauses for eating. In the schooner's little galley he was likely to be happier than he had ever been at Greyfriars.

The skipper's voice boomed after him:

"Boy! Come back!"

Bunter paused and hesitated.

"Kim on," said Mr. Fillot calmly.

Bunter followed the cook again.

There was another roar from aft.

"Stop, I tell you!"

Again Bunter paused, irresolute. Mr. Fillot linked his arm in the fat junior's, and marched him into the galley.

There was a hurried tramp of feet after him. The red, angry face of the skipper looked in at the galley.

"Send that boy out, Bill Fillot!"

"I guess not!"

"You fat swab!"

"You ornery, slab-sided, bullpup-faced land-lubber!" said Mr. Fillot cheerfully.

The skipper glared, and retired. Billy Bunter breathed more freely. Mr. Fillot clapped him on the shoulder.

"Don't you be afeared, Tubby."

"My name's Bunter, if you please!"

The one visible eye of Mr. Fillot glinted.

"I'm goin' to call you Tubby! Any objection?"

"N-n-no," stammered Billy Bunter hastily.

"Good, then! Wash up them dishes; and don't you be afraid of Pete Jex so long as you're with me."

"But he's captain, isn't he?" asked Bunter.

The cook chuckled.

"I guess he is, but I'm cook; and when you've been longer on board this craft you'll know that the cook is as big a man as the captain, and p'r'aps a little bit bigger, sonny!"

"That's curious, isn't it?" persisted Bunter inquisitively.

"P'r'aps it is! Any business of yours, by any chance?"

"N-n-no," stammered Bunter, scared by the gleam in Mr. Fillot's eye. "Of course, it doesn't matter to me."

"Stow the cackle, then!"

"C-c-c-certainly!"

"And wash up them dishes and plates!"

Bunter cast an eye of great disfavour upon the huge pile of dirty crockery. He didn't fancy the task.

"If—if you please, I'd rather do some cooking!" he ventured.

Mr. Fillot smiled genially.

"You'd rather stand by," he suggested, in a pleasant tone, "and look on while I do the rough work myself."

"Yes, that's it exactly," said Bunter, delighted at being so easily understood by Mr. Fillot; "that's just what I should like!"

"And maybe you'd give me some orders now and then?"

"I should be very pleased."

"And a clout on the head if I needed it?"

"Oh, really——"

Mr. Fillot picked up a strap. Bunter eyed him nervously.

"W-w-what are you g-g-going to do?" he stuttered.

"Give you some more medicine!"

"Ow! I—I—I—I say, I—I should like to wash up those dishes! I'm very fond of washing-up! I hope you'll let me do all the washing-up there is to be done! That's what I really meant to say all along!"

Mr. Fillot chuckled and dropped the strap.

"Waal, I'll give you a chance!" he said. "Pile in!"

And the fat junior piled in.

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## THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

### A Startling Discovery.

HARRY WHARTON & CO. had been well fed and well rested by the kindness of the strange sea-cook. They were willing to work, and they set to it cheerfully.

Captain Jex was inclined to be captious, and Preece inclined to bully. But the juniors worked with such a good will that they could not in decency find anything to complain of.

There was no picking and choosing; the lads did as they were told, and did it well. In the new tasks they had found to do, Mark Linley had an advantage over the others. The Lancashire lad had once had a job in the Mersey docks, and he knew a great deal about ships and the sea. In the new life he had led at Greyfriars he had gained a different kind of knowledge, but he had not forgotten what he knew. Linley was the handiest fellow of the five; but what the others lacked in knowledge they made up in industry.

And there was plenty to be done.

At "pulling and hauling" the juniors were at first, of course, of little use. Mark was able to take his place with the seamen, but the others naturally required time to "get on" to such duties. But there was plenty of other work to be done. The ship was in a state of great uncleanliness, and looked as if nothing in the way of cleaning or scrubbing had been done for weeks. The forecastle was filthy, and the juniors had the task of cleaning it out. They performed the task to the satisfaction even of Mr. Preece, who had not the slightest excuse for using the rope's-end, which he seemed greatly inclined to do upon the slightest provocation.

It was perhaps fortunate for all concerned. Bunter was the kind of fellow to be safely bullied, but the other juniors were not likely to put up tamely with ill-usage.

If the rope's-end came into play, there was likely to be trouble.

But for the present all was plain sailing.

In the dusky September night the juniors slaved away, while the seamen lounged about the decks, and smoked or played cards.

Little as Harry Wharton knew of practical life at sea, he knew that this was a most extraordinary state of affairs in the most carelessly-governed vessel afloat.

If the boys had not been there, it was clear that no work at all would have been done, except that actually necessary for the working of the ship.

No discipline seemed to be maintained at all.

Orders in connection with sailing the ship the crew obeyed, but on other occasions they took no notice of the officers.

Neither did Captain Jex nor Mr. Prye seem to exact any special respect.

Late in the evening the juniors saw the two officers playing cards with the hands on deck, with a pile of money among them, in the light of an oil-lamp swinging overhead.

**The Chums of the Remove took a hand each of the fat junior, lying with their chests on the wall. "Climb, you ass!" they exclaimed. "Ow how c-c-c-can I climb when you're holding my hands!" gasped Billy Bunter.**

The skipper cursed as roundly when he lost as the most reckless forecastle-hand could have done.

Wharton looked at the scene in amazement, and went on with his work.

It was no business of his. Yet he could not help wondering. And it was borne in upon his mind, clearer and clearer, that something unknown—something terrible—had lately happened on the schooner.

Where were the rest of the crew?

How came these two men, with the manners and habits of the roughest forrard-hands, to be in command of a ship?

Into what den of unknown iniquity had the boys been thrust by a strange freak of Fate?

It was useless to trouble their heads about it; they were booked now for the voyage to the Brazils, and had to make the best of it. Yet they could not help thinking about it.

Billy Bunter, in the cook's galley, was the most peaceful in mind of the Greyfriars party.

Having done all the washing-up and cleaned out the galley and worked at various hard and rough tasks till he was almost dropping with fatigue, he was taken pity upon by Mr. Fillot, and allowed to join in the cooking.

Then Bunter bucked up wonderfully.

He and Mr. Fillot got on together very well, and in the pleasant scent of the cooking they talked quite familiarly and cheerfully.

Mr. Preece looked into the forecastle when the juniors had finished. He could not help looking surprised at the state he found it in.

"Will it do, sir?" asked Wharton.

Preece nodded.

"I guess that's O K!" he said.

"Good!"

"Better sluice down the steps and finish," said Preece; "then you can turn in, if you like."

"Thank you!"

Three steps led down into the forecastle. They were in as dirty and neglected a condition as any part of the ship. Bob Cherry held up a big ship's lantern to show Wharton a light to sluice them down before the scrubbing commenced.

Harry glanced at the steps, and gave a sudden start.

Preece had gone back to join the gamblers on the deck, and the Greyfriars juniors were alone.

Bob Cherry looked quickly at Harry. The latter was staring at the steps with wide-open eyes and a face that had grown suddenly pale.

"What's the matter?" asked Bob, in a whisper.

Harry made no reply.

With a hand that shook, in spite of himself, he took the lantern from Bob's hand, and brought it close down to the steps, and knelt to examine them.

The juniors, startled and mystified, bent down round him, to stare at the wood.

On the wooden step was a great dark blotch.

It was a dark stain on the dirty wood, and not an old stain. Feet had trodden and trodden over it, but not long enough to obliterate it.

The stain had not been there twenty-four hours; Harry Wharton knew that, and the others knew it without his telling them.

But what was the stain?

What had made that purple patch upon the fo'c's'le steps?

Harry turned a face upward to his comrades, and the lantern-light, gleaming upon it, showed it to be deadly pale.

"What is it?" asked Nugent, in a hushed whisper.

And Harry's voice was a whisper, too, as he replied.

"Blood!"

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## THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.

### A Big Bluff.

SILENCE fell upon the Greyfriars juniors.

The strange and terrible discovery robbed them for a full minute of the power of speech.

It was blood!

The great purple blotch on the fo'c's'le steps could be nothing else—it was nothing else.

Blood!

The terrible discovery let in a flood of light upon things that had mystified and perplexed them.

Where were the rest of the crew? What had happened on board this mysterious craft? That purple stain on the dirty wood seemed to tell only too plainly.

The juniors could not speak.

They could only look at one another with startled eyes, with faces grown suddenly white and ghastly in the light of the lantern.

From the dusky deck came the voices of the gamblers uninterrupted. What deeds had been done by those hands that were now dealing and shuffling the cards?

Wharton was the first to break the frozen silence.

"It's blood!" he said again.

"Good heavens!"

"What does it mean?"

"I'm almost afraid to think," said Harry, in a low voice. "But let's get on!"

"I suppose we had better!"

In grim silence the juniors went on with their work.

The steps were washed down and, along with the dirt and dust, the tell-tale stains were washed out.

Tired by their labour, but more perplexed and worried than tired, the Greyfriars juniors reported themselves to Preece.

Preece was playing poker with the captain and mate and the cook. The four dagoes were playing among themselves, some game of their own.

"I go you four," said Preece.

Captain Jex clinked five shillings into the pool.

"That's one better, I guess!"

Mr. Prye threw down his cards, with an oath.

"Pass, partner."

"Waal, cooky?"

The fat cook looked at his cards, and looked at the "pot." According to the rules of the game it cost five shillings to "come in" now, and the cook appeared to be doubtful about whether his "hand" was worth the money.

The skipper watched him, with a mocking grin. The Greyfriars juniors, not caring to interrupt the game at such an interesting point, stood by and waited till the round should be over.

"I guess I'll ante," said the cook.

And he clinked five shillings into the pool.

Preece followed his example, and then Captain Jex dropped in half-a-sovereign. They were evidently playing "no-limit" poker—probably one of the most reckless forms of gambling known.

"I guess that lets you down," said the skipper.

The cook grinned.

"I guess I stay in, just for greens!" he remarked.

And he put a half-sovereign over the captain's.

Preece looked very dubious.

After a searching look at his cards he threw them down and scowled discontentedly.

"I reckon one pair ain't worth it," he remarked; "though I shouldn't be s'prised if cooky was bluffing!"

The cook chuckled.

"Bluffing or no bluffing, I'll see you through!" grunted the skipper. "I raise you ten, you fat swab."

And he dropped in a sovereign.

The cook hesitated long.

He glanced at his cards, he glanced at the pool, and he glanced at the skipper. Then he fumbled in his trousers-pockets.

"Oh, pass!" said Jex. "Pass, you swab! Pass, you slabsided lubber. You know you ain't got the keerds—you're only bluffing!"

"I'll bluff you out then!" said the cook.

And he dropped a sovereign in.

The skipper uttered an oath.

"I'll double that."

Two sovereigns went in.

The Greyfriars juniors looked on in amazement. There was already a pile of silver and gold in the beercan that served as a pool.

Where did these men obtain the money? How came a sea-cook to be in possession of so much cash—at sea, too? Where had Preece obtained the money he gambled with?

Cooky hesitated again.

But Harry Wharton, as he watched the fat cook, caught the sly twinkle in his single eye, and guessed that his hesitation was only simulated for the purpose of drawing the skipper on to further recklessness.

Finally the two sovereigns went in.

Then the skipper hesitated.

He covered the bet without raising it; but his momentary hesitation showed the cook that he had reached the end of his tether.

With slow deliberation the cook drew a couple of five-pound notes out of the recesses of his trousers, and added them to the pool.

"I raise that," he remarked.

The captain stared blankly at the pool.

To "come in" now would cost him ten pounds; and if he did not cover the bet, the cook would rake in the pool without being obliged to show his cards at all. If he did cover it, he would lose that sum of money if the cook's hand was the better of the two.

The question was, whether the cook had a strong hand, worth the money he was risking upon it, or whether he was "bluffing"—that is, trying to freeze out his opponent by forcing the betting high.

The skipper doubted long.

The cook's face was placid and comfortable, his single eye twinkling and gleaming in the light of the swinging lamp.

The amount he had risked must certainly be considerable to him, however he had come by it; yet he showed no sign of nervousness.

"You swab!" said the skipper at last. "You fat, slabby swab! You're bluffing!"

"Cover my blind, and see the cards, then!" said Cooky.

"You ain't got the keerds for the money."

"I'm ready to show up."

The skipper snorted.

He could not call upon the cook to show his cards unless he covered the stake; and that meant the loss of his money if the cook's hand was the stronger of the two.

