



THE FIRST
CHAPTER

THE JAM FROM
INDIA!

"WHAT time
does the
Jam ar-
rive, Inky?"

"About three
o'clock, my es-
teemed chums."

"By train?"

"No; the excel-
lent Jam travels
carefully."

Billy Bunter
pricked up his ears.

Bunter was pass-
ing Study No. 1
in the Remove at
Greyfriars, and at

the sound of voices from within, he
lingered, and listened. That was a

The MYSTERY
of the
CHRISTMAS
CANDLES!

By

FRANK RICHARDS

*Four candles seen a strange sort of Christmas
gift for Harry Wharton & Co. to get from their
Hindu chum, Hurree Singh. But those candles
start the Greyfriars juniors on a whole series of
thrilling and mysterious Yuletide adventures!*

way Bunter had.

Bunter's eyes
glistened behind
his big spectacles,
and he moved
cautiously nearer
to the door of
Study No. 1. Bunter
was keenly inter-
ested in the jam
that was to arrive
by car at about
three o'clock. If
a consignment of
jam was arriving
at Greyfriars for
Harry Wharton &
Co., Billy Bunter
intended to be on
the scene when it
arrived.

"Then we'll chuck footer," said
Harry Wharton. "You'll have to

be on hand to see the Jam, Inky.”
Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, the Nabob of Bhanipur, nodded.

“That is so, my esteemed Wharton.”

“We’ll back you up!” said Bob Cherry. “We’ll all be around, and give the Jam a distinguished reception.”

“Good!” said Frank Nugent. “I’ve never seen that variety of jam before.”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“I say, you fellows——” Billy Bunter rolled into the study.

“Hallo, hallo, hallo! Bunter’s heard about the Jam!” exclaimed Bob Cherry. And there was a loud chortle in Study No. 1.

Billy Bunter blinked at the Famous Five of the Remove rather puzzled. He did not see where the joke came in.

“I say, you fellows, are you expecting the jam in time for tea?” asked the Owl of the Remove.

“Ha, ha! Yes.”

“You’ve been listening, you fat bouncer!” growled Johnny Bull.

“Oh, really, Bull! I just happened to catch a word as I was passing the door—sheer chance! I was coming to see you fellows——”

“Well, you’ve seen us now,” said Johnny. “Roll along!”

“About Christmas,” said Bunter. “I suppose you fellows haven’t forgotten that we shall be breaking up for Christmas soon. I’m making up a Christmas-party for Bunter Court. You fellows care to come?”

“Bow-wow!”

“That isn’t the way to reply to a generous invitation for Christmas, Bob Cherry. I’ve refused several pressing invitations for the holidays, simply because I’m going to ask you fellows home!” said Bunter reproachfully.

“Cut along and accept some of them, then, before it’s too late!” suggested Bob Cherry.

“Oh, really, Cherry. But, about the jam——”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“If you fellows are getting in a thumping lot of jam this afternoon——”

“Not a thumping lot,” chuckled Harry Wharton. “How much does the Jam weigh, Inky?”

“About eight stone, my esteemed chum,” grinned the Nabob of Bhanipur.

Billy Bunter jumped.

“Eight stone!” he yelled.

“Aboutfully, my esteemed Bunter.”

“But that’s a hundredweight!” gasped Bunter. “Mean to say you’re getting a hundredweight of jam?”

“Just that!” said Nugent.

Bunter’s mouth watered.

The mere thought of revelling in a hundredweight of jam dazzled the fat junior. Even William George Bunter would have had to rest occasionally in getting through a consignment like that.

“Oh, I say, you fellows!” he breathed. “That—that’s splendid! It—it’s ripping! Where does the jam come from?”

“India,” said Wharton.

“Do they make jam in India? I say, Inky, is the jam nice?”

“Extremely so, my worthy Bunter,” grinned the Nabob of Bhanipur. “I have always found the esteemed Jam delightful.”

“Good!” said Bunter. “I’m glad I dropped in to see you fellows about Christmas. Of course, you won’t want a hundredweight of jam all to yourselves. I’m willing to take half of it off your hands for cash.”

"Puzzle—find the cash!" remarked Johnny Bull.

"Cash—as soon as my postal-order comes," said Bunter firmly. "I've mentioned to you fellows that I'm expecting a postal-order, I believe!"

"Ha, ha! I believe you have!" chortled Bob Cherry. "I seem to remember something of the sort."

"Is it a go, then?" asked Bunter eagerly.

Hurree Singh shook his dusky head.

"I am not disposing of the Jam salefully," he answered.

"But you won't want it all, Inky! Suppose you let me have about a stone of it—cash, you know!"

The dusky nabob chuckled, but shook his head again. His face was wreathed in smiles. Apparently he saw something very humorous in Bunter's request for a portion of the jam. Bunter could see nothing humorous in it.

"Well, if it's not for sale, you can make me a present of it!" suggested Bunter. "A chap can accept a present from a pal—specially at Christmas-time. I'm not a fellow to accept presents as a rule—"

"Oh, my hat!"

"I'm more particular than some fellows!" snorted Bunter, with a glare at the chuckling juniors. "But in this case, being Christmas-time, I should not refuse, Inky. How much am I going to have?"

"Nix, my esteemed Bunter!"

"Oh, really, Inky—"

"The nixfulness is terrific," said the nabob.

"Don't be a pig, Inky," urged Bunter. "I'm asking you down to Bunter Court, for Christmas, you know. One good turn deserves another. If you don't whack out the jam, when you're getting such a

thumping lot of it, you can't expect me to take you in for the vac. Can you?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the Famous Five.

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at," said Bunter peevishly. "I say, you fellows, I'm going to make you a generous offer. There's going to be quite a distinguished party at Bunter Court for Christmas. That chap Drake, who used to be here—the chap who's become a detective—I'm asking him, and his governor, Ferrers Locke—you'd like to meet Drake again, and, of course, Ferrers Locke is a great catch. Now, you fellows do the decent thing over this jam, and I'll stand you a couple of weeks at Bunter Court. What do you say to that?"

Bob Cherry winked at his comrades—a wink unseen by the short-sighted Owl of the Remove.

"That's a good offer," he said gravely. "Suppose we agree to let Bunter eat as much as he likes of the jam—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The whole study shrieked.

"I don't see where the cackle comes in," said Bunter. "If you fellows agree to that—"

"What about it, Inky?" asked Harry Wharton, laughing. "The Jam's coming for you, not for us."

Hurree Singh chuckled.

"The agreefulness is terrific," he answered. "If Bunter cares to eat the Jam, he may go aheadfully, and I shall not stop him."

"As much as I like?" asked Bunter eagerly.

"Certainly."

"Oh, good!" Bunter rubbed his fat hands together. "You're not a bad sort, Inky. In fact, you're quite decent."

"The esteemed opinion of the ridiculous Bunter is grateful and comforting to my unworthy self," said the Nabob of Bhanipur gracefully.

"And the jam gets here at three!"
"Aboutfully."

Bunter glanced at the study clock.

"Why, it's five to three now!" he exclaimed. "I say, you fellows, if you'd like to go down to the footer you can leave the jam to me. I'll look after it."

"Oh, we'll be there!" said Bob Cherry. "We want to see how you like that Jam, Bunter. You've never eaten anything like it before."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Better get along to the gates now," said Wharton. "Come on, you fellows!"

"I'm coming!" gasped Bunter.

The Famous Five quitted Study No. 1, and Billy Bunter rolled after them, quite a beatific expression on his fat face. There was a keen wind in the quadrangle, and it was very cold. Bunter preferred, as a rule, to spend a half-holiday loafing over the fire in cold weather. But now he braved the wind in the quadrangle without flinching. He wanted to see that enormous consignment of jam from India. He was very keen on it. His fat mind revelled in the prospect of unlimited jam till the end of the term.

Hurree Jamset Ram Singh glanced down the road towards Courtfield.

In the distance a big motor-car could be seen coming on towards the school.

"Is that the car, Inky?" asked Bob.

"I thinkfully opine so," assented the nabob.

Bunter blinked at the distant car. He seemed puzzled.

"I should have thought it would come by lorry," he remarked. "Is the jam really coming here in a car, Inky?"

Hurree Singh nodded.

"Well, my hat!" said Bunter. "I suppose the packing-case is inside the car?"

"I hardly think the Jam's in a packing-case," grinned Bob Cherry, and the chums of the Remove roared again.

"Well, it would be in jars, I suppose. But the jars are bound to be in a packing-case of some sort," said Bunter. "Jolly queer idea to stick it inside a car like that! Expensive, too! You do chuck your money about, Inky. I say, there's a nigger driving that car!" exclaimed Bunter, as the automobile came nearer.

"Not a nigger, my esteemed fat-headed Bunter," said the nabob mildly. "A Hindu."

"Same thing," said Bunter.

"The samefulness is not terrific."

