

FREE GIFTS AND A BUMPER PROGRAMME OF SCHOOL, SPORTING AND DETECTIVE STORIES INSIDE!

The MAGNET

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THE
KIDNAPPED
SCHOOLBOY!



Come Into The Office, Boys!

Your Editor is always pleased to hear from his readers. Write to him: Editor of the "Magnet," The Amalgamated Press, Ltd., Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, E.C.4. A stamped addressed envelope will ensure a reply.



YOU'LL be reading this little chat of mine a day or so before the festive 25th, so let me again take the opportunity of passing along—from my staff and myself—all the very best of good wishes for a merry Xmas and a happy and prosperous New Year!

Are you making out a list of New Year Resolutions? I've already made one—and you can rely on me to keep it! That resolution is to continue the high standard in schoolboy fiction which has been set by the MAGNET, and to make it even better—if that is possible! Let me suggest a resolution for you to make! Resolve to make sure of your weekly copy of the MAGNET by placing an order NOW with your newsagent. You'll never regret it!

You'll find six more first-rate free gift picture stamps in this issue, chums—every one of them a "winner." There are two useful tips in "Self-Defence." The first shows you how to "slip" an attacker's left lead, and counter by bracing up both legs and delivering an upward punch to the jaw. The second illustrates how to hold a "prisoner" so that there is no fear of him escaping. Hold him as shown, and to stop him getting free, merely bear down on your own right forearm. Be careful, though, or you'll break his elbow!

Long-distance travel in Australia has been made extremely comfortable nowadays, and the third of this week's picture stamps illustrates one of the locomotives in use between Melbourne, the capital of New South Wales, and Adelaide, the capital of South Australia. Australian railways run through some of the finest scenery in the world, and, as you can see, their locos are bang up to the mark!

Have a look at the Hawker Fury plane. This is a single-seater interceptor fighter, with an all-metal fuselage. She is fitted with a Rolls-Royce "Kestrel" engine, and she can attain a speed of over 220 miles per hour!

How would you like to serve on an Arctic Ice-Breaker? Most of the finest vessels of this class were built in Britain, and they are used to keep open the harbours of the White Sea, and similar places which are frozen over in the winter. These ice-breakers are tremendously strong and powerful—they have to be, or they would get frozen in. Imagine the shocks and jolts the crew get when the vessel barges into the ice, or else lifts her bows and crushes them down on top of it!

Everybody knows the wire-haired terrier, for it is one of the most popular breeds in this country. Dogs of this type make real "pals," for they are intensely faithful, learn tricks easily, and seem to be a veritable bundle of energy. If you're looking for a pet, try a wire-haired terrier!



GET ready for a smile! C. E. Cooper, of 507, Blackburn Road, West End, Oswaldtwistle, Lancs, is smiling already, because by this time he will have received the dandy Sheffield steel penknife which I have sent along to him for the following riddle:



"Now, children," said the new teacher, who thought she would begin by imparting a little general knowledge, "it is the law of gravity that keeps us on this earth."

"But, miss," objected Willie, who was brighter than he looked, "how did we stick on before the law was passed?"



I've got plenty more penknives and pocket wallets ready to hand out to you fellows—so get busy with your jokes and Greyfriars limericks, and see if you can win one!

I have had several letters this week asking for advice on the choice of careers. Several of these readers ask a question which I have often answered in these pages. They want to know

HOW TO JOIN THE ARMY.

If they will apply at any post office, they can obtain, free of charge, a booklet which will give them all the information they require, and will also tell them the rates of pay, etc. For any specialist branch, such as the Royal Horse Artillery (for which Fred Standen asks) a boy should write direct to the War Office, Whitehall, S.W.1. It is possible that he may possess special knowledge which will fit him for a better position. If, for instance, he has a knowledge of horses, he is more likely to be accepted, and to gain quicker promotion.

J. J. K., of Belfast, fancies the Royal Tank Corps, and, as he has had eight years college education, he should have no difficulty in getting into one of the higher paid branches. But here again it depends on whether his specialist education will fit in with what is required. A certain amount of technical knowledge is essential for the better-paid posts. He can obtain information from the War Office, or from the Headquarters of the R.T.C., at Wool, Dorset.

"Old Reader," of Edinburgh, like many other boys, wants

TO GO ON THE STAGE,

and asks me how to set about it. If there are any resident companies in Edinburgh, he might write to the manager and ask for an interview, but it is useless to write to a touring company, for their artistes are usually engaged in London. By far the best way to embrace a stage career is to study for some time at one of the principal schools of acting. As most of them are in London, I am afraid my Edinburgh reader will have to go there in

order to study, although he might find a suitable school in Edinburgh. If he decides to study in London, he should write to the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art, 62, Gower Street, London, W.C.1, and ask for a prospectus.

HERE is a question which should interest those of you who like to "study the stars." K. J., of Brightlingsea, wants to know which is

THE NEAREST PLANET TO THE EARTH.

The distances of planets vary according to their orbits, but the planet which comes (at times) nearest to the earth, is Eros. At its nearest, however, it is fourteen million miles away from us! The nearest heavenly body, of course, is the moon, which is just 239,000 miles away from us—but the moon is a satellite of the earth, not an independent planet. She, more or less, belongs to us, as it were!

Of the larger and better known planets, Venus is the nearest to us—it is less than twenty-six million miles away! Mars comes next at a distance of 48,400,000 miles! The sun itself is 92,900,000 miles away from the earth! Neptune holds the record for being the farthest large planet from the sun (in our solar system). She is 2,793 millions of miles away from the sun! The above distances are mean distances, and, of course, vary with the orbits of the planets.

Can you answer this one? John Tarrant, of Monkwearmouth, asks,

ARE THERE ANY DRAGONS ALIVE TO-DAY?

John doesn't believe there are—but he's wrong! On the island of Komodo, in the Dutch East Indies, dragons exist and attain a length of fourteen feet! They have got jaws that can bite through metal. Although they are powerful enough to kill a man, they are quite harmless, and never molest human beings. They live on wild pigs, rabbits, and water fowl.

A splendid prize of a topping leather pocket wallet goes this week to Miss V. Harris, 14, Hook Road, Epsom, Surrey, in return for the following Greyfriars limerick:

A Greyfriars fellow named Kipps,
On magic will give you some tips.
He'll produce a cat
From out of a hat.

Said Fishy: "It's sure the snake's hips!"

There's a real first-rate "New Year" story for you next week in:

"DICK THE PENMAN!" By Frank Richards.

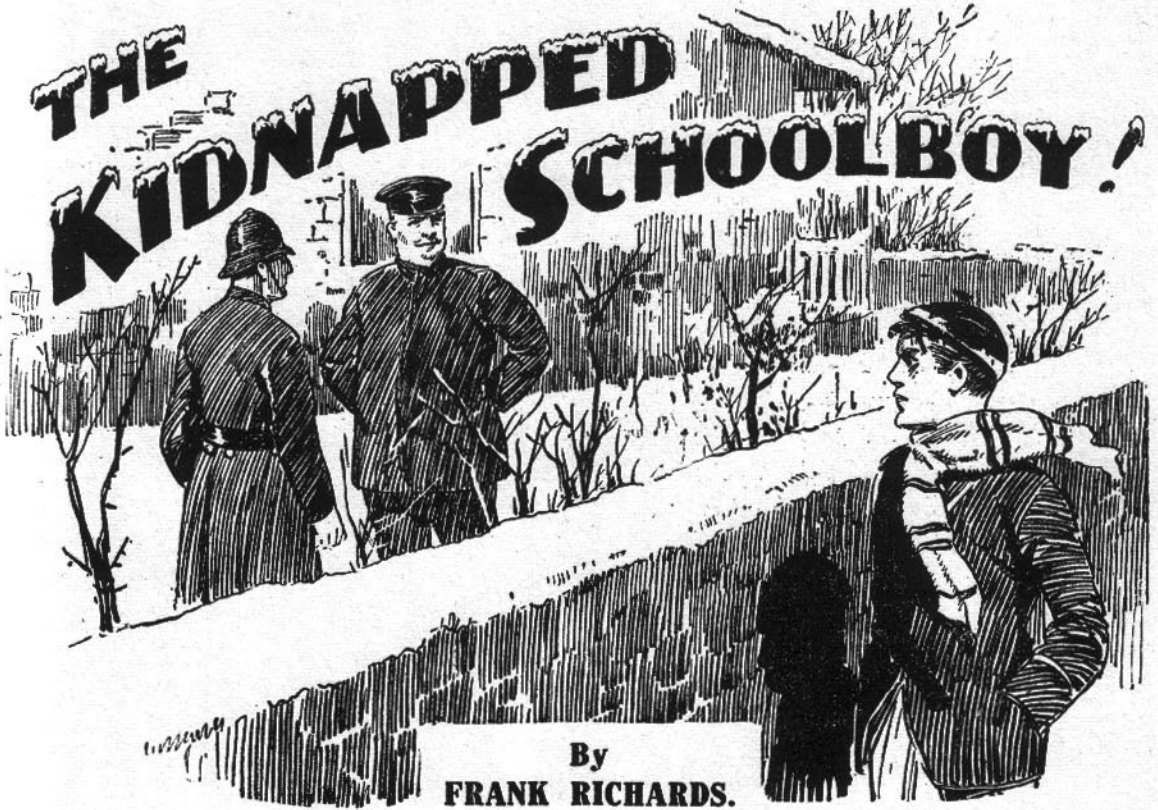
In our new series, featuring Jim Valentine, the boy from the underworld, the chums of Greyfriars are booked for some very exciting—and humorous—times! Next week's yarn will keep you both thrilled and amused.

There are thrills galore, too, in next week's chapters of "Nobby, the Shooting Star!" Hedley Scott's magnificent new football and detective story. And if you don't get a good laugh out of the next issue of the "Greyfriars Herald"—well, you ought to see a doctor.

There'll be our usual shorter features and, of course, six more FREE picture stamps for your album. Au revoir till next week, then.

YOUR EDITOR.

THE KIDNAPPED SCHOOLBOY!



By
FRANK RICHARDS.

THE FIRST CHAPTER. In the Dead of Night!

HARRY WHARTON awakened suddenly. It was long past midnight, and Wharton Lodge was dark and silent, buried in slumber.

The winter wind, whistling round the old red chimney-pots, was the only sound that broke the silence of the night—save for a faint, murmuring rumble, the snore of Billy Bunter in the adjoining room.

But something had awakened the Greyfriars junior—and he wondered sleepily what it was.

He sat up in bed, staring round into the darkness of the room—darkness broken only by the glimmering square of the window, against which snow-flakes drifted on the wind.

A sudden bright beam of light shot through the blackness, the gleam of an electric-torch.

It shone on the schoolboy's face, starting and dazzling him, and he winked and blinked in the sudden light.

"What the thump—" ejaculated Harry Wharton.

At the same moment a cold draught of air struck him, and he was aware that the casement, which overlooked a balcony with steps to the garden, was open. It had been shut when he turned in. Possibly it was the forcing of the casement from without that had awakened him.

Wharton's heart thumped.

He made a movement to spring from the bed. Someone was in the room, invisible behind the gleam of the torch.

"Silence!" A cold, hard, metallic voice came in low tones from the darkness behind the gleaming torch. "If he utters a cry, Barney, knock him senseless."

"You bet, guv'nor!" came a husky mutter.

Wharton's lips had opened for a shout. But he did not utter it. He was at the mercy of the midnight intruders.

"Who are you?" His voice was low. "What do you want?"

"You!" was the brief reply.

The torch was held steadily in the hand of the unseen man, the light on Wharton's startled face. Another man loomed shadowy beside the junior's bed. Wharton heard the cold, metallic voice again.

"This is the right one—the old colonel's nephew—the one we want. Keep silent, boy! You will not be

Greyfriars rings to the chatter of merry voices and the tread of many feet—it's First Day of Term! But one member of the famous old school, at least, never expected to be present at "first roll-call"; and he was the "Kidnapped Schoolboy!"

harmed if you do not try to give an alarm. A crack from the lead pipe will keep you silent enough, if you prefer it that way. Get out of bed!"

Silently, Harry Wharton stepped from the bed.

He was lost in amazement.

A strong hand grasped him. He felt a cloth passed over his mouth, and fastened there, to gag him. It was too late for him to shout an alarm now. He could not speak, but he could hear. The metallic voice spoke again.

"Dress yourself—quick!"

Lost in astonishment, the Greyfriars junior groped for his clothes, and dressed.

What it all meant was a mystery to him.

Evidently the intruders were not burglars; it was Wharton they wanted, though why they wanted him he could not begin to guess.

Faintly, through the wall, came the rumbling snore of Billy Bunter in the next room. Farther along the passage were the rooms of his friends—Bob Cherry, Frank Nugent, Johnny Bull, Hurree Singh. They were asleep, little dreaming of what was happening to their chum. Wharton dressed quickly. It was futile to attempt resistance, with a burly ruffian looming over him, a length of lead-piping in his hand.

When he was dressed, his wrists were seized and drawn together, and a cord knotted round them.

"Bring him along, Barney!"

"Easy done, guv'nor!"

The light was shut off.

In the darkness the schoolboy, with his hands bound, was led towards the window. In a pair of muscular arms, he was lifted through the open casement to the balcony outside.

It was carpeted with snow, in which his feet sank deeply. Flakes were falling fast. The December night was dark; but now that he was in the open air Wharton could glimpse his assailants. He could see two figures, thickly muffled against the cold—one of them a thickset, stocky man, with a red moustache, the other a smaller, thinner man, with a beak of a nose. And then the junior knew into whose hands he had fallen. It was not the first time that he had seen Nosey Clark and Barney Hayes.

But he could not speak.

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The red-moustached man swung him over the parapet of the balcony, and lowered him as far as his arms could reach. Then he dropped him, and Wharton plunged deep into the thick snow banked against the wall below. He stood there helpless, almost buried in snow. With a thud, the red-moustached man dropped beside him, and there was another thud in the snow as the beaky-nosed man dropped.

Not a sound came from the silent house. There had been no alarm. Midnight intrusion in a sleeping building was no new experience to Nosey Clark and Barney; and they had done their work silently, cautiously, successfully. Still, Wharton, though he knew now who the nocturnal visitors were, could not imagine what they wanted with him.

"Walk!" muttered the metallic voice.

A hand grasped his bound arms, on either side. He had no choice about going; and he walked between the two crooks, through the wind and darkness and falling flakes.

Silently, swiftly, they led him away from the house and down the drive towards the gates. It seemed like a dream, or, rather, a nightmare, to the junior as he went. What did they want? Where were they taking him? Without a word they tramped on, the junior between them. They turned from the drive before reaching the gates, and came to the wall that bordered the country road. Nosey Clark clambered lightly over the wall, and the red-moustached man swung the school-boy up in his powerful arms. Wharton was dropped over the wall into the snow on the other side.

A few moments more, and he was again led away, with a grasp on either arm. They crossed the road into a narrow lane that ran up into the snowy woodland on the other side. In the dimness, Wharton made out the shape of a car. The man with the beaky nose opened the door, and he was hustled in, the beaky man following him.

Barney dropped into the driver's seat. The engine purred. The car showed no lights as it swung out into the road. It glided away through the snow and darkness. Not till it was a quarter of a mile from Wharton Lodge did the driver switch on the lights.

Harry Wharton sat beside the man with the vulture's beak, while the car ate up the miles. Wharton Lodge was left far behind. Where were they taking him—and why? He could not guess. Not a word came from the man seated beside him. Mile after mile glided under the wheels, as the car throbbed on through the wild winter's night.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Missing!

"HALLO, hallo, hallo!"

Bang!

"Wake up, old bean!"

Thump!

The bright, sharp sunlight of the December morning gleamed on the snowy roofs and window-sills and frosted panes of Wharton Lodge. The Co. were up, and wondering why Harry Wharton did not appear. Bob Cherry banged and thumped at his door, and roared through the keyhole in a voice resembling that of the Bull of Bashan of old.

But there came no answer from within.

"Wharton's sleeping jolly soundly," said Frank Nugent, in surprise.

"The soundfulness is terrific," remarked Hurree Janset Ram Singh.

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"Can't be sleeping through that hullabaloo!" grunted Johnny Bull. "Rip Van Winkle couldn't! You'll wake up even Bunter at that rate, Bob!"

Billy Bunter had not awakened yet. His deep and steady snore rumbled from his room. Bob Cherry turned the door-handle, and rattled it loudly as the door did not open.

"It's locked," he said. "Wharton never locks his door, I believe. What is he sporting his oak for, I wonder?"

Bang! Bang! Thump!

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" roared Bob. "Wake up, Wharton! Just on time for brekker! Anything up? Can't you sing out?"

But only the echo of Bob's powerful voice replied. His stentorian tones, mingled with the banging and thumping, had, however, awakened the Owl of the Remove in the next room at last. Billy Bunter's snore ceased, and a peevish voice was heard to squeak.

"I say, you fellows, stop that row! Can't you let a fellow sleep?"

"Look here, something must be up with Wharton," said Bob. "He can't have gone down early and locked the door after him and taken the key. He must be there. Let's cut round to the window."

Bob tramped back to his own room, followed by Nugent and Johnny Bull and the dusky nabob. His window opened on the same balcony as Wharton's, and it was easy to reach one window from the other. Bob clambered out of the casement, and his friends followed him, uneasy and a little alarmed. Obviously, Wharton could not have slept through that terrific din at his door; but why he did not answer was a puzzle.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! His window's open!" said Bob, as he reached it. "He may have gone down this way if he went early." Bob put his head in.

"Wharton, are you there, old top?" No answer came, and he could see that the bed was empty. He jumped into the room and stared round him.

"Not here," he said. "He's dressed; his clobber's gone. I suppose he went out early by way of the balcony. It's rather queer."

"He didn't," said Frank Nugent quietly.

"How do you know, fathead?" "Because he would have left tracks in the snow here. It's been snowing in the night, but it had left off before I got up. There's no footprints here."

"The queerfulness is terrific!" remarked Hurree Janset Ram Singh. He pointed to the door of the room. "The esteemed key is inside. The absurd Wharton could not have gone out that way."

"Well, this beats Banagher!" said Bob Cherry, in astonishment. "He didn't go out by the door, and it looks as if he never went out by the window! Couldn't have gone up the chimney, I suppose?"

The juniors stared round the deserted room. Harry Wharton was gone; and, as he must have left by the window, it was clear that he must have gone before it had left off snowing—that is, during the night. The snow had completely covered up all signs of his footsteps before it had ceased.

Bob Cherry unlocked the door. In a state of great astonishment the four juniors went out of the room. Why Harry Wharton should have left the house alone before dawn was a mystery to them. Bob opened the door of Bunter's room and looked in. The fat junior of Greyfriars had settled down to sleep again, and his unmelodious snore once more woke the echoes.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Bunter!" roared Bob.

Snore!

"Bunter!" Shake! Shake! Shake!

"Wake up, fatty!"

"Oooogh! Beast!" Bunter opened his eyes. "Can't you let a fellow sleep? Look here, Wharton, I shan't jolly well stay here till the end of the vac if you can't keep that howling idiot Cherry quiet—see?"