Finally, with an oath, the captain threw his hand down.

He threw the cards face upwards, and revealed two jacks, two queens, and an ace—technically known as "two pairs, queen high." It was a hand strong enough to bet a great deal upon; but it was useless if his opponent should have three of a kind, or a full hand, or a four, or a royal flush.

And that cooky had at least a full hand—that is to say, a pair and a three—the skipper was convinced.

"Take the pot, you lubber!" grunted Jex.

The cook reached over for his winnings. As the skipper had "passed," the pool was his without the trouble of showing his cards.

He clinked the money into his pocket, leaving his cards face downwards on the table. His fat face was grinning.

"Show your keerds, you fat swab!" grunted the skipper.

"I ain't no call to show them!" said the cook.

"Show up, I tell you!"

"I guess I ain't showing."

Captain Jex reached over towards the hand.

A knife glimmered in the cook's grip, and he made a motion of pinning the skipper's hand to the deck.

Captain Jex hastily withdrew it.

The cook chuckled.

"You can see the keerds if you pay for it," he said "I charge you a dollar for a show, skipper."

"You swab!"

Curiosity overcame the captain's repugnance to parting with his money. He wanted badly to know whether the

cook had, indeed, had a strong hand, or whether it was, after all, only a "bluff." He clinked the four shillings across to the cook, who stowed them away in his pocket.

"Now show up, you swab!"

The cook grinned, and turned his cards face upwards in the lamplight.

There was a roar of rage from the skipper, and a chuckle simultaneously from Preece and Mr. Prye.

The hand was composed of a two and three, a six, a seven, and a jack, of different suits. It was not even a flush. There was not a pair in his hand. It was worthless.

"By gosh, a kilter!" exclaimed Preece.

"Haw, haw, haw!" ejaculated Mr. Prye.

The skipper glared furiously at the cook.

He had been bluffed in the most barefaced way. If he had paid up and called for a show his hand would have raked in the pot easily. As it was, through want of nerve in staking his money, he had given away the pot to his opponent.

"You—you swab!" he gasped.

Mr. Fillot chuckled.

"I guess it was a bluff!" he remarked. "You should have asked for a show, skipper—it would only have cost you ten pounds. Ha, ha, ha! He, he, he!"

The skipper was choking with rage.

His hand was sliding, perhaps unconsciously, towards his hip-pocket. The cook, doubled up with merriment, did not seem to observe it.

"He, he, he! He, he, he! You should have had a little nerve, skipper. He, he, he! You are playing with dead men's money, too; and you haven't the sand to risk it. He, he, he!"

The skipper's expression was murderous.

His hand came from his hip-pocket, and there was a steely glimmer in the light of the swinging lamp.

Harry Wharton was watching the man.

He had read something in his eyes—something terrible. And the boy, his heart beating like a hammer, was ready for that movement of Captain Jex's.

He threw himself forward as the skipper's hand came up, and grasped the strong, sinewy wrist with both hands, and forced it into the air.

Crack!

The pistol exploded, and a bullet went tearing through the canvas above.

The cook's chuckling ceased suddenly.

He sprang to his feet, and his hand took a businesslike grip on the handle of his knife.

Captain Jex leaped up, too, his face pale now, the smoking revolver in his grip.

For a moment they glared at one another.

Then the cook chuckled—a chuckle that sounded unearthly on the lips of a man who had just barely escaped a sudden and violent death.

"He, he, he! A close call that time, skipper! He, he he!"

"You swab!"

"I guess you'll hand me that barker," said the cook. "I kinder reckon it'll be safer in my keeping!"

The skipper hesitated a moment.

But the solitary eye of the fat cook was bent upon him, with a red glint in it. The hand that held the knife was moving spasmodically. The man was about to spring. If he had sprung, a bullet would not have stopped him in time.

And Harry, as he looked at the face of the skipper, saw that he was afraid—terribly afraid—of that strange, one-eyed man.

"You'll give me that barker, you scum!"

Captain Jex hurled the pistol to the deck.

"Pick it up, sonny."

Bob Cherry picked up the pistol and handed it to the cook, who slipped it into his pocket.

"I guess you can run now, skipper," said the cook, chuckling. Then his face became serious, savage, and his eye glinted red. "But don't try them tricks again, sonny. Don't try to draw on Bill Fillot again! I warn you! The schooner's lost one skipper—she'll lose another!"

And the cook rolled back to his galley, leaving the skipper cursing under his breath.

The juniors went forward in silence.

## THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER.

### Captain Jex Requires a Cabin-Boy.

THE cook looked out, and called to the juniors.

"Kim in here!"

They went in. The cook was chuckling as usual, but there was a kinder expression upon his fat face than they had seen there before.

"I guess you saved my life, kid," he said to Harry Wharton.



Harry nodded.

"Very likely, sir."

"I guess it's so. You might have got that bullet, too."

"I didn't think about that."

"You're a good plucked lad," said the sea-cook—"a real lad of grit. You saved my life. I ain't likely to forget that. I stand your friend while you're aboard the Nancy."

"Thank you."

"Maybe you'll need one," said the cook. "The skipper'll be up agin you now. You want to look out for him, I tell you!"

"I suppose so."

"But there ain't so much skipper as cook on this craft," grinned the one-eyed man. "I guess you've noticed that, sonny."

"I have noticed it," said Wharton. Then he went on abruptly. "You say you're going to stand my friend. Tell me what it all means."

"What what all means?"

"All this mystery. How is it that you have more power than the captain?"

"Because I've got more grit, I guess."

"Yes, I see that; but that isn't all. Any cook may be braver than any captain, but——"

The cook gave his peculiar chuckle.

"This ain't an ordinary ship," he said.

"It appears not."

"Don't you ask no questions," said the sea-cook. "Better not. Maybe the Nancy sailed with a full crew, and maybe she didn't. Maybe Captain Jex sailed as skipper, and maybe he sailed as a fo'c's'le hand. Maybe and maybe not. Don't ask questions."

Wharton drew a deep breath.

"There was blood on the forecastle steps before we cleaned them down," he said.

The cook gave a start.

"There was what?"

"Blood!"

"I—I—I say, you fellows," broke in Billy Bunter, "you're j-j-joking!"

"Shut up, Bunter!" grunted Bob Cherry.

"Oh, really, Cherry——"

"Dry up!"

The cook's single eye glinted.

"You'd better not speak of that to anybody but me, sonny," he said slowly. "Better not ask questions. Better not notice too much. Come in and grub."

The juniors entered the galley, and they were hungry as well as tired after their work. They ate heartily, in spite of the worry that was upon their minds. The cook's words only seemed to make darker the shadow of crime that hung over the schooner.

What had happened there before they came on board?

The cook was unusually silent, and his chuckles had ceased. A strange fellow he looked, with the black patch over his missing eye, and the other gleaming and twinkling like a carbuncle as the light caught it. There was something uncanny about the sea-cook, and yet something that the boys could not help liking.

"Maybe you've noticed that one of the boats is missing," said the cook, breaking the silence at last.

"I had not noticed it," said Harry Wharton.

"Waal, it is missing. Maybe some of the hands went in that. If one of them had a broken head, maybe it was because he was a fool, and didn't know when to give in. You see?"

Harry Wharton nodded.

"In plain words, there has been a mutiny here?" he exclaimed.

The cook chuckled.

"That's an ugly word," he said.

"And Captain Jex is wearing the clothes of a man who's drifting away in an open boat!" exclaimed Bob Cherry.

The cook grinned, but did not speak. So much, indeed, was clear to the juniors. The familiarity between cook and captain was a proof that Jex was no real captain at all. He evidently knew how to navigate a ship, but in everything else he was as rough as the roughest forrard hand.

But where was the former captain—where were the crew? The cook implied that they had been sent adrift in a boat, after a struggle! Was it the truth, or was he deceiving them? Had there been grim murder on that mysterious craft?"

Whatever the answer to that question might be, it was pretty certain that they would get no more out of Mr. Fillot. The juniors ate their supper in silence. They had finished when a red, angry face was put in at the galley.

Captain Jex scowled at them.

"I guess I want one of them brats for a cabin-boy," he remarked. "It's only just kim into my mind, too."

The cook grinned at him.

"Which one, skipper?"

The captain pointed to Harry Wharton, with a venomous gleam in his eyes that did not escape the boy.

"That's the one."

"I guess not," said the cook.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean what I say."

"Look here, Bill Fillot, I reckon I'm going to have that brat aft as cabin-boy, if I choose," said the skipper, beginning to bluster.

The cook shrugged his shoulders.

"Then you're out in your reckoning, skipper."

"What's the objection?"

"That kid's under my protection."

"Look here, you fat swab——"

"He saved my life, skipper. Bill Fillot isn't the kind of sea-cook to forget that. He saved my life."

"I tell you I'm going to have him."

"And punish him for that," grinned the cook. "I guess not."

"I'm not going without him. Come here, boy."

Harry Wharton met the savage glance of the captain steadily. He knew very well that the ruffian wanted to get him aft to make him suffer for what he had done.

"I won't come," he said.

The captain's face was red with rage.

"You—you young lubber! You dare to disobey your skipper's orders!"

"You are not my skipper."

"I guess you're on board my ship."

"Your ship?" said Harry pointedly.

The man changed colour. He bent a furious glance upon the sea-cook.

"What have you been telling the brats, Bill Fillot?" he hissed.

"Nothin'," said the cook. "Nothing that they ain't noticed for themselves. They ain't blind or silly, skipper."

"They may know more than is good for them," said Jex, between his teeth. "But look here, I'm going to have that boy aft. Come here."

"I won't."

"I'll larrup you till the blood runs. I——"

"You won't lay a finger on him, skipper," said the cook coolly.

"By gosh, I'll——"

The cook whipped out the revolver he had taken from the skipper. Captain Jex turned pale as the glimmering tube was turned towards him.

"Put that down!" he roared. "You fool, it might go off!"

"He, he, he! It will go off if you don't clear out of this galley, skipper!"

"You fat hound——"

"Better skip."

"I'll—I'll——"

The hammer rose a little as the cook's finger pressed slightly on the trigger. The skipper gasped, and made a single bound out of the galley.

The cook sent a roar of laughter after him, answered by oaths and curses from the deck.

He thrust the pistol out of sight, and resumed stirring a saucepan that was simmering on the stove.

"Jex ain't no grit," he said. "He can knock a man down from behind with a belaying-pin, but he can't face a shooter. You younkers had better stay in here—you can sleep on them sacks again, and I guess you'll be safer in here with me than in the fo'c's'le with the scum forrard."

"Thank you very much," said Wharton gratefully. "However this affair turns out, we sha'n't forget your kindness to us, sir."

"I guess I'll see you through," said the cook.

And the juniors gladly turned in upon the sacks; and, in spite of the strangeness of their surroundings, and the grim shadow that hung over the schooner and its crew, they slept soundly and uninterruptedly till dawn.

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## THE SIXTEENTH CHAPTER.
### Straight from the Shoulder.

HARRY WHARTON opened his eyes, and blinked in the sunlight. It was morning, and the schooner was gliding swiftly along under a sunny sky. There was a smell of cooking in the galley—a smell that seemed permanent there. It was welcome enough to the captain of the Greyfriars Remove, who had awakened very hungry.

The sea-cook was at the stove, chuckling as usual. He did not know that Wharton was awake, and he was not on his guard. His face told of the thoughts in his mind; in his expression good humour and cunning and malice were strangely mingled. It came into Wharton's mind then that the sea-cook would be a bad man to have for an enemy, and a decidedly uncertain one to have for a friend. Yet he was the boys' only friend on board the schooner, and all that stood between them and the brutality of the skipper.

Wharton rose from the sacks, and the cook gave a slight start and turned round.

"Oh, you're awake?"

"Yes."

"Good! You've been called a dozen times from the deck."

"I'm sorry. I suppose I was tired."

"It's all serene, I guess. I wouldn't let them wake you."

"Thank you very much."

The cook looked at him curiously.

"You mean that?" he asked.

Wharton coloured.

"I'm not in the habit of saying things I don't mean," he replied. "I am very much obliged to you, and so are my friends."

"Would you back me up if it came to that?"

"In what way—against the captain?"

The cook nodded.

"Certainly," said Harry, at once. "You've stood by us, and if it gets you into trouble with Jex, you can rely upon us to stand by you."