"There's another nigger sitting beside him," said Bunter, blinking curiously at the oncoming car. "Are they in charge of the jam, Inky?"

"Looks like it," said Bob Cherry, chuckling. "Can you see the Jam yet, Inky?"

"Yes, my esteemed chum."

The big car was quite close now. It was a saloon, but the nabob's keen eye had caught sight of a dark face within. Billy Bunter blinked at the car with intense interest and curiosity.

"Blessed if I can see the jam!" he said. "I can see an old nigger sitting there in a turban, that's all!"

"If that old merchant hears you call him a nigger, Bunter, he may tell one of his servants to chop your head off!" grinned Bob Cherry. "That

old nigger, as you call him, is an Indian prince."

"Oh!" said Bunter. "Relation of yours, Inky?"

"My esteemed uncle."

"But where's the jam? Is he sitting on it?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The big car rolled up, and slowed down at the gateway. The turbaned Oriental within glanced at the group of juniors, who lifted their caps very politely. The dark gentleman smiled, with a flash of white teeth, and returned the salute politely, and made an affectionate sign to Hurree Singh. The car turned in at the gates, and the juniors followed it in. Billy Bunter caught at the nabob's sleeve.

"I say, Inky, hadn't the jam better be unloaded at the lodge? Gosling can take it in—"

Hurree Singh shook his head, and the juniors hurried on. The car moved at a leisurely rate up the drive, and they overtook it at the great doorway, Bunter trotting breathlessly to keep up. The car halted at the steps, and the dusky servant, who was seated beside the dusky chauffeur, jumped down and opened the door.

The old gentleman stepped out.

He was enveloped in a fur-lined overcoat, probably finding the English winter rather cold after India. But



"Where's the jam?" asked Billy Bunter. "There he is, just going in with Inky!" laughed Bob Cherry. "That's Inky's uncle—he's a Jam!" Bunter blinked blandly at the chums of the Remove. It was quite a different hundredweight of jam from what he had expected.

glimpses of rich Oriental attire could be seen, and his turban glittered with jewels.

Hurree Jamset Ram Singh salaamed to his esteemed uncle, and his esteemed uncle salaamed to Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, much to the entertainment of a score of Greyfriars fellows who were looking on.

Then they shook hands in the English manner. And then Hurree Singh presented his chums in turn, with polite ceremoniousness, but somehow forgetting Bunter.

But Bunter was not thinking of a

presentation to the visitor, even if he was a prince in his own country. Bunter was blinking into the motor-car in search of the jam.

There was no sign of anything in the shape of a packing-case, or even a box, inside that magnificently upholstered motor-car. Unless the jam was hidden under the seats, it was difficult to guess where it could possibly be. Bunter blinked into the car and then blinked at the nabob. He was puzzled and he was annoyed.

"I say, you fellows, where's the jam?" he demanded.

The little dark gentleman looked round, with a glitter of jewels as he moved.

"This is one other friend of yours?" he asked.

"It is the esteemed Bunter," said Hurree Singh. "Come with me, my uncle. I will show you the way to the Head."

"Where's the jam?" yelled Bunter, heedless of the visitor.

Mr. Quelch, the master of the Remove, appeared in the doorway. He saluted the Indian gentleman very politely. Hurree Jamset Ram Singh proceeded to present him.

"My esteemed and venerable Form-master the Sahib Quelch—my excellent uncle the Jam Sahib Bahadur Munny Singh—"

The Indian gentleman salaamed, and the Form-master bowed. Bunter blinked at them. Mr. Quelch ushered the dark gentleman into the house very impressively. Evidently the Jam Sahib Bahadur Munny Singh was a great gun. Billy Bunter clutched at Wharton's sleeve.

"Where's the jam?" he hissed.

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

"There he is, just going in with Inky."

"Eh?"

"That's the Jam!"

"Wha-a-at? Wharrer you mean? That's Inky's uncle——"

"Inky's uncle is a Jam."

"A—a—a Jam!" stammered Bunter.

The expression on Bunter's fat face was worth at least a guinea a box. He blinked blandly at the chums of the Remove.

"A giddy Jam!" chuckled Bob Cherry. "That's the Jam Inky was expecting this afternoon, Bunty—about a hundredweight of him——"

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

"You see, it's a title in India," explained Harry Wharton, laughing.

"I don't know whether they have any nobby nob called a marmalade, but they certainly have a Jam, and Inky's uncle is a Jam."

"Oh!" gasped Bunter.

"But the agreement holds good," said Bob Cherry. "You can eat as much of the Jam as you like——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Unless he raises objections, of course——"

"He might!" chortled Johnny Bull. "Ha, ha, ha!"

Billy Bunter bestowed a glare on the chums of the Remove that bade fair to crack his spectacles. He rolled away, in utter disgust. But he did not follow the Jam Sahib Bahadur Munny Singh. Healthy as Bunter's appetite was, and attached as he was to almost any kind of jam, he evidently did not want to sample that Jam.

THE SECOND CHAPTER

SOMETHING LIKE FOOTBALL I

THE Jam Sahib Bahadur Munny Singh was an object of great interest to the Greyfriars juniors that afternoon.

All sorts and conditions of people had visited Greyfriars at one time or

another, but it was uncommon for the old school to be distinguished by the visit of a Jam.

The Jam was a very benign and affable old gentleman.

For some time he was shut up with Dr. Locke, and later on he was seen walking about Greyfriars, taking a survey of the old school, escorted by the Head in person.

Only very distinguished visitors were shown around personally by Dr. Locke, so it was plain that the Jam was a great gun.

The two august gentlemen arrived on the football-ground together, and paused to look on for a few minutes.

Harry Wharton & Co. were punting a ball about on Little Side, to keep themselves warm, with a crowd of other Removites. Hurree Jamset Ram Singh was with his chums at the footer while his august uncle was occupied with the headmaster.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Here comes the giddy Jam!" murmured Bob Cherry, as the glitter of the jewelled turban caught his eye. "Bunter hasn't scoffed that Jam, after all!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

It was an honour to the juniors for the Jam to stand in the keen wind looking at their play, and they felt it. Skinner of the Remove strolled on to the field and joined in the punt-about. Skinner, the slacker, never exerted himself in that way if he could help it; but on this occasion Skinner had a special motive.

"Give a fellow a chance at the ball!" he called out.

"Bow-wow!" said Bob Cherry. "What on earth do you want with a footer, Skinner?"

"I want the Jam to see me score a goal!" said Skinner.

"The Jam would have to stand there till he struck roots if he waited

for you to kick the ball anywhere near goal!"

"Well, let's try!" said Skinner.

Skinner was given his chance. He was just going to let fly, when Hurree Jamset Ram Singh made a rush forward and collared Skinner round the neck.

Crash!

Skinner and the nabob went to the ground together.

"Yaroooh!" roared Skinner.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" shouted Bob Cherry. "This isn't Rucker practice, Inky!"

"Yoop!" howled Skinner. "Leggo—lemme gerrup! Wharrer you at? Oh crumbs!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Jam Munny Singh smiled as he looked on, and glanced at the Head, who seemed rather puzzled by the scene.

"One good game—yes!" said the Jam. "My nephew play same as honourable schoolfellows—yes! Fine!"

And the Jam clapped his hands.

Skinner was rolling on the ground in the grasp of Hurree Singh, and yelling at the top of his voice.

Hurree Singh was rubbing Skinner's features into the earth, and Skinner did not seem to be enjoying the process.

"Fine!" said the Jam Bahadur. "Oh, yes! Very fine!"

"Ah—er—yes!" murmured the Head. "We will—er—ahem—pass on. Yonder there is a senior game —"

And the Head walked his august visitor off to Big Side, where the Sixth were at football.

"Will you fellows draggimoff!" came in muffled accents from Harold Skinner. "I'll smash him! I'll— Help! Yoop! Help!"

Harry Wharton and Johnny Bull seized the nabob and jerked him away from his victim. Hurree Singh rose breathlessly.

Skinner sat up and spluttered.

"What on earth's the game?" demanded Wharton. "What sort of footer will your uncle think we play at Greyfriars after that?"

"My esteemed chum, the humorous and rascally Skinner was about to kick the ball at my honourable and ludicrous uncle——"

"Oh!" exclaimed Wharton.

"That was Skinner's little game, was it?" exclaimed Bob Cherry.

"Skinner, you cad——"

"Yow-ow-ow!"

"I thought that was what he was up to!" said Peter Todd. "Inky stopped him just in time!"

"Yow-ow-ow-wow!"

"Bump him!" roared Johnny Bull.

"Leggo!" raved Skinner. "Only a joke, you rotters! I was only going to biff his silly turban off—— Yaroooooh!"

"Bump him!"

"Yooop! Help!"

The Jam Bahadur, evidently under the impression that this was the famous British game of football, looked back and clapped his hands with enthusiasm.

"Oh! Fine! Fine!" he ejaculated.