"Wharton isn't here, fathead!" said Bob. "He seems to have gone out in the night. Did you see or hear anything of him?"

"How could I when I was fast asleep?" snorted Bunter. "Don't be a silly ass! Lemme alone!"

"Something must have happened, you fat chump!"

"Well, I can't help it, can I?" asked Bunter peevishly. "Let a fellow sleep, you silly ass! What are you getting up so early for?"

"It's eight o'clock, fathead!"

"You utter beast!" said Bunter, in tones of deep indignation. "Waking a fellow up at eight in the morning! You—you—you rotter! Lemme alone!"

"But Wharton—"

"Blow Wharton!" roared Bunter.

"Let a fellow sleep!"

Bob Cherry picked up Bunter's pillow, and it swept through the air and smote the fat junior. Once, twice, thrice it smote him, and three successive yells proceeded from Billy Bunter. Having thus apprised the fat Owl of what he thought of him, Bob Cherry tramped out of the room, leaving the Owl of the Remove spluttering. It was several minutes before William George Bunter was able to settle down peacefully to sleep again.

The Co. went downstairs, puzzled and uneasy. Aunt Amy was not down yet, but Colonel Wharton was taking an early walk on the terrace when the juniors came out of the house. Wharton's uncle greeted them cheerily.

"Harry not down yet?" asked the colonel.

"He seems to have gone out, sir," answered Bob. "He's not in his room, and his door was locked on the inside. Can't make it out."

Colonel Wharton stared at him.

"That's very odd!" he said. "No doubt he will come in to breakfast, though."

But when the gong sounded for breakfast Harry Wharton had not appeared. The colonel was puzzled, but did not seem alarmed; but the juniors had a feeling of lingering uneasiness. Billy Bunter did not come down; Bunter's breakfast was not due for another hour yet. The fat junior took things easily in holiday-time.

Breakfast was over when the telephone-bell was heard to ring. Wells, the butler, came with his silent tread to announce that a Mr. Clark desired to speak to the colonel on the phone.

Bob Cherry & Co. exchanged glances as Colonel Wharton went to the telephone cabinet in the hall.

"Clark!" murmured Bob. "That's the name of that nosey sportsman who was after that kid Valentine!"

Frank Nugent caught his breath.

"He can't have anything to do with Harry being gone!"

"Blessed if I see how he could!" said Bob. "But where the dickens is Wharton all this time?"

Colonel Wharton took the receiver, little guessing what he was to hear over the wires.

"Hallo!" he said in his deep voice. A sharp, penetrating, metallic voice came back.

"Is that Colonel Wharton?"

"Speaking!"



Wharton awakened suddenly, and made a movement to spring from his bed. Then his lips opened for a shout. "Silence!" A cold, hard, metallic voice came in low tones from the darkness behind the gleaming torch. "If he utters a cry, Barney, knock him senseless!" "You bet, guv'nor!" came a husky mutter.

"Very good! Have you missed your nephew, sir?"

"My nephew! What do you mean? He is not in the house at the moment. What—"

"You need not be alarmed about him, sir. He is quite safe."

"I have no doubt that he is safe!" rapped the colonel. "What do you mean, Mr. Clark—if that is your name?"

"I mean that your nephew is, at the present moment, fifty miles away from his home, Colonel Wharton!"

"What?" roared the colonel.

"And that he will not return to you so long as my ward, Jim Valentine, remains sheltered in your establishment!"

"Are you mad, sir? I know nothing of your ward, Jim Valentine!" roared the colonel. "Is this a jest, sir—an impudent jest, or what?"

"You will find that it is not, sir!" The metallic voice came sharp and clear. "Last week I called on you concerning my ward, Jim Valentine, who ran away from home. He was taken in and sheltered by your nephew and his friends. I have no doubt that this was done without your knowledge. Nevertheless, I am assured that the boy is still there."

"Nonsense!"

"Your nephew has been taken as a hostage!" said Mr. Clark coolly. "Send the boy Valentine back to me, and your nephew will be immediately released. Until I see my ward again, you will not see your nephew! Do I make myself clear?"

"You scoundrel!"

"Good-morning, sir!"

Mr. Clark rang off.

Colonel Wharton, the receiver in his hand, his bronzed face purple with wrath, stood staring at the telephone, the most astonished man in the county of Surrey.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Unexpected!

"SAY, bo'!"

Fisher T. Fish, of the Greyfriars Remove, called out that greeting through his transatlantic nose.

Greyfriars School in vacation time was deserted and rather dismal. All the fellows were away, with the single, solitary exception of Fisher Tarleton Fish. Fishy's home was in the great city of New York—or Noo Yark, as he called it in his own language. For which reason Fisher T. Fish spent most of his holidays at the school. Fishy did not like it. His own company, in his own opinion, was the best going. But it did not suffice; for Fishy, above all things, loved the sound of his own voice, and talking to himself was neither grateful nor comforting.

During the weary days while the fellows were away, and there was nobody to listen to Fishy's nasal tones, Fishy would seek out Gosling, the porter, in his lodge, or Mrs. Kebble, the housekeeper, in her room, or even Mr. Mumble, the gardener, and bestow on them the delights of his conversation. They did not seem to like it much, but that could not be helped. Fishy had to talk or burst. Gosling sometimes slammed his door when he saw Fishy

coming. Mrs. Kebble would heave a tired sigh. Mr. Mumble would reply in monosyllables. Fishy's conversation, being all about himself and the wonderful country from which he came, was not really entertaining. But it was a case, as the song says, of a victim having to be found, and the lone and lorn Fishy could not afford to consider the feelings of the victims.

It was a windfall, or rather a god-send, to Fisher T. Fish, when a fellow arrived at Greyfriars days before the new term was due to begin. Fisher T. Fish was not of a genial or affectionate nature; but he welcomed the stranger like a man and a brother. The fellow's name was Jim Valentine, and Fishy gathered that he was going to be a new boy in the Remove, only the matter was not settled yet. Who he was, and where he came from, Fishy did not know, and Valentine did not tell him. Fishy was curious and inquisitive; but the stranger did not satisfy his curious inquisitiveness. He was reserved and even taciturn; and when they talked, Fishy put in ninety-nine per cent of the conversation. Still, that Fishy was more than willing to do.

Mr. Quelch, the master of the Remove, had sent Valentine there. Fishy knew that. Mr. Quelch had stayed a few days, after Christmas, at Wharton Lodge, in Surrey, and Fishy had an idea that he had met Valentine there, or thereabouts. Mr. Quelch had returned to Greyfriars, and Fishy noted that he treated Valentine with very great kindness and consideration. But whether Valentine was to become a Greyfriars man or not, was, it seemed, THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,238.

left over to be settled when Dr. Locke, the headmaster, should return.

Lonely as Greyfriars was, with everybody away, Jim Valentine seemed to like the school. Whenever Fishy saw him, his face was cheery and contented. Since Mr. Quelch had come back, he sometimes gave the boy instruction, in his study, and set him tasks which he worked at very carefully, in Study No. 1 in the Remove—which belonged to Wharton and Nugent in term time.

Valentine seemed a cheery, good-tempered sort of fellow; but he did not seem to enjoy Fishy's society a whole lot. Still, he was always civil, and Fishy, longing for human companionship, haunted him almost like a lean transatlantic ghost. Now, having spotted him sauntering in the quad, under the leafless old elms, Fisher T. Fish bore down on him, determined that he should not escape. Conversation was bottled up in Fisher T. Fish, like a river's waters behind a dam, and he longed and yearned and pined to pour it forth on somebody, no matter whom. Fishy's talk, when he could find a listener, was like the little brook that went on for ever.

Jim Valentine was strolling, with his hands in the pockets of his coat, a thoughtful shade on his handsome face, his dark, hazel eyes fixed on the ground. He seemed to be thinking; but that cut no ice with Fisher T. Fish. Fishy wanted to talk, and he was going to talk. Valentine glanced up as the American junior came along with his jerky steps, and seemed disposed to walk away; but he good-naturedly held on, and allowed the lonely Fishy to join him.

"Say, bo'! Cold, what?" said Fisher T. Fish. "Colder than this in Noo Yark, though. Another week before the guys come back! Pierce, ain't it?"

Jim Valentine smiled. He had a very pleasant smile, that lighted his handsome face like a sunbeam.

"I find it all right here," he answered.

"You seem to get on with Quelch!" grunted Fisher T. Fish. "Say, is the old galoot a relation of yours?"

"No!"

"But he sent you here," said Fishy. "Where do your people live?"

"I haven't any people."

"Now, I've got lots and lots," said Fishy, who always, according to his own account at least, had more of everything than anybody else ever had. "I'll say there's heaps and heaps of Fishes, in Noo Yark."

"Quite an aquarium!" remarked Valentine.

"Eh? What? And we're connected with the Shovelsteins and the Guggenguggers," added Fisher T. Fish impressively. "Ever heard of them?"

"Never."

"Where was you raised?" said Fisher T. Fish pityingly. "But, I say, if you haven't any people, I guess you're well-fixed for dust, what?"

"Eh?"

"You've got the durocks," said Fishy. "The what?"

"The rocks—the spondulics—the dough!" explained Fisher T. Fish. "I guess you're well-heeled, on your looks."

"Oh, you mean I'm well-off!" said Valentine. "No, I'm not well-off. I've got nothing."

"Waal, I swow!" said Fisher T. Fish. Poverty was no crime; though Cecil Reginald Temple of the Fourth, had been heard to say that, though it was no crime it was jolly bad form. But in the transatlantic eyes of Fisher T. Fish, a fellow who had "nothing" was a

fellow not to be touched with a barge-pole.

Money was the beginning and the ending of all things to Fisher T. Fish, and a fellow who had no money was beneath any sort of consideration.

So deep was Fishy's disgust at this information that he was strongly tempted to leave this guy Valentine severely to himself.

But Valentine was the only fellow at Greyfriars School, at present, and Fishy had to wag his chin or perish. So he overcame his natural disgust and contempt for a fellow who had nothing, and rattled on.

"You haven't put me wise yet where you come from, bo'."

"And I'm not going to," answered Valentine coolly.

"Been at school before?"

"Yes."

"Where?"

"Guess! You're rather fond of guessing."

"Aw! Can it?" said Fisher T. Fish. "Say, are you coming out? I'll show you some of the sights. What?"

"Oh, all right!" said Valentine.

They walked down to the gates together. Old Gosling was in the doorway of his lodge, looking out into the sunshine of the winter afternoon. At the sight of Fisher T. Fish he stepped in and shut the door.

But Fishy did not heed; he had a victim, and had no use for Gosling. The two strolled out into the road together, and took the path to the cliffs.

There was the sea to be seen, and as an occupation it was cheap. Fishy was rather uneasy lest Valentine should suggest going to the pictures at Courtfield. A fellow had to pay for admission to the pictures, and Fishy did not like paying for anything. But Jim Valentine did not want to go to the pictures. Several times, in the days he had spent at the deserted school, he had walked along the cliffs to the fishing village of Pegg, past the deserted bungalows that, in the summer, were occupied by seaside visitors, and echoed to the gramophone and the wireless; but which, in the winter, were locked up, dark and deserted.

Valentine's early life had been spent in London, under conditions which Fisher T. Fish would never have guessed, reckoned, or calculated. It was a sheer joy to him to walk on the cliffs, in the keen salt air, and to see and hear the billows thundering in from the North Sea. That keen, frosty afternoon, he was quite pleased to walk by the sounding sea, though probably he would have preferred to dispense with the fascinating company of Fisher T. Fish.

Fishy's tongue wagged incessantly, and Valentine answered a word every now and then, rather at random. But Fisher did not mind. He wanted to do the talking, and an occasional "yes" or "what" sufficed him in the way of replies.

Valentine's thoughts were far away

from Fishy's incessant cackle. Greyfriars School, so dismal and dreary to Fishy in vacation time, was a haven of refuge to the boy with so strange a secret. It spelt safety from Nosey Clark and the gang; an end to the old life that seemed like a nightmare when he thought of it—which was as little as he could.

Not a single thought had he dreamed of giving to himself, or his own advantage, on that wild night when he had found Mr. Quelch lost and wandering in the Surrey woodland, and had guided him to safety. But his generous kindness to a stranger had brought an unexpected reward.

If Mr. Quelch could arrange it with the headmaster, he was to be admitted to Greyfriars as a new boy when the term began—and he longed to know. In the meantime, he was safe from Nosey Clark—sheltered from the crooks who had made use of his uncanny skill with the pen—and "Dick the Penman" had ceased to exist. If only he could remain at Greyfriars—a schoolboy among other schoolboys—the past throng behind him for ever!

"I'll say them guys must be fond of cold weather." A remark from Fisher T. Fish brought him back to his surroundings as the American junior halted, and stared at a bungalow that lay back from the cliff road. "Jumping snakes! First time I've heard of one of them bungs being taken in the winter!"

Jim Valentine glanced carelessly at the building indicated by the Yankee schoolboy.

It was one of the many holiday bungalows that dotted the road over the cliffs. It had been deserted, like the rest, when he had passed it in a walk a few days before. Now it seemed to be occupied. Smoke ascended from the chimney, and floated away on the wind from the North Sea. A saloon car stood on the snowy, weedy, unkept drive from the cranky wooden gate.

"Cheap, I reckon," remarked Fisher T. Fish thoughtfully.

"Eh?"

"I'll say any guy who wanted one of these bungs in the winter, would get it cheap," explained Fishy. "Couldn't have any other reason for locating hyer, I guess. They got a car, though."

Fisher T. Fish took a true transatlantic interest in everybody else's business. Certainly it was very unusual for one of the holiday bungalows to be taken in the winter, and Fishy was curious about the occupants. Instead of continuing on his way, he stood by the fence, staring at the car outside the house door.

"Oh, come on!" said Valentine.

"Carry me home to die!" ejaculated Fisher T. Fish. "I'll say that guy was around when noses was handed out—just a few!"

Valentine started, and stared in the same direction. For an instant he stood spellbound as his eyes fell on the man who was coming out of the bungalow to the car.

It was a man he knew—a thin, slight man, with a hard acid face, keen, black eyes, and a prominent nose, curved like a vulture's beak. Jim Valentine's heart stood still, and seemed to miss a beat. Nosey Clark, the crook here—hardly a couple of miles from Greyfriars School! What in the name of misery was Nosey doing here?

For one dreadful moment it seemed to Jim that his enemies had found him—that Nosey's presence here meant that the crooks had found out that he was at Greyfriars School.

A shiver ran through him, and his face paled.

CONSTRUCTIONAL TOYS!

There are new thrills awaiting the boy who is mechanically-minded this year—for Meccano Ltd. have lately added a new series to their Constructional Toy Outfits. Last year they added a series of Aeroplane Constructor Outfits by means of which boys are able to build splendid models of many different types of aeroplanes. Recently there was added a series of Motor-Car Constructor Outfits with which most realistic models of "sports" cars can be made. Meccano Outfits can be bought at any large toy shop.

But he realised in an instant that it could only be chance. Nosey & Co., for some crooked reason of their own, had taken that lonely bungalow on the cliffs; but it could have had nothing to do with Jim Valentine. Had they guessed or discovered that he was at Greyfriars School, it was there that they would have come.

Nosey Clark, stepping out towards the waiting car, paused to speak a word to a man in the doorway—a man with a red moustache. But for that pause he might have sighted the two faces by the fence on the road.

But it was only for a moment that he had the chance. Jim Valentine grabbed Fisher T. Fish by the arm and dragged him away.

"Come!" he hissed.

"Say, what's bitin' you?" ejaculated Fisher T. Fish in amazement. "Them guys ain't hoodlums, I guess! What you scared of?"

"Quick, you fool!"

"Jumping Moses! Oh, great snakes!" gasped Fisher T. Fish as his companion dragged him away so forcibly that he slipped in the snow and fell. "Look hyer—"

"Quick!" panted Valentine.

All his good-tempered civility had vanished. His face was white, his eyes gleaming, his teeth set, his grasp on the American junior like iron, hard and savage. Fisher T. Fish rolled in the snow and scrambled up somehow as his companion dragged him on without a halt.

"Say, you!" gasped Fishy. "What the thunder—oh, wake snakes! I guess you're plumb loco! Yaroo!"

Valentine was running, and Fisher T. Fish had to run, too. He ran, panting and gasping, amazed. There was a sound of an engine behind, of a car grinding on the snow, rutted road. Nosey Clark had left the bungalow, and was driving down the road towards Friar-dale—the same direction that Valentine had taken in his haste to get back to the refuge of Greyfriars.

The boy stopped, panting hard. The car was coming the same way—it would pass them on the road—and he knew the keenness of those black, glinting eyes. He dragged Fisher T. Fish from the road, behind a snow-bank at the roadside, and crouched down. The astounded American junior was dragged down by his side.

"Waal, I swear!" gasped Fisher T. Fish. "What in the name of Hanner—"

"Be silent!"

"What?" gasped Fishy. "What—" To his amazement and alarm Valentine's hand closed over his mouth and cut his cry short. In amazement and terror Fisher T. Fish stared at him with starting, bulging eyes.

"Silence!" hissed Valentine. "Silence, you fool! If that man sees us—Silence, dolt!"

In sheer stupefaction Fisher T. Fish was silent. The car came grinding down the road. It passed within six or seven feet of the bank of snow; but the snow hid the two crouching figures from the eyes of the man who drove. Nosey Clark drove on, little dreaming that he had passed so close to the boy who had escaped his clutches.

The grinding of the car died away in the distance.

Jim Valentine, white as chalk, panting for breath, rose to his feet at last. He stared after the car. It was disappearing in the far distance towards Friar-dale. He drew a sobbing breath of relief. He had released Fisher T. Fish, and seemed to have forgotten his existence.

Fishy gurgled for breath, and glared ferociously at him. He shook a bony set of knuckles under Valentine's nose, and thus forced the strange lad to remember that he existed.

"Say, you geck!" roared Fisher T. Fish. "What's this stunt, hay? You want me to wade in and make potato-scrappings of you, say?"

Fisher Tarleton Fish was wrathful, which, in the circumstances, was not really surprising.

Valentine stared after the car till it disappeared. Then he looked back towards the bungalow on the cliff road. Only the slanting slate roof, and the column of smoke from the chimney, could be seen. He was safe—safe from discovery by the enemy, who had turned up so utterly unexpectedly in that corner of the coast of Kent.

Why were they there? What did their presence mean? It had nothing to do with himself—it could not have. But why were they there, so dangerously near to his refuge, which he had deemed so safely far from the gang?

"Say, you boob!" yelled Fishy. "Say, you got a tongue in your cabeza? You want to let on what you mean by this game, see, before I make potato-scrappings of you—see?"

And as the boy did not heed his brandished bony fist the enraged Fishy tapped him on the nose with it.

Remove looked worried and troubled. Billy Bunter, on the other hand, was feeling rather merry and bright. Breakfast—an ample breakfast—in bed, and a little nap afterwards made Bunter feel that life was worth living. He came down in quite a cheerful mood, to find the other fellows looking anything but cheerful.