"What-ho!" said Bob Cherry, standing up, and rubbing his eyes. "We'll pull you through, cooky."

The cook fixed his eye upon them. He appeared to be debating something in his mind.

"You don't want to go to Rio?" he asked suddenly.

"Hardly."

"You'd give a great deal to be set ashore in England?"

"Yes, a very great deal."

"It would be worth a bit of a tussle."

"Yes."

"I'll remember that. 'Nuff said now, but I'll remember it."

And Mr. Fillot turned to his cooking.

The juniors were considerably puzzled, but they ate their breakfast in silence. They could not make out Mr. Fillot. It seemed to be hinted in his words that he was meditating some scheme for taking the authority out of the hands of Captain Jex.

If Captain Jex—as Wharton now felt certain was the case—was simply a mutineer masquerading in a captain's clothes, there could be nothing wrong in superseding him. But it might be difficult—it might be dangerous. Preece and Mr. Prye and the dagoes might stand by the skipper; and they were grown men, and they were armed, in all probability, and reckless. The sea-cook, though he appeared to have boundless nerve, could scarcely hope to contend with them, backed only by half a dozen schoolboys.

Harry did not think the man would be so reckless as to attempt such an enterprise, but he could not think of any other explanation of what the cook had said.

After the meal the juniors tumbled up.

The schooner was under full sail, and getting through the water at a great rate.

No land was in sight. Here and there on the sea could be seen glancing sails, or the black smoke of a steamer.

Where the schooner was Wharton had no idea. For the voyage the captain had spoken of, she should be heading for the Atlantic, and should now be in the English Channel. In that case, she must have passed the Straits of Dover in the night.

Captain Jex was on deck, looking up a little anxiously at the great mass of canvas under which the schooner was speeding along.

The breeze was very brisk, and the Nancy was making good way; but the vessel was too short-handed for so much sail to be safe.

In the case of a squall, it would be impossible for the few hands to deal with the sails, and the result might be disastrous.

The skipper looked round at the boys as they came up. He appeared to be in an evil temper—partly the result of his anxiety about the ship, partly of his altercations with the cook, partly, perhaps, of what he had drunk the previous night, for his red, bleared eyes and loose lips showed that he was in the habit of indulging in strong drink.

"Come here, younker!" he called to Wharton.

Harry approached him, touching his cap respectfully.

"Ay, ay, sir!"

"You're goin' to earn your rations on this craft," said Captain Jex venomously.

"I'm quite willing to do so, sir."

"Good! I want you to lay aloft."

Wharton looked up at the straining masts and the bellying canvas. He was not afraid to go aloft, but he knew perfectly well that the skipper was sending him up in the hope of seeing him fall into the sea.

The boy smiled contemptuously.

"Ay, ay, sir."

"Let's see what you can do," said the skipper, with an evil grin. "Up you go!"

"Ay, ay, sir."

Harry Wharton stepped to the ratlines, and was about to ascend, when there was a call from the direction of the galley.

"Stop!"

Wharton glanced at the sea-cook.

"It's all right, sir," he called out. "I'm not afraid."

"You young swab, obey my orders!" roared the skipper.

"You'll obey mine, I guess," said the cook.

"Go below, Bill Fillot."

"Go and hang yourself!" retorted the cook.

"Up with you, younker!"

"You won't leave the deck, I guess," said the cook.

Harry Wharton hesitated. Had Captain Jex been a properly constituted skipper, his obligations to the cook would not have justified him in disobeying orders. But he owed no obedience to a successful mutineer. He stepped towards the cook.

"Come back and do as I tell you," shrieked the captain.

"I am not under your orders," said Wharton. "I'm willing to work, but I obey the orders of the only decent man on board. You have no right to give orders here. I owe no obedience to a man I know to be at least an attempted murderer."

The skipper appeared to be choking.

"You—you young lubber! Preece!"

"Ay, ay!"

"Give that brat a dozen with the rope's-end."

"I guess so," said Preece.

He picked up a rope's-end, and stepped towards Harry Wharton. The cook sat down on the combings of the hatchway, a grin on his fat face.

Wharton did not look for help from him, and he did not expect it. He was quite ready to take care of himself.

He faced Preece, his eyes gleaming, his hands clenched hard.

"Don't touch me with that!" he said.

The man laughed. He did not expect much resistance from a boy; but he did not yet know the champion athlete of the Lower Forms at Greyfriars.

The rope-end swung in the air, and descended, with a swinging blow, across Harry Wharton's shoulders.

Harry's eyes blazed. Without stopping for a second to think of the consequences, he sprang forward. His right fist, clenched as hard as iron, caught the ruffian on the point of the chin in a terrific upper-cut.

Preece gave a yell, and staggered back, and back, till he fell helplessly on the deck with a ringing bump.

There was a burst of chuckling from the cook.

"He, he, he!"

Preece lay dazed, astounded as much as hurt, but very much hurt, all the same. The skipper seemed to be stupefied. He stared blankly at the boy, whose young arm had struck so terrible a blow.

"Gosh!" exclaimed Mr. Prye, in equal astonishment.

"He, he, he!"

Preece staggered to his feet. He did not speak; but his hand groped for a belaying-pin, and seized it. The Greyfriars juniors gathered quickly round Wharton. There was a sudden shout from the cook.

"Stow that, Preece!"

The man snarled like a wild beast.

"I'll smash him!"

"Stow it, or you'll drop!"

There was a click of a trigger. Preece looked round apprehensively, and saw the glimmer of Jex's revolver in the sea-cook's hand. Mr. Fillot grinned pleasantly over the levelled barrel.

"Are you tired of life, Preece?" he asked genially.

"You—you dare not pull trigger."

"Try me and see."

Preece did not seem inclined to try him. He flung the belaying-pin into the sea with a curse, and stamped away, holding his chin in both hands.

The sea-cook chuckled in his curious, gnomish way.

## THE SEVENTEENTH CHAPTER.

### The Sea-Cook's Scheme.

AFTER that, the juniors were let severely alone by the crew of the schooner. They were not even given orders to work. The fear in which the men stood of the cook was clearer every hour. It was a curious circumstance that the chuckling, good-humoured fat man should inspire so much fear. But Wharton was already aware that there were depths in Fillot's nature that did not appear on the surface. The man had a reserve, as it were, of desperate hardihood, which the others lacked. He stood the friend of the juniors, and even the skipper dared not lay a finger on them.

And although they could not help feeling that this man, who stood by them, was as darkly stained by crime as any man on board, the juniors could not help liking him.



Indeed, it was only too probable that, in whatever dark transactions had taken place on board the schooner, the hardy, reckless sea-cook had borne the chief part.

The boys shuddered at the thought that there might be blood on his hands. Yet he was kind to them—he saved them from much.

That he had some plan in his mind of turning against the skipper, and taking the ship into his own hands, Wharton felt certain; and he was quite willing to back the cook up in that, or in anything else that did not savour of crime.

But what the man's scheme was exactly he could not guess.

During the morning, while the schooner pressed on under almost full sail, the cook kept his own counsel.

The freshening of the wind caused Captain Jex to decide to take in sail, much against his will. His keen desire to get out of the narrow seas, and to escape into the wider waters of the Atlantic, was apparent enough. In English waters he ran continual risk of being overhauled and called to account. Out in the ocean he would breathe more freely.

It seemed to Harry that the sea-cook should have had the same desire. If he was as deeply involved in the seizure of the schooner as Jex and the rest, he should naturally be as anxious as they were to escape from English waters.

But if he seized the schooner, he could not possibly hope to navigate her across the Atlantic with a crew of half a dozen juniors from a public school.

What could his intention be, then?

Harry learned from the cook that the schooner was now in the Channel. Once he caught a distant glimpse of the coast of France, far away to the south. In the Channel the wind was choppy, as well as the waves, and Captain Jex was forced to take in more sail, and to tack wearily to get on his way at all.

Captain and crew were in equally vile tempers, and in the dusk a fight was observed in progress between Preece and one of the Italian sailors.

The only contented man on board was the cook. He had blankly refused to take a hand in working the schooner, sticking to his galley with a grin on his face while the sailormen wore themselves out.

Wharton guessed that he took no interest whatever in the progress of the schooner, though that puzzled him more than anything else.

In the second dog-watch the juniors were called into the galley to feed. Billy Bunter, under the directions of the cook, had made a plentiful and savoury stew. The fat junior was given the task of waiting on the crew at their meals, a task which he performed with muttered grumbling. He took care that none of his grumbles reached the ears of the cook, however. Billy Bunter had learned already to be terribly afraid of the one-eyed man.

The cook was looking more serious than usual, and Harry guessed that he was about to speak out.

The man looked out of the galley, and then signed to Hurree Singh to get up.

"You can take your grub outside, nig," he remarked. "Keep an eye peeled. If anybody comes this way, sing out."

"With great pleasurefulness, my worthy and esteemed cookful sahib," said the polite nabob; "also I shall be gladful to eat my esteemed stew outside, as your august apartment is somewhat close and stuff-ful."

And the Nabob of Bhanipur went out to keep watch.

"Now, then," said the sea-cook, leaning a little towards the boys, "you kids want to land in England?"

"Yes, rather!"

"You'd like to land to-night?"

The juniors felt their hearts beat. Greyfriars had seemed so far behind them, while they thought they were going to Rio Janeiro. To land in England—the mere thought of treading the old soil again made their hearts jump.

"My hat!" said Bob Cherry. "We'd be jolly glad to land to-night. We'd do anything."

"What-ho!" said Nugent.

Mark Linley was looking keenly at the cook.

"How can we land to-night?" he said. "Captain Jex is going westward, and he does not mean to touch anywhere."

The cook chuckled.

"Captain Jex don't count in this deal," he said. "Look you, I ain't a saint, as I dessay you've observed. Things have taken place on board this craft that I won't tell you about; you'd better not know. But Captain Jex ain't the captain any more than Mr. Prye is the mate. They'd have left you to drown, only they thought you'd be useful. This craft sailed with a round dozen of men in the forecastle."

"Where are they now?"

Mr. Fillot did not appear to hear the question.

"We could get across the Atlantic," he said. "It's risky, but we could do it, at any rate, now we've got you

boys to help with the ship. But I don't want that. Jex is a fool. Bill Fillot ain't that. Besides, there ain't enough for all."

"There isn't enough what?"

"Never mind. Look you, you will have to swear to keep your mouths shut. If you land in England, I land with you. You'll swear not to say a word about me for twenty-four hours, and as little as possible after that."

"We will promise."

The one-eyed man blinked at them.

"Waal, I guess that's as good. In twenty-four hours Bill Fillot will be all serene. I've got friends in a certain place I can reach from the Devon coast, you see. Jex has come as far as suits me."

Wharton shivered a little.

There was something terrible in the coolness and deliberation with which this man had allowed his companions in crime to carry out their plans just so far as suited him, and with which he now prepared to abandon them when they could serve his special purposes no longer.

But Jex and his crew were entitled to no sympathy from the boys.

They were criminals and ruffians, and their intentions towards the Greyfriars juniors were brutal, if not murderous.

"If we land to-night," went on Mr. Fillot, "we're all O. K. But Jex would rather drown than land; he doesn't want to run his neck into a noose."

"What if we took the boat, and stole away in the dark," suggested Harry Wharton. "The sea is calm enough now, and the wind favourable for landing on the coast of Devonshire."

The sea-cook chuckled.

"I guess that won't suit me."

"It would be doing what you have mapped out."

"I ain't going empty-handed, you see."

"But you could easily take your belongings with you."

The cook chuckled grimly. It occurred to Harry then that it was not only his own belongings that he wished to take.

It came into the junior's mind that there was something of value on board the schooner; that the rascals had not mutinied simply to take possession of the Nancy: Probably there was a sum of money in the captain's cabin: perhaps a very large sum. And, if so, Mr. Fillot intended to annex it for himself.

Wharton felt sick at the thought of being mixed up in the wretched, sordid dealings of a gang of thieves. But he had his own safety to think of. Bad as he was, the cook was the best of the party. He was the only friend the boys had on board the Nancy.

"I guess I'm going to keep the schooner till I'm done with her," said the sea-cook, lighting a big cigar. "The question is, where are they going—Jex and the rest?"

Harry remembered the purple stain on the fo'c's'le steps, and shuddered.

"You surely do not mean——" he began.

The sea-cook laughed.

"Of course I don't, you young jackanapes! What I'm thinking of is putting them into the boat. They can land in France."

"But they are seven against us—seven men."