He tore himself quite reluctantly away from the scene to accompany the Head to Big Side, and his looks showed that he did not find the Sixth Form game nearly so interesting.

THE THIRD CHAPTER

THE NABOB'S GUESTS!

"MY esteemed chums——"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Is the Jam coming to tea in the study, Inky?"

Hurree Jamset Ram Singh shook his head.

"My excellent uncle is partaking of tealuf refreshment with the worthy Head and the elegant mem-sahib," he answered. "He is going departfully in short time, and I am going with him——"

"Oh!" said Bob. "He's taking you back to London?"

"Exactly! I am sorry to leave my esteemed and ridiculous chums," said the nabob; "but we shall meet again Christmasfully!"

"Lucky bargee, to get away nearly a week before break-up!" said Frank Nugent.

"You'll be coming home with me for Christmas, Inky?" asked Wharton.

"I want my esteemed chum Wharton, and my other excellent pals, to come to me for Christmas!" explained Hurree Singh.

"It's rather a long step to Bhanipur, isn't it?" grinned Bob Cherry.

"My excellent uncle wishes me to bring my friends to his mansion in esteemed London for Christmas, where there will be high old time!" said the nabob. "I am going with him, by kind permission of honourable Head, to make all arrangements preparefully, if my chums will honour me with their desirable company at Christmas!"

"Good old Jam!" said Bob.

"It will be terrific honour and pleasure for my unworthy self——"

"Cut it out, Inky!" said Harry, laughing. "We'll come!"

"Yes, rather!"

"The worthy Jam has taken large mansion in fashionable square," said the nabob. "Everything will be very top-hole, and the grubfulness will be terrific!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What about Drake?" asked Harry Wharton. "I was going to have Drake home for Christmas if he'd come——"

"The askfulness will also be extended to the esteemed Drake."

"Good!"

"Count me in, Inky!" said a fat voice at the door, and Billy Bunter blinked into Study No. 1.

"My esteemed Bunter——" murmured the nabob.

"I wouldn't desert you for anything!" said Bunter. "For your sake, Inky, I'll give up my own party at Bunter Court."

"Don't!" said Johnny Bull.

"You fellows can come on to Bunter Court afterwards, if you like," said the Owl of the Remove. "Bring your uncle, too, Inky, and his set of

niggers. There's plenty of room at Bunter Court. You can send down the car for us when school breaks up, if you like. I'm accustomed to travelling by car, you know."

"My worthy and ludicrous Bunter, I——"

"Consider it settled!" said Bunter breezily. "I dare say I shall get on all right with your uncle, Inky. Funny old codger, isn't he?"

"Eh?"

"That turban and his features would make his fortune in a circus, wouldn't they?" said Bunter agreeably.

Hurree Jamset Ram Singh looked rather fixedly at the fat junior, but he did not answer.

"Will there be a lot of other niggers there, Inky?" continued Bunter.



"Yaroooh!" roared Skinner as Hurree Singh brought him to the ground. "Wharrer you at?" Skinner soon discovered that! The nabob proceeded to rub his features into the earth! The Jam Munny Singh smiled as he looked on, assuming that it was all part of the game!

"There will be esteemed Indian friends of my respected uncle," said the nabob mildly.

"Well, I don't mind," said Bunter generously. "Bit queer to be mixing up with a lot of stove-polish gentry; but, dash it all, I'm no snob! I'll be quite civil to them, Inky."

"The excellent Bunter will lack the opportunity of bestowing civility upon esteemed uncle and other niggers," said the nabob grimly. "The niggerful doorkeeper will have orders to give esteemed Bunter the boot, if esteemed Bunter shows up."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, really, Inky——"

"Scat, you fat boulder!" growled Johnny Bull.

"Of course, I know you're only joking, Inky, old chap," said Bunter. "I'm coming! And I tell you what. I'll telephone to the pater to send the Rolls-Royce for us. Now, what about tea?"

That question was not answered.

Bob Cherry took the Owl of the Remove by one fat ear, with a finger and thumb that gripped like a vice, and led him into the passage.

Bob did not speak, though Bunter did—loudly.

Having led the Owl into the passage, Bob slewed him round by his fat ear and planted a heavy boot behind him.

"Travel!" he said briefly.

And Bunter travelled.

The propulsion of Bob Cherry's boot was an irresistible argument. Bunter had no choice about travelling.

Then the Famous Five sat down to tea in Study No. 1 in a merry mood. Christmas with a Jam was an experience rather out of the common, and the chums of the Remove were rather looking forward to it. There was no doubt that the festivities would be

on a scale of Oriental magnificence.

After tea Hurree Jamset Ram Singh made a round of the Remove passage, adding names to the list of his guests.

Vernon-Smith and Tom Redwing, and Peter Todd, and Tom Brown, and Squiff, and several other fellows willingly accepted the invitation to the large mansion in the fashionable square for Christmas.

It was going to be quite a large party from Greyfriars, but it did not include William George Bunter, in spite of that fat youth's willingness to be civil to the niggers for the occasion.

When the car came round for the Jam, the Head came out to say good-bye to his distinguished visitor, and a crowd gathered round to see the Jam Bahadur off.

Hurree Jamset Ram Singh stepped into the car with his esteemed uncle. He said good-bye to his chums, and the dusky chauffeur started the engine. Billy Bunter shoved through the juniors and reached the car.

"Au revoir, Inky!" he gasped.

"Good-bye, my esteemed, ridiculous Bunter!"

"See you again at Christmas, Inky!"

"I think notfully."

"Oh, really, Inky——"

"Stand clear there, Bunter, you ass!" called out Johnny Bull.

The big car started.

The Greyfriars fellows raised a cheer as it rolled away with the Jam and the nabob.

Bunter stood blinking after it, with a rather dubious expression on his fat face. Bunter was determined that he was not going to be left out of the Christmas festivities, especially as he had heard Hurree Singh remark that the grubfulness would be terrific. That was an attraction

that William George Bunter could not possibly have resisted.

When Harry Wharton & Co. turned back into the House, the fat junior followed them in.

"Will you fellows be going up by train?" he asked.

"Most likely."

"I suppose one of you could lend me my fare, if my postal-order doesn't come before we break up?"

"You won't be going," said Johnny Bull. "And the Head will hand you your travelling money to get home."

Bunter blinked at him.

"My dear chap, I can hardly decline Inky's invitation, when he's depending on me to come!" he answered.

"Inky's what?"

"His pressing invitation!" said Bunter firmly.

"Why, you fat owl——"

"I hope you fellows will behave yourselves at the Jam's place."

"What?"

"None of your blessed horseplay, and all that," said Bunter. "I don't want to be disgraced by a mob of dashed hooligans, you know."

"Why, you—you——" stuttered Wharton.

"Remember that you'll be with me, and that I shall expect you to behave yourselves," said Bunter. "I shall be responsible for you, in a way. Inky looks on me as the head of the party, being so pally with me. Mind you take some clean collars, Bob."

"Why, I—I—I——" spluttered Bob Cherry.

"And for goodness' sake, Johnny Bull, don't have baggy trousers on an occasion like this!" said Bunter.

"Baggy knees are all very well for the Remove passage; but at the

Jam's mansion I shall expect you to do me credit—as far as you can, of course."

And the Owl of the Remove rolled away, leaving the Co. staring after him as if mesmerised. William George Bunter had quite taken their breath away.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER

THE CHRISTMAS CANDLES'

"MASTER WHARTON!"

Gosling, the porter, appeared in the doorway of Study No. 1.

It was a couple of days since Hurree Singh's departure for London with his esteemed relative the Jam. Four members of the Famous Five were at tea in Study No. 1 when Gosling appeared in the offing.

The porter had a parcel in his hand, which had apparently arrived by post.

Harry Wharton glanced round.

"Trot in, old bean!" he said cheerily. "What is it?"

"It's a parcel for you, Wharton!" came Billy Bunter's voice from behind the school porter. "I say, shall I open it for you?"

Gosling came into the study and laid the parcel on the table.

"Just arrived, Master Wharton," he said. "I thought I'd bring it up for you, sir."

The chums of the Remove smiled.

As a rule, Gosling would not have dreamed of carrying up a parcel to a junior study, if he could possibly have helped it. But the approach of Christmas always made a considerable difference to the crusty old gentleman. It was not so much that the festive season softened his heart, but there was an expectation of a crop of tips when the school broke up.

"Thanks no end, old bean!" said the captain of the Remove.

Gosling lingered.

"Them stairs is steep!" he remarked.

"They is!" said Bob Cherry sympathetically. "I say, you chaps, we ought to help Gosling downstairs, as he's come up to oblige us."

"Good egg!" said Nugent.

"As Inky would say, the goodness of the egg is terrific!" chuckled Johnny Bull. "Hold on, Gosling; we'll all bear a hand!"

The Greyfriars porter did not wait for assistance from the merry Removeites. He departed hastily from the study, and was heard to grunt emphatically as he disappeared down the Remove staircase. Possibly he feared that his descent might have been too rapid with the assistance of the chums of the Remove.