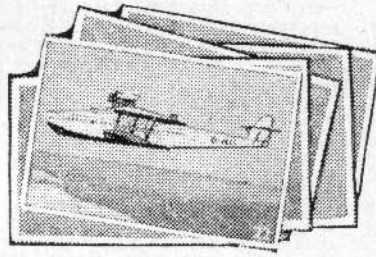
"I say, you fellows, what's up?" demanded Bunter. "Where's Wharton?"

"Nobody knows," growled Bob Cherry. It was some time since Colonel Wharton had received that startling telephone message. It had taken him utterly by surprise, and he could scarcely believe that Mr. Compton Clark had stated the facts. That his nephew had been spirited away from his home during the night was a startling piece of information. If it was true, the aid of the police had to be called in. But the colonel hesitated to take that step till he was sure of his ground. The Co. had gone out to look for their chum—or, at least, for traces of him—but the falling snow had covered up all signs, and it was only clear that Wharton must have gone before the snow ceased to fall, which was before dawn. They had come back worried and uneasy, the colonel being still out of doors. They were discussing the strange affair when the fat Owl of the Remove joined them.

Next week's **MAGNET** will contain six more **FREE** Picture Stamps!

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"Oh!" gasped Valentine. "You fat-head! Chuck it!"

He jumped back.

Fisher T. Fish followed him up with both bony fists brandished. He was breathless and dishevelled, smothered with snow, shaken and dizzy. And he was wildly wrathful, and wanted vengeance. He hit out as he followed Valentine up, and his bony knuckles caught the boy on the jaw.

What happened next was like a thunderclap to Fisher T. Fish. What seemed like the kick of a mule lifted his bony chin, and he found himself distributed in the road, on his back, staring at the steely sky. It was a full minute before Fishy sat up, clapping his chin and gurgling. He blinked round dizzily for Valentine. That youth was vanishing over the cliffs, going at a trot.

"Waal, I swear!" gasped Fisher T. Fish.

And he picked himself up and limped away to the school, still clapping his bony chin.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER. Where is Harry Wharton?

"I SAY, you fellows!" Billy Bunter blinked at the group of juniors standing by the log fire in the hall at Wharton Lodge. The chums of the Greyfriars

Amazing as it was, they had little doubt that Mr. Clark had told the truth on the telephone, and that Harry Wharton was in his hands—where, there was no means of guessing, but assuredly at a safe distance from his home. Doubtless the gang had planned this blow carefully in advance, and had prepared some secure hiding-place for the kidnapped schoolboy, far from any possible search by his friends.

"Well, what's happened, then?" asked Bunter, blinking at the Co. in astonishment.

"That villain, Nosey Clark, has got hold of Wharton!" snapped Johnny Bull.

"Must have been an ass to let him!" commented Bunter. "He wouldn't get hold of me so easily!"

"You howling fathead! He did get hold of you, and you're the cause of this happening!" growled Bob.

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

Colonel Wharton came in. The old military gentleman's face was set and grim. He came over to the group of juniors.

"You've seen nothing of Harry?" he asked.

"Nothing," answered Bob. "I'm afraid what that villain told you is true, sir. They've got him."

"I don't understand!" rapped the colonel. "For what reason can this man
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Clark possibly imagine that the boy Valentine is here?" He knitted his brows grimly. "I remember that the boy, whoever he was, was given shelter by you one day last week, in the hut in the grounds, but he left of his own accord, and I understood that you had not seen him since."

"That's so, sir," answered Bob. "He told us that the men after him were some sort of crooks, and we stood by him. But he cleared off when Mr. Clark turned up here, and we've seen him only once since—a day or two afterwards at Shepot Farm. Since then we've heard and seen nothing of him—and I know that Harry hasn't, either. He's gone."

"This man Clark is apparently convinced that he is still here—hidden somewhere about the place without my knowledge!" said the colonel sternly. "Is it possible that Harry can have done anything so foolish?"

"I'm sure not," said Bob. "He couldn't have, without us knowing. It was that ass Bunter put the idea into Clark's head—"

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"Bunter—"

"Look here, it wasn't my fault!" exclaimed Billy Bunter warmly. "That beast Clark got hold of me the day Quelch went. He believed that that cheeky young ass Valentine was still here, and asked me about it. He twisted my arm, the beast! I told him the kid was nowhere about the place, and he wouldn't believe me. So I pulled his leg."

"Do you mean that you told him untruths?" hooted the colonel.

"Well, he was twisting my arm!" grunted Bunter. "What was a fellow to do? He wouldn't believe that the kid wasn't still here—and he was going on twisting my arm till I told him where the young ass was! So I told him."

"You young rascal!"

"Oh, really, sir! I only told him that young Valentine was stopping in the room over the garage," said Bunter. "I had to tell him something—twisting my arm, you know—"

Colonel Wharton interrupted him with an angry snort. It was clear now why Mr. Clark was so thoroughly convinced that his missing "ward" was still at Wharton Lodge. The Greyfriars fellows there had befriended him, and given him shelter, and since then he had disappeared from all knowledge, which naturally led Mr. Clark to suspect that he was still there and keeping out of sight. Then he had obtained positive information on the subject from Bunter! Bunter, certainly, would have told him anything to escape from Mr. Clark's twisting grip on his fat arm. To do the fat Owl justice, he had told the truth first, and had not been believed by the suspicious crook. Then Bunter had fallen back on his usual resource of mendacity.

Buzzzzz!

It was the telephone bell again. Colonel Wharton made long strides to the telephone cabinet. He grabbed up the receiver with an angry grasp that made the instrument rock.

"Is that Colonel Wharton?" came the metallic tones of Mr. Compton Clark.

"Yes!" rapped the colonel. "You rascal—"

"Cut out the greetings, sir!" came Mr. Clark's cool voice. "I have now given you time to reflect. Have you sent Jim Valentine away?"

"Listen to me, Mr. Clark!" said Colonel Wharton, controlling his anger and speaking calmly. "I understand your mistake; you were told falsehoods

on the subject, I learn, by a foolish boy who was frightened by your threats. His statement was utterly unfounded. The boy Valentine is not here, and has not been here since the day you called more than a week ago."

"That will not do for me, sir!" answered Mr. Clark. "Your nephew's friends must know the facts, and I recommend you to question them."

"I have done so; and they know nothing of the boy."

There was a contemptuous laugh on the wires.

"I advise you to inquire further, sir! You will not see your nephew again till I see Jim Valentine."

"I tell you the boy is not here!" roared the colonel. "And if you believe that he is here, sir, the law is at your disposal. If you are truly the boy's guardian, you are entitled to invoke the law and to call here with a constable to search for him."

"I prefer my own methods, sir."

"And I understand why!" roared the angry old gentleman. "You are a rascal, sir, and dare not come into contact with the law and the police! I have little doubt that the boy was justified in leaving you, even if you are his guardian, as you state. Only a lawless rascal, sir, would dream of adopting such methods as you have adopted."

"You are wasting time, sir!" said Mr. Clark coolly. "All this is beside the point."

"My nephew is still missing, sir, and I conclude that you have stated the facts, and that he is in your hands. I shall now invoke the aid of the police, and you will be prosecuted for kidnapping."

"You may find that a little difficult, sir! May I point out that the matter may be ended promptly and peaceably by dismissing the runaway boy who is—quite illegally—hidden in your establishment?"

"I repeat that he is not here!"

"Whether you are seeking to deceive me, sir, or whether the schoolboys have deceived you, I will not undertake to say! But I am absolutely assured that my ward is still within your walls; and your nephew will remain a hostage in my hands until he is turned out. I am in no hurry, sir—I will give you further time to reflect, and I will ring you up again to-morrow."

"I tell you—" roared the colonel.

But Mr. Clark had rung off.

"Good gad!" breathed Colonel Wharton, tugging at his grizzled moustache. "If I had that scoundrel within reach of a horsewhip—"

But Mr. Compton Clark was far beyond the reach of a horsewhip. Colonel Wharton reflected a few moments, and then rang up the police station at Wimpford. It was a matter for the police now, though what chance the local police had of tracing the schoolboy who had been spirited away from his home was a problem.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

The Prisoner!

HARRY WHARTON moved restlessly about the room.

Where he was, was as great a mystery to him as to his friends at Wharton Lodge.

All he knew was that he was many a long mile from his home. The car had sped on and on through the winter's night, and he knew that it could not have covered less than fifty miles, likely enough seventy or eighty, perhaps a hundred. It had stopped at last, and he

had been taken out, blindfolded with a cloth—though in the darkness there was little chance of his seeing anything of his destination.

His eyes had been uncovered in the building, whatever the building was, the gag removed from his mouth, his hands unbound. Then he was left alone in the darkness. He had heard the car drive away; but one man remained in the building, he could hear him moving for some time. The door of his room was locked; the window was shuttered and covered inside with a strong wire-netting, proving that preparations had been made for keeping a prisoner there.

Groping about the room in the dark, he had found a bed, and lain down; but little sleep visited his eyes. But he had fallen into an uneasy slumber at last, and when he opened his eyes a pale glimmer at the shuttered window told that it was day, and he found a tray in the room with breakfast on it—bread and cheese and water! Several times he knocked on the door and called, but without receiving an answer, though he could hear someone moving about the house. Hours had passed, and he moved restlessly about the room, wondering what it all meant and what was to follow.

All he knew was that he was in the hands of Nosey Clark and Barney Hayes, the two rascals who had been in pursuit of Jim Valentine. But why they had seized him was a complete puzzle.

Sooner or later, he supposed, he would learn. At present he could only be patient—or as patient as possible. But as he thought of his uncle's anxiety, and the anxiety of his friends, his eyes glinted with anger.

What direction the car had taken from Wharton Lodge he had no means of guessing. He was sure that he was no longer in Surrey, but he might have been in any of the adjoining counties.

The wire-netting kept him from the window, and there were strong wooden shutters locked inside the glass. It was impossible to obtain a glimpse of his surroundings outside the room where he was imprisoned. Although he knew that it was now past noon, only a faint glimmer of light penetrated to the room. How long was he to remain there—and why? Even a few hours of that dismal, solitary imprisonment made him feel that he would be willing to take any measures, howsoever desperate, to make his escape.

But he could do nothing—but wait! Save for an occasional movement in the building, there was silence. But in the silence there came a distant sound which he did not notice for a long time, but which he noticed at last. It was a sound that he often heard at Greyfriars—the sound of the distant sea. In rough weather the boom of the sea was heard at Greyfriars School, and it was that familiar sound that he could hear now. The building in which he was imprisoned was on the coast; he knew that much. But that only told him that he must be at a great distance from his home in Surrey.

It was a relief in the dismal monotony to hear the key turn in the lock at last. He swung round towards the door as it opened, and his eyes glinted at the burly man with the red moustache.

He made a stride towards him, his hands clenched.

"Better not, kid!" grinned Barney. "I don't want to have to hurt you. But if you want your head cracked, get on with it."

There was a length of lead-piping wrapped in a sock in the ruffian's hand—the weapon of the thug. But without the weapon there would have been no



"What?" gasped Fisher T. Fish. "What——" Valentine's hand suddenly closed over on his mouth and cut short his cry. "Silence, you fool!" hissed the boy from the underworld. "If that man sees us—silence, do it!" A car passed along the road; but the snow hid the two crouching figures from the eyes of the man at the wheel.

chance for the schoolboy in a struggle with the burly ruffian.

"You rotter!" breathed Wharton. "Why have you brought me here? What do you want with me?"

"I dessay Nosey'll tell you when he comes back," answered Barney. "I've brought you some grub, kid." He laid a loaf and an opened tin of corned beef on the table. "Not what you're used to at home, I dessay. But we're on short commons here."

"Where are we?"

Barney grinned.

"Can't you hear the sea?" he asked. "Healthy seaside resort; do you good—and nothing to pay! Keep quiet! We're far enough from the road for nobody to hear you if you yell—and there isn't anybody on that road once in a blue moon at this time of year. But I'm not taking chances. If you call out jest, once you'll be tied up and gagged."

"But what——"

"You'll hear from Nosey."

The man with the red moustache stepped out and closed and locked the door again. Wharton breathed hard and deep.

He found that he was hungry, and he ate some of the rough fare that the kidnapers had provided. Then he roamed restlessly about the room again. He had a glimpse of a passage while the door was open, but none of a staircase, and he knew that he had not ascended stairs when he was brought in. He guessed that the building was a bungalow—some seaside bungalow, as lonely a place as the crooks could have desired at that time of year. It had been easy enough for Mr. Nosey Clark to find a solitary and safe hiding-place for his prisoner by hiring a seaside bungalow in the winter. In the summer

there might have been crowds passing and repassing, but in winter the place would naturally be a chilly desert.

Pacing the room, with anger growing more fiercely in his breast as the long, long minutes crawled by, the silence only broken by the distant wash of the sea, it was a relief to him to hear at last the sound of a car.

It must mean that the man with the vulture's beak was returning, and he would learn at last why he was there.

He caught a sound of muttering voices, and there were tootsteps. His door was unlocked again at last.

This time it was the nosy man who entered. Barney remaining in the doorway, no doubt to cut off any attempt at a rush by the prisoner.

Wharton gave Mr. Clark a fierce look. "Now, are you going to tell me why I am here?" he demanded.

Mr. Compton Clark nodded.

"Exactly!" he assented. "You are here, Master Wharton, so long as Jim Valentine remains at Wharton Lodge."

Wharton stared at him blankly.

"Valentine is not at Wharton Lodge," he answered.

The beaky man shrugged his shoulders impatiently.

"That is the answer I have twice received from your uncle," he said. "I told him that it would not do for me."

"You've seen my uncle?" exclaimed Wharton in amazement.

"I have spoken to him on the telephone twice to-day. I did not care to call at Wharton Lodge personally, in the circumstances." Mr. Clark smiled sourly, and Barney gave a husky chuckle.

Harry Wharton understood at last.

He had wondered what had become of Jim Valentine many times since he had last seen him, and hoped that the boy

had succeeded in keeping clear of his pursuers. Evidently he had done so—but only to leave Nosey Clark convinced that he was still hidden at Wharton Lodge.

Wharton was aware that Valentine had made the acquaintance of Mr. Quelch, the Remove master of Greyfriars, but he knew nothing of Mr. Quelch having befriended the boy and sent him to the school. Never for a moment had it crossed his mind that the waif had found a refuge at Greyfriars. Valentine had vanished from his knowledge, and he did not suppose that he would ever see him again.

"You utter ass!" exclaimed Wharton at last. "I know nothing of Valentine. It's a week or more since I saw him last. I know Bunter told you whoppers on the subject. What could you expect when you refused to believe the truth, and twisted the silly duffer's arm till he told you lies?"

"If Valentine is not at your home, where is he?"

"How should I know?"

"You took him in and sheltered him——"

"Certainly I did. I'd do the same again to keep him clear of a scoundrel like you, Mr. Clark."

"Quite!" agreed Mr. Clark. "And I have no doubt—none whatever—that you have done so. Whether Colonel Wharton is aware of it I cannot determine, but I am assured that you could put my finger on Jim Valentine if you desired."

"I wouldn't if I could!" snapped Wharton. "I know nothing whatever about the kid; but if I knew I would not tell you a word!"

"A few days in this rather dreary quarter may cause you to alter your
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mind, my lad," said Mr. Clark smoothly. "You will not get much in the way of light and air, and the food will be somewhat plain. As soon as you desire your freedom you will write a letter to your friends, begging them to dismiss Jim Valentine. Once he is outside the walls of Wharton Lodge he will not clude me again. You can guess that the place is well watched. But so long as Jim Valentine remains there you remain here."

Wharton gave an angry laugh.

"That means that I shall remain here for ever, then," he said. "The kid is not at Wharton Lodge, and whatever I might write to my friends, they could do nothing; they know no more of him than I do."

Mr. Compton Clark's piercing black eyes fixed on the junior's face. It seemed as if for a moment the suspicious, distrustful crook wavered in his fixed belief. But he shook his head.

"You are lying," he said quietly. "Let me advise you, for your own sake, to give up the boy. He is nothing to you, though no doubt he has deceived you with some plausible tale."

"He has told me nothing, except that crooks were after him," answered Harry. "And I know that is true; only a crook would act as you are acting now."

Mr. Clark turned to the door.

"Look here, Mr. Clark," exclaimed Wharton, "haven't you sense enough to see that I'm telling you the truth? I don't deny that I wouldn't help you find Valentine if I could. But I couldn't, anyhow."

"Think again!" sneered Nosey Clark. "You can't keep me here. My uncle will call in the police—"

Mr. Clark laughed, and the laugh was echoed by Barney. The two rascals did not seem alarmed.

"You're not so safe as you think!" snapped Wharton. "You say you've telephoned twice to Wharton Lodge. The police will be able to find out where you phoned from."

Mr. Clark laughed again.

"Doubtless," he agreed. "In that case, they will discover that the first call came from a post office in Brighton, and the second call from a post office in Winchester. A car covers the ground quickly, Master Wharton."

"Oh!" said Harry, rather taken aback. "I suppose that means that this bungalow is not in the direction of Brighton or Winchester?"

"A bright lad, Barney," said Mr. Clark, with sour amusement.

"Yeah!" grinned Barney.

"I will leave you now, Master Wharton. Think over what I have said—"

"What's the good, when I can do nothing, even if I wanted to?" snapped Wharton. "You are a cunning rogue, Mr. Clark, but you are a fool, too—as I suppose rogues generally are! If you knew when you could take a fellow's word it would save you a lot of trouble."

"I fear that I am not of a trusting nature," said Mr. Clark.

"Not half!" chuckled Barney.

"You can't keep me here—"

"We shall try," sneered Mr. Clark.

"Have a little sense!" said Wharton desperately. "I'm looked for school next week; the new term at Greyfriars begins—"

"Greyfriars!" repeated Mr. Clark, with a start. "You belong to Grey-

friars School?" He exchanged a quick look with the red-moustached man.

Wharton stared at them. Why the fact that he belonged to Greyfriars School should startle them he could not guess.

"Yes," he said. "What about it?"

"Oh, nothing! It matters little. I hope that this little matter will be settled amicably before the new term begins at your school. And, in any case, you are safe enough here."

Mr. Clark left the room, and the door was locked again. A few minutes later Wharton heard the car start up, and the grinding of the wheels as it departed. Silence followed, save for the wash of the sea and the occasional movements of the man who remained in the house.

Wharton breathed hard and deep. He knew now why he was imprisoned, and the knowledge made his situation more hopeless. It was impossible for the vanished boy to be handed over to Nosey Clark, but of that the crook was not to be convinced. The outlook seemed hopeless unless he could escape—and escape was impossible. Why, he wondered, had the crooks been startled to learn that he belonged to Greyfriars School? It could not affect their plans in any way.

Then, as he pondered over it, a sudden light flashed on his mind. He was on the seacoast somewhere within a hundred miles of Wharton Lodge. It was not the Sussex coast, or Nosey would not have telephoned from Brighton; it was not in Hampshire, or he would not have phoned from Winchester. It was in a direction opposite from both—Kent!