"I reckon we can't do it by taking them by the scruff of the neck," grinned the cook. "But there are other ways. You younkers will have to stand by to help me, that's all. The work will be in my hands."

"We're ready to help, if there's no bloodshed," said Harry Wharton quietly. "We stop at that, under any circumstances."

"What-ho!" said Bob Cherry emphatically.

"There won't be any of that, sonny. I'm not a fool like Jex. If I land a lubber with a belaying-pin it won't crack his skull. That's settled."

"Then we're with you."

The sea-cook nodded, and relapsed into silence, his brows contracted over his cigar. He was evidently thinking the matter out, and arranging his plans for the dangerous work of the night, and the juniors did not interrupt him.

## THE EIGHTEENTH CHAPTER.

### Desperate Measures.

MIDNIGHT was on the sea—black and grim. There were stars in the sky, reflected in the rolling surges. But the stars were few; the shadows deep.

The Greyfriars juniors had remained in the cook's quarters. He had told them to sleep on the sacks, as before, and they had obediently lain down, but they did not sleep.

Their nerves were too tense for that.

Their hearts were beating and thrilling with suppressed excitement. That night was to see wild work done, and though the sea-cook had assured them that he was far from dreaming of bloodshed, they knew that they could not trust him.

What might happen they did not know, but it was impossible for them to set themselves against the man.

It was after midnight when the cook came into the galley.

They knew that he had been aft, drinking in the cabin with the captain and mate, the deck being in charge of Preece and the dagoes.

Harry Wharton looked at the cook as he entered.

His fat face was a little less highly coloured than usual, and his more than usually rolling gait showed that he had been drinking deeply. His fat hands were trembling.

His single eye blinked towards the juniors.

"Are you awake, sonnies?"

His voice was a little thick, but steady.

"Yes," said Harry.

"Get up."

They rose. They had not closed their eyes since they had lain down. They fixed inquiring looks upon the sea-cook.

The fat man drew a bucket of water towards him, and soused his face in it, and rubbed it with a rough towel till he gasped again. That seemed to clear away the fumes of liquor from his brain.

"Ready for business?" he asked, with his old chuckle.

"Quite ready."

"The readyfulness is terrific," murmured the Nabob of Bhanipur.

"Jex and Prye are in the cabin," said Fillot abruptly. "They're asleep—drunk as pigs."

"Then they won't interfere?"

"Not much."

The cook drew the skipper's revolver from his pocket, and carefully examined it. The boys watched him with thrilling nerves. Harry Wharton spoke in a quiet, determined tone.

"You are not going to use that," he said.

"That depends."

"It does not depend."

The sea-cook gave him a sudden, savage scowl.

"What do you mean, you young swab?"

"I mean what I say," said Harry firmly. "What has taken place on this ship I don't know, but I do know that there shall be no murder while I'm here, if I can stop it. If you use that weapon we shall be against you instead of for you!"

The cook laughed softly.

"I guess it's all right, sonny. I may have to wing one of them, but that is all. Bill Fillot isn't a fool to put his neck into the halter."

He returned the weapon to his hip-pocket.

"Now, look here," he went on, in a lower tone, "there's Preece on deck, and he's an ugly customer. Then there are the four dagoes. Two of them are in the fo'c's'le. It will be easy for you to nip along and fasten the scuttle on the outside, so that they'll be penned up there."

"I could do that easily," said Linley.

"Then cut along and do it, kid."

The Lancashire lad disappeared. He returned in a couple of minutes, and met the inquiring look of the sea-cook with a nod.

"All serene?" asked Fillot.

"Yes."

"They're fastened in."

"Yes, quite securely."

"I guess that's all right. If Preece had seen me there he might have smelled a rat. It's all O. K. now. We've three men to deal with. The dagoes haven't any pluck; the sight of a shooter will be enough for them. I may have to wing Preece, but don't be afraid; a bullet in the leg will be enough for him if he cuts up rusty."

The juniors breathed hard.

Now that the enterprise was near its culmination, they realised that it was not so desperate as it had looked at first, but that it was at the same time terribly dangerous. What in the case of failure?

It would mean death for the sea-cook; his fellow-mutineers would never forgive him for the trick he tried to play. What else could it mean for them?

But they did not falter.

Billy Bunter was still snoring on the sacks. As a matter of fact, the fat junior was not asleep; he did not quite know what was going on, but he knew enough to throw him into a palpitating state of terror, and he was too frightened to sleep. But he snored all the same, determined that he should not be called upon to help. If they had tried to wake him they would have found it very hard.

Bob Cherry took the fat Removite by the collar, and knocked his head against the mast. "Now then, you fat bounder!" he exclaimed wrathfully. "Was that some of your giddy ventriloquism!"

But they did not want Bunter. He was worse than useless in a matter like this.

The five juniors found weapons for themselves—belaying-pins or cudgels. The tussle might be a hard one—for life or death. It was no time for half-measures. Then the cook led the way on deck.

Preece was standing staring away into the gloom, where the red-and-green lights of the schooner glimmered through the night.

The two dagoes on duty were talking together in low tones.

Preece suddenly started and tried to turn as a hand was laid on his shoulder, and he felt the cold muzzle of a revolver pressed behind his ear. A convulsive shiver ran through him from head to foot.

"Quiet!" said the sea-cook softly.

"Wh-wh-what——"

"You're my prisoner."

"What do you mean, Bill Fillot?"

"You're my prisoner."

"I—I'll——"

"You'll cave in."

Preece forced a laugh.

"I suppose this is a joke," he muttered.

The cook chuckled quietly.

"Yes, a good joke, Preece—a very good joke. You know I'm a joking cuss. Bring that rope here, sonny, and rope him up."

"Yes, sir."

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The two Italian sailors were staring blankly at the scene. They looked at Preece, and they looked at the cook. One of them drew a knife, and the voice of the cook was heard, clear and cutting as the steel.

"Put that knife down, Antonio."

The cook's revolver was still turned upon Preece, but his voice was enough for the Italian. The knife dropped on the deck.

The other man had started aft, evidently to call Jex and Prye.

"Come back here, Carlo."

The man hesitated.

"Come back!" rapped out the cook. "Another step, and I'll put a bullet through your silly carcase!"

The Italian stopped, shivering in every limb.

"Me stop-a, signor," he stammered.

"I guess you'd better!"

Harry and Bob Cherry rapidly twisted the rope round the long limbs of Preece, making him a helpless prisoner. He was thrown on the deck, bound hand and foot. His eyes were turned fearfully upon the sea-cook. He had not dared to resist the man who held the six-shooter, but it was clear that his terror was great after he had surrendered.

"Bill," he muttered hoarsely, "I'm your shipmate. Remember that. Don't——" His voice broke off.

The chuckle of the sea-cook answered him.

"Your life's safe, Preece, my boy. I'm not a fool."

The man breathed deeply with relief.

"Now rope up the dagoes."

The two Italians drew together, and one of them gripped a

knife. The glimmer of the levelled revolver showed up in the faint starlight.

"You fools! Take care!"

They made no resistance. They were more afraid of the glittering eye of the sea-cook than of the revolver. The juniors bound them hand and foot, and laid them beside Preece on the deck.

The cook laughed softly.

"Now follow me."

He descended the steps into the cuddy, where the cabins opened. Captain Jex was at the cuddy table, his arms stretched out before him, and his head on his arms. An overturned bottle of whisky was still dripping.

He started and moved as they entered the cuddy.

The cook clapped him on the shoulder.

"Wake up, captain!"

Jex started up.

"Why—what—— Hallo!"

He started back in sudden alarm from the glimmer of the revolver, and thrust his hand into his coat.

The cook's fat hand gripped him by the throat, and he was jammed back in his chair, and a cold muzzle was thrust into his neck.

"You won't draw that barker, I guess, Captain Jex."

The skipper's hands dropped to his sides. He stared at the cook in blank, half-drunken amazement and fear.

## THE NINETEENTH CHAPTER.

### Back to Greyfriars.

THE cook laughed in his soft, silky way. The revolver-muzzle was pressed to the brawny neck of the skipper, and the colour slowly faded out of the man's bronzed face.

"Hold on, cooky, for mercy's sake!"

"Are you bucking ag'in me, skipper?"

"No, I reckon not."

"Keep still."

The cook signed to the juniors. Almost in a twinkling the captain was bound. He was left in his chair, still blinking in dazed astonishment.

Then Mr. Fillot stepped into the adjoining cabin.

The mate lay there in drunken slumber. His hands were tied, and he was searched for weapons, which were taken away and tossed into the sea.

The cook was chuckling with great glee as they returned to the deck.

The coup had been made.

The schooner was in the hands of the fat man and the Greyfriars juniors, and the latter were as jubilant as Mr. Fillot.

Bob Cherry executed a cake-walk on the deck to show his glee, caught his foot in a coil of rope, and went down with a bump.

"Ow!" he gasped.

"Let's see you do that again," said Nugent, with great interest.

But Bob Cherry did not do it again.

Mark Linley went along to the galley to reassure Bunter. He found the fat junior on the sacks, no longer affecting to be asleep, but sitting up and listening with straining ears for the slightest sound.

At the sound of Linley's footsteps the fat Removite shook in every limb. It was very dim there, and Bunter was in too great a state of terror to look at Linley even.

"Mercy!" he howled, as he heard the footsteps. "I hadn't anything to do with it. It was all the fault of that fat cook chap. I swear it was. I never had a hand in it, and I didn't know anything about it. I didn't even know they were going to do anything at all. I was fast asleep when they left the galley.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The roar of laughter from the Lancashire lad made Bunter come to himself. He blinked at Mark through his spectacles.

"Oh! Is that you, Linley?"

"Ha, ha, ha! Yes!"

"Oh! Is it all right?"

"Yes, all serene."

Bunter grunted with relief.

"Oh, I thought it was one of those brutes coming, you know! I—I—I wasn't afraid, you know! I'm a brave chap, but——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I can see anything to cackle at!—I——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, chuck it! Look here, has it gone all right? Are we masters of the ship?"

"We are," said Linley laughing. "I don't know about you. You hadn't a hand in it, as you have just said yourself."

"Well, of course, I should have backed you up—in fact, I was just preparing to rush forth with a—a—a—a carving-knife to back you fellows up when—when——"

"Oh, draw it mild, Bunty!" said Bob Cherry, looking in.

"Oh, really, Cherry! I say, you fellows, are we really going ashore to-night?"

"Yes, I suppose so."

"Then we'd better have a solid meal. Fortunately, I'm not at all sea-sick. It's a good idea to lay a solid foundation, you know, and we may as well take some grub in our pockets, too."

And Billy Bunter set about making those important preparations for going ashore.

Meanwhile, the cook was on deck, and the juniors joined him there. Mr. Fillot gave the boys quick orders, punctuated by many fat chuckles.

A quantity of provisions, water, sails, and oars were put into the remaining boat, and then it was lowered. It towed along beside the Nancy. The juniors had lowered it very well under Mr. Fillot's directions. Then the prisoners were brought up from the cuddy and placed in the boat, lowered into it on ropes. They were still bound, and the remarks they made as they came out of their drunken stupor, and realised that they were being cast adrift, were lurid in the extreme, and deprived them of any sympathy the juniors might have felt for them.

Mr. Fillot watched them over the rail with undying merriment in his single eye.

"I guess you're all right, skipper," he said. "You've got a good boat, plenty of grub, and a larger crew than I have. You've only got to run due south five or six miles to get to the French coast. What more do you want?"

"You swab! You fat thief! You——"

"You're lucky to get off with your lives," said the cook cheerfully. "It would be safer for me to sink you, skipper, only I'm such a tender-hearted cuss."

The skipper seemed to realise it, too, and his flow of language ceased. He knew better than the Greyfriars lads what the cook might be like if the worst side of his nature were aroused.

Preece and the two Italians were lowered into the boat after the others. Then there remained the two dagoes shut up in the forecastle. They were still sleeping. Fillot went forward with his revolver to wake them.

He came back in a few minutes with the two half-awake, scared rascals driven before him like sheep.

Under the muzzle of the revolver they swung themselves down into the boat.

Then the rope was cast off.

The boat immediately dropped behind in the gloom.

Wharton glanced after it. The rascals were safe enough. It was a short run to the coast of France, and they could easily land in a couple of hours. After that, doubtless, they were in danger of arrest, but from that danger Wharton had not the slightest inclination to save them.

The cook chuckled as the boat dropped astern.