Billy Bunter rolled into the study, and started unfastening the parcel. He seemed more curious about its contents than the junior to whom it was addressed.

"Tuck, most likely," said Bunter. "It isn't a hamper—and it's not a large parcel—but it's most likely tuck. Were you expecting tuck from somebody, Wharton?"

"Not that I know of," said Harry. "Let's look at it. Why, it's in Inky's fist!"

"The parcel's from Inky," said Nugent.

"Christmas presents, perhaps," said Billy Bunter, his eyes glistening behind his big spectacles. "Something for me in it, I should think; Inky would hardly forget his best pal. Sure this is addressed to you, Wharton? Just like that ass Gosling to bring it to the wrong study——"

"Look at it, fathead!"

Bunter blinked at the label. There was no doubt that the package was addressed to Harry Wharton; but the Owl of the Remove did not seem

to be quite satisfied. He shook his head.

"It's in Inky's fist," he admitted. "But he might have written the wrong name by mistake; he's a bit careless."

"Shut up, ass!"

Harry Wharton unrolled several thick sheets of brown paper, and disclosed a box.

The juniors gathered round curiously to see the box opened. Wharton unhooked the lid and threw it up.

Inside the box were four separate packages.

Each had a name written on the outside of it, and the names were Wharton, Nugent, Cherry, and Bull.

"One each!" remarked Frank.

"Isn't there one for me?" demanded Bunter.

"Looks as if there isn't," chuckled Bob Cherry. "Inky must really have forgotten how pally he was with you, Bunter."

"May be one under the packing," grunted Bunter. And he searched through the box. But there was nothing for Bunter. Astonishing as it seemed to the Owl of the Remove, Hurree Jamset Ram Singh had apparently forgotten that his best pal at Greyfriars was William George Bunter.

The four juniors unrolled their packets.

Bunter eyed them almost wolfishly. "You've got mine, Bull!" he exclaimed suddenly.

"Fathead!"

"There's my name on it——"

"Is your name spelt B-U-L-L?" demanded Johnny Bull.

"That isn't a double L, I think—looks to me more like NTER," said Bunter. "The B and the U are plain enough."

"Oh, go and eat coke!"



"Hallo, Inky!" yelled Bunter. The intruder jumped and gave a gasping cry. Next moment he sprang at the Owl of the Remove, and Bunter felt a hand grasp his fat throat in a grip like that of a vice.

"Look here, if there's something valuable in that parcel, it's for me!" roared Bunter.

Unheeding Bunter, the juniors unrolled the four packages. Somewhat to their surprise, what looked like four large Christmas candles were revealed.

"Candles!" exclaimed Bob.

Bunter's clouded brow cleared.

"He, he, he!" he chuckled. "You can have them; blessed if I want a candle! Inky is pulling your leg! He, he, he!"

The juniors gazed at the candles, rather taken aback. They were large, handsome candles, certainly, of a very hard aromatic wax. But it was rather a peculiar gift to receive from their dusky chum the Nabob of Bhanipur.

"Hold on! There's a letter with

mine," said Wharton. "Here it is. It was folded round the candle."

The four juniors gathered round the letter. Billy Bunter continued to cachinnate, evidently very much tickled by the nature of the Christmas presents.

Wharton read the letter aloud. It ran:

"My esteemed Wharton,—I trustfully hope that my excellent and ridiculous chums will accept the humble and ludicrous present of honourable candles. I begfully request that they shall not be lighted until placed on esteemed Christmas-tree on Christmas Day in mansion of excellent Jam. Then there will be small delightful surprise for esteemed chums.

"With kindful regards,

"HURREE JAMSET RAM SINGH."

"Well, my hat!" said Bob Cherry. "I suppose this is some little joke of Inky's. Something happens when the candles are lighted, I suppose."

"I suppose so," said Harry. "They look ordinary enough—just wax and a wick! But I suppose there's something else about them, or Inky wouldn't be so particular about their not being lighted till they're on the Christmas-tree."

"He, he, he!"

"What are you going off like an alarm-clock for, Bunter?"

"He, he, he! Inky's just pulling your leg!" chuckled Bunter. "Those candles are worth about sixpence each! He, he, he! If that's Inky's idea of a Christmas present, he needn't trouble to remember me. He, he, he!"

"Fathead!"

"Sorry for your disappointment," grinned Bunter.

"But we're not disappointed," said Harry Wharton mildly. "We're not Bunters, you know."

"Inky's rolling in money, and you jolly well expected something decent," grinned Bunter. "Serve you jolly well right! He, he, he! I never could stand chaps who suck up to a fellow because he's wealthy. Not in my line at all."

"Oh, my hat!"

"This ought to be a lesson to you!" chortled Bunter. "I'm jolly glad! He, he, he!"

Bunter's cachinnation was suddenly interrupted by Johnny Bull's boot being introduced into the conversation.

There was a loud howl from William George Bunter.

"Ow! Yah! Beast!"

Bunter rolled out of the study. But he put his head into the doorway again to ejaculate:

"I'm jolly glad! He, he, he!"

Then he vanished at top speed.

Harry Wharton smiled.

"We'll put Inky's candles away somewhere safe, and take them to London with us," he said. "Some ass might get lighting them by mistake. I suppose Inky's got some reason for not wanting them lighted till they're on the Christmas-tree. Anyhow, we'll do as he asks."

"As he begfully requests," chuckled Bob Cherry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And the four candles were replaced in the box, and the box was bestowed in Wharton's desk, and locked up. And then the four juniors gave their attention to prep, and for some time the Christmas candles were dismissed from their minds.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER

IN DANGEROUS HANDS!

"INKY!"

Billy Bunter ejaculated the name in great surprise.

It was the day following the arrival of the Christmas candles for Harry Wharton & Co., and the December dusk was thick in the Greyfriars quadrangle. Billy Bunter was ambling between the old elms and the school wall, braving the keen winter wind—for a good reason. While he ambled, he was devouring jam-tarts from a bag under his arm. The tarts did not belong to Bunter; hence his retirement to a secluded spot while he devoured them.

A rustle in the ivy on the wall caught Bunter's ear, and he glanced round. As it happened, he was in the deep shadow of a tree, and quite invisible to anyone climbing the wall. But as he blinked in the direction of the rustling sound, Bunter caught a

glimpse of a dusky face and deep black eyes.

"Inky! My hat!" murmured Bunter.

He stood where he was, transfixed, with a jam-tart half-way to his mouth, with astonishment.

Hurree Jamset Ram Singh was supposed to be in his uncle's mansion in London, making magnificent preparations for the Christmas festivities. And here he was—climbing over the school wall in the most secret and surreptitious manner.

It did not occur to Bunter for the moment that possibly the dusky clamberer was not Inky. The bronze Oriental face and black eyes, of which he caught only a glimpse, were enough for Bunter. He did not expect to see any other Indian at Greyfriars; and he did not think of doubting for a moment that this was the nabob; though why he should be returning to his school in such a surreptitious manner was an amazing puzzle.

Bunter stood quite still, watching and listening. He heard the climber drop from the wall, with another rustle of ivy; but he could not see him now. The dusky intruder was hidden in the shadows.

Bunter grinned.

For some reason the Oriental was creeping secretly into the precincts of Greyfriars; and Bunter determined to give him a fright. He heard a faint footfall, indicating that the Indian was coming towards the trees, under which the fat junior stood.

Bunter drew back quietly behind a big trunk, and watched, still grinning. A dim figure in a heavy overcoat loomed in the dusk near him. Then Bunter gave a sudden yell.

"Hallo, Inky!"

His intention was to startle the intruder by that sudden yell.

He succeeded; there was no doubt about that.

The intruder jumped almost clear of the ground, and gave a gasping cry.

But what followed startled Bunter more than he had startled the Indian.

The dim form made a spring at him, and Bunter felt a hand grasp his fat throat in a grip like that of a vice.

Over his startled fat face loomed a dusky countenance, with glittering black eyes.

Bunter's heart almost ceased to beat with fright.

It was not Inky!

That iron grip was not Hurree Singh's; and the face, now that Bunter saw it more closely, was older than Inky's. It was the face of an Indian at least twenty years older than the Nabob of Bhanipur.

Two fierce black eyes, set very close together over a prominent nose like a beak, glittered at the frightened Owl.

Bunter would have yelled; but he could make no sound with the iron grip of the Indian compressing his throat.

He was forced back against the tree and pinned there, helpless in the grasp of his assailant.

His round eyes dilated behind his spectacles as he blinked at the dark face before him in utter terror.

It was not Inky—it was some man he had never seen before—and the expression on his dusky face was hard, cruel, ruthless. What the man could possibly want within the walls of Greyfriars was a mystery to Bunter. But he realised that he was in dangerous hands.

"Silence!"