The thought excited him. A seaside bungalow on a lonely cliff road on the coast of Kent; and the mention of Greyfriars School had startled the two rascals. Did that mean that he was near Greyfriars? Was this very bungalow one of the buildings on the cliff road between Friardale and Pegg, which he had passed often enough while at school in term time? He remembered the buildings well enough—deserted and locked up in the winter, with hardly an inhabited house within a mile. It was exactly such a place that the crooks might have chosen for their purpose, though they might not have done so had they been aware that he knew the locality.

The knowledge did not help him, even if it was so. But there was some comfort in the thought that, imprisoned as he was, he was near the old school; would be near his friends, though they would not know it when they came back to Greyfriars for the new term. It was little enough, but it was a comfort to the schoolboy held as a hostage, and doomed to a dreary imprisonment that seemed in prospect to be endless.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Grasping the Nettle!

FISHER T. FISH gave Jim Valentine a grim look when he came into tea.

The two juniors who had Greyfriars School to themselves, tea'd with the housekeeper, Mrs. Kebble, as a rule; though sometimes, since Mr. Quelch had returned, he asked them to tea with him. Fisher T. Fish had a lingering pain in his bony chin, and his temper was still ruffled. Valentine's conduct, on the cliff road that afternoon, was a mystery to Fishy—and a very irritating mystery. He was powerfully tempted to push the quarrel



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further and make "potato-scrappings," as he expressed it, of the fellow who had left him wallowing in the snow. But a doubt smote Fishy whether he might not turn out to be the fellow of whom potato-scrappings were made, if he tried it on. So he contented himself with grim looks—which Jim Valentine did not even notice.

Valentine got through his tea as soon as he could, and went out. His face was clouded—for the first time since he had arrived at the school. Fisher T. Fish could discern that something was "biting" the rather mysterious boy, though he could not guess what it was.

The brightness was gone from his looks, the elasticity from his step. The sight of the hard, evil face of Nosey Clark had been like an overwhelming blow to poor Jim. Even in that remote spot the shadow of the underworld seemed to have fallen on him again. He had supposed himself far from Nosey & Co. far from the orbit of the gang of crooks, whose activities were confined to London and the large towns; and he wondered drearly whether it was chance, or fate, that had brought Nosey within his sight again.

He had to see Mr. Quelch after tea; and he went to the Remove master's study, and found that gentleman in a genial humour. Quiet days and evenings with his books, in the deserted school, were a pleasure to Mr. Quelch; he had few interests in life outside the walls of Greyfriars. But he had found it rather pleasant to see Valentine's handsome, cheery, smiling face about the passages and the quad; and the boy's evident happiness there was pleasant to see.

The more he observed the boy, the more the Form master liked him. He knew that Valentine had been in bad hands and that he had run away; no more than that. It was little enough—and yet, in a sense, too much—to know of a fellow whom he thought of placing in the school as a Greyfriars boy.

But close and keen observation made him sure that, whatever the boy might have been through, it had left his character unspoiled—that even if he had, as was possible, done wrong, it had been under pressure, and was not natural to him. Indeed, his delight and relief in getting safe away from his former mysterious associates was a proof of that.

Whether Dr. Locke would consent to admit him to the school, the Remove master could not be sure; but he had decided, so far as he himself was concerned. He liked the boy, and believed that he was "straight," and could not forget the services he had received from him.

Moreover, he found Valentine keen enough to learn. The boy had been at school before, but he had left early, and was scarcely fitted to take a place in Mr. Quelch's Form, the Lower Fourth, or Remove. Mr. Quelch was only too willing to instruct; and he found Valentine a keen and apt pupil, eager to work hard to prepare himself for the place he hoped to take. Few Remove fellows were keen on learning things, so Valentine came as rather a pleasant change to the Remove master in that respect.

On this particular afternoon, however, Mr. Quelch found his new pupil unlike his usual self. Jim tried hard to conceal the heavy trouble that sat on his mind and his heart, but he could not quite succeed.

Mr. Quelch had a cheery little exercise in Latin all ready for him; but before letting the boy take it away, he talked with him for a few minutes.

The gimlet eyes had not failed to notice the cloud on the boy's face.

"You find the school somewhat lonely at present, I have no doubt, Valentine," Mr. Quelch remarked.

"I don't care about that, sir," answered Jim.

"You are still glad to be here?" asked Mr. Quelch, with a smile.

"More than I could tell you, sir."

"And you still desire to become a Greyfriars boy, if the matter can be arranged with the headmaster on his return?"

"More than ever, sir! Only—"
Valentine coloured. "Only I don't want to impose on your kindness, sir."

"So far as I am concerned, Valentine, the matter is settled," answered Mr. Quelch benevolently. "I am convinced, by my own observation, that you are a boy likely to do the school credit."



HERE'S A CHRISTMAS PRESENT

for H. H. Wharmsly,
of 32, Ponsoby Terrace,
Roehampton Street, West-
minster, S.W., who sub-
mitted the following

GREYFRIARS LIMERICK:

When Wharton & Co. are at tea,
Round the door Bunter's head you
will see.

But a boot comes his way,
Follows groan of dismay—
"It's doorstep and dishwasher
for me!"

Send in your limerick,
chum, and win a HAND-
SOME LEATHER
POCKET
WALLET.

"Thank you, sir!" faltered Jim. He wondered, with a pang at his heart, what Mr. Quelch would have thought had he ever heard of "Dick the Penman," and had he known that he was talking to Dick the Penman! Never—never should he know that!

"In some respects you have a good deal of leeway to make up before you can work with my Form," went on Mr. Quelch; "but in one respect, at least, Valentine, you are ahead of any boy in my Form—in penmanship."

Valentine started, and the colour wavered in his face.

"Your writing," said Mr. Quelch kindly, "is the best I have ever seen—it is really beautiful calligraphy."

Valentine stood silent.

He liked a word of praise from the Remove master; but this gave him no pleasure. It was his skill with the pen, his uncanny gift for handling that instrument, that made him useful to Nosey & Co. There had been times when he had wished that he had never learned to write!

Mr. Quelch praised his penmanship; but what would he have said had he known that this boy, on seeing his name written, could have dashed off an imitation of it which he would not have known from his own signature? If he

had known that the hapless lad had done such work at the dictation of Nosey Clark? He stood with downcast eyes and a heavy heart.

"Well, here is your exercise, my boy," said Mr. Quelch. "You will work it out at your leisure! Come to me at any time!"

"Thank you, sir!"

For once, Valentine was glad to get away from his kind friend. Mr. Quelch was too keen not to be aware of it, and he wondered, with a slight feeling of disappointment for the first time.

Valentine did not go up to the Remove study with his exercise. He slipped it folded into a pocket, and went out into the quad.

The late December darkness had fallen. There was snow on the leafless trees, snow on the sills, frost on the windows. A sharp, icy wind came from the distant booming sea.

Valentine paced to and fro, thinking—trying to think!

Hardly more than a mile away was the bungalow on the cliff road—the new headquarters, apparently, of Nosey & Co. Why were they there? What did it mean? They knew nothing of his presence in the school—could know and guess nothing. But if they remained in the neighbourhood, obviously they would find him out sooner or later, if he stayed at Greyfriars—as he passionately longed to stay. Nosey and Barney at Sea Cliff—that was the name he had noted on the bungalow gate—members of the crooked gang going and coming—it was beyond doubt that they would spot him in time, at the school so close at hand. The mere accidental mention of his name would be enough.

And then—

Jim set his teeth savagely. He had suffered enough from Nosey Clark; it was going to end.

He had fled from the gang; but he had never dreamed of betraying the men who had been his associates—or, at least, his masters. All he wanted was to keep clear of them. Indeed, he could not betray them without betraying himself; and the police wanted Dick the Penman. But he would not be driven from his last refuge; from the school where, if his kind friend could contrive it, he might find rest and peace and happiness. He could not remain at Greyfriars if Nosey & Co. remained in that vicinity. They must go!

His brow grew darker, grimmer.

He only wanted to be let alone, and they would not let him alone. They would have to take the consequences!

"Say, you geek!"

It was Fisher T. Fish's nasal voice. Jim Valentine swung round towards him with an angry exclamation.

"For goodness' sake, give a fellow a rest!" he snapped.

"Say, you don't want to go off on your ear, do'!" said Fisher T. Fish. The stern necessity of finding some victim for his conversation had made Fishy resolve to forgive this queer "guy" and extend the right hand of friendship once more. "What you up to, moseying around in the dark all on your own?"

"Thinking!" snapped Valentine. "Nothing in your line."

"Aw, can it?" jeered Fisher T. Fish. "Say, what did you go off at the deep end for this afternoon?"

"Find out!"

"I guess that's why I'm asking. I calculate you was scared stiff by that galoot with the proboscis," said Fisher T. Fish. "You know that guy?"

"Find that out, too!"

"You've said it," agreed Fishy.

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"You dog-goned, cheeky, all-fired gink, I guess I can get wise if I want. I reckon I'm going to mosey along to that bung tomorrow, and give them galoots the once-over. I guess I want to know what it all means, jest a few."

Valentine stood very still, his heart almost ceasing to beat.

He could understand that the curious, inquisitive American schoolboy was surprised and interested and perplexed, and wanted to know. But the bare thought of Fisher T. Fish butting in at the lonely bungalow was utterly dismaying.

Fishy, of course, had not the remotest suspicion that the strangers who had hired Sea Cliff were a gang of crooks. He had only been surprised at anybody hiring a summer seaside bungalow in the depths of winter. But Valentine's actions had made him intensely curious. He was inquisitive already about the boy who had been sent to the school by Mr. Quelch, and who refused to gratify his curiosity. Now he "guessed" that Valentine knew the people at Sea Cliff and was afraid of them. Nosing into the place and asking questions seemed quite a natural proceeding to the inquisitive American.

And if he mentioned Valentine's name there, the game was already up. And the tattling, talkative fellow was sure to mention it if he got into conversation there. The colour drained from Valentine's face. The danger which he had feared must come was in reality close at hand. The very next day Nosey might learn where he was!

He turned away, and left Fisher T. Fish staring.

With a discontented grunt, Fishy walked back to the House. He had to seek out Mrs. Kebble for somebody to talk to.

Jim Valentine was still pacing under the elms in the deep dark when he glimpsed Mr. Quelch going down to masters' gate to let himself out. He backed into darker shadow, unwilling for the Remove master to see him, fearing that the keen eyes might read something in his face.

He heard the gate shut behind Mr. Quelch.

"What am I going to do?" he muttered.

What could he do?

Walk down to Courtfield and tell the police at the station where they could lay their hands on a gang of crooks and forgers?

Easy enough. But it meant that Nosey, under arrest, would retaliate by giving away Dick the Penman. He would share the fate of the gang. But that was not the worst. Mr. Quelch would know! That happy prospect of peace and safety at Greyfriars School would be at an end.

He passed his hand over his aching brow. What was he to do?

If the crooks were taken, it would matter little what they said if they did not know where he was to be found. If he could act without revealing his hand in the matter—

Probably, too, they would not be taken. They were wary and watchful. Ten to one they would escape and keep clear of the place afterwards. That was all that he wanted. Only to get rid of them from the neighbourhood of Greyfriars.

He resolved at last.

Quietly he went into the House and went to Mr. Quelch's study. The Remove master had gone out. No one was likely to come there. He turned on the light, took the telephone directory, and searched it for a number. He rang

up the exchange and gave the number of Courtfield Police Station.

"Please let me speak to the officer in charge!"

"Inspector Grimes speaking!" came back a deep voice.

"Do you know Sea Cliff Bungalow, on the road from Friardale to Pegg, along the cliffs?"

"Eh, what? Yes."

"It has been taken by a gang of crooks—"

"What?"

"Watch the place, and you will find out that it is true."

"What, what? Who's speaking?"

came the astonished voice of the Courtfield inspector. "Is this a practical joke, or what?"

"Nothing of the kind! Have you ever heard of Dick the Penman?"

"Good gad, yes!"

"Look for his associates at Sea Cliff."

"Here, what—I—"

Jim Valentine rang off. He turned out the light and left Mr. Quelch's study, and went out into the frosty quadrangle. Even in the quaint town of Courtfield the local inspector had heard of Dick the Penman, whose identity Scotland Yard had never been able to discover. That name was more than enough to excite the keenest interest of the Courtfield inspector. Surely he would at least observe the place, take note of its occupants? That would be enough for such wary birds as Nosey & Co. As soon as they learned that they were watched they would vanish. Whatever their game was in that lonely place—and Jim could not guess what it was—they would abandon it as soon as they knew that the local police had an eye on them.

Jim Valentine felt more at ease. He had done all he could, and he had to leave the rest to fortune. In his room at Courtfield Police Station, Inspector Grimes sat staring at his telephone, in a state of great astonishment.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

The Knocking at the Door!

KNOCK!

In the little lounge hall of the bungalow on the cliffs, Barney Hayes sprawled in a canvas chair, his feet to the fire, his pipe in his mouth, and a racing paper in his hands.

The winter evening had closed in, dark and bitter.

With a heavy, incessant boom the sound of the sea came echoing over the cliffs. It was the only sound in the silence of the dark, winter evening till that loud, sharp knock came at the door.

Barney was yawning over his paper.

To the crook, accustomed to the lights and din of a busy city, it was an inexpressible bore and weariness to be shut up in one of the rooms opening off the hall.

But there was no help for it. The prisoner had to be guarded. And Barney smoked his pipe, read his racing paper, sipped a glass of whisky-and-water, yawned, and longed for the time when some other member of the gang would relieve him of his dismal and monotonous duty.

But little as the red-moustached man liked the silence and the solitude of the seaside in midwinter, he liked still less the prospect of visitors at the lonely bungalow.

He started to his feet as the door rang under that heavy knock.

Who could it be? Some wayfarer, lost in the winter darkness, coming up to the bungalow to ask his way? It

could hardly be that, for the windows were shuttered and thickly curtained, and hardly a glimmer of light escaped. Nobody passing by the road would have guessed that the building was occupied. In the daytime smoke from the chimney revealed the fact, but in the night there was nothing to be seen.

Barney drew a deep, hissing breath. Always on the alert, with the wary alertness of the law-breaker, he scented danger at once. The knock on the door was sharp and authoritative, and it hinted of an official hand—the hand of a policeman!

Knock!

It was repeated as he stood in the light of the oil-lamp, staring at the door, which was on the hall itself, without any outer passage or lobby. The door was locked and chained, only to be opened at a signal given. But there was no signal. It was not one of the gang that knocked! Who was it?

Barney heard a sound of stirring in the locked room a few yards away. That loud knocking had, of course, reached the imprisoned schoolboy; it echoed through the whole building and beyond.

"By gum!" muttered Barney. He crossed swiftly to the locked room.

Before he ascertained who was knocking, before anything else, he had to silence the prisoner, to make sure that Harry Wharton did not call out. He leaped into the room.

Harry Wharton was on his feet in the dusky room, lighted only by the gleam from the lamp in the hall, now that the doorway was open.

He had heard the knocking, and it made his heart beat fast. Whoever it was, the veriest stranger, it meant help if he could make his imprisonment known. He could guess why the red-moustached man had hurried to him as that unexpected summons at the door rang through the silent bungalow.

He stood with clenched hands. He would not be silenced if he could help it, now that there was a chance—even a remote chance—of rescue and freedom.

The ruffian's grasp was on him at once.

"Silence!" he breathed between his teeth. "One call and—"

The wrapped lead-piping was in his hand.

Knock, knock! Sharp and loud came the summons at the outer door. The ruffian's deadly weapon, in his right hand, menaced the schoolboy, while his sinewy left grasped him like a steel vice.

Wharton shut his teeth hard.

One crashing blow from the lead piping and he would fall senseless, perhaps with a fractured skull.

Yet he was strongly tempted to take the risk to utter at least one shout for help before he was struck down.

The ruffian's eyes gleamed with ferocity in the half-light of the prison-room. His grip was on the schoolboy, like the claw of some beast of prey.

"A single sound—" he breathed.

Wharton was silent. He was utterly at the ruffian's mercy, and there was no more mercy in the alarmed crook's heart than in a tiger's.

In Barney's grip, he listened—and the crook listened also. Who was knocking at that lonely door on that bitter winter's night? Not one of Nosey Clark's gang, that was certain. Was it the police? Long ago Colonel Wharton would have set the police to work, in search of his missing nephew. But that was far away, in Surrey; they could have found no clue to his hiding-place. It was not help for the imprisoned schoolboy. Some chance wayfarer—and



Softly as a cat, Barney was creeping away down the snowy garden, when a sudden light flashed out and a voice rapped : "Stop!" The lead-piping in the ruffian's hand swept through the air as a hand gripped his shoulders, and Inspector Grimes dodged the blow barely in time.

yet the knocking was loud and imperative.

Knock! Knock! Knock!

Wharton could see that the crook was puzzled. He feared the police, as he feared them at every moment of his lawless life. Yet he could not believe that the police had traced the kidnapped junior to that lonely place. It was impossible—or almost impossible.

Knock! Knock!

"Who the thunder—" Barney muttered aloud. "Some drunken fool mistaken the house, going home from the Anchor. Hang him! Why doesn't he go?"

Knock! Knock!

Whoever it was at the front door, it was clear that he had no intention of going.

Wharton's heart throbbed.

What the ruffian feared the prisoner hoped. And the delay in opening the door would surely excite suspicion. It could not be some chance wayfarer who persisted in that imperative summons at the door.

Knock! Knock!

Barney gritted his teeth.

"Listen you!" he breathed. "I've got to see who's there. Make a sound—a single sound!—and I'll crack your skull like an eggshell. I reckon you know I mean it!"

He forced the schoolboy into a chair, jerked the handkerchief from his pocket, and stuffed it into his mouth. Then rapidly he knotted a rope round him, binding his arms and legs to the chair.

He slipped the lead piping into an inner pocket, stepped quickly from the prison-room, and closed the door. Wharton heard the key turn in the lock and heard it withdrawn.

He sat helpless in the darkness, listening intently.

The bungalow was small, the partitions within of light material. He could hear all Barney's movements in the little hall.

He heard the ruffian tramp to the front door and open it, and a clinking of metal told that he had opened it on the chain.

"Who's there?"

He heard the ruffian snarl the question.

Wharton did not catch the answer of the man outside. The boom of the rough sea came more loudly now that the front door was open.

"I ain't letting anybody in, in a lonely place like this!" he heard Barney's growling voice again.

A voice answered, and Wharton strained his ears. He caught the voice, and it seemed to him that there was a familiar tone in it. It was a voice he had heard before, somewhere. But he did not catch the words.

"How do I know who you might be?" he heard Barney's growl again. "The gov'nor's left me in charge here, and it's a lonely place. And it's late. What do you want, anyhow?"

This time the answer reached Wharton's straining ears. The voice was raised in sharp authority.

"I advise you to admit me, my man. You can see that I am an officer of the law, and you have nothing to fear. Open this door!"

Wharton's heart bounded. He had been right. He knew the voice. And his suspicion that the lonely bungalow was on the coast near Greyfriars School was confirmed now. For the voice speaking at the door was the voice of Inspector Grimes, of the Courtfield Police.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

The Arm of the Law!