"I guess that's O. K.," he remarked.

Most of the schooner's canvas had been taken in, and the cook and the Greyfriars lads easily trimmed the sails to put the schooner before the wind.

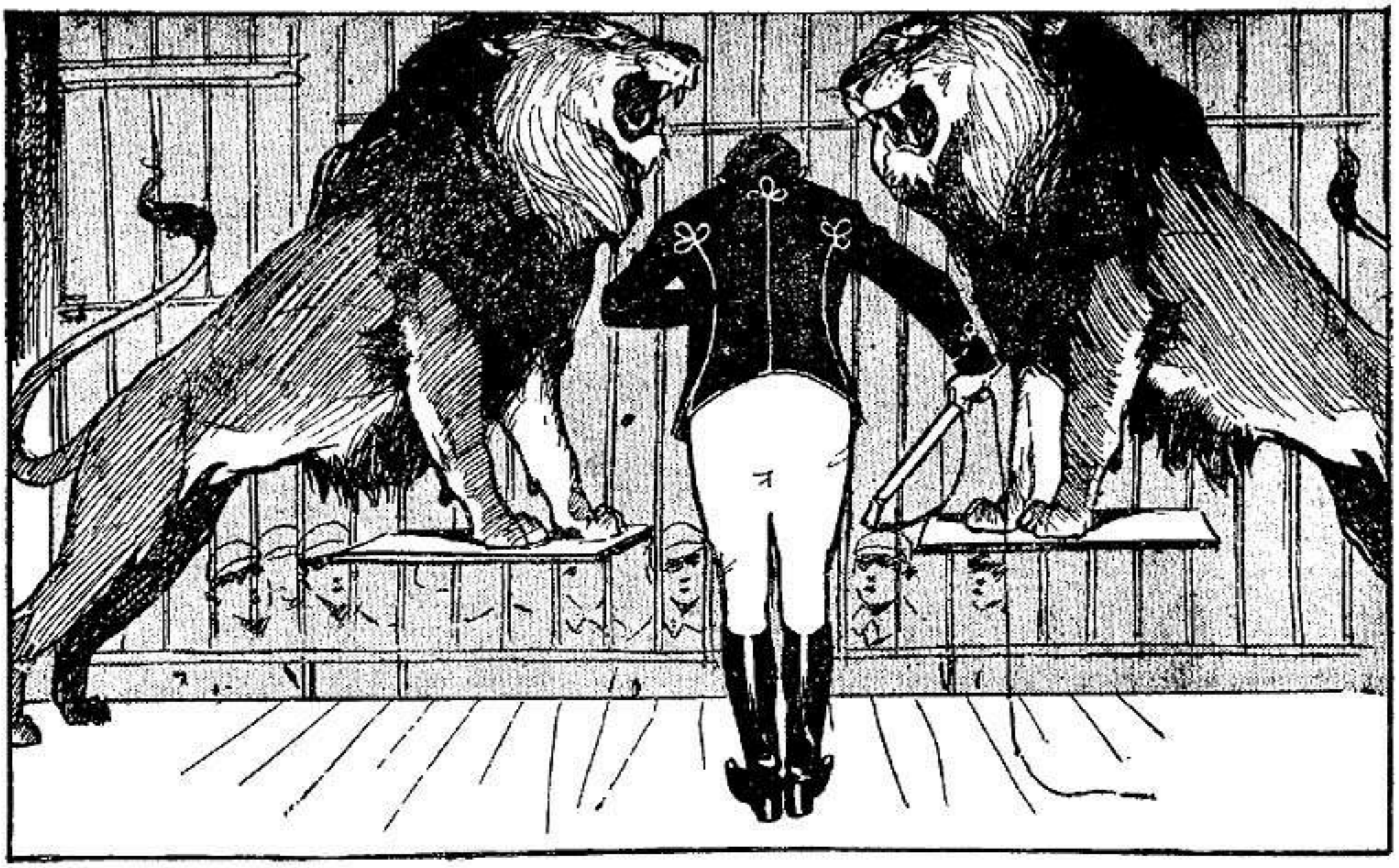
The breeze which had baffled Captain Jex in his attempts to get out into the Atlantic was favourable for the run back to the coast of Devonshire.

If rough weather had come on the vessel, with a crew of a one-eyed man and half a dozen boys, would have been in the greatest danger, but that was not to be feared. In a few hours they would be on English soil.

With the schooner speeding on its way to Old England, the juniors' hearts beat high.

Fillot disappeared below, and they knew that he was ransacking the desk and drawers in the cabin and concealing about his person all that he wished to take away with him. But with that, Wharton felt, they could not interfere. If the man was a thief it was not their business to turn upon the one who had saved them. Besides, as he was armed with a deadly weapon, and would certainly have used it if they had turned upon him, the enterprise would not have been a light one.

Bunter, meanwhile, was loading his pockets with eatables. For the rest of that night the juniors were too excited to sleep. The sun came up on the sea, and showed them the





cliffs of the Devon coast. Harry Wharton was at the wheel when the cook came on deck in the rising sun, and glanced at the shore.

The land looked lonely enough. There was a stretch of yellow sand at the foot of frowning cliffs, broken here and there by deep "coombs."

The cook grinned at the sight with much satisfaction.

"I guess that's all right," he said.

"We land here?" asked Wharton.

"I guess so."

"Right-ho!"

The cook went below again. He did not reappear for a quarter of an hour, and then he came up looking very red and dusty. Wharton knew that he had been down into the hold, and he wondered why.

He soon discovered. The schooner commenced to roll and pitch heavily in the sea, and presently there was a sound of gurgling water below.

As Wharton heard it he cast a startled glance at the cook.

"She's sinking!"

"I guess so."

"You have scuttled her!" gasped Mark Linley.

The cook nodded coolly.

"I guess she won't swim long. Keep her steady for the sand."

Wharton set his teeth. He understood that the cook wished to cover his tracks by sinking the schooner. With only a jib drawing, the vessel plunged on towards the sands. Her keel was already grating on the sand when she heeled over, and the juniors were thrown down.

"Jump!" shouted the cook —

And he sprang into the water and swam shoreward with powerful strokes. Billy Bunter gave a squeal of fear.

"I—I—I can't swim!"

"Quick, I'll help you!" exclaimed Wharton.

"But—but I——"

Wharton wasted no time in words. He dragged the fat junior into the water and supported him there. Bunter, too terrified to know what he was doing, kicked and struggled wildly.

"Keep still, you ass!"

"I guess I'll manage him!"

It was the cook. His strong grasp closed on Bunter, and at the glint of his eye the fat junior ceased to struggle.

The cook swam ashore with him as easily as if he had no burden. The juniors followed, and they dragged themselves ashore upon the sands. The cook dropped Bunter on the sand, and the fat junior lay there puffing and blowing like a grampus.

The cook shook the water from him like a dog.

"I'm off!" he said. "Remember the agreement—nothing said of me for twenty-four hours."

Harry Wharton nodded.

"We'll remember."

"Good-bye, then! I guess we sha'n't meet again."

And the one-eyed sea-cook disappeared among the rocks like a man who knew the way well. The juniors looked after him till he was out of sight.

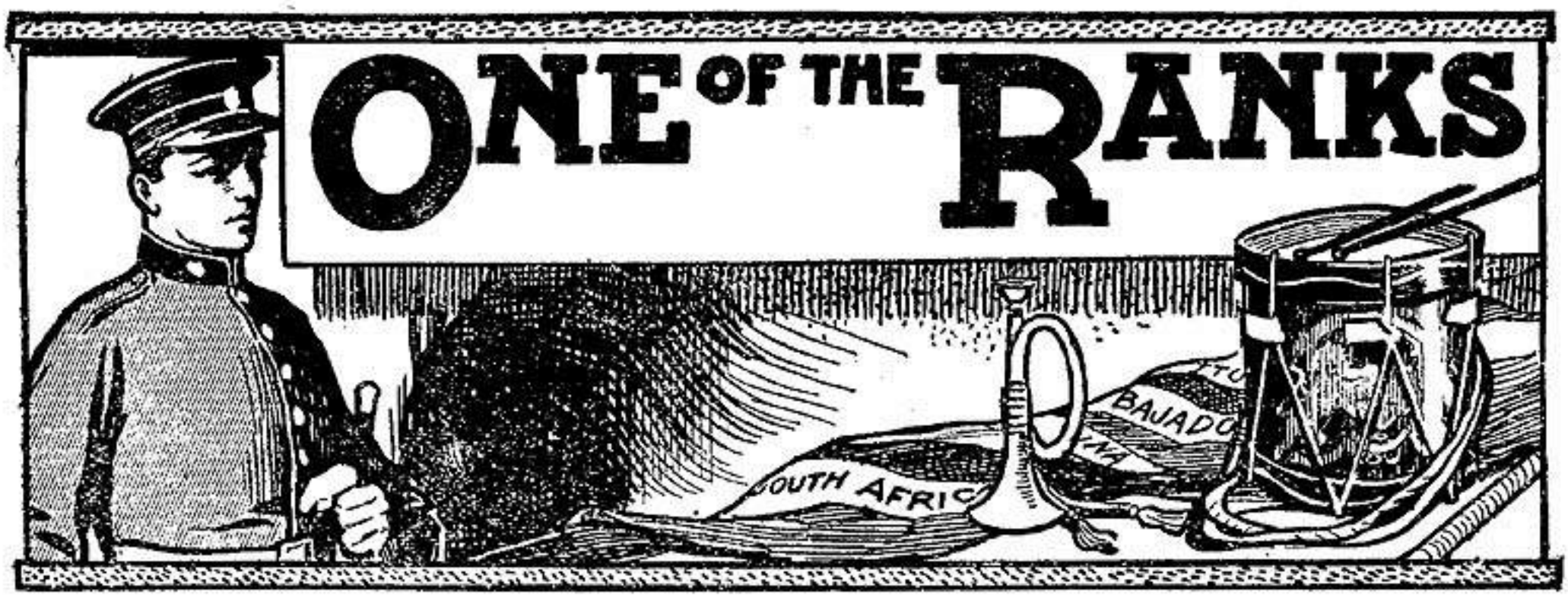
"Well," said Bob Cherry, "he was a rum beggar, and I'm afraid he was an awful rascal, but blessed if I don't like him, somehow!"

. . . . . .

Greyfriars received the juniors, when they returned, with wonder and relief. They had been given up for lost. The Head, in his relief at their safe return, was not too keen to inquire into the cause of the disaster, and there were no punishments meted out, but early morning sails outside the bay were strictly forbidden in future. The juniors were the heroes of the Remove, and they had to relate their adventures a score of times over, and they were even invited in a party to tea in Wingate's study, and the captain of Greyfriars and a select circle of Sixth-Formers listened to the story of their adventures afloat. The story was thrilling enough, even when told by Harry Wharton & Co., who kept closely to the facts; but when related by Billy Bunter it became weird and wonderful, and at every repetition it became more wonderful still, and, in fact, there was only one point upon which all Bunter's yarns agreed with one another, and that was in making himself the central figure and the hero of every exploit.

THE END.

*(Another long, complete tale of Harry Wharton and Co. next Tuesday, entitled: "The Greyfriars Visitors," by Frank Richards. Please order your copy of "The Magnet Library" in advance. Price One Halfpenny.)*




## A Splendid Tale of Life in the British Army.

### A BRIEF RESUMÉ OF THE EARLIER CHAPTERS.

**Ronald Chenys is forced to leave Sandhurst through the treachery of his step-brother, Ian, and enlists in the Wessex Regiment under the name of Chester. Unfortunately for Ronald, Ian joins the Wessex as a subaltern, and, assisted by Sergeant Bagot and Private Foxey Williams, does his best to further disgrace Ronald. In a sham fight with an Irish regiment, a recruit named Augustus Smythe loses his head and uses his bayonet, wounding one of the Irishmen, and this incident causes high feeling between the two regiments. Ronald is at a music-hall in the town one evening with some friends when the news comes that the Irishmen are on the rampage and looking for him, as they think that he is the culprit in the bayonet incident. Ronald is escorted out into the street by his three friends, prepared for trouble.**

**(Now go on with the story.)**

### Mr. Mordecai's Discovery.

It stung Ronald to the quick to leave the music-hall while the little affair with Pushoffsky remained unsettled. In vain he protested. Mouldy Mills and Hookey Walker, now perfect lions in valour, grabbed him by the neck and hurried him along the narrow, back passages of the theatre, while Tony lent his weight behind whenever Ronald offered fresh resistance.