Bunter did not need the injunction; the grip on his throat kept him silent. His fat limbs were shaking with terror.

A shiver ran through him, as something glittered in the dusk. It was a knife that the Indian had taken out from under his heavy overcoat.

"Silence! If you call out, you will never utter a sound again on this earth!" muttered the man in perfect English.

He loosened his grasp on Bunter.

"Oh dear!" gasped the fat junior.

"Are you alone here?"

"Yes!" gasped Bunter.

The man with the beaky nose stared round him suspiciously in the December dusk.

But there was no sound in the quadrangle, and the lights of the School House were hidden in the winter mist that hung low over the quad.

He seemed reassured at last. Bunter did not make a sound or a movement; the cold steel glimmering within a foot of him had an hypnotic effect on the Owl of the Remove. The Hindu fixed his black eyes again on the Owl's scared face.

"What is your name?"

"B-b-bub-bub-bub——" stuttered Bunter.

"What?"

"Bub-bub-Bunter."

"You are not Wharton?"

"Eh? No! Oh, I'm Bunter! If—you if you want Wharton, he's indoors!" gasped Bunter.

He felt a sense of relief at finding that it was the captain of the Remove that the Hindu seemed to be after.

"You know Wharton?"

"Yes, he's in my Form."

"Has he received a parcel by post?"

Bunter started.

"Yes; yesterday he had one—some silly Christmas candles——"

The black eyes flashed.

"From Hurree Jamset Ram Singh?"

"Yes."

"Where are the candles now?"

"In Wharton's study."

"Where is that?"

"No. 1 in the Remove passage."

The hawk-faced Oriental made an impatient gesture. It was evident that he knew nothing about the interior arrangements of Greyfriars, and probably had never heard of the celebrated Remove passage.

Bunter was feeling a little reassured now. Evidently this mysterious marauder did not want him—and Bunter guessed, though he was not quite sure, that the knife was only displayed to scare him. If he wanted Inky's Christmas candles he was welcome to them, so far as William George Bunter was concerned.

"Listen to me," said the Hindu, after a pause. "I am a servant of the Huzoor Hurree Singh, and he has sent me to take away the candles."

"Has he really?" gasped Bunter.

"They are of no value, and were sent by mistake."

Bunter blinked at the man.

"I am here to take them away," continued the Hindu, watching Bunter like a hawk. "You will guide me to where they are placed, boy. I will give you money for your trouble."

"I'd do it like a shot," said Bunter; "but the chaps will be in their study now, most likely. They jolly well won't let you take the candles, unless you've got some authority from Hurree Singh."

Bunter grinned a little as he spoke. He was not a very bright youth, but he did not think for a moment of believing the Hindu's statement. Four candles worth about sixpence each hardly justified all these surreptitious proceedings, so far as Bunter could see.

There was a pause after Bunter's

reply. The Hindu seemed to be thinking deeply.

"I—I say, lemme go now!" mumbled Bunter. "It's close on bed-time, you know, and—and the prefects will be after me if I don't show up in time for dorm."

"You will point out the room to me?"

"Like a shot," said Bunter, glad of the chance of getting nearer to the School House.

"Lead the way! If you give the alarm, I shall drive my knife between your shoulders!"

"Ow!"

Bunter led the way in the gloom. There was a light from the window of Study No. 1, glimmering down through the mist, showing that Wharton and Nugent were in their quarters. Bunter pointed out the window.

"That's Study No. 1," he said.

The Hindu stared up at the lighted window.

"The candles are there?"

"Yes; locked up in Wharton's desk."

"They have not been used?"

"No; Inky told Wharton they weren't to be lighted till they were put on the Christmas-tree."

The Hindu nodded; he seemed to be quite as well aware of these details as Bunter himself.

"There's someone in the room now!" he muttered.

"Yes—Wharton and Nugent will be there. Perhaps Johnny Bull and Bob Cherry as well. I—I say, can I go now?"

The Hindu ignored the question.

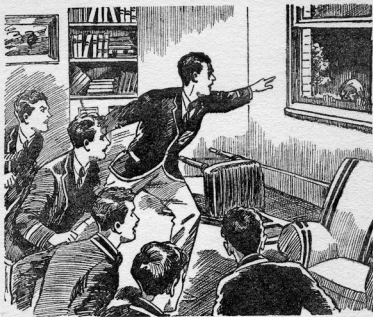
"You say it is nearly bed-time?"

"Yes—ten minutes or so."

"These boys will leave their study at bed-time?"

"Yes, or sooner."

The Hindu scanned the lighted



Whingate rushed into the study with a mob of Juniors at his heels. They were just in time to see a dark-skinned face vanish from the open window!

window again, and his eye followed down the thick ivy from the window-sill to the ground. Bunter could see that he was calculating his chance of climbing the ivy to the window of Study No. 1.

The light in the study window suddenly went out.

"They're gone now!" said Bunter. "To bed?"

"Not till half-past nine. Most likely down to the Common-room, or to another study along the passage."

The Hindu muttered something in his own tongue in tones of satisfaction. His black eyes scanned the ivy again.

"I—I say, lemme go!" mumbled Bunter. "It—it's jolly c-c-cold out here, you know!"

"Silence!" The word came in a ferocious hiss that sent a chill of fear to Bunter's heart.

The Hindu turned on him. He drew a coil of thin strong cord from his pocket and proceeded to bind Bunter's wrists and ankles. The Owl of the Remove did not dare attempt resistance. He was bound till he could not stir a limb, and then a gag was inserted in his capacious mouth and fastened there with a cord passing round his head.

The Hindu lifted him—with some exertion—and laid him on the ground in the deep shadow of an elm. Bunter made no sound or movement while he was bound and gagged; he was too terrified for that. He blinked with dilated eyes after the Hindu as the man glided away in the gloom. A rustle of ivy came to his ears, and he knew that the lithe Oriental was climbing up towards the window of Study No. 1 in the Remove.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER

A THIEF IN THE NIGHT!

WINGATE of the Sixth glanced round the Remove dormitory. The half-hour had chimed, and the Removites were about to turn in. But there was one member of the Lower Fourth Form missing from the dormitory.

"Where's Bunter?" rapped out Wingate.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! The Owl's missing!" exclaimed Bob Cherry.

"Better look for him in the pantry, Wingate!"

There was a laugh.

"Doesn't anybody know where the fat duffer is?" exclaimed the Greyfriars captain impatiently.

"I know he bagged a bag of tarts from my study," said Vernon-Smith.

"I was keeping a fives-bat ready for him, but I didn't see him again."

Bob Cherry chuckled.

"He's keeping out of the way of Smithy's bat," he remarked. "He's forgotten all about dorm."

"I'll jolly well warm him for forgetting dorm!" said Wingate angrily.

"Some of you go and rout him out!"

"Right-ho, Wingate!"

The Remove fellows were not specially keen on going to bed—in fact, they were rather pleased to get another ten minutes or so. Nine or ten fellows who had not yet started taking off their shoes left the Remove dormitory to look for Bunter.

"Where the thump can he be?" asked Bob Cherry. "Can't be out of doors at this time of night."

"I believe he scuttled out when he bagged my tarts," said the Bounder. "But he must have come in again before this—the door's been shut some time."

"We'll rout him out of a box-room, or one of the Remove studies," said Peter Todd.

"Blessed if I see why he hasn't turned up!" Harry Wharton remarked. "He must have finished the tarts long ago. They wouldn't last Bunter long."

"He's in hiding!" chuckled Bob. "We'll rout him out! Some of you fellows look in the box-room, and I'll go along the passage."

"Right!"

Harry Wharton and two or three juniors went along to the box-room,

and Peter Todd looked into Study No. 7. Bob Cherry and Nugent went along to Study No. 1.

If Bunter was in hiding, for fear of the wrath to come, it was most likely that he had taken refuge in a study, where there would be the remains of a fire. So the juniors looked into all the studies along the Remove passage.

Bob Cherry gave a soft chuckle as he came to the door of Study No. 1. A slight movement from within caught his ear.

"He's there!" murmured Bob.

There was a faint glimmer of light under the door.

Bob Cherry turned the handle, to throw open the door, but it did not move. It was locked inside.

He thumped on the panels.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" roared Bob.

He heard a sudden movement inside the study, and a catching of breath. Someone had evidently been startled by the thunderous summons at the door. Bob rattled the handle.

"Bunter!" he roared.

"Is he there?" called Wharton along the passage.

"Yes; he's got the door locked!"

"The silly ass!"

The searchers scudded along the passage and gathered round the door of Study No. 1. There was a heavy thumping on the panels.

"Bunter!" roared Bob. "Bed-time, you fat idiot! Unlock the door!"

"Come out, Bunter!"

"Wingate will be after you in a minute, you fat duffer!" shouted Harry Wharton. "Come out at once!"

There was no answer from within the study, and the door was not opened.

Vernon-Smith stooped and put his eye to the keyhole.