INSPECTOR GRIMES stood with an official foot planted in the opening of the door and a grim, suspicious expression on his plump, keen face. The front door of the bungalow was open about a foot, secured by the chain within, and the hard, red-moustached face looked out at him, surly and distrustful. Dimly behind the inspector loomed the figure of a constable, stolidly waiting.

Mr. Grimes had been greatly astonished by that mysterious call on the telephone. He had been more than half inclined to believe that it was some practical joke—an attempt to pull his official leg. But the name of Dick the Penman had startled him into activity.

Hardly anybody in Courtfield, outside the police, could possibly have heard of Dick the Penman. It was a name that was only known in official quarters and in the underworld of London. A very few minutes' reflection convinced Mr. Grimes that there must be "something in it." And the barest possibility of laying hands on Dick the Penman was exciting to the country inspector.

Who the Penman was nobody knew; the keenest brains at Scotland Yard had failed to pick up a clue to his real name, to his identity, to his description. He was known only by his works. When a document came to official knowledge on which a man's name was written so accurately that he might have believed that he had written it there himself, they knew that the Penman had been at work—and that was all they knew. If Mr. Grimes could have laid hands

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(Continued from page 13.)

on the unknown and mysterious Penman it would have been the triumph of Mr. Grimes' career. The mention of that name had roused Mr. Grimes to the keenest activity.

He was not likely to guess that the call had come from Greyfriars School. That, certainly, never crossed his mind for a moment. If the call was genuine, he concluded that it must have come from some dissatisfied and disgruntled member of the gang. That mattered little, at present; what mattered was to ascertain whether there was anything in it. A brief inquiry at the local estate agent's elicited the information that Sea Cliff Bungalow had been hired, furnished, by a City gentleman named Brown, who desired to run down in his car for week-ends in that healthy locality. That was all he could learn; but it told him that the lonely bungalow was, in fact, occupied—a very unusual thing in late December.

To visit the place with a search-warrant was impracticable, at the present stage. But to visit it unofficially and take a look at the occupiers was practicable and easy. Taking a constable with him, Mr. Grimes drove in a Courtfield taxi to the cliff road. He left the taxi on the road and gave the place the "once-over" before approaching it. At first glance there was no sign of occupation. Every vestige of light was shut in by shutters and curtains. That was a suspicious circumstance, hinting that the occupants desired to avoid observation as much as possible.

Mr. Grimes approached the building at last—quietly. He had been standing outside the front door for some time, his official ears keenly on the alert, before he knocked. He had heard Barney moving in the hall within, and knew that someone was there. At last he knocked at the door. And the long delay before the door was opened deepened his suspicions. And although the red-moustached, surly face that looked out at him was the face of a stranger, it was the type of face that Mr. Grimes knew only too well. Whether Dick the Penman was at the bungalow or not, Mr. Grimes had no further doubt that he had happened on something that required investigation.

His keen eyes searched the red-moustached face, peering at him from the opening. A strong iron chain prevented the door from opening farther, and Mr. Grimes had no authority, so far, to force an entrance. But his foot was planted within, and his sharp glance took in all that was to be seen of the little hall. Barney scowled at him, perplexed. To refuse to admit a man who was obviously an officer of the law was to admit that he had something to hide. But to admit him was dangerous, even with the prisoner gagged and silent. The ruffian was at a loss. And Mr. Grimes could read his expression, and what it implied.

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"Well," he rapped, "are you letting me in?"

"No, I ain't!" grunted Barney at last. "I'm letting in nobody."

"Is Mr. Brown at home?"

"No, he ain't."

"When will he be here?"

"He comes down for week-ends," muttered Barney, furtively eyeing the face of the police-inspector.

"And you are left in charge here?"

"Yes."

"Nobody else in the house?"

"Nobody else, sir," answered Barney.

"I'm Mr. Brown's servant, and there's only me here."

"What is your objection to admitting me?"

"I ain't letting anybody in at night."

"You can see that I am a police-officer, and that this man with me is a constable. What are you afraid of?"

"You've got no business here," said Barney sullenly. "Take your foot away, and let me shut this door. It's cold."

"I have business here," said Mr. Grimes, watching the man's face intently as he spoke. "I have received information that a certain person is to be found in this building."

Barney Hayes started.

"Who?" he snarled.

"A person known to the police, who has been badly wanted for a year or more," said Mr. Grimes.

Barney stared at him blankly. He had supposed, for the moment, that Mr. Grimes alluded to the kidnapped schoolboy, behind the locked door only a few yards away. But he discerned now that the Courtfield inspector knew nothing of a prisoner in the bungalow. Whatever it was that this meddlesome officer suspected, it was not that.

"Well, there ain't nobody here!" grunted Barney.

"Then I advise you to admit me, and let me satisfy myself on that point," said Mr. Grimes gently. "Why not?"

"You got a warrant?" jeered Barney.

"Not as yet!" said Mr. Grimes significantly. "But I fancy you know enough of such things, my man, to know that will be the next step."

Barney gritted his teeth.

"You ain't coming in here. Take that from me."

"Very well," said Mr. Grimes tranquilly, and he withdrew his foot from the doorway at last, and Barney shut the door and bolted it.

There was a grinding of footsteps on the path outside, as the inspector and his man moved away.

But Barney did not need telling that they had not gone far. Whatever information, or vague suspicion, had brought Mr. Grimes there had been confirmed and intensified by the crook's refusal to admit him to the house.

From that moment Sea Cliff Bungalow would be under observation. Not for a single moment would the place be left unwatched. Barney knew that as well as if Inspector Grimes had told him so.

He stood in the little hall, his face wrinkled with uneasy thought. For the moment discovery and detection had been barred off. But when the morrow came—

On the morrow Nosey Clark was coming, and he would come under the watching eyes of the police! He was a stranger in that part of the country—it was because he was utterly unknown there that he had selected that spot to hide his prisoner.

But Nosey's face was well-known in the Rogues' Gallery at Scotland Yard; Nosey's acquaintance with the police had been long and somewhat hectic. It

would not do for the "cops" to see Nosey. And if they watched the bungalow closely, sooner or later they must learn that something was kept in concealment there. And under watching eyes it would be impossible to move the prisoner to another place. And a search warrant could be only a matter of time—

Barney muttered oaths under his breath.

What had put these rural police on the track? Evidently they knew nothing of a prisoner in the bungalow. What could have started this suspicion? Barney could not begin to guess.

He went to the telephone at last. He was at a loss, and it was for his chief to decide what was to be done. He took up the receiver, but there came no answer from the exchange. He snarled into the transmitter; but only stony silence was the result.

The perspiration oozed out on Barney's brow.

It was not uncommon on the windy cliff road for telephone wires to be blown loose, and the instrument to fail to connect. But Barney knew that it was not that. He knew quite well that the police-officer had spotted the telephone wire, and clipped it through, to cut him off from outside communication.

He was cut off from Nosey Clark—and on the morrow Clark would arrive in his car under the watching eyes! The game was up! Barney's brain was not quick on the uptake; he was a ruffianly follower of a wary leader, unaccustomed to thinking out plans for himself. But he realised very clearly that now the police were watching the bungalow the game was up, and that it behoved him to disappear from the locality—and as quickly as he could. The imprisoned schoolboy had to be left where he was; there was no help for that. Indeed, Barney realised that he would be lucky if he made his escape alone. For if Mr. Grimes spotted him in the act of flight, it was a hundred to one that he would arrest him on suspicion.

He did not lose time after making up his mind.

He had to go—and he had to go before that meddling police-inspector sent for more men to surround the house.

If they caught him going he would be stopped. That was a certainty. And if he remained, the police-inspector would take more decisive steps before long. That was another certainty. Barney sagely made up his mind to go while the going was good.

His preparations occupied him only a few minutes. Then he turned out the lamp.

He trod softly to the kitchen door at the back of the house. Silently he shot back the well-oiled bolt and turned the key. He opened the door an inch or two, and peered out into the black night.

Nothing was to be seen but darkness. He stepped out and drew the door silently shut behind him. Softly as a cat, he trod away down the snowy garden. A sudden light flashed out and a voice rapped:

"Stop!"

A hand gripped his shoulder. The lead-piping in the ruffian's hand swept through the air, and Inspector Grimes dodged the blow barely in time. Barney tore free and ran. For a moment or two his footsteps rang back from the night, and then the blackness had swallowed him.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

An Unexpected Discovery!

MR. GRIMES grunted. He stood staring into the night. The man was gone; there was no chance of laying hands on him. His flight had not taken the Courtfield inspector by surprise; he had been watching for precisely such a move on the part of the man in the bungalow. But the crook had been too quick for him, and he was gone. Mr. Grimes reflected for a few moments. He had left the constable

watching the front of the house, while he himself watched at the back. He had been prepared to make an arrest, on suspicion, if the man in the bungalow attempted flight; but he had lost his man. Pursuit in the blackness of the night on the cliffs was futile. But the bungalow was open to him now; and Mr. Grimes felt more than justified in making an entrance to investigate the interior. He groped over the back door, and it opened to his touch. All was dark within. He turned on his flashlamp and advanced warily across the kitchen, which opened direct on the little hall.

He had no doubt that the man had been alone there, but he was warily on his guard. He found the lamp, struck a match, and lighted it. The inspector's keen eyes glanced swiftly round him in the light. A packet of tobacco lay on the table, a racing paper on the floor beside the chair Barney had occupied when the knocking came at the door. Three doors opened on the hall, and the first one Mr. Grimes tried was locked. The others opened to his hand, and proved

(Continued on next page.)

"QUALIFICATION" RULES!

THE Cup competition is now claiming quite a lot of attention, and this probably accounts for a question-letter which is just to hand. In it the writer asks whether there is not some difference in the "qualification" rules as between Cup and League games, and he wants to know what those differences are.

The assumption that there is a difference in respect of players' qualifications for Cup and League games is a correct one.

For instance, no footballer can play in a match in the so-called English Cup competition unless he has been a registered player of the team for fourteen days. In the League competition a player can turn out for a club immediately his registration with the club has been lodged at headquarters.

Perhaps you will remember the almost unique case of a footballer named Pape. A few years back he was a member of the Clapton Orient team, and on the Friday he travelled with the party of Orient players with the intention of playing for that side in a League match against Manchester United. On the Saturday morning, however, negotiations for the transfer of Pape were entered into by the officials of Manchester United and Clapton Orient. These were duly carried through; a telegram was sent to football's headquarters announcing the fact, and instead of Pape playing for Clapton Orient that afternoon against Manchester United, he actually played for Manchester United against Clapton Orient! Such a change could not, obviously, have been made in respect of a Cup game.

In regard to this fourteen days signed on qualification to take part in a Cup game, it should also be mentioned that a player who is not eligible to play in the first game between two clubs is not eligible if those clubs have to replay. To make this clear, let me give an example. Suppose a player had been signed on for a club for twelve days prior to a Cup game. He would not be able to play in the game. If the game was drawn, and had to be replayed on the following Wednesday, the same player would still not be eligible, although he would then have been signed on for sixteen days. One other point of difference between Cup and League qualifications:

No player can play for two clubs in the same season in the English Cup competition.

It does not matter how obscure the club for which a player has turned out in the Cup competition he cannot, in that

SOCCER PROBLEMS SOLVED HERE!



Shoot your Soccer queries in to "Linesman," c/o MAGNET, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. It's his job and his pleasure to solve knotty problems for readers.

season, play for another club in the competition later on. In the League a player may, of course, play for more than one team in the same season. There are a lot of people who think that the Cup rule might be extended to the League: that is, one player one club one season. But I am not to be dragged into a long argument on that point.

sacking will be found to give a much better foothold.

To be properly "shod" for the occasion is one way to victory; there cannot be any doubt about that.

THE OFF-SIDE TRAP!

AN observant MAGNET reader, who plays football, and also takes every possible opportunity of watching the big clubs, tells me he has noticed this season that several of the leading teams are reverting to off-side tactics. I am asked if I think this is a fair or a wise move.

In the first place I would say to my young reader that there is nothing wrong with his eyesight. His sense of observation is well developed, for it is a fact that to a greater extent than for some time past, the defenders of first-class football clubs are resorting to off-side tactics to an increasing extent. Hull City, a team doing very well in the Northern Third, are setting the off-side trap cleverly, and opponents are falling into it repeatedly.

So far as my opinion goes, I give it that there is nothing unfair about such tactics.

The off-side rule is a definite part of the game, and if the defenders of a side can use this rule to thwart their opponents, then I think they are justified in adopting such methods.

It is up to the opponents to think out ways and means of preventing these methods from being successful, and the off-side trap can easily be dodged—more easily than it used to be—by players who put some thought into their play.

As to whether these tactics pay depends on the opposition. The best method of defeating such tactics is for the player with the ball to go through on his own rather than pass it. In these days, off-side tactics ought not to prove successful, and I very much doubt if they do so in the long run.

"LINESMAN."

PITCH EMERGENCIES!

"WE are getting all sorts of pitches to play upon just now," writes a young player, "and some hints from you as to the right footwear for particular occasions might help all young players." I am happy to give any assistance I possibly can on this line. It is a fact that at this time of the year the surface of the football pitch changes almost from match to match. One day the pitch is ankle deep in mud; the next match it may be more like a skating-rink, while a smattering of snow may provide another change.

Obviously it is important that the soles of the shoes worn by footballers should be such as to give the best possible foothold. The trainers of the big football clubs are always ready for pitch emergencies. I have seen managers send out a player on to a pitch before the match was due to start, trying different kinds of soles on his boots to see which gave the best grip.

You players are not in such a fortunate position, but there are things you can do without much trouble.

On soft grounds fairly long studs give the best grip. When a match is to be played on a hard ground the studs should be quite short. If the surface of the pitch is slippery—perhaps with a coating of ice or frozen snow—studs can be dispensed with entirely. In their stead strips of stout sacking should be nailed to the soles of the football boots to take the place of the studs. This

to be unoccupied bed-rooms. He came back to the locked door.

There was no key to be seen; it was in the pocket of the fleeing crook, far enough away by that time.

Mr. Grimes opened the front door and let in the constables. Then he rapped with his knuckles on the locked door.

"Is anyone here?" he called.

He little dreamed on whose ears that call fell.

Harry Wharton was struggling desperately with the gag in his mouth. But he could utter only the faintest mumble. Bound hand and foot to the chair, he could not stir a limb. But he made a desperate effort, and shifted the chair a little, scraping it on the floor. The sound was slight, but it reached the keen ears of the men outside the room.

"Someone is there!" said Inspector Grimes, puzzled and perplexed.

That he was investigating a den of crooks he was assured; but that there was a prisoner in the bungalow had not crossed his mind for a moment—any more than it had crossed Jim Valentine's.

The scraping sound was repeated from within the locked room. The door was flimsy enough, and a heave of Inspector Grimes' plump shoulder drove it in. It flew open.

Mr. Grimes flashed his light into the room.

He almost dropped it in his amazement at what he saw.

"Great gad!" gasped Mr. Grimes. "Bring the lamp, Simpson."

The constable followed him into the room, carrying the lamp. It shone on the gagged schoolboy, bound hand and foot to the chair. Mr. Grimes stared at him like a man in a dream.

"Is—is—is that Master Wharton?" he stammered.

He knew Harry Wharton of Greyfriars well enough; but he was utterly astounded to see the Greyfriars junior now.

Wharton mumbled faintly.

Mr. Grimes jerked the handkerchief from his mouth. The imprisoned junior gasped for breath.

Under the wondering eyes of the constable holding the lamp, Mr. Grimes opened a knife and cut the prisoner free.

Wharton staggered from the chair.

His eyes were dancing.

"Mr. Grimes," he gasped, "thank goodness you've come! I heard your voice—at the door—and when you went—"

"You thought I was gone for good—what?"

"I was afraid so! Oh, thank goodness you've found me here!" gasped Wharton. "But how did you know I was here? I can't understand it."

"That's easily explained. I did not know," answered Mr. Grimes. "And what I want to know is—what are you doing here? How on earth did you get here, young man?"

Wharton laughed breathlessly.

"I didn't come of my own accord, Mr. Grimes," he answered. "I've been a prisoner here all day. I was kidnapped last night from my uncle's house in Surrey."

"Good gad!"

"They brought me here in a car," explained Harry. "I'd guessed already that this was one of the bungalows on the Pegg road. Did you get Barney?"

"Who's Barney?"

"The man who was keeping me here—a big brute with a red moustache!"

"So his name's Barney?" said Mr. Grimes. "No, Master Wharton; Barney's gone, though I've little doubt

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that I shall see him again. Was Barney alone in this extraordinary business?"

"No. There was another man—Nosey Clark!"

"Nosey Clark?"

"Compton Clark; but they called him Nosey," said Harry. "They were together when they got me away last night from Wharton Lodge."

"Have you seen any others?"

"No; only those two."

"Did you hear them mention any other names?"

"Not that I remember."

"Such a name as Dick—Dick the Penman?" suggested Mr. Grimes.

Wharton stared.

"No; I've never heard that name before."

"You're sure?" asked Mr. Grimes, disappointed.

"Quite."

Inspector Grimes knitted his brows in puzzled thought.

The mysterious telephone call had told him that the associates of Dick the Penman would be found at Sea Cliff Bungalow. That had set him actively to work. And at the bungalow he had discovered Colonel Wharton's nephew, a prisoner—an utterly unexpected and amazing discovery. Had his informant known that the kidnapped schoolboy was there? If so, why had he not said so? Or had he, in putting him on the track of the crooks, caused the rescue of the kidnapped junior by sheer chance?

It was a puzzling problem to Mr. Grimes. One thing, at least, seemed certain—Dick the Penman was not there, and Mr. Grimes doubted whether he would find any clue to him there. Yet if the red-moustached man who had escaped was an associate of the Penman, Henry Grimes had been nearer to the unknown and mysterious crook than any of the big men at Scotland Yard had ever been. He was the first police officer that had ever got into actual touch with the gang of which the mysterious Penman was a member.

That was a satisfaction to Mr. Grimes. It was another satisfaction to have rescued the kidnapped Greyfriars junior. That was a feather in his official cap.

"Well, Master Wharton," said the inspector at last, "I dare say you are tired of your quarters here; and there is still time to catch a train from Courtfield to your home. You may tell me all you know in the taxi as we go."

"My hat, I shall be glad to get going!" said Wharton. "I don't think you can guess how pleased I am to see you here, Mr. Grimes!"

Mr. Grimes grinned.

Leaving the constable in charge of the bungalow, Mr. Grimes walked to the taxi with Wharton. The Greyfriars junior breathed deep in the keen salt air from the sea. Free at last—and utterly unexpectedly! He felt as if he was walking on air as he trotted by the side of the burly inspector.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

Home Again!

"DON'T you worry, ma'am!" said Billy Bunter encouragingly.

Miss Wharton did not reply.

Aunt Amy was deeply distressed. Colonel Wharton had gone to the telephone for the tenth or twelfth time since the December dusk had closed in. The old lady had come into the hall to hear if there was any news. Bob Cherry & Co. were there waiting—they could do nothing but wait. Wells hovered in the background, respectful

sympathy in his clean-shaven, portly face as he hovered.