"There's a back door somewhere to the place. It's in Chalk Lane; I've seed the gals and play-people driving away from it," said Mouldy. "If we get out there we can take our time."

"But, look here," said Ronald savagely, "I flatly refuse to go skulking out of back doors for anybody! If the Fermanaghs want me, I'll meet them fair and square, and tell them I am not their man."

"Yes, and while you were telling 'em, some wild bog-trotter would crack the top of your head in with a bed-leg or a barrack-poker. Rats, my lad! You leave this to Hookey and me. We ain't running away; we're only makin' what the tactician blokes 'ud call a strategic movement to the rear. You'll get fighting enough afore we reach the barrack-gate, if I ain't mistaken. Hallo! We've got lost among the scene-shiftin' department now, it seems to me. Ah, there's the door I'm looking for!"

"Then you go and leave me," said Ronald doggedly. "I'll stand my ground. I'll not run like this, so there's an end to it!"

Fortunately for Mouldy's plans, their presence behind the scenes was spotted by the distracted manager at this moment.

Furious at all the indignity he had suffered, and only anxious to see the back of the last redcoat before the rioting broke out in full fury, he rallied all the stage-hands to his aid and charged the four warriors in the rear.

"Kick 'em out! Outside with 'em!" yelled the little man; so carried away by excitement, and the confidence lent by overwhelming numbers, as to suit the action to the words himself.

With a running kick it was his design to lift Mouldy clean off his feet, hurtle him through the door, and land him in the street.

Hookey saw his old chum's danger just in time. Releasing his grip of Ronald, he caught the little man's leg as it flew out, and, with a deft jerk, deposited him on his back—a stumbling-block for the rest.

Then Tony, seizing a large pail of whitewash standing near, emptied it over the struggling mass, clapped the bucket on the head of the limelight man, who happened to be at the top, and, with a last effort, propelled Ronald into the street.

But for the yells of the scene-shifters, Chalk Lane was quiet as the grave. From the High Street, however, came the sounds of hooting and the angry cries of men at close grips.

At Woolchester Barracks the bugles were sounding shrilly the "Fall in!"

"'Ark to that!" said Mouldy, pricking his ears, as he led the way. "Now then, Chester, that's an order! Are you going to obey it, or are you going to run your silly head into trouble? Remember, that there's one man they're arter, and that's you. Any Wessex chap'll do for them to practise on meanwhile; but when they've got you they'll begin real biz, and 'Eaven knows when they'll stop! You're the one that stuck their chum in the arm."

"That's a lie, and you know it, Mouldy!" retorted Ronald hotly.

"Now, don't lose your hair, or waste time argifyin' over trifles, neither," answered Mouldy. "We know you didn't do it, but they don't. You haven't seen these Irish regiments when they run amok, as 'Ookey and me have. 'Airy, 'eathen babcons ain't in it, simply!"

"No, nor gorillas, neither!" assented Hookey. "They'll scrap and fight, an' fight and scrap, even when the picket's standing on their 'eads with their 'obnailed boots, coaxin' 'em to be quiet with the butts of their rifles. Ain't that so, Mouldy?"

"Yes, and more. Now, come you on, Chester, and no hank about it! If we hadn't got you with us, of course, 'Ookey and me would be stayin' and seeing it out; but we ain't going to let you get yourself murdered like a silly lamb, not if we can help it."

Ronald had more than half an idea that the boot was on the other leg, and that the two old soldiers, being peaceable souls in their moral senses, were longing to be within the snug shelter of the barrack-square.

Whatever Ronald's final decision might have been it mattered little, for as the quartette hastened along Chalk Lane they heard the clatter of ammunition boots approaching from a side alley.

Someone was running like the wind, and, by the whoops and cries, others were in close pursuit.

"Wait and see what this means," said Ronald, wrenching himself from Mouldy's grip and swinging round.

The words were scarcely out of his mouth, than a red tunic showed for an instant under the lamp, as the runner dashed out of the narrow passage.

"White facings! He's one of ours!" shouted Ronald; for his eye had detected the white cuffs and collar of their regiment. The Fermanaghs facings were green. "Wessex, this way!"

The fugitive, who had already turned down Chalk Lane in the opposite direction, now doubled like a hare at the friendly hail. The lead he had gained, however, was not sufficient to carry him clear of the alley-mouth before his pursuers burst upon him.

The fugitive was nipped against the wall, as a fox is nipped in a farmyard by a pack of hounds; but he broke free, and cleared a breathing space with vicious swings of his heavy-buckled belt.

The six Irishmen had their belts off, too. The buckles starred the brickwork round their enemy's head, but the man at bay wielded his with a master-hand, and ducked and dodged with the quickness of desperation.

A Fermanagh went down under a swiping cut, and a hoarse cry rose from his comrades.

In their mad thirst for double revenge, they did not notice the four warriors closing in on their rear.

Headed by Ronald, the Wessex reinforcements rushed down like a whirlwind, tumbling four of the Fermanagh six over on to the cobbles before they could rally to strike a blow.

The man they had rescued was George. He crouched against the wall, breathless and spent with his run and the exertion of the last struggle.

A thin stream of blood trickled from a buckle-cut on his forehead, and had been dabbled over his dirt-grimed face.

"Thank 'Eaven you turned up!" he gasped. "I'm about done. But don't stop 'ere, Chester. They're after you, and they know you're round 'ere somewhere. Hook it sharp, and leave us to 'old 'em back. Mind your eye, though. 'Ere come the brutes again! Ah, you would, would you?"

George, whirling his belt up, made a swinging cut at the first man who ran in on him. Ronald despised the use of any other weapon than his iron fists.

The Irishmen, having rallied out of distance, had charged furiously at the little phalanx of Wessexers. Mouldy, in stemming the rush, got a tap in his rotund bread-basket, which put him past caring about worldly matters for the next five minutes.

Hookey got a fistful of stars, and in staggering backwards on his heels, tripped over Mouldy, and sat on that warrior's head.

Tony fared better; but even then, strive as he would, he was cut off from Ronald and George, who were standing at bay against the wall.

The ex-hooligan was plainly done. The breath sobbed as he struck, and his blows were feeble and wide. Ronald had two men's work to do to enable them to keep their feet, and there was no fitter man in all his battalion for the job.

With straight left drives from the shoulder, which landed on jaw and throat like the blows of a pile-driver, he soon crushed the head and front of the attack, and Tony, having accounted for his man with a lucky one, the Fermanaghs drew off, cursing with strange oaths.

Dragging Mouldy on to his feet, and leaving Hookey to be hurried along like a blind man by Tony and George, the four made for the alley. Once in its narrow neck, Ronald felt sure of a breathing space.

Luck was against them, however. They had scarcely taken their stand beneath the lamp than they heard the patter of feet at the further end, and the hoarse cry of the enemy.

At the same instant one of the six who still hung upon their flank, suddenly rushed in to where Ronald was standing beneath the street lamp, and, peering into his face, darted away again with a yell.

"It's he, bhoys! It's the man we're afther—the murderin' spalpeen that stuck Micky O'Ferrol wid his baynit! This way, Fermanaghs! Whoo-oop! At him, bhoys! Afther the scut!"

The little knot of Wessexers were in a tight place, for they were now between two fires. Ronald saw this, and saw also that by his presence he was endangering perhaps the very lives of his comrades with him. But for him, the others might yet make good their escape; at any rate, they should have the chance offered them.

"Look here, Mouldy, Tony, and the rest of you," he said quickly. "This seems to be mainly my affair. I'm not going to let you be dragged into it if I can help it. You cut your way through this lot in Chalk Lane. You can do it easily enough. Leave me to look after myself. I shall be all right."

"Bless my bunged-up peepers!" snorted Hookey. "Hark at him, Mouldy! Did you ever hear the like of it?"

"Wants us to run and leave him?" gurgled Mouldy, still struggling for breath. "Wants us to leave 'im to be devoured 'oof and 'ide. I don't mind running along with any man, but if I do, you've got to come, too. If you don't, I stays where I am; and Hookey, too, and the rest of us. So no more argifyin'! Lead on if you're goin', for we'd best get out of 'ere!"

The old soldier was right. There was nothing to be gained by stopping where they were. What force threatened them in the rear they could not tell, but the six on their flank they had already beaten, and could beat again.



Seeing it was a waste of breath trying to persuade his comrades to leave him, Ronald gathered the handful for the dash, and headed a charge back into Chalk Lane.

As he anticipated, the enemy there did not wait to come to grips. They fell back to the left, leaving a path clear only to the High Street—the centre of the riot.

Without hesitation Ronald led the way in this direction, and the Fermanaghs behind, and their reinforcements from the alley closed in pursuit, yelling a "view halloo."

When two British regiments cherish a grievance against one another, and set out to square old scores, there is trouble in the land. The grudge may be a paltry one of recent date, or it may be as ancient as a hundred years—Tommy Atkins is not particular.

The bugles may bray till they crack, the military and civil police swoop down and decimate the opposing forces, the pickets, armed and unarmed, charge through and through them, but as long as Tommy has a belt to swing, a fist fit to punch with, or a head to aim at, while the madness is on him, he will go on till he drops.

There are certain regiments that have to be kept as carefully apart as flame from gunpowder. Some of the grievances are so old that they are forgotten; but the jealousy and bad blood continues from generation to generation.

Therefore, when the one is sent to the East, the other must be quartered in the West, and their courses must be laid so that they never meet, except on the battlefield, when private grudges are sunk in the presence of a common foe.

The row between the Fermanaghs and the Wessexers being of fresh brewing, was all the more hot and strong; and Ronald was the centre of it.

High Street was strewn with knots of struggling men, while here and there crouched the wounded in the gutter or against the doorways, recovering dazed senses or nursing their hurts. Here the Wessexers more than held their own; there the Irishmen had the upper hand, and were hammering home victory with a heavy hand.

But as soon as the shout went up that the man they were seeking had been brought to bay, the Fermanaghs drew off to join in the hunt, while the Wessex men rallied to Ronald's rescue.

Caught up between the two opposing forces, his little bodyguard was tossed about, scattered, flung together again, and swept finally against the front of a little beer-house bearing the sign of the Blue Boar.

A civilian who had ventured out into the street was entangled in the melee before he could skip off the pavement, and found himself pinned against a wall beneath the sheltering elbow of a tall youngster whose face he remembered, even in that breathless moment, seemed strangely familiar.

Buffeted, bewildered, utterly helpless, he could not help but admire the masterly coolness of this man in the midst of his enemies—the swift precision of his guards and blows.

That civilian was Mr. Mordecai, of Mordecai & Evans, the moneylenders, and the man who stood over him as he crouched in terror, was Ronald Chenys, the man who had once robbed him of a fat pigeon he had got fast fixed in his claws, and kicked him into the street.

Mr. Mordecai prided himself that he never forgot a face or a name; but if he was at fault for the moment on this occasion, the circumstances were rather trying for a man of peace.

It is scarcely the best moment for ransacking the cells of one's memory when fists are whizzing past one's ears in every direction, and belt-buckles are whizzing like splinters of shell.

Mr. Mordecai's hat was sent spinning by one of the men, and in reaching to pluck it from the trampling feet, somebody trod on his hand with a hobnailed boot, and bent and jagged the diamond ring he was wearing deep into the flesh.

Then somebody kicked him violently behind, and at last a friendly hand reached out and dragged him on his hands and knees up the step of the Blue Boar tavern, and across the sawdust floor.

At that instant, curiously enough, as he sat blinking like an owl in daylight, and sucking his damaged fingers, he remembered where he had seen the face of the man battling beneath the window.

The shock of the discovery deafened his ears for the moment to the words of the host of the beerhouse, and the sniggerings of the weazel-faced man in seedy civilian clothes who sat in a corner well away from all view of the street.

"You didn't ought to have ventured out when there was a shindy on like this," the publican was saying. "You bide here for a bit till the pickets come. Why they ain't here before now, bless me if I can tell. It's outragis to have these goings-on in a respectable place like Woolchester, durn me if it isn't. A pretty thing when peaceable folk can't

walk to their homes without being kicked about like sacks of shavings."

But Mr. Mordecai was thinking. Even as he sat where he had been dropped among the sawdust and the spittoons, his practical mind was running on business.

And bad business, too, for somebody—that is, if he, Mr. Mordecai, chose to make a fuss and show him up to the world as a fraud and a getter of gold under false pretences.