Then he gave a yell.

"Great Scott!"

"What's the row, Smithy? Nothing happened to Bunter, I suppose——"

"Burglars!" yelled Vernon-Smith.

"What?"

"Bunter's not here—I couldn't see him, anyhow! There's a Hindu at your desk, Wharton!"

"A Hindu—at my desk!" stammered Wharton.

"Look!"

The captain of the Remove, in utter amazement, put his eye to the keyhole.

Inside, the study was glimmering with the light of an electric torch. The light shone on Wharton's desk, and a man in an overcoat was stooping over the desk. The lock had already been forced, and two or three drawers pulled out, and the contents scattered. Wharton had a glimpse of the man's profile—it was that of a Hindu.

The captain of the Remove gasped.

"A burglar in a junior study!" he exclaimed. "Must be potty! Here, we're jolly well going to break in the door!"

"What's the row there?" called Wingate over the banisters. "Have you found Bunter?"

"Burglars!" roared Bob.

"What?"

"A Hindu breaking into Wharton's desk——"

"Rot!"

"Come and look——"

Wingate was on the scene in a twinkling. He stooped and peered through the keyhole.

Heedless of the clamour at the door, the hawk-faced Hindu was tearing out the drawers of the desk in frantic haste, scattering the contents far and wide as he searched eagerly for what he wanted.

"Great Scott!" gasped Wingate. He jumped up.

"A blessed burglar!" said Johnny Bull, in wonder. "What the thump can he want in your desk, Wharton?"

"Give it up!" said Harry. "There's nothing there of much value—only a few pounds, anyhow!"

Wingate strode along the passage and grasped the heavy form that stood in the window recess.

"Lend a hand here!" he called.

"What-ho!"

The form was rushed to the door of Study No. 1. It crashed on the lock with a terrific concussion.

Crash!

There was a gasp within, and the Hindu sprang away from the desk. The door shook and shivered, and it was obvious that it would fly open under a couple more such assaults.

Crash!

There was no time for the rascal to complete his search if he was not to be taken. He made a spring for the window.

Crash!

The lock gave way, and the door flew open with a bang. Wingate rushed into the study, with the mob of juniors in wild excitement at his heels.

They were just in time to see the dark-faced man vanish from the open window.

Wingate rushed to the window.

Below him the ivy was shaking and rustling as the man descended, hand-below-hand, with reckless hurry, and the activity of a monkey.

"Stop!" roared Wingate.

The man did not even look up. In the December dimness Wingate caught only a glimpse of him descending rapidly.

"We can cut him off in the quad if we hurry!" exclaimed Wharton.

"Come on!" shouted Bob.

The juniors went scampering down the stairs. Mr. Quelch met them in the lower hall, amazed by the uproar from the Remove passage.

"Boys, what—what—" he began.

"Burglars, sir!"

"Wha-a-at?"

Wingate came speeding down the stairs. He rushed to the door, and tore it open.

"Come on!" roared Johnny Bull.

The juniors rushed on past their astonished Form-master, after Wingate, into the misty quad. They tore round the house to the wall under the windows of the Remove passage.

A shadow loomed for a moment in the mist, and there was a pattering of running feet.

"He's off!" yelled Nugent. "After him!"

The escaping thief had reached the ground less than a minute before the crowd arrived on the spot. He fled into the mist and darkness, and there was a roar behind him, and a frantic rush in pursuit. All Greyfriars was alarmed now, and a hundred fellows had turned out into the quad.

There was little chance of running the fugitive down now that he was free in the darkness and shadowy mist. But the Greyfriars fellows did their best. They scattered among the elms, and shouted to one another, groping their way in the gloom. Bob Cherry stumbled over something that moved and wriggled, and immediately he grasped it and held on, and yelled:

"I've got him!"

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER

A MYSTERY!

BOB CHERRY'S voice rang through the winter night.

"I've got him! Bear a hand here! I've got the brute!"

" Good ! Hold on to him ! "
" Bring a light, somebody ! "
" Hang on, Bob ! "

Bob Cherry's prisoner did not resist. He wriggled on the ground under Bob's grasp, and that was all. He seemed incapable of resistance. Neither did he utter a word, save for a faint inarticulate gurgle.

A dozen fellows were quickly on the spot, grasping the prisoner on all sides, groping in the gloom for a grip on him.

Mr. Quelch came hurrying up with a lamp.

" What—what—what is it ? " he gasped.

" Got him, sir ! "

" The burglar, sir," said Bob, breathlessly. " He was crouching here, and I fairly stumbled over him— "

" Got him safe, sir ! " said Nugent. Mr. Quelch brought the light nearer, and it glimmered on the prisoner, who wriggled feebly in the grasp of the excited juniors. Then there was a startled yell.

" Bunter ! "

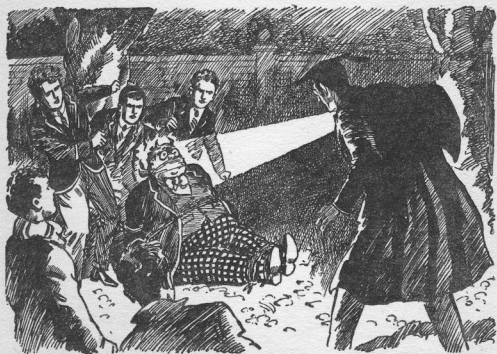
" It's Bunter ! "

" My only hat ! " gasped Bob Cherry.

The prisoner was released as suddenly as if he had become red-hot. The juniors blinked at Bunter in utter astonishment.

" He is tied up ! " said Mr. Quelch. " He—he seems to have something in his mouth. A—a—a gag, apparently ! Release him at once, my boys ! "

Many hands were already at work releasing Bunter. The fat junior was soon free, and he sat up and spluttered.



As Mr. Quelch shone his torch on the prisoner, there was a startled yell, and the juniors dropped the prisoner as if he were red-hot. " It's Bunter ! My only hat ! " gasped Bob Cherry.

"Groooooogh!"

"What has happened, Bunter?"
exclaimed Mr. Quelch.

"Groooooogh!"

"Bunter——"

"I'm c-c-cold——"

"Take the boy indoors," said Mr. Quelch. "Take him into my study, to the fire. All juniors will go indoors at once! Wingate, will you request the Sixth to help you in searching for the—the burglar?"

"Can't we help, sir?" asked Bob.

"You may go indoors, Cherry."

The Removites reluctantly gave up the hunt. As a matter of fact, it was pretty certain that the mysterious Hindu was, by that time, well outside the walls of Greyfriars, and far on the way to safety. Wingate and the Sixth-Formers made a thorough search, however.

Harry Wharton & Co. marched Bunter into Mr. Quelch's study. The fat junior was shivering and stuttering with cold. He squatted before the fire, and rubbed his fat hands, and gasped and groaned. To the questions the eager juniors showered upon him he made no answer whatever. He was too busy looking after his own comfort.

Mr. Quelch came in at last. He was looking very disturbed and a little cross.

"Have they caught him, sir?" asked Wharton.

"No; he appears to have escaped," said Mr. Quelch. "I shall telephone to the police at once. Bunter!"

"Ow! Yes, sir?"

"Kindly tell me how you came to be in the state in which we found you!" snapped Mr. Quelch. "Were you attacked by the man who seems to have attempted to commit a robbery here?"

"Ow! Yes, sir."

"Tell me what happened, as briefly as possible."

"I—I was taking a walk for—for exercise before going to bed, sir," said Bunter. "Suddenly a fearful ruffian leaped on me, and pointed a pistol at my head, and said 'Hands up!'"

"Keep to the facts, Bunter!"

"Oh! Ah! Yes, sir. I mean, he took hold of my throat, sir, and showed me a knife."

"Not much difference!" murmured Bob Cherry.

"Well, what then, Bunter?"

"He—he asked me about the candles, sir."

"Candles!" ejaculated Mr. Quelch.

"Yes, sir, candles."

"Are you wandering in your mind, Bunter?"

"Nunno, sir."

"Do you mean to say that that unknown man came here to steal candles?" exclaimed the Remove master.

"Yes, sir. Wharton's Christmas candles."

"Nonsense!" said Mr. Quelch.

"It must be some practical joke."

"It wasn't, sir! He made me point out Wharton's study, and tell him where the candles were, sir. Then he tied me up, sir, and shoved something into my mouth, and stuck me under the tree, sir. It was frightfully cold. And—and I've lost the tarts, sir——"

"The tarts?"

"I—I mean I hadn't any tarts!" gasped Bunter, catching Vernon-Smith's eye at that moment. "Nothing of the kind, sir! I—I was shivering and freezing and shuddering and dying of cold, sir, and—and then some silly idiot came walloping over me—that silly fool Cherry, sir——"

"Oh!" murmured Bob.

"And that's all, sir," said Bunter. "I think I'm going to be seriously ill from—from exposure, sir, and—and if you don't mind, I'd rather stay in bed all day to-morrow, sir. My meals could be sent up to the dormitory."