A long, long day had worn by without any news of the missing junior—except the news that had been received from Nosey Clark over the wires. The local police had taken the matter up, but so far they had picked up no trace of Harry Wharton, and it seemed unlikely enough that they would pick up any. It was easy to guess that a car had been used to carry him away, and there was no hint as to even the direction it had taken.

Bob Cherry and his friends were dismal enough. If they could have done anything to help it would not have been so bad; but they could do nothing. It looked as if Nosey Clark held the trump card, and that Harry Wharton would remain in his hands—till when? Jim Valentine could not be given up to him, for nobody at Wharton Lodge had the remotest idea where he was. Until the vulture-nosed crook was convinced of that, Wharton was to remain a prisoner. And what would convince the suspicious, distrustful crook?

Faces were glum and gloomy. Only Billy Bunter's fat countenance retained its podgy equanimity.

Bunter bore this well!

Fortitude was Bunter's strong point when it came to bearing the troubles and misfortunes of others!

Bunter refused to be alarmed. Feeling quite cheerful himself, he took the trouble to cheer up others with his cheery cheerfulness.

"It's all right, ma'am," he assured Aunt Amy. "You needn't worry about Harry. They won't hurt him. They've simply got him shut up somewhere. If they keep him long enough he will get out of the beginning of the term at school. Ten to one they won't do him any damage."

Miss Wharton did not answer Bunter. Perhaps the odds of ten to one did not seem good enough to the kind old lady anxious for her dear nephew. She wanted to see him safe and sound.

Billy Bunter blinked at the gloomy Co. His look was sarcastic. It was the maxim of the Co. to keep a stiff upper lip and take things as they came, and not to grouse. But it could not be said that they were bearing this so well as William George Bunter.

"Buck up, you men!" said Bunter. "No good looking like a lot of moulting fowls, you know! That won't bring Wharton back!"

"Oh, shut up!" growled Johnny Bull. "Keep your pecker up!" urged Bunter. "Dash it all, I'm keeping my pecker up! I'm not looking as if I were just going to be hanged, I hope! I'm keeping cheerful—what?"

"The dryfulness up is the proper caper, my esteemed cackling Bunter!" said Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh.

"Ten to one he's all right! Of course, if that nose fellow loses patience he may give him beans," remarked Bunter thoughtfully. "He's a vicious sort of rotter! He twisted my arm—"

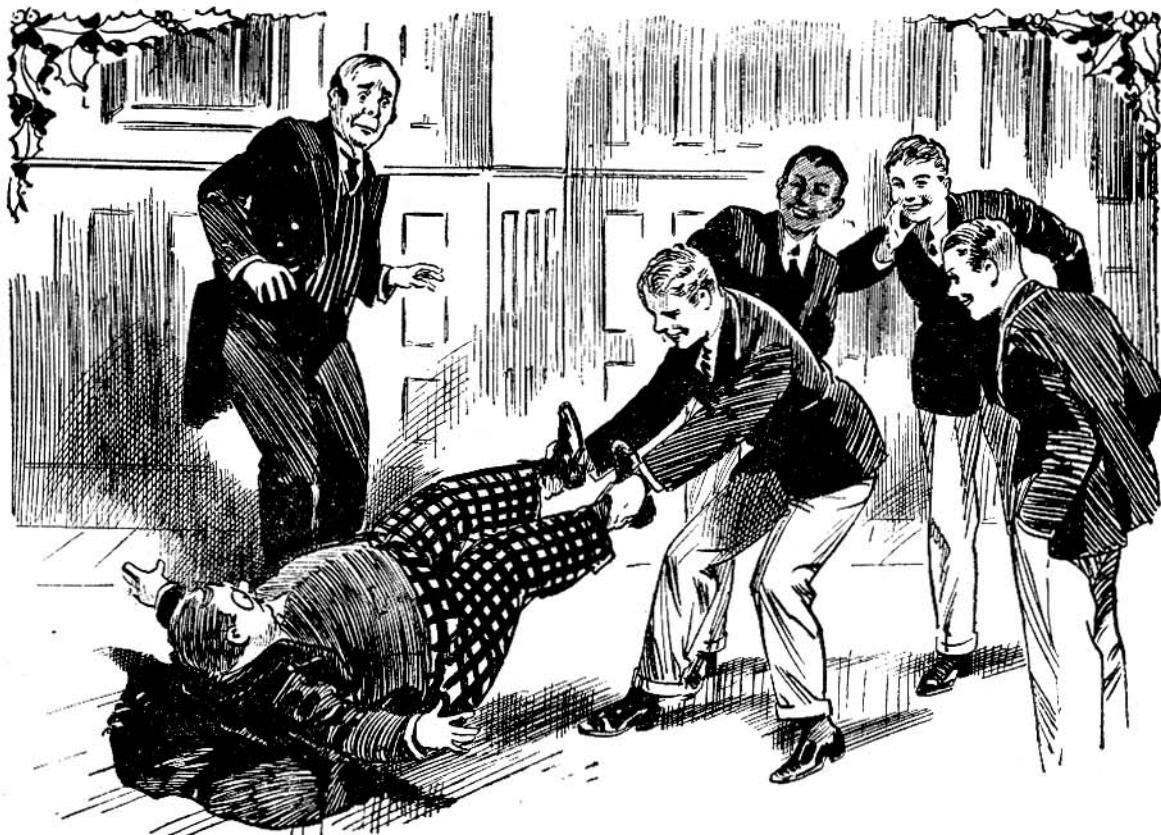
"The silly ass!" growled Johnny Bull. "Why didn't he twist your neck?"

"Oh, really, Bull, of course, I'm sorry for poor old Wharton! Still, let's keep cheerful!" said Bunter. "Matters might be a good deal worse."

"How do you make that out, fat-head?" grunted Bob.

"Well, they've bagged Wharton to keep as a sort of hostage," said Bunter. "They might have bagged me."

"Eh?"



"Ow! Beasts!" gasped Bunter, floundering on the floor. "Gimme a hand, you rotters! Wow!" "I'll give you two, old fat man!" said Bob Cherry, grasping Bunter by his ankles and pulling him wrong end up. "Ooooooooooop!" spluttered the Owl of the Remove. "You—you beast—you—you dangerous maniac—help!"

"Lucky they picked on Wharton—what?"

The Co. looked expressively at the cheerful Owl. They seemed to see no luck in that whatever.

Colonel Wharton came away from the telephone. He went to the window, and stood looking out into the frosty night. Miss Wharton sighed.

"Cheer up, ma'am!" said Bunter kindly. "No good moping! Like me to turn the gramophone on?"

Miss Wharton gazed at him. "I'll pick out something jolly," said Bunter. "Cheer you up—what?"

"Dear me!" said Miss Wharton. She went over to the window and joined her brother there.

Bunter blinked after her. Then he began to sort among the gramophone records for something "jolly" to cheer up the dismal company. Frank Nugent took him by the collar and jerked him away.

"Ow! Leggo!" squeaked Bunter. "Keep quiet, you fat fool!" snapped Nugent.

"On, really, Nugent—"
"Kick him!" growled Johnny Bull.
"Beast!"

Billy Bunter grunted discontentedly. Feeling himself that there was really nothing to worry about specially, he was deeply annoyed and irritated by the general atmosphere of gloom.

"Jolly sort of party, ain't you?" he said sardonically. "Nice sort of bright and cheerful company—I don't think. You'll make me as glum as yourselves if you keep on like this. That's you fellows all over—you're inconsiderate! Think of me!"

"What!" howled Johnny Bull.
"Think of me!" repeated Bunter firmly. "What sort of a time am I

having, with all this worrying and moping? You hadn't thought a word about that, I'll be bound! Well, I call it selfish. And if there's a thing I never could stand, it's selfishness. Selfishness all round."

Buzzzzzz!

It was the telephone bell. It had rung a good many times that day; but the sound was one of hope to the chums of the missing junior.

"News, perhaps!" said Bob Cherry. Colonel Wharton strode to the telephone. The juniors watched him eagerly. They saw him start as he placed the receiver to his ear.

"Harry!" he gasped.
"Yes, uncle!" came a well-known voice over the wires. "It's Harry speaking—from Courtfield."

"You are safe?"
"Perfectly safe, and free, and taking a train home in ten minutes."

Colonel Wharton drew a deep breath. He turned his head, and called to his sister in the hall.

"Amy! Harry is safe and free, and is coming home to-night." Then he turned back at once to the telephone.

Miss Wharton clasped her hands in thankfulness, and the tears shone on her lashes. Bob Cherry gave a chirrup of glee. Every face had lighted up at the colonel's words.

"Harry! Did you say you were at Courtfield? That is the town near Greyfriars School," said the colonel.

"Yes, uncle. I've been kept a prisoner in a lonely bungalow—one of the bungalows between Greyfriars and the sea."

"And you escaped?"
"No fear; they never gave me a chance. Inspector Grimes—that's the police-inspector here—found me there

and got me out. He got information, somehow, that there were crooks at the place, and went there, and so—"

"You have not been hurt?"
"Not at all! Mr. Grimes brought me back to Courtfield, and I'm phoning from the police station. There's a train in ten minutes, and I'm catching it for home. I shall be in rather late—eleven o'clock at Wimford."

"I shall be there in the car to meet you, my boy. Thank Heaven you are safe, and are returning to us. We have been terribly anxious."

"I was afraid so. It was that man Clark—Nossey Clark—"

"Yes, I have heard from him," said the colonel. "Take care not to lose your train, Harry. I shall not feel easy till you are here."

"I'm cutting off now; I thought I'd let you know as quickly as I could," said Harry Wharton. "Good-bye, uncle—till eleven."

Colonel Wharton's bronzed face was bright, as he put up the receiver. He came back into the hall, and told the chums of the Remove, in a few words, what Wharton had said.

"Good old Grimes!" said Bob. "But how on earth did he get on the track? Fancy Harry being only a couple of miles from Greyfriars all the time! They took him far enough away from here."

"I say, you fellows—"

Colonel Wharton and Aunt Amy left the juniors in the hall. Billy Bunter blinked at them severely through his big spectacles.

"I told you so!" he remarked.
"Fathead!"

"Didn't I tell you there was nothing to worry about?" demanded Bunter. "I

jolly well did! And was there? There wasn't! Lot of rot, I call it! I told you Wharton was all right—and isn't he all right? Well, then—"

"The rightfulness is terrific, my esteemed idiotic Bunter," chuckled Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "This good news is a stitch in time that saves ninepence."

"Hurrah!" chortled Bob Cherry. "Bunter told us to buck up and be cheerful—and now we'll jolly well do it. Let's be jolly, Bunter!" And Bob Cherry seized the fat junior, and waltzed him round the hall.

"Ow! Leggo!" roared Bunter, as he crashed into a chair and sent it flying.

"My dear chap! I'm bucking up and getting cheerful!" chuckled Bob. "Here we go round the mulberry-bush!"

"Oogh! Groogh! Leggo!" shrieked Bunter. "You're squish-squish-squashing me! Leggo! I'm out of—groogh!—breath! Beast! Leggo!"

"Here we go round—"

"Oooogh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"On with the dance, old fat bean!" roared Bob, and he waltzed the fat Owl round at a terrific rate, till William George Bunter hardly knew whether he was on his head or his heels.

"Groogh-hoooh-hooohoooh!" gurgled Bunter. He gasped and panted and gurgled for breath. "Oooogh! Beast! Wooooogh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Will you leggo?" shrieked Bunter.

"There you are, old fat tulip!" Bob Cherry let go rather suddenly, and the fat junior went spinning.

"Yaroooooh!"

The spinning Owl cannoned into Wells, and clutched at him for support. The butler staggered and sat down. The breathless Owl crashed on him, and flattened him on the floor. A yelp of anguish came from Wells. Billy Bunter was not a light-weight.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Bob. "Rescue, you men!"

The Co rushed to the rescue. Bunter was rolled off Wells, who staggered to his feet gasping. He retired quickly from the scene. When Bob Cherry was

in a state of exuberant spirits, it was hardly safe for a sober, sedate, and middle-aged butler to be near him.

"Ow! Beast!" gasped Bunter.

"Gimme a hand up, you rotter! Wow!"

"I'll give you two, old fat man," said Bob, and he gave Bunter two—grasping his ankles and pulling him up, unfortunately for Bunter by the wrong end.

"Ooooooooop!" spluttered Bunter.

"You—you beast—you—you dangerous maniac! I say, you fellows—

Help!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Leggo!" raved Bunter frantically.

"Oh, all right! There's no satisfying some chaps!" said Bob, and he let go, and Bunter rolled again. He rolled on a rug, and Bob playfully rolled the rug round him as he did so, and left him wrapped up in it.

"Now we'll have the jolly old gramophone on, what?" said Bob. "Bunter's suggestion—Bunter is full of good ideas! What would you like, Bunter?"

"Groogh!" Beast! "Wooogh!"

gurgled Bunter, from within the rolled rug. "Urrgh! Yurrrgggh! Wurrgrgh!"

"Is that German or Esperanto?"

"Wurrrrrrgggh!"

Bob Cherry set the gramophone going, what time Billy Bunter wriggled and squirmed out of the rug. A flustered and breathless fat Owl shook a furious fist at Bob and rolled wrathfully away. He left the happy Co. rejoicing. Nobody was thinking of bed, at bedtime, except Bunter. When the colonel started for the station in the car, the Co. packed into it. And when the train came in from Courtfield, and Harry Wharton stepped from it, Bob Cherry's roar of greeting woke most of the echoes of Wimford. It was a merry party that drove back to Wharton Lodge in the car.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

All Clear!

JIM VALENTINE was down very early the next morning.

Fisher T. Fish was still fast asleep when Mr. Quelch's protegee let himself out of the house, Mr. Quelch was not down—neither was the house-

dame. In the early gleam of the winter dawn, Valentine hurried across the quad, and dropped from the old Cloister wall into the road. He turned up the collar of his coat, and pulled his cap low over his forehead, as he started down Friardale Lane. At that early hour there was no one to be seen abroad; but the boy's eyes were as watchful as a hunted animal's. And his watchfulness grew more keen as he neared the road over the cliffs.

He had slept little in the night. What would be the outcome of his telephone call to Courtfield Police Station he could not be sure. He little dreamed that it had been the means of releasing the schoolboy who had befriended him at Wharton Lodge, on the first day of his escape from Nosey's gang. Surely, he told himself, the local police would have observed the place—the name of "Dick the Penman" was enough to make them stir. They were not likely to guess that it was Dick the Penman himself who had phoned. If they had given Sea Cliff Bungalow their attention, that would be enough—the crooks would take the alarm at once, and go. If only they had gone—

He had to know!

If Barney or Nosey was still at the place he had somehow to prevent Fisher T. Fish from visiting the bungalow and tattling there.

Carefully and cautiously the boy approached the lonely building, keeping in cover and watching it from a distance.

Smoke was rising from the chimney; the building was occupied. He noticed that the front door was open, early as the hour was.

If Barney or any of the gang was there he dared not be seen. There was no sign of the car, from which he could guess that Nosey Clark was not there. But, watching from a distance, he discerned a figure moving in the hall through the open doorway. Farther back was another figure. He dropped on his knees by the fence and watched through the palings. The man in the hall stepped out of the doorway and stood breathing in the keen air from the sea—and Jim's heart leaped as he saw that the man was a ruddy-faced country constable!

His eyes danced

It was a constable from Courtfield; the police were there! That meant that the crooks were gone! Gone—or taken! Jim cared little which! They could do him no harm now. But it was not likely that they were taken, they were too wary for that. He had no doubt that the sight of the police had scared them away; they were gone, and gone for good!

There was deep satisfaction in his heart as he trod away down the snowy road again back to the school.

What had brought the gang to that quarter he could not fathom; some sort of rascality, but what, he could not guess. It mattered little. They were gone, and the police must have made some sort of discovery there, or they would not be in possession of the place. That meant that Nosey & Co would give the place the widest of wide berths, that they would keep away from the vicinity of Greyfriars!

The murky winter morning seemed sunny and bright to Jim Valentine as he walked back to the school. Danger had come close to him—the shadow of the underworld had fallen on him once more—but it had passed him by unharmed. And now surely all was clear! Nosey would seek him, would seek him long before he gave up the search in despair; but whatever he fancied had



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become of Dick the Penman, Nosey never would and never could guess that he was a schoolboy at Greyfriars! If he remained at the school he was safe from the gang, safe from the past—and in time he would even be able to forget that there had ever existed such a person as Dick the Penman.

His heart was light when he came into the school. Mr. Quelch was taking a walk in the quad when Jim came along to the House, and he gave the boy a nod and a benignant smile.

"Good-morning, Valentine! You are out early!"

"Yes, sir! It's a ripping morning!" said Valentine brightly.

The cold, murky December morning did not seem very ripping to the middle-aged Form master. He was quite unaware of the circumstances that made the morning seem so ripping to the boy who had been a crook. But the bright cheerfulness in the boy's handsome face was infectious, and Mr. Quelch smiled genially.

He looked thoughtfully after Valentine as the boy went into the House. The previous afternoon he had wondered whether his protegee was getting a little tired of the deserted school. Jim did not look like that now, however. Judged by his looks, he seemed to think Greyfriars, even in its silent and deserted state, the most delectable spot in the wide world—as indeed he did! And Mr. Quelch resolved, more decidedly than before, that he would prevail upon the Head when he returned to agree with his view that Jim Valentine could and should take his place as a new boy in the Lower Fourth.

"Say, bo', you lost a cent and found a dollar?" asked Fisher T. Fish, when Valentine came in to breakfast with a sunny face.

Valentine laughed. He could laugh now with a happy ring in his laugh that was good to hear.

"I guess I'm going on a lecture pasear after breakfast," said Fisher T. Fish, with his cold, suspicious eyes on the happy face. "Like to mosey along with me to see the folks at the bung?"

"I've got a Latin exercise to do," answered Valentine gravely. "You can tell me about the folks at the bung when you come back, Fish."

"I guess that means that you're scared stiff of that guy with the boko," said Fisher T. Fish. "You don't want to meet up with that galoot."

And after breakfast the inquisitive American started for Sea Cliff Bungalow, determined to find out whatever was to be found out. Jim Valentine sat down to his exercise in Study No. 1 in the Remove. That study, he had learned was occupied by Harry Wharton and Frank Nugent in term time—two of the fellows he had met in Surrey and who had helped him. He liked them, and he believed that they had taken something of a liking to him. If he stayed at Greyfriars he was to share that study with them. Mr. Quelch had said so. They would be friends, he was sure of that! It was a happy prospect!

He wished, perhaps, that they had known nothing of him—nothing of Nosey Clark and the gang. But they were not the fellows to tattle of what they knew; and, after all, they knew little.

He worked very carefully at that exercise. He wanted to please his kind protector, and he wanted to fit himself for entering the Greyfriars Remove, if such was his good fortune. He had finished the paper when there was a tramp in the passage, and Fisher T. Fish threw open the door and stared in. "Oh, here you are!" grunted Fishy.

"Say, I've been to the bung! There's cops there now!"

"Cops?" repeated Valentine.

"A pie-faced gink of a policeman!" grunted Fisher T. Fish. "He asked me what I wanted, and told me to hook it! Said he didn't want schoolboys nosing into the place! Told me to absquatulate! I absquatulated!"