Mr. Mordecai, however, did not think much of the practice of showing evildoers up and handing them over to the hands of justice. It didn't pay.

It was much more profitable, in his wide experience, to lead them on into a well-baited trap, and then snap the spring on them and consider at his leisure how best he could pluck them and bleed them to his own advantage. Justice could wait for the skin and bones when there were no longer any pickings.

"Yes, quite so," said Mr. Mordecai, rising to his feet and walking shakily to the window. "I had a train to catch, but I will stay here now for a bit. There is the night mail through to London, and I can take that. Himmel, but you English are a queer people! You fight for nothing, and the smaller the quarrel, the harder you fight. Now this riot, for instance—what is it for? A scratch, they tell me; and, look, they will murder each other. That fellow there"—pointing to Ronald—"he fights like a demon. Who is he?"

"The bloke what done it," said the man with the weazel face drily.

It was none other than Foxey, who, availing himself of the privilege of an officer's servant, was taking an evening off in civilian rig. In this disguise he was safe from molestation by the Fermanaghs. There was, therefore, no earthly reason why he should join in the general melee, unless he wanted to, and he didn't want to. Things outside were too warm for Foxey's taste. In a little while matters would quieten down, and he could slink back to the barrack gate and swagger the rest of the way.

"He's the one what done the scratching, as you call it," he volunteered in further explanation, seeing the puzzled look on the moneylender's face.

"Indeed! And what is his name?" asked Mr. Mordecai, with a fresh interest in Ronald's prowess.

The pickets from Woolchester Barracks and Fort Kit were now advancing down the streets at the double, and the military and garrison police had returned to the charge with renewed energies. If their efforts failed, there would be armed pickets along shortly, with ball cartridge in their pouches.

"'Is name?" said Foxey, noting this sign of clearance in the storm with inward satisfaction. "'Is name's Chester."

"Chenys? Oh!" murmured the moneylender, as if he only echoed what the other had said.

Foxey spun round as if a bayonet had pricked his shoulder-blade. There was wonder and consternation in his face for any man to see.

"Chenys! 'Oo said Chenys?" he snarled, with astonishing heat, considering the trifling nature of the other's blunder. "Chester, I said—C-h-e-s—Chester—not Chenys. How did yer get that name inter your 'ead?"

"Don't ask me," laughed Mr. Mordecai. "There is a Chenys in the Wessex regiment, ain't there, though?"

"Yes. 'Ow did you know that?" demanded Foxey, with persistence out of all proportion to so trivial a matter.

"I once came across him," explained the moneylender, "that's all. So when you said Chenys, I thought it might be him."

"'Ang you! I didn't say Chenys, I tell you!" said Foxey, getting wild. "Mr. Chenys is an orficer."

"Oh, yes, of course he is! And he has a brother, I remember now!"

"Had a brother, you mean. He's dead—dead and buried—drownded," answered Foxey, anxious to make his statement as convincing as possible.

"Then the man outside is another brother," murmured Mr. Mordecai, with remarkable stupidity for so astute a man. Yet under their half-closed lids his black eyes were watching every change and twist of Foxey's sallow features.

"Curse you, you fool!" burst out Foxey, in quite a panic. "Don't I tell you the man outside is called Chester—Private Chester? D'yer think British orficers have got brothers in the ranks of their own battalion? Is it likely? You make me sick with your fat-'eaded, foreign notions! Get out!"

"Well, if it ain't Mr. Chenys' brother, it's very like him," persisted Mr. Mordecai, with a grin behind Foxey's back. "You're sure it ain't Chenys, not Chester?"

Foxey turned as if he was going to knock the moneylender into the grate; but, catching the last fleeting trace of the smile on Mr. Mordecai's face, he thought better of it, and returned to the window.

The High Street was clearing now as if by magic. From Chalk Lane and a few other turnings still came faint echoes of the strife; but the pickets were chivvying the rioters into corners and out of them, sorting the men of their own regiments, heading them off, and frog-marching those who still would not cry "Enough!"

Ronald had been marched off under friendly escort, and outside the Blue Boar comparative peace had settled down. A few angry shopkeepers were taking stock of dented shutters, damaged panels, and broken windows; but the coast was now clear for the peaceably inclined.

"I think I'll go now," said Mr. Mordecai. "Here, landlord, get yourself a drink and ask your friend to join you. Good-night!"

He threw down half-a-crown by Foxey's pewter-pot, and, putting on his crumpled hat, he stepped into the street and disappeared in the direction of the station. Foxey sent a brace of curses to speed him on his way.

"Who's 'e, and what's 'is game?" he demanded fiercely of the landlord.

"Lor', how should I know? Never seed him afore, as I knows. Seemed to be sort of pulling your leg, to my way of thinkin'."

"Pulling my leg! Pulling my leg!" repeated Foxey, as if there was some shred of satisfaction in that thought. "No, boil 'im! There's more be'ind it than that. 'E knows somethink."

"Knows something—what? What d'yer mean? What's there to know?" demanded the landlord, looking curious.

"Oh, curse you! Don't you get actin' the thick'ead, too!" snarled Foxey, realising his danger. "I've talked to enough fools for one night. There's for the last drink, and good-night to yer!"

"Oh, all right—all right!" expostulated the landlord, in an injured voice, as Foxey bounced out of the bar into the street.

"I'd better tell the boss about this," said Foxey, as he hastened towards the barracks. "That cove was nosing after somethink, I'll take my davy. If he finds out and blows the gaff, my little gold mine'll be up the spout in two shakes of a moke's rudder."

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## Ian Gets Desperate.

"Then you know 'im? I see you does. Out with it. Who was he?"

Foxey, as has been said, was not very particular how he addressed his officer and master when he "got him on the quiet," as he described it to himself.

Ian sat huddled in the armchair in his room, as nerveless and crushed as a man might look who has just been pulled from under a mound of fallen sand.

It was late. The barrack clock had chimed midnight as Ian left the mess, to find Foxey awaiting him at his quarters.

"You think—he knows?" he gasped, looking at Foxey again; for his eyes had been staring at the whitening embers in the grate.

"I know 'e knows," answered Foxey; "what I'm askin' you is, do you know 'im?"

"Yes," answered Ian, with a groan; "he's a man I've done business with."

"A blinkin' moneylender?" pressed Foxey; and Ian nodded.

"The cove you raised money off of when you thought your brother was dead?"

Again Ian nodded and groaned.

"An' you've been borrowin' some more on the same terms, though you know your brother is alive?"

"How do you know that?" cried Ian, springing forward in his chair.

"I didn't know it. I was asking you, and now you've told me. Oh, yes, you have!" said Foxey, as Ian made as if to deny it. "That's what that chap was in Woolchester for. He knew you, too; he mentioned your name. Knew you 'ad a brother; had met him before, he said."

"And what did you say?"

"That he was dead, of course. And Chester was standin' with his back to the bar-parlour window at the time. But I could see the cove wasn't having any, though he was cursed cunning over it. He rumbled it right enough. I said——"

"You seem to have said a hanged sight too much!" burst out Ian, in a white heat. "If you had kept that clacking tongue of yours between your teeth this would never have happened!"

"Oh, wouldn't it!" sneered Foxey. "You know, 'cause you was there, wasn't you?"

Ian had nothing to offer to that, and slunk back into his chair again.

"I'm tryin' to 'elp you," said Foxey. And Ian laughed a harsh, unbelieving laugh.

"Oh, yes, I am! And you'll need help as far as I can see, and need it bad."

Ian shrugged his shoulders.

"You've seen this cove to-night," Foxey persisted, "and you've been raising more money. You own to that. The first time was all right. You thought your brother was dead, and your prospects of inheriting the old man's money absolutely Sir Garnet. Except as it turned out, it was a fair deal. This time, though, you've put your neck in it. You pitched the same yarn—and I'm a Dutchman if you didn't!—said nothink about the dear departed being alive and kickin' arter all, and touched the foreign chap with the big nose and the greasy 'air for another bucketful on the same terms. That's obtainin' money under false pretences, ain't it?"

"Look here, you've turned mighty sanctimonious all of a sudden, haven't you? Why have I had to borrow this money, I'd like to know!" cried Ian desperately. "Isn't it because of blackmailers and vampires like you and Slaney ——"

"Sh! Now, it ain't no use saying hard things, and calling honest men of business nasty names," said Foxey. "In any case, it's late, and the walls in these 'ere rabbit-'utches are wonnerful thin. Remember that, and remember, too, that Mr. Fairly's room is just acrost the passage. He ain't a friend of yourn exactly, if I'm not mistaken."

Ian ground his teeth in helpless rage. To think that he, an officer holding his Majesty's commission, should have to submit tamely to such contemptuous insolence from a common private.

"You haven't got the money, of course?" said Foxey, having given his master time to simmer down.

"No such luck," answered Ian, gulping down the last of his wrath. Something in Foxey's tone told him that he was sincerely anxious to help him, if even only for his own ends. And, as the man had said, if his schemes went wrong now, he would need help, no matter whence it came.

"It's promised, though," he added. "Mordecai said it would be all right. I could take his word for that."

"That was before 'e 'ad seen your brother. The question is what'll 'e do now? Blow on you, and bankrupt you—and you know what that means in the Service—or put 'is finger on 'is nose, and lend you more? 'E might do that."

"Why—what do you mean?"

"It 'ud pay 'im," said Foxey, with a cunning leer. "'E'd 'ave you properly under his thumb, then."

"Let him! What do I care! I'm under thumbs enough now, as it is. One more or less wouldn't much matter," laughed Ian weakly. "Give me the cash, and I'll take the risk!"

"It's that brother of yours that crops up and spoils everything," said Foxey, half to himself.

Ian looked at him with startled eyes. How often had he thought that, and more besides.

"If——" began Foxey again, after a long silence, and paused to look at Ian.

"If what, you fool?" said Ian sharply, his nerves all on the quiver.

"Only 'if'—that's all," said Foxey, turning to the fire again. "I was just thinking."

"Confound you and your riddles!" said Ian, rising. "You are driving at something. Out with it! You mean—if only my brother were out of the way?"

"That's it," said Foxey. "If only that had been him what they dragged out of the river that morning, you'd be all right now."

"Is that all?" laughed Ian harshly. "I thought you were going to say something more."

"More? How?" asked the other innocently.

"That if he were only put out of the way now—dead! Anything! Heavens, what am I saying?"

The wretched youngster dropped into his chair again, and covered his face with his hands.

"Yes; what have you been saying? You may well ask. But still, you're quite right from your way of looking at it. If any little thing was to 'appen to Private Chester, you'd be in clover agin."

Again there was a long silence.

The hands fell gradually from Ian's face. The shame that had been there had faded. The dark, handsome eyes blazed again with the fires of hate, and the thin lips were compressed and bloodless.

"Yes; if any little thing should happen," he echoed, and looked meaningly at Foxey.

"You wasn't at the music-'all to-night, of course," said Foxey, apparently ignoring the words. "There was a man there—a great, 'ulking brute of a wrestler, called Pushoffsky. A Pole, I think he called hisself."

"Yes?" said Ian, still keeping his eyes on the other's face.

"He challenged any chap in the audience to take 'im on for ten quid," continued Foxey. "Two old mugs of No. 4 section—Mills and Walker—got pushed on by somebody for a lark, and there was a scrap. At that, Chester shoves his oar in."

"Yes?" said Ian again.

"The end of it was they wrestled. It was a clipping good bout, and some'ow or other—it wasn't by strength—your brother won. The Pole took the lickin' like a foreigner would. He yelled 'Foul!' and started to set about Chester and chuck him through the roof. Chester waited for 'im, cool as ice, and fetched him one—two! Just like that. The last was on the jaw, and the Pole went out."

"Yes?" said Ian, for a third time.

"When he came to, your brother had been lugged off. Then, you oughter have heard the furious Pole curse and swear. He was going to do this to him, an' that, and I don't know what else, when he catched him. It fairly made your blood run cold to 'ear 'im."

"And what has all this got to do with me?" asked Ian, when it was plain that Foxey had nothing more to tell.

"Well, I was only just thinking," said Foxey, still looking at the dying fire, "if that foreign cove does all he says he's going to do to your brother, there won't be much cause for you to worry no more."

"Do you think you could get hold of him for me?" said Ian. "I'd like to meet that man. Not, of course, with any notion of——"

"No, of course not!" agreed Foxey, chipping in.

The barrack clock tolled the hour of one.