"Can you explain this, Wharton? What are these candles to which Bunter alludes?"

"Inky—I mean, Hurree Singh—sent us four Christmas candles, sir," said Harry. "They're not to be lighted till Christmas Day. I can't understand why anybody should want to steal them. They can't be worth more than a few shillings."

"Extraordinary!" said Mr. Quelch. "Are these—these candles still safe, Wharton?"

"I haven't looked, sir. I never thought about them."

"I will go with you to your study, Wharton. All the others will go to their dormitory immediately."

The Removites cleared off, Bunter going with them with many deep groans.

Harry Wharton and the Remove master proceeded to Study No. 1.

That celebrated apartment was in wild disorder.

The lock of the door was smashed, the window was wide open, and the drawers of Wharton's desk lay about the floor, and papers, books, pens, all sorts and conditions of articles were scattered on the carpet. The electric torch used by the burglar was still there.

Mr. Quelch switched on the light.

"Now look for the candles, Wharton," he said.

"Certainly, sir!"

Wharton opened the secret drawer of his desk, in which the box of candles had been placed. The drawer was not much of a secret; the

burglar certainly would have discovered it if he had been given time. Fortunately, he had been interrupted before his search could extend so far.

"Here they are, sir—quite safe!"

"Let me see them."

Wharton opened the box, and the Form-master looked at the four big coloured candles, knitting his brows.

"It is an extraordinary thing that a burglar should desire to possess himself of such things," he said. "Why did Hurree Singh send these to you, Wharton?"

"A sort of Christmas present, I suppose, sir."

"It is very odd."

"He said they're not to be lighted till they're on the Christmas-tree, when we shall get a surprise."

"Is it possible that some article of value may be concealed in them," said Mr. Quelch. "Something in the nature of a surprise-package. Evidently the Hindu attached some value to them, as he ran such risks in coming here to steal them."

"Looks like it, sir," agreed the captain of the Remove, regarding the mysterious candles very curiously.

"I shall inform the police immediately of this occurrence, Wharton. In the meantime, these candles had better be locked up in the Head's safe. If they are really of value they are not safe here."

And Mr. Quelch carried off the box of Christmas candles with him; and Harry Wharton, very much puzzled, proceeded to the Remove dormitory.

It was long before the Removites slept that night!

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER

OFF FOR THE HOLIDAYS!

THERE was a great deal of excitement at Greyfriars the following day, on the subject of the attempted

burglary. Inspector Grimes came over from Courtfield, and interviewed Wharton and Billy Bunter and the Head, and inspected the set of Christmas candles. He smiled sceptically as he looked at the candles, evidently under the impression that they were not really the thief's objective. The affair was puzzling enough, and the inspector promised to investigate it, and he took his departure.

The Christmas candles remained locked up in the Head's safe till break-up day, and in a day or two the excitement was forgotten. The candles, valuable or not, were safe enough now, and it was not likely that the thief would venture to return.

Harry Wharton & Co. debated whether they would write to the nabob an account of what had happened, but they decided that there was no use in bothering Hurree Singh with the affair. The nabob's peculiar present was safe now, and that was all that mattered.

The Co. kept their eyes well open for any dark gentleman who might show up in the neighbourhood during the following days; but no dark gentleman dawned upon them. And, in the excitement of the approaching holidays, they soon ceased to give the affair much thought. It was arranged that Wharton was to take the candles home with him when the school broke up, as his chums were going with him. The party were to travel up to London on the morning of Christmas Eve, to arrive that day at the mansion of Inky's esteemed relative the Jam.

So when the Greyfriars fellows scattered to the four corners of the kingdom for the Christmas vacation, the box of candles reposed at the bottom of Wharton's trunk. The rest of Inky's guests went their various ways, to meet again on Christmas Eve

at the Jam's mansion. Billy Bunter waved a genial good-bye to the Co. when they changed trains for Wharton Lodge.

"See you again Christmas!" called out Bunter.

"Bow-wow!" answered the Co. in chorus.

"If you like, Wharton, I'll come along with you now, and we'll travel up to Inky's place together——"

"Rats!"

"Yah!" yelled Bunter.

And they parted.

Harry Wharton & Co. had to change trains a second time for Wharton Magnus, and they were careful to see to the transfer of the baggage. A man, wrapped in a heavy overcoat, and deeply muffled against the cold, with a cap drawn down over his brows, came along to the guard's-van, and at sight of the juniors, walked up the platform quickly. Bob Cherry glanced at him, and then looked after him rather fixedly.

"That chap's a Hindu," he said.

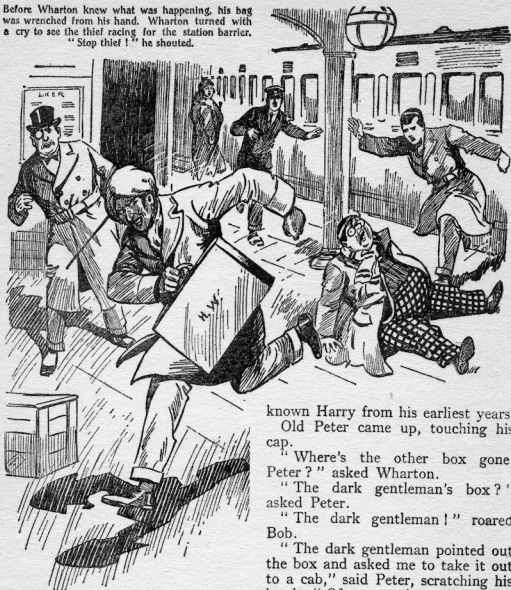
"After the giddy candles?" grinned Nugent.

"Well, he's a Hindu! I saw his chivvy!" said Bob. "We'll jolly well keep our eyes open. Of course, there's plenty of Hindus about, but a chap can't be too careful, considering what's happened."

"Right enough!" agreed Wharton.

At Wharton Magnus, a little country station, the four Removites left the train. Colonel Wharton was there to meet his nephew, and they chatted on the platform for a little time, while the other passengers cleared off. Bob Cherry, remembering the importance of looking after the baggage, hurried along the platform to where the trunks had been deposited. There were three boxes in a row.

Before Wharton knew what was happening, his bag was wrenched from his hand. Wharton turned with a cry to see the thief racing for the station barrier. "Stop thief!" he shouted.



"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" shouted Bob. "Where's your box, Wharton?" "What?"

The juniors came racing up.

"Wharton's box isn't here!" exclaimed Johnny Bull. "Has it gone on in the train? Where's the porter?"

"I saw it put out," said Harry.

He called to the old porter, who had

known Harry from his earliest years. Old Peter came up, touching his cap.

"Where's the other box gone, Peter?" asked Wharton.

"The dark gentleman's box?" asked Peter.

"The dark gentleman!" roared Bob.

"The dark gentleman pointed out the box and asked me to take it out to a cab," said Peter, scratching his head. "Of course, there ain't a cab 'ere, but I told 'im he could get a fly from the Wharton Arms——"

"Come on!" shouted Bob.

The juniors rushed out of the station. Colonel Wharton followed them at a more leisurely pace, while old Peter stood scratching his head in perplexity. It was evident that the dark gentleman who had travelled by

the train had designs on Wharton's box, and pretty clear that he was the same Hindu who had attempted to burgle Study No. 1 at Greyfriars. It was a daring attempt, and had the juniors been a little less watchful it would certainly have succeeded. The porter had carried out the box at the dark gentleman's behest, without the slightest suspicion that it belonged to another passenger.

But the juniors were in time.

Outside the station the box reposed on the pavement, and a taxi was just driving up. The coated and muffled Hindu was calling to the driver as the vehicle arrived.

"Quick! Take up my box! I am in a great hurry!"

"That's the man!" roared Bob Cherry.

The Hindu spun round.

Harry Wharton & Co rushed straight at him. For a moment the man hesitated, his black eyes blazing at the juniors. But he evidently realised that the game was up. He turned, and fled along the village street, leaving the box where it stood, and the driver of the taxi blinking after him in astonishment.

"Chase him!" yelled Johnny Bull.

The juniors scudded in pursuit. But the dark man was out of the village in a minute, and he darted away down a misty lane and vanished. Harry Wharton & Co. slackened down.

"No good chasing him across the fields in the mist!" said Harry. "We shall never get him! Come back!"

The juniors returned to the station. They found Colonel Wharton awaiting them there.

"Well, what does this mean?" asked the colonel, eyeing the breathless juniors curiously.

Harry Wharton explained, and the party started for Wharton Lodge. The

colonel tugged thoughtfully at his white moustache.

"It's pretty clear that there's something valuable about Hurree Singh's Christmas candles," he said with a smile. "It's rather odd how that dark fellow has got on the track of them, however. You will have to be careful in taking them up to London, Harry."