"What are the police there for?" asked Valentine innocently.

"How'd I know?" grunted the American junior. "I kinder asked him, and he told me to mind my own business and clear off! Huh!"

"Not much good telling you that, was it?" remarked Valentine pleasantly.

"Still, it was good advice!"

"Aw, can it!" snapped Fisher T. Fish, and he jerked himself away, evidently very much dissatisfied with his morning's visit to the "bung."

Valentine smiled, and carried down his finished exercise to Mr. Quelch's study. The Remove master greeted him kindly, and they went through the exercise together. After which, Jim Valentine went out for a walk again—and again his footsteps took him past the bungalow on the cliff road. But this time he walked past it with his head erect and a smile on his face. The police were still there—a car stood on the road, and he saw a plump red-faced inspector in talk with a constable in the snowy garden. Inspector Grimes glanced at the boy as he sauntered past, and smiled—the handsome face, with its happy smile, brought that smile to the inspector's ruddy face. His glance lingered genially on the boy as he went. Little did Inspector Grimes dream that he was casting that genial glance after Dick the Penman.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

Bold Bunter!

"DON'T be afraid, old chap!"

"What?"

"I'm with you, you know!" said Bunter.

"You blithering duffer!"

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

Harry Wharton's eyes glinted under his knitted brows as he glanced back along the dusky lane. It was two or three days since his return home, and during those days the eyes of the Greyfriars fellows had been very wide open indeed for Mr. Nosey Clark.

No word had been received from that gentleman; nothing had been seen of him. But now that Harry Wharton & Co. were on their guard they had no doubt that Wharton Lodge was being watched.

Colonel Wharton considered it doubtful whether the rascals would venture to make another attempt, and he thought it likely, too, that they had become aware by that time that Jim Valentine was not at the Lodge. But he was taking every precaution to safeguard his nephew till he should go back to school for the new term. The local police were on the watch, and one or two of the keepers kept ward at night, and bars had been fitted to Harry Wharton's window. And he never went out alone.

It was an irksome and irritating state of affairs to Harry Wharton, and he would have been rather glad to meet Mr. Nosey Clark and plant his knuckles hard on that gentleman's prominent nose.

The juniors had been down to the village, and were walking back to the Lodge in the dusk when they became aware that they were followed. Hurree Janset Ram Singh's keen eyes had de-

tected a shadowy figure that lurked in the dusk behind. But as the juniors stopped and looked back that shadowy figure vanished into the frosty woodland.

"This is getting too jolly thick!" said Harry between his set lips. "I suppose those rotters are watching for a chance to catch me alone."

"Safe enough all together," said Bob. "But it's jolly annoying. I wish they'd come to close quarters."

"Don't be nervous, old chap!" said Bunter.

"Who's nervous?" roared Bob.

"You are!" answered the fat Owl cheerfully. "Lot of nervous asses, you know. I'm not nervous! I'll handle them fast enough if they slow up."

"My esteemed idiotic Bunter—"

"Don't you be afraid, Inky," said Bunter reassuringly. "Leave it to me if there's any danger! I'm the man for it!"

"Oh, shut up, you ass!" growled Johnny Bull.

"Yah!" retorted Bunter.

Billy Bunter, it was true, was not afraid. When there was no danger William George Bunter was as bold as a lion.

Each of the Famous Five carried a stout stick in his walks abroad, and it was extremely unlikely that the crooks would make any attempt to tackle them in a bunch. The juniors rather wished that they would. It was fairly clear that if Harry Wharton was caught alone he would be in danger. But there was no danger for the whole party together. That being obviously the case, Billy Bunter feared no foe. Not content with being in that bold and fearless state himself, Bunter persisted in taking the view that the other fellows were alarmed, and that it was his business to buck them up and inspire them with courage. Which was a little irritating in view of the undoubted fact that, on the first appearance of the slightest danger, the fat Owl would have been in the bluest of blue funks.

The chums of the Remove walked on, casting every now and then a glance behind, or into the dusky shades of the woodland that bordered the lane. They were not, as Bunter affected to think, nervous, but they were wary.

"Cheer up, Franky, old man," said Bunter, turning his big spectacles on Nugent. "You're looking rather pale."

"You fat idiot!"

"Keep a stiff upper lip, and all that, you know," said Bunter encouragingly.

"Pluck's what you want—just a little pluck!"

"My esteemed absurd and idiotic jawful Bunter—"

"I dare say you're looking pale, too, Inky, if a fellow could see it through your jolly old Day-&Martin complexion!" chuckled Bunter. "Wharton, old man, there's nothing to be frightened of in that wood—there's nobody there! He, he, he!"

Bob Cherry gave the fat Owl a grim look. He dropped behind the party. Bunter blinked back at him in the winter dusk.

"I say, Cherry, better keep with me!" he called back. "You're safe with me, you know."

Bob, without answering, disappeared in the dusk behind. The other fellows sauntered on; they guessed, though the obtuse and self-satisfied Owl did not, that Bob had some object in view.

A few minutes later there was a rustle in the dusky woodland beside the lane. Billy Bunter gave a start.

"I say, you fellows, that sounds like
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somebody in the wood!" he exclaimed, with an uneasy blink through his big spectacles.

"Go hon!" said Nugent. "Getting nervous?"

"Nothing of the sort. Still, I think we may as well hurry a bit—we shall be late for tea!"

There was another rustle in the wood. It was deeply dusky under the frosty trees, but the juniors had a glimpse of Bob Cherry, who was getting ahead of the party. The short-sighted Owl, however, saw nothing; but he could hear, and the rustling sound made him uneasy. To his great annoyance, the other fellows slowed down.

"I say, you fellows, get a move on!" exclaimed Bunter irritably. "I tell you we're late for tea!"

"That's all right!" said Harry. "You cut on first!"

"I—I'm not going to leave you when you might be in danger, old chap," answered Bunter, with an uneasy blink at the dusky road ahead. "Safer to keep together, you know. But do buck up a bit!"

Instead of bucking up the juniors dawdled. Billy Bunter was generally rather too slow for them. Now he had to slow down. The winter darkness deepened, and Bunter blinked in great disquiet at the bordering wood. He was certain that somebody was there—and he was no longer feeling as bold as a lion.

But he could no longer hear the rustling. Bob Cherry was now well ahead of the walkers. Having got ahead of them, Bob came out of the wood and lurked in the shadow of a tree beside the lane, waiting for them to come up. He was wearing a dark muffler, and he now tied this across his face to serve as a mask. In his right hand he held a copy of the "Gem" rolled up in circular form. Thus he waited.

Four fellows grinned as they glimpsed the dark figure waiting under the trees as they came up. Billy Bunter did not grin—he yelped.

"I—I say, you fellows! That—that's somebody!"

"Go and see who it is," suggested Nugent. "Collar him while we get past, Bunter."

"I—I—I say—" Bunter's teeth chattered as he blinked at the still, silent, dark figure with its masked face. "I—I say— Yaroooh!"

The figure made a sudden spring into the road. The rolled-up "Gem" was levelled at Billy Bunter's startled fat face.

"Hands up!" barked a husky voice. "Owl! Yow! Wow! Help!" roared Bunter.

"Collar him, Bunter!" shouted Johnny Bull. "Never mind his pistol! Collar him, and give us a chance!" "Yoooooh!"

Billy Bunter did not collar the terrifying figure. He squeaked with terror and tore on at a desperate run. "Halt!" roared the masked figure.

"Hands up!" "Yaroooh!"

Bunter's fat little legs went like machinery. Spluttering with terror, the Owl of the Remove vanished up the lane in the direction of Wharton Lodge.

Bob Cherry took the muffler from his face and unrolled the "Gem" and put it in his pocket.

"Anybody else scared?" he asked.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The scarefulness is not terrific!" chuckled the Nabob of Bhanipur.

"I wasn't really going to shoot Bunter with that 'Gem,' you know!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Famous Five proceeded at a trot, chuckling. From ahead, in the dusk, they could hear the pattering of feet and the spluttering and gasping of Billy Bunter. Bunter was going strong. He whirled in at the gateway of Wharton Lodge, and went up the drive at a terrific burst of speed. Behind him, at a little distance, trotted the Famous Five, chortling.

It seemed to Bunter an age before he reached the house. He could hear the pattering of footsteps behind him, and in his mind's eye he saw a masked desperado with an automatic on his track. Puffing and blowing, he reached the door and hammered on it frantically.

"Lemme in!" shrieked Bunter. "They're after me! Help! Help! Help! Open this door! Help! Police! Murder! Fire! Yaroooh!"

Bang! Bang! Bang! The door opened. Wells, with grave surprise in his well-trained face, gazed at the terrified Owl. Bunter charged in the moment the door was open, and Wells, being in the way, received the charge. The butler of Wharton Lodge sat down with a gasp.

Bunter staggered across the hall, spluttering.

"Owl! Help! Shut the door! Keep them off! Whoop!"

"What is all this?" Colonel Wharton came striding into the hall. "Bunter, are you out of your senses? What—"

"Yaroooh! Help! They're coming!" shrieked Bunter, dodging round the tall military gentleman. "Keep them off! They're coming! Make that idiot shut the door! Ring up the police! Oh lor!"

"Who are coming?" roared the colonel.

"We are!" chuckled Bob Cherry, as he came in with his comrades, and the astonished colonel stared at five grinning faces. "Nobody else! It's all right, Bunter—no danger!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I say, you fellows, shut the door!" yelled Bunter. "He's got a pistol—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What in the name of all that is absurd is the matter with this foolish boy?" exclaimed Colonel Wharton testily.

"I think he got frightened about something, sir," answered Bob. "I rather think he fancied he saw a man with a gun—"

"I did see him!" yelled Bunter. "He had a pistol—he pointed it at me! Oh lor!"

"You saw the pistol?" asked Bob.

"Owl! Yes! Oh lor!"

"Was it anything like this?" asked Bob, taking the "Gem" from his pocket, rolling it, and levelling it at Bunter.

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the juniors.

"Why, you—you—you beast!" gasped Bunter. "You—you beast! It—it was you pulling my leg, was it, you rotter? You—you—you—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Pshaw!" grunted Colonel Wharton, and he strode back to the library, leaving Billy Bunter glaring at the yelling Co with a glare that almost cracked his spectacles.

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

Nosey's Last Chance!

NOSEY CLARK gritted his yellow teeth, and his black eyes glinted. There was savage anger and deep perplexity in the hawkish face of the crook.

In the clear frosty morning he was standing among the trees by the Wimford road, watching a car that came from the direction of Wharton Lodge. Colonel Wharton was driving the car, and inside it were two schoolboys—Harry Wharton and the Nabob of Bhanipur. There was baggage on the car, and it was heading for Wimford and the railway station. It was the first day of the new term, and the juniors were about to start for the school. And the crook watched them as the car passed, in angry perplexity.

A day or two ago, Bob Cherry and Johnny Bull, Frank Nugent and Billy Bunter had gone home—a matter of indifference to Nosey Clark, though his spies had watched their going. He was still fixed in the belief that the boy who had escaped him was sheltered at Wharton Lodge. But now the last of the party were going; and obviously Jim Valentine was not with them. If he had been at the Lodge, he was still there; in which case it was plain that the juniors had not sheltered him without the knowledge of the master of the place, as Nosey had suspected. If he was still there, it must be with Colonel Wharton's knowledge and permission; and the crook, at long last, began to doubt and to wonder whether he had been, after all, mistaken.

Jim Valentine had vanished from all knowledge. He must have found a refuge somewhere; and Nosey had been convinced that that refuge was Harry Wharton's home. But he doubted now.

The car disappeared along the road, its occupants unconscious of the hawk-eyes that watched from the trees. Nosey Clark was left to wonder and doubt.

Half an hour later he watched the car return, with the colonel alone in it. Harry Wharton and the nabob were on their way to Greyfriars. Had they left the boy they had once befriended at the Lodge? Nosey Clark could not help realising that it was improbable. Yet if Jim Valentine was not there, where was he? The crook ground his teeth at the thought that he had been following a false scent for so long, and that all the time Dick the Penman had been far away.

Later in the day, hanging about the vicinity of the Lodge in a mood of doubt and indecision, Nosey saw the car again.

This time it was driven by a chauffeur; and Colonel Wharton and his sister were inside, and again the car was packed with luggage. Now that the vacation was over, and their nephew gone back to school, apparently the colonel and Miss Wharton were leaving also.

Nosey Clark snarled as he watched them go.

He could hardly doubt any longer. Wharton Lodge was left to the servants, and it was scarcely possible that Jim Valentine was left there also. It was borne in upon Nosey's angry mind, at last, that he had been on the wrong track—wasting his time in the wrong quarter, while the boy he sought was making good his escape. And after such a lapse of time, how was he to pick up the right trail again? If Jim Valentine was not at Wharton Lodge, he was far away; and in what direction to look for him was a problem to the crook.

At a wayside inn, a mile from Wharton Lodge, he compared notes with Barney Hayes. Barney had shaved off his red moustache, and made other changes in his appearance, and was hardly recognisable as the man who



"I say, you fellows!" squeaked Billy Bunter. "I say—Oh crikey! What's that?" Something descended suddenly on his round bullet head, enveloping his ears. It was Temple's topper! "Oh crikey!" squealed the fat junior. "I say—yaroop!" "Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the onlookers.

had guarded the kidnapped junior at Sea Cliff Bungalow.

"We've been fooled!" was Barney's verdict. "I've found out that the old covey and the old lady have gone to Bournemouth—some relation they've got there. They ain't coming back for a month. The house will be shut up while they're gone—only some of the servants left. Jim ain't there, Nosey!" Nosey snarled.

He was sure of that, now.

"They took him in and helped him, but he left afterwards, same as they said! He never came back there," said Barney. "It looked like it—but it wasn't so, Nosey! We've had all our trouble for nothing."

"I'll find him yet!" said Nosey Clark, between his teeth. "We can't afford to lose him, Barney."

Barney shrugged his shoulders.

"Where'll you look?" he asked. "He's had a couple of weeks to get clear, as it turns out! We're dished."

Mr. Clark replied with a string of unpleasant remarks. After which, he wrinkled his brow in thought.

"We made a mistake," he conceded. "He was not there, as we thought. There was plenty of reason to think so, as we knew that those young scoundrels had taken him in once and sheltered him. But they must have taken some sort of liking to him, to help him as they did. Likely enough they know where he is."

Barney shook his head.

"I fancy young Wharton was telling the truth when he said he knew nothing about him," he said. "It looks like it now."

"I know it does!" snarled Nosey. "But he may know something, all the same. Jim's alone—friendless. Ten to one he may keep in touch with fellows

who were friendly with him. If Wharton knows anything of his whereabouts—"

"He don't!" said Barney, with another shake of the head.

Nosey spat out an oath.

"It's a chance, anyhow!" he growled. "It's the only chance! If young Wharton knows anything, I'll get it out of him—and I know where to find him, at least. He's at school at Greyfriars—that's the school a mile or two from the bungalow where we parked the young hound. I can get my hands on him easily enough, and if he knows where Jim is—"

"He don't know any more'n you do, Nosey! You'll be wasting your time again."

"It's a chance, at least!" snarled Nosey.

Mr. Compton Clark, as a matter of fact, had little doubt that Barney was right, and that Harry Wharton had told the simple truth when he had said that he knew nothing of Jim Valentine's whereabouts. He was aware that he was clinging to a straw. But it was, as he had said, the only chance that remained; if Wharton knew nothing, the trail was hopelessly lost, but if he knew anything, what he knew should be extracted from him.

The neighbourhood of Wharton Lodge was relieved of the presence of Nosey and his gang. It was in the direction of Greyfriars School that Nosey was now setting to work. That Jim Valentine was there was a thought that never crossed Nosey's mind for a moment. Harry Wharton was his object in giving his attention to Greyfriars. But at Greyfriars, Nosey Clark was destined to make a startling discovery. Jim Valentine's refuge was not so safe from the gang as he believed.

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.

Back to Greyfriars!

"HALLO, hallo, hallo!" roared Bob Cherry.

"Look out, you ass!" ejaculated Cecil Reginald Temple, of the Greyfriars Fourth.

Bob Cherry—merry and bright, as usual—was standing on the platform at Courtfield Station, which was rather crowded on the first day of term. Bob was looking out for his friends—and as he sighted Harry Wharton and Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh he took off his cap and waved it and shouted, with a voice that Stentor of old might have equalled, but could hardly have excelled.

Perhaps Bob did not notice—or perhaps he did—that Cecil Reginald Temple was close at hand, his lofty head adorned with a handsome silk hat. Waving a cap, with a silk hat within reach, was bound to lead to disaster—to the hat! Temple's shining topper flew from his head; and Temple looked as alarmed and excited as if his head had flown along with it.

"My hat!" shrieked Temple. "You clumsy ass—my hat!"

He plunged after the flying topper. "Stop that hat, Smithy!" shouted Bob.

A gust of wind caught the hat, and floated it along, with Temple in pursuit.

It floated towards Herbert Vernon-Smith, the Bounder of Greyfriars. Smithy stared round, spotted the hat, and stopped it promptly. Apparently, however, he mistook it for a football, for he stopped it with his foot, and then lifted it with a neat kick which sent it flying over Temple's head again.

"Oh gad!" gasped Temple, clutching THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,298.

at the topper as it flew, and missing it. "You cheeky fag—my hat!" Temple spun round after the hat. "Pass, Squiff!" shouted the Bouncer. Squiff of the Remove cheerfully "passed," sending the hat sailing back to Bob Cherry. There was a shout of laughter along the platform. Bob lifted the hat with his toe, and it sailed away again, with Temple once more in frantic pursuit.

"I say, you fellows!" squeaked Billy Bunter. "I say— Oh crickey, what's that?"

Something descended from the air on Billy Bunter, dropping on his round bullet head, and coming down to his ears. Temple's topper was a large size for Billy Bunter, and as it dropped fairly on his head it came down like an extinguisher on a candle.

"Oh crickey! I say Yarooooop!" squealed Bunter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bunter, in amazed alarm, clutched at his extinguisher. He dragged Temple's hat from his head, and blinked at it in astonishment through his big spectacles.

"It—it—it's a hat!" gasped the astonished Owl.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Gimme my hat, you fat freak!" yelled Temple of the Fourth, coming up breathless.

"Your hat!" snorted Bunter. "If it's your hat, wharrer you mean by slamming it on my napper, you silly ass? I can tell you, I don't like such larks, Temple! Blow your silly hat!"

And instead of giving it to Temple, Billy Bunter hurled it across the platform. Temple stayed only to give Bunter a smite—but it was a hefty smite, and it caused the Owl of the Remove to sit down with a heavy bump. Bunter sat and roared, and Temple chased the hat. Coker of the Fifth had caught it on the end of a walking-stick. Coker, grinning, held it in the air on the end of his stick.

Temple, hatless and breathless, rushed up.

"Gimme my hat!" he shrieked.