"I'll see what I can do," said Foxey, and turned to go.



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## Ronald Goes Up, and Bagot Goes Down—A Soldier Dog.

The little affair between the Fermanaghs and the Wessex was not to be settled in a single encounter, nor yet in two. Such quarrels between regiments often take years to adjust; and for many a day when Fermanagh meets Wessex, and the topic of that luckless bayonet-thrust of Gussie's crops up, as it will be bound to do, it will be a case of a word and a blow.

By a little determined handling on the part of their respective colonels, however, the two battalions were given small opportunity for flying at each other's throats; and when, in a little while, the Irish regiment got its orders for Egypt, the citizens of Woolchester heaved a deep sigh of relief.

Meantime, things moved apace. In spite of all Ronald could do to help him, Gussie was sentenced to 168 hours cells; not so much for losing his head in the excitement of sham fighting, but, as Colonel Conger said, mainly for standing silent while an innocent man was saddled with the blame.

Gussie was the first to admit the justice of the punishment. He confessed bravely that he had behaved like a coward, and went to his prison like a man.

This trial was scarcely over before the court-martial of Sergeant Bagot commenced, and, to Ronald's disgust, he, again, had to appear in the role of witness.

Here there was no temptation to him to let the prisoner down as lightly as he could. Bagot had behaved like a brute to the young soldier ever since he had joined. Moreover, there was that cowardly attack on Rough, which had left the game little terrier still in a crippled state.

Ronald could easily forgive all the cruel injustice to himself, but wanton brutality to a dumb animal was a thing he could not even forget. Still, his evidence betrayed not one spice of venom, and when he realised all that conviction meant to the prisoner, he guarded his tongue in a way that made all who heard him marvel at his mercifulness.

If Sergeant Bagot were found guilty, he would be reduced to the ranks for a certainty, and this meant that he would finish twenty-one years' arduous service with the meagre pension of a common private. Instead of a possible 3s. 3d. a day for the rest of his life, he would drop to 1s. 1d. No light penalty this for even so despicable a sin as Bagot's.

Ronald had scarcely returned to barracks after the trial had closed, than his colour-sergeant sent for him.

"Well, Chester," said Jones, as Ronald presented himself, "you remember some months ago, when you first joined, that I spoke to you about promotion, and urged you to go for a stripe?"

"I do, colour-sergeant," answered Ronald.

"Well, I can't say, young fellow," continued the Flag, with a grim twinkle in his eye, "that you have taken my advice to heart exactly. I think you have been in about as much hot water as it is possible for a young soldier to have got into, in your short term of service."

"I am afraid that is so," said Ronald humbly; "but it was not all of my own brewing."

"True enough," agreed the Flag. "If it had been otherwise, I should not have sent for you at this moment. The fact is, there is a vacancy for a lance-stripe in No. 4 section, and it has been suggested, I won't say by whom, that you should put in for it."

"I!" exclaimed Ronald, in honest amazement. "It's about the very last thing I could have expected. Of course, I——"

The word of consent was at his lips, when he halted.

"I'm a very young soldier for promotion, don't you think, colour-sergeant?" he said modestly, after a pause. "There must be plenty other older and better men for the job. I could easily wait. Besides, I don't know that I am very popular all round—in fact, I've an idea that it's the other way about."

"Now, look here, Chester," retorted the Flag, but still in the same kindly voice, for he liked this big, simple-hearted lad of his, "don't be an ass! Popularity has nothing to do with it. A non-com. is made to command first. If he can do so and still remain popular with his comrades under him, well and good. If not, popularity does not matter two straws. Remember that.

"As for your being a very young soldier, you ought to be the prouder now that a lance stripe is put within your reach. Take my advice and put in for it. Say the word, and I'll take you before the captain to-morrow afternoon."

"If you mean it, colour-sergeant, yes," said Ronald.

"Of course I mean it, my lad!" said the Flag heartily. "Good luck to you with your choice! You'll find it hard at first, just a bit. There will be some chaff that you can afford to shut your ears to, and other that you must drop on swiftly with a heavy hand. You've a soft heart, I know; but duty's duty, and don't flinch. When you do jump, jump with both feet. There's no running with the hare and hunting with the hounds in the non-commissioned ranks of the British Army. Remember that always. And now you can go."

Ronald went with a light heart.

On his way to see how Rough was getting on, Ronald passed Sergeant Bagot returning from the court-martial. The sentence had been reserved until the following morning.

The strain of the trial and the prospect of degradation and consequent loss of two-thirds of his pension had worked ravages in the man's face and figure.

His once florid cheeks were grey and hollow, and he walked already like a broken, beaten man.

But the green eyes lit up at the sight of Ronald, who had been the cause of his undoing. There was a tigerish glint beneath the scowling brows, and Bagot's jaws were set like the teeth of a steel spring-trap.

If ever a glance could kill, Ronald would have been struck down in his tracks. The murderous hate in Bagot's eyes quite startled Ronald. It was so undisguised, so open in its challenge, that he could only think that the man was beside himself with desperation, and cared for nothing.

Bagot paused in his stride as if he would have intercepted his enemy; but Ronald ignored him and pressed past.

"To-morrow, my friend," he said to himself. "Perhaps then we two shall be on an equal footing, if only for a few hours. Then if you want trouble, you may have it; but, remember, it will be of your own making."

During Rough's convalescence the guard-room had been turned into a temporary canine hospital for the terrier's benefit. In fact, he had almost come to be looked upon by each succeeding commander of the guard as an item of the inventory of the Government property over which he had charge.

"One fender, one set of fire-irons, one coal-bucket, and Rough."

That was the way in which it became customary to conclude the list during the process of checking. And Rough, if he did not actually appear on the inventory of furniture and utensils of the guard report, was nevertheless regarded as the most important item there.

The coal-bucket might be spirited away, and the "one table and two forms" vanish into thin air without comment, but if anything happened to the four-footed patient, serious trouble might be looked for.

Rough, of course, was an interloper. He had no right in the guard-room at all, or in the barracks, for the matter of that. But somehow all the persons whose business it was to see him ejected into the street always failed to spot his black nose peering out of the blanket by the fireside, while some bolder spirits, like Lieutenant Bob, actually went so far as to condone his offence by patting his shaggy, bristly head.

The sergeant-cook had a soft corner in his smoke-toughened heart for dogs, so Rough was allowed his ration of everything and anything that was going, just as if he were a soldier and a man.

When Bugler Midge, too, constructed a blue hospital shirt for the patient out of the seat of an ancient pair of dungaree overalls, to wear during his convalescence, there was no longer doubt in anybody's mind but that Rough was fully enlisted on the "strength."

He already had a tunic with little brass buttons, a miniature Brodrick cap, a row of medals made out of card counters, a gun, and a canteen clay pipe embossed with the crest of the regiment.

Arrayed in these, he would turn out with the guard when the battalion marched out or in, and, squatting up on his hind legs, "present arms" as steadily as any colonel could desire.

That, of course, was in the days before Sergeant Bagot's boot had made such a hash of his poor little anatomy. Still, he was progressing favourably, thanks to the care of the poultice-wallahs, as the ambulance-men are dubbed.

How near he was to complete recovery Rough himself did not realise till that afternoon.

He was crouching lazily outside the guard-room door, enjoying a watery blink of winter sunshine, yet thinking that he was all the better for the little red tunic he was wearing, when the wheels of a carriage echoed more and more distinctly, as it rattled up the street leading past the barrack gate.

As a soldier-dog, Rough paid no attention. It was a civilian turn-out, as he could tell at the first cock of his ear. If it had been a military waggon, or artillery, or anything like that, it would have come under his department, of course.

So he left it to the butcher's mongrel, who happened to be on the other side of the road at the time, to inquire into matters.

The butcher's mongrel's father, Rough always said, was a half-bred Newfoundland, and his mother a cross between a dachshund and a retriever; but this, of course, was only to make the butcher's mongrel wild. As a matter of fact, the mongrel had only about five different kinds of breed mixed up in him, and it irritated him to have Rough pulling his leg in this fashion.

Some day, he always promised himself, he would go for the cocky little beast in the red coat, and teach him a lesson. It was because he had heard of Rough's illness that he had taken to haunting the barrack gate of late.

He had it in his ugly head that if he was ever to take the job of trouncing his impudence in hand, he ought to do it now, for he would never have such a golden opportunity again.

So he had been sitting on the opposite pavement for the best part of that afternoon, trying to make up his mind to start a fight, and squirming under Rough's undisguised sneers.

That was just it. If only he could have got at Rough before the latter was ready for him, it would have been easy enough. But Rough was ready—very much so.

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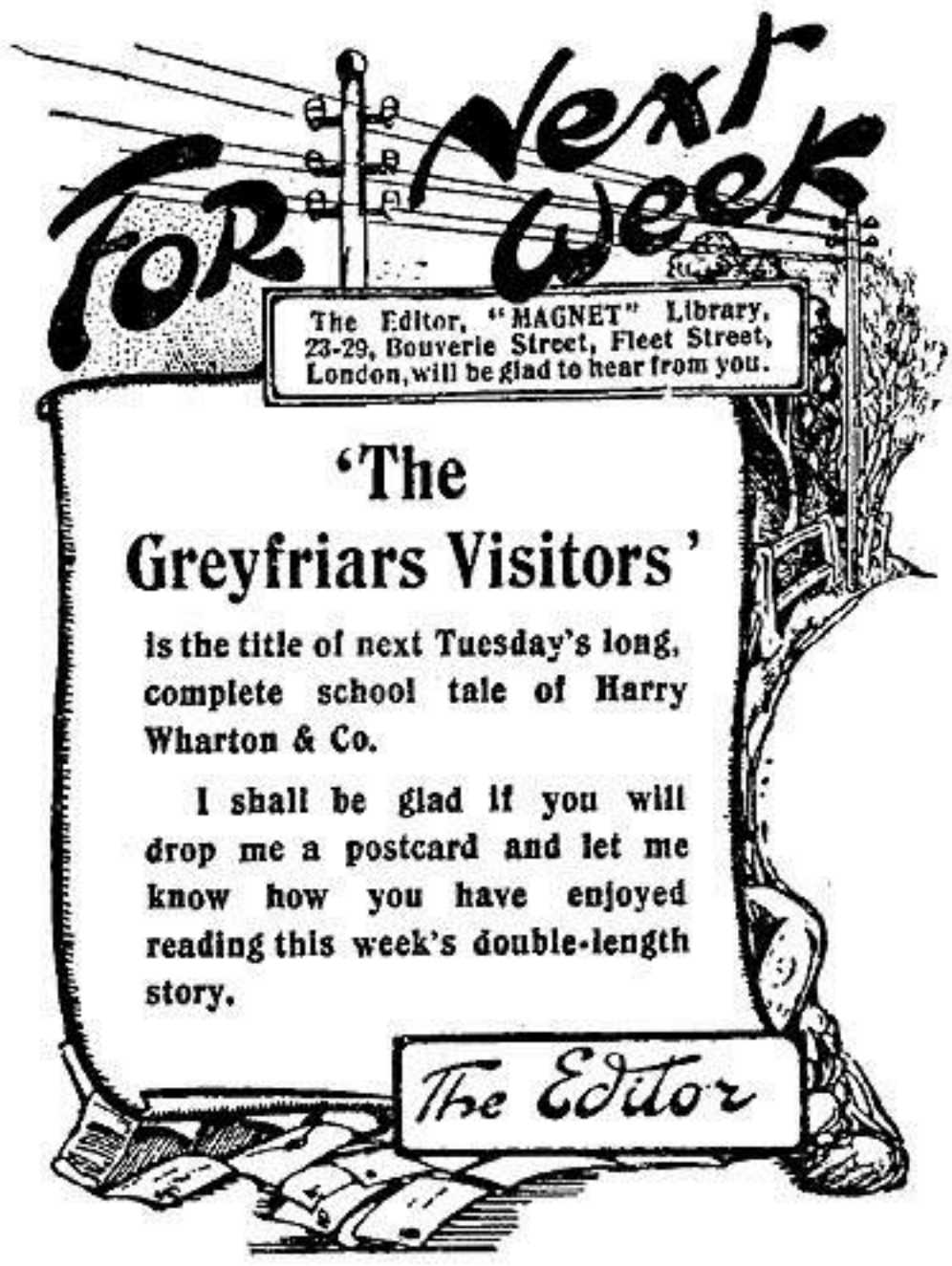


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