Horace Coker, grinning, marched along the platform with the hat elevated on the end of his stick. This seemed funny to Coker. It did not seem funny to Temple, who raged after him, demanding his hat. It was a handsome hat—or, rather, it had been a handsome hat, it was beginning to look rather like a busby now. They disappeared along the platform, Coker triumphantly waving the hat on the stick, Temple in frenzied pursuit, amid shouts of laughter.

"Here we are again!" said Bob Cherry, as the Co. gathered in a cheery group. "This is going to be a jolly term, my beloved 'carers!' Every term, according to Bob, was going to be a jolly term.

"I say, you fellows—"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Here's Bunter!" Bob Cherry greeted the Owl of the Remove with a hearty smack on the shoulder—so hearty that Bunter uttered a howl of anguish.

"Ow! Beast! Yarooooop!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"This way, you men!" called out Vernon-Smith from a doorway of the local train. "Room for half a dozen!" Smithy and Tom Redwing were in the carriage. The Famous Five pushed their way in after a struggle.

"I say, you fellows," gasped Bunter, "what about me?"

"Full up!" chuckled Bob. "See you again at Greyfriars old fat man!"

"I'm coming by train!" yelled Bunter, grabbing at the door-handle. A

porter clutched at him. "I say, you fellows— Beasts! If you think that funny, I can jolly well say— Leggo, you silly chump!"

But the porter did not let go; he grabbed Bunter and jerked him away from the train, which was beginning to move. Grinning faces packed the window as it went, and Bob waved farewell to the Owl of the Remove, who shook an infuriated fat fist in return. Billy Bunter had to wait with the crowd for the second train.

There was a cheery buzz of talk in the crowded carriage as the train ran on to Friardale.

"Going to be a good boy this term, Wharton?" asked the Bouncer, with a chuckle.

Harry Wharton coloured a little. He did not like being reminded of the troubles of last term.

"Yes; I'll leave your example alone, Smithy," he answered. "One silly ass playing the goat is enough in the Remove."

The Bouncer laughed.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! I know that chap," exclaimed Bob Cherry, who was looking from the window as the train approached Friardale. "Great Christopher Columbus! Look!"

"Who? What?"

"Look!" yelled Bob excitedly.

From the train, as it ran towards the village station, Friardale Lane could be seen. In the lane, walking, was a boy in cap and overcoat, swinging along cheerily and whistling as he went. All the fellows in the carriage stared out, wondering what Bob's excitement was about. The Co. fixed their gaze on the handsome face, with its dark hazel eyes, of the boy swinging along the lane. They knew him at once.

"Valentine!" exclaimed Wharton in amazement.

"And here!" exclaimed Nugent. "There's no doubt about it; it's the same chap. I'd know him anywhere."

"Great pip!"

The Co. stared blankly. There was no doubt about the boy's identity; it was Jim Valentine. They had wondered a good many times what had become of him, but were rather beginning to forget him by this time. They had not expected to see him again. But they saw him now, looking merry and bright as he swung along the frosty lane.

Bob Cherry threw the window open and leaned out.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" he bawled.

They saw Valentine start and glance round. But the train was rushing on, and before he could spot them they were carried on out of his sight.

"Well, my hat!" said Harry. "Fancy seeing that chap here!"

"Looks a decent sort of kid," said Vernon-Smith. "Who is he? You fellows know him?"

"We met him in the hols," said Harry, adding no further information. If Jim Valentine, as appeared to be the case, was staying in that neighbourhood, the less said about his peculiar history the better.

The train ran into Friardale, and the juniors descended from it. Harry Wharton & Co. walked from the village to the school, and they kept their eyes open for the strange lad they had befriended in the holidays at Wharton Lodge. But they saw nothing of him. The juniors were thinking of him as they walked on to the school and wondering if they would meet him during that term. They were far from guessing how soon they were to meet him—and where.

THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER.

Something Like a Surprise!

FISHER T. FISH beamed on the arriving crowd.

First day of term was not a jolly day to many fellows who would have liked the holidays to last longer. But to Fisher T. Fish it was, so to speak, a day to be marked with a white stone. Fisher T. Fish counted the days and the hours till the fellows came back; he was fed-up with his own company, fascinating as it was.

True, this vacation had been a little better than usual, as his solitude had been shared by Mr. Quelch's protege. But that quiet youth was taciturn and stand-offish, and displayed no enjoyment in hearing Fisher T. Fish talk about himself and the wonderful Yew-nited States. And Fishy, in an ill moment for himself, had lost his transatlantic temper, and started out to make "potato-scrappings" of Jim Valentine—an enterprise that resulted in disaster, and left Fishy with a lingering pain in his long transatlantic nose. Fisher T. Fish was feeling that his vocal organs were getting rusty for want of use. Conversation was bottled up in him in enormous quantities. He fairly beamed when the quad echoed once more to many footsteps, and the passages to the buzz of voices.

"Say, you guys, I'm sure glad to see you!" chirruped Fisher T. Fish, when the Famous Five came in, ruddy and cheery from their walk in the frosty air.

"I'll say I'm plumb glad!"

"The gladfulness to behold your esteemed and ridiculous countenance is also terrific," said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh solemnly.

"Where did you dig up that nose, old bean?" asked Bob Cherry. "Been scrapping with Cosling?"

Fisher T. Fish caressed his damaged nose tenderly.

"I guess I've been walloping a guy," he answered. "An all-fired cheeky galoot. I sure did wallop him some! And then a few! Yep, I surely did make potato-scrappings of that guy!"

"Your nose looks like it!" grinned Bob Cherry.

"Who is it—a new kid?" asked Harry Wharton.

"I guess so—and you've got him in your study, I reckon," said Fisher T. Fish. "Old Quelch picked him up somewhere and slung him along here, in the vac. I guess he might as well have left him where he belonged. But I calculate you know that Quelch is an all-fired, dog-goned, pesky old gink—"

"FISH!"

"Oh, Jerusalem crickets!" ejaculated Fisher T. Fish, in dismay, spinning round like a humming-to; at the voice of his Form master.

Mr. Quelch glared at him.

"Were you referring to me, Fish?"

"Oh! Yep! Nope! Oh, wako snakes!" groaned Fisher T. Fish, wishing from the bottom of his heart that he had ascertained whether Mr. Quelch was in hearing before he described him as an all-fired, dog-goned gink!

"You will follow me to my study, Fish!"

Mr. Quelch gave the Famous Five a kind nod. Fisher T. Fish groaned as he followed the Remove master to his study.

Fishy had been longing to use his voice—and now he used it as Mr. Quelch proceeded to administer "six." He used it on its top note.

Harry Wharton & Co. went up to the Remove passage. Most of the fellows had arrived by now, and that passage was crowded and considerably noisy.

Fellows were bagging their old studies or arguing with other fellows desirous of bagging them. Bags were being banged down, doors opening and slamming, fellows greeting one another with cheery shouts.

Bob Cherry and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh went along to Study No. 13, and found that Skinner, having arrived first, had landed himself there, preferring that study to his old quarters in Study No. 11. But after Bob had talked to him for a few minutes—sitting on his head the while—Skinner decided in favour of his old study after all.

Harry Wharton and Frank Nugent turned into Study No. 1.

The new kid to whom Fishy had referred was not there, but there were a good many signs of recent occupation.

A fire burned in the grate; a book lay open in the armchair; and there were books and papers on the table, among them an unfinished Latin exercise.

"Rotten luck!" remarked Wharton. "We don't want new kids bunged into this study, Frank."

"No fear!" agreed Nugent.

"Looks as if he's been at work here! Queer for a kid to come along before the term. Rather a windfall for Fishy—but he doesn't seem to like him."

"That's something in his favour!" said Nugent, laughing.

The two juniors unpacked their belongings in the study, rather curious to see the new fellow who was, apparently, to be their study-mate that term. He did not come in, but they came across a good many things belonging to him—among them a set of school books, neatly packed on the bookshelf. Then a bell rang, and they joined the crowd rushing down to Hall.

After which, having time on their hands, the Famous Five walked out of gates, the Co. being curious to see the bungalow on the cliffs where Harry Wharton had been kept a prisoner while in the hands of Nosey Clark & Co.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo. There's jolly old Grimey!" exclaimed Bob Cherry, as she sighted a portly figure in Friardale Lane.

The juniors saluted Inspector Grimes of Courtfield politely. Mr. Grimes stopped and gave them a genial grin.

"Back at school again, what?" said Mr. Grimes. "Safe and sound, what, Master Wharton?"

"Yes, thanks to you, Mr. Grimes," said Harry.

"You've seen nothing more of Mr. Nosey Clark, what?"

"No!"

"Or of the boy—what was his name—Valentine? He did not turn up at your home again?" asked Mr. Grimes.

"He never came back there," said Harry, colouring a little.

The Co. were silent. Quite unexpectedly, they had had a glimpse of Jim Valentine that day—from the train windows—in Friardale Lane. But they hesitated to mention that to Mr. Grimes.

"I should like to see that boy," said Mr. Grimes. "Safe and sound, what, at the time, Master Wharton, I gather that there is no harm in him—in fact, he seems to have been doing the right thing in trying to keep clear of a bad lot."

"I'm sure there's no harm in him, Mr. Grimes," said Harry.

"The surefulness is terrific!" declared Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"But I want to see him," said the inspector. "I've no doubt he knows something that would be very useful to

me—very! Those rascals must have had a very powerful reason for wanting to get their hands on him again. I fancy he knows too much for them to want him to be running loose. You see that?"

"I—I see," said Wharton slowly.

"If that young fellow turns up again I'd like you to let me know," said Mr. Grimes, and with a nod to the schoolboys he rolled ponderously on.

The chums of the Remove walked on towards the cliffs, rather silent. They quite understood the police-inspector's desire to get into touch with the boy who had fled from a gang of crooks Mr. Grimes, of course, did not know Valentine by sight, and might have passed him in Friardale without guessing who he was. It was pretty certain, on the other hand, that Valentine did not want to get into touch with the police, or he would have done so already.

"No bizney of ours," said Johnny Bull at last.

And it was left at that, and the juniors dismissed the matter from their minds as they walked on to the cliffs.

"That's the place," said Harry, as they came in sight of Sea Cliff Bungalow.

The place was shut up, doors closed and windows shuttered, the police evidently no longer in possession.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! There's somebody else interested in the show," said Bob Cherry.

Standing by the fence that bordered the snowy garden, with his back to the juniors as they came along, was a boy in cap and overcoat.

He was looking over the fence towards the bungalow, as if interested in the lonely, deserted building. He was deep in thought, and did not hear the juniors as they came up.

Bob Cherry, with a cheery grin, stooped and scooped up a handful of snow.

"Chuck it, fathead!" said Nugent. "Keep your larking for Greyfriars fellows, you ass!"

"Chuck it?" asked Bob.

"Yes, ass!"

"Right-ho! Here goes!"

And Bob Cherry "chucked" the snowball—not in the sense that Nugent intended. It landed on the back of the stranger's head, and he gave a sudden jump.

"Oh!" he gasped.

He spun round, staring at the juniors.

"Sorry, old bean!" chuckled Bob.

"Simply couldn't resist it—Why—what—my hat—Valentine!"

"The esteemed and ridiculous Valentine!" exclaimed Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Oh! You fellows!" exclaimed Jim Valentine, rubbing the snow from the back of his head. "It—it—it's you!"

"Little us!" chuckled Bob. "We're back at school to-day. We're at Greyfriars, you know. It's quite near here. Ever seen it?"

"Yes," gasped Valentine, "I've seen it. Oh, yes."

He looked rather uncertainly at the chums of the Remove. It was evident that he was a little doubtful of how they would greet him. Harry Wharton settled that matter by holding out his hand, and the Co. shook hands with him in turn.

"Glad to see you again, Valentine!" said Harry.

"The gladfulness is preposterous."

"I'm jolly glad to see you," said Jim Valentine. "I haven't forgotten how you stood by me—a stranger to you. And—and you took me on trust, too!"

"Oh, we know a decent chap when we see one," said Bob cheerfully. "Are you staying about here?"

Valentine laughed.

"Yes, I'm staying about here—for the present," he answered. "It's a safe distance from Nosey." His face became grave again. "I asked you fellows, last time we met, to say nothing about Nosey, in connection with me. You said you wouldn't. I know you'll keep to that."

"Of course!" said Harry, though he could not help remembering Mr. Grimes' request as he spoke. "That's all right. We'd better get back, you fellows. They'll be calling the roll soon. Going our way, Valentine?"

"Yes," said Valentine, with a rather curious grin.

"Trot along, then, old bean."

Jim Valentine walked down the cliff road with the Famous Five towards Friardale. They passed through the village, and Valentine, rather to their surprise, kept on along Friardale Lane towards the school. They had supposed that he was staying in the village, but apparently his destination was farther on.

"That's Greyfriars," said Bob Cherry, as the grey old tower came in sight over the leafless trees.

Valentine smiled.

It had not occurred to the juniors that his destination was Greyfriars. He wondered what they would think when they knew.

They reached the school gates, and the juniors stopped.

"Well, here we are!" said Wharton.

"Yes, here we are!" agreed Valentine. "Come on!"

To the astonishment of the juniors Valentine turned in at the gateway. They followed him in.

"You know somebody here—I mean, as well as us?" asked Bob Cherry.

"Oh, yes. Don't you remember, I met your Form master, Mr. Quelch, while he was at Wharton Lodge, in the vacation?" smiled Valentine.

"Yes, I remember. But—"

In great surprise, the chums of the Remove walked across to the House with Jim Valentine, in the falling dusk. Fisher T. Fish met them on the way, and bestowed a rather hostile look on Valentine.

"How's your nose, old bean?" asked Valentine amiably.

"Aw, can it, you pesky geck!" growled Fisher T. Fish. "I guess I'll sure make potato scrapings of you one of these days."

And he stalked away.

"You seem to know Fishy," said Bob Cherry, more and more surprised. "Did you give him that nose? Hallo, hallo, hallo! Here's Quelch!"

Mr. Quelch met the juniors as they came into the House. Mr. Quelch was very busy on the first day of the term. But he stopped, and gave Jim Valentine a kindly smile.

"I see you have met your old acquaintances, Valentine," he said.

"Yes, sir," said Valentine.

"You boys met Valentine, I think, in the holidays," said Mr. Quelch. "I hope you will be friends, my boys."

"Oh, certainly, sir!" said Wharton, in astonishment. "We all like Valentine, sir!"

"The likefulness is terrific!"

"I am glad to hear it," said Mr. Quelch genially, and he passed on, leaving the juniors staring.

(Continued on page 28.)

instead, but impulsively stretched out a hand and clasped Nobby's.

"Bully for you, kid!" he exclaimed. "But where did you spring from—"
"I can answer that," broke in Ferrers Locke. "He sprang from the luggage grid, and, unless I'm mistaken, we picked him up outside the circus ground at Middleham. You remember we stopped there to change seats."

"Go on; now say he's the circus kid you were telling me about," said Drake banteringly, but he was taken aback by the answer.

"He is! The very same!"
Nobby, who had been studying Locke and Drake in the light of the car lamps, realised for the first time that he had met the former before. On that occasion he had been squirming in the grip of the Don. This tall stranger with the keen, kindly face had chipped in.

Nobby was doubly glad now that he had been of some assistance, albeit he felt strangely shy and embarrassed under Locke's kindly scrutiny. A burning in his cheeks told him he was blushing, and, to cover his confusion, he pointed to the two bandits who were now showing some signs of returning consciousness.

"Bring me—" began Locke.
But Drake was already speeding towards the Rolls. He returned with a pair of handcuffs that glittered in the rays of the headlights.

"One pair will be enough for these beauties, gov'nor," he jerked out; and to Nobby's astonishment Drake stooped, clipped one of the cuffs round the wrist of the bandit in the overcoat, passed the remaining cuff through the wheel of the bandit's car, and linked it around the wrist of his companion.

"They'll be safe enough like that until the police call and fetch them in, gov'nor," said Drake crisply. "Can't have seem like this inside our car."

Ferrers Locke smiled.
The Rolls was brand new, and Drake took a passionate interest in its appearance.

"Have it your own way, Jack," he conceded. "There's one thing, they won't do any more of their highway robbery tricks for a few years to come, thanks to our young friend here. Hallo! Where's he gone?"

Nobby had thought this an opportune moment to make himself scarce. Jamming on one of his shoes which lay near to hand, he faded into the darkness, hoping that luck might bring him across the companion shoe. He told himself that he could not expect to continue his ride on the luggage grid; and it never occurred to him to ask Ferrers Locke for a lift.

Locke's keen eyes, however, soon detected his moving shadow, and in a moment the detective was striding after him.

"Not so fast, young man," he said good-naturedly, dropping a hand on Nobby's shoulder. "Why, I haven't thanked you yet."

"I don't want any thanks, sir," said Nobby.

"Well, where are you bound for?"
"Nowhere—that is anywhere—," replied Nobby in confusion.

"Meaning London, what?" asked Locke. "Well, I happen to live there myself. Let me give you a lift."

Nobby didn't remember how he replied to that invitation; he was somewhat overwhelmed. Not much of the milk of human kindness had come his way. Before he knew what was happening Ferrers Locke was ushering him into the well-sprung saloon.

(Nobby has fallen on his feet by the look of things. But has he seen the last of the tyrannical Don Carlos? You'll be surprised and thrilled when you read next week's chapters of this powerful story.)

THE KIDNAPPED SCHOOLBOY!

(Continued from page 25.)

"Well, my hat!" said Bob blankly. "I don't catch on. You seem to be at home here, Valentine."

"Oh, quite!" assented Valentine, and he took off his coat—evidently very much at home.

"You're staying here?" exclaimed Wharton.

"You've got it."
"With Quelch?" exclaimed Nugent.

"Sort of."
"Well, my hat!"

The Famous Five gazed at him. Remembering what Mr. Grimes had said in the lane, it was rather startling to find that the boy whom Mr. Grimes desired so much to see was staying at Greyfriars School. But there was another surprise in store for them yet.

Valentine went up the staircase, and the astonished juniors followed. They were heading for the Remove passage, and they found that Jim Valentine was heading for the same spot, evidently knowing his way well. To their further astonishment, he threw open the door of Study No. 1 and walked into that celebrated apartment as if it belonged to him.

They followed him in. Valentine turned on the light and regarded their amazed faces with a smile.

"You don't catch on?" he asked.

"Blessed if I do!" said Harry.

"Look here—"

Then, all of a sudden, it dawned on him.

"There's a new kid here! You—" he gasped.

"I'm the new kid!"

"Great pip!" gasped Bob Cherry.

There was silence. Jim Valentine was still smiling, but there was a faintly anxious look in his dark eyes.

"You don't like the idea?" he asked.

"Oh, yes," gasped Wharton. "That's all right. But—but—I'm glad, old chap! Jolly glad! But—but—"

He left it at that. He was glad, but—there were many "buts." Between Nosey Clark on the one hand and Inspector Grimes on the other, he could not help wondering what was in store for Jim Valentine of the Remove.

THE END

(Next Saturday's MAGNET will contain another grand long yarn of Jim Valentine and the chums of Greyfriars, entitled: "DICK THE PENMAN!" and SIX more FREE picture-stamps to stick in your album. See that you order your copy in good time, chums!)

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