"I jolly well won't let them go out of my hands on Christmas Eve!" said Harry. "He won't get another chance at them, the rascal! He must have been waiting for the break-up at Greyfriars, and must have watched us leave the school——"

"Chance for Drake if he had bagged them!" grinned Bob Cherry. "We could have set Drake to elucidating the 'Mystery of the Missing Candles'——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors arrived at Wharton Lodge in great spirits. During their brief stay there, before starting for London, nothing was seen or heard of the mysterious Hindu. And when on Christmas Eve, the chums of Greyfriars caught their train, Harry Wharton carried the precious candles in his own bag, which he did not even trust to the hands of a porter. And, so far as the juniors could see, there was no dark gentleman on the train. And they arrived at the London terminus without adventure, and feeling that Hurree Jamset Ram Singh's mysterious Christmas present was safe at last.

THE NINTH CHAPTER

ROBBED!

"I SAY, you fellows——"

"My only hat! Bunter!"

"Bunter—you bounder!"

Harry Wharton & Co. stepped from their carriage, and were greeted on

the platform by no less a person than William George Bunter. The Owl of the Remove grinned at them genially.

"Thought I'd meet your train!" he remarked. "I happened to hear you mention the train you were coming by at Greyfriars, you know——"

"You fat bounder!"

"The other fellows have come up," said Bunter. "I've seen Vernon-Smith and Toddy and Browney, and two or three more. They crammed into a taxi to drive to Inky's place. The beasts wouldn't give me a lift — I—I mean I refused their pressing offer of a lift, because I thought I'd better wait for you fellows. Inky would like us all to arrive together, wouldn't he?"

"I don't think he'd like you to arrive at all!" said Wharton.

"Oh, really, Wharton——"

"Buzz off!" suggested Johnny Bull.

"You fellows can lend me some things, of course," said Bunter. "I see you've brought your bags. I thought I wouldn't bring any luggage. I'll carry your bag for you if you like, Wharton."

"Let it alone!"

Bunter chuckled.

"Got those precious candles in it?" he grinned. "I suppose you're going to agree to my having one of them, Wharton?"

"Cheese it!"

"I hate selfishness!" said Bunter reprovingly. "Well, shall I call a taxi for you fellows? There's rather a rush on them. It won't take us long to drive to Trumpington Square. Take care of that bag, Wharton. There's a dark gentleman on the platform somewhere. I saw him in the crowd. May be the same chap——"

"Keep your eyes open, you fellows!" said Bob.

"Yes, rather!"

The Greyfriars juniors passed the barrier and gave up their tickets, and Bunter parted with his platform-ticket. The Owl of the Remove stuck very close to the Co. With all his nerve, Billy Bunter seemed to prefer to arrive at the Jam's mansion in company with Harry Wharton & Co. Evidently he hoped to insinuate himself into the Christmas party under the wing, as it were, of Inky's special chums. Outside the barrier there was a jostling, hurrying crowd of people going to catch trains or coming away from trains, and the chums of the Remove found themselves separated. Billy Bunter caught hold of the sleeve of Wharton's coat and hung on grimly, quite determined not to be shaken off in the throng.

"Let go, you ass!" exclaimed Harry.

"Oh, really, old chap——"

"You fat duffer——"

"Here, hold on!" exclaimed Bunter. "I've dropped my umbrella! Silly ass jostled me——"

"Let go my coat!" roared Wharton.

"Shan't! You're not going to dodge me! Lemme get my umbrella!" howled Bunter.

Still grasping Wharton's sleeve with one tenacious hand, Billy Bunter stooped and groped for the fallen umbrella with the other. Two or three people jostled him, and the Owl of the Remove sat down and roared. Wharton was half dragged over by Bunter's grasp on his arm. He shook himself angrily, but the Owl of the Remove was not to be lightly shaken off. At the same moment someone hurried by and crashed against Wharton, almost sending him staggering over Bunter. A grip

fastened on his right wrist, twisting it suddenly and savagely, and almost before he knew what was happening his bag was wrenched from his hand.

Wharton turned with a cry.

"Stop thief!" he shouted.

He had one glimpse of a man in an overcoat, muffled up, who plunged into the jostling throng and disappeared. Wharton would have rushed furiously after him, but Bunter caught at his coat again and held on.

"I say, Harry, old chap——"

"Let go!" shrieked Wharton, dragging at his coat.

"But I say——"

Wharton wrenched himself loose. He darted into the crowd in the direction the thief had taken; but the man and the bag had vanished.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" Bob Cherry came through the crowd with Nugent, and Johnny Bull arrived from another direction. "Anything up, Harry?"

"The bag——" gasped Wharton.

"What?"

"It's taken——"

"My hat!"

"That fool Bunter was holding me!" gasped Wharton. "Somebody twisted my wrist, and grabbed it and cleared! It was the Hindu, of course—the man we saw at Wharton Magnus! The bag's gone—and the candles——"

"Great Scott!"

Bunter came up gasping.

"Wharton, you beast, I've lost my umbrella! You'll have to buy me a new umbrella! It was all your fault——"

"Shut up!" howled Wharton.

"It was a jolly good umbrella—cost three guineas—— Yaroooh!" roared Bunter as Wharton, out of all patience, thumped his hat and flattened it over his eyes.

Billy Bunter was busy with his hat for some time, and the chums of Greyfriars held a hurried consultation.

"Drake!" exclaimed Bob Cherry.

"What about Drake——"

"He's the man!" said Bob, with conviction. "We're seeing him at Inky's, you know——"

"He mayn't be there yet—most likely not——"

"Cut off to Baker Street," said Bob. "We'll go to the station police here about the bag, and you cut off to Baker Street for Drake; and if he's left, keep on to Inky's, and see him there. Jump into a taxi, and don't lose a tick!"

"Good!" said Wharton. "It's the best thing."

"Get a move on!"

Harry Wharton ran for a taxi followed by Bunter.

"Baker Street, driver, as fast as you can—Ferrers Locke's house."

"Yes, sir!"

The taxi glided away.

It stopped at last outside the house of the famous Baker Street detective.

A handsome fellow of about Wharton's age had just come down the steps with a bag in his hand. There was a taxicab waiting, and he was about to step into it. Wharton leaned from his window and shouted:

"Drake!"

THE TENTH CHAPTER

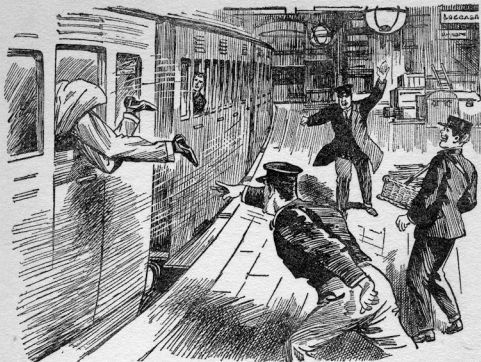
THE DETECTIVE ON THE CASE!

JACK DRAKE glanced round in surprise.

His face brightened at the sight of his old school-fellow. He turned from the waiting taxi and hurried towards Wharton.

"Hallo, old top!" he exclaimed.

"Jolly glad to see you!" He shook hands with Wharton through the window. "I didn't know you were



Jack Drake was determined not to miss the train. As it was steaming out, he raced up, grasped a carriage door, and heaved himself through the window head first.

calling for me. I was just off to Inky's——"

"Something's happened! I want your help!" said Harry. "Send your taxi away and jump in here, will you?"

"Certainly!"

Drake dismissed the waiting cabman and Wharton opened the door for him, and he stepped into Wharton's vehicle. Harry directed the driver to return to the station they had left, and the taxi glided away. Drake sat down facing Wharton, his bag on the floor. Billy Bunter blinked at him with a genial grin.

"So you're coming to the party, Drake, old bean?" he asked. "Jolly glad you'll be there!"

"Thanks!" said Drake, rather dryly. "You said something had

happened, Wharton. If I can help you——"

"I hope you can," said Harry. "I hardly like to turn up at Inky's place without the candles——"

"The what?" ejaculated Drake.

"I'd better spin you the whole yarn," said Harry.

And he told the story of the Christmas candles from the beginning.

Wharton had a strong hope that Drake might be able to help him, but he had to confess that he did not see how the boy detective was to do it. The man who had snatched the bag at the terminus had vanished into the crowd, and was lost in the wilderness of London. How Ferrers Locke's pupil was to get on his track was a mystery to Harry—if, indeed, he could do so at all.

"You think there's a chance?" asked Harry at last.

"I hope so," said Drake quietly. "We'll do our best, anyhow. You didn't see much of the man who robbed you?"

"Only that he was a Hindu."

"The same who tried to bag your luggage at Wharton Magnus?"

"I am almost sure. Anyhow, it seems pretty certain, doesn't it?"

Drake nodded.

"If it was the same man, he had a prominent nose, and black eyes set rather close together," said Harry.

Drake turned to Bunter.

"Does that fit the man who colared you in the quad at Greyfriars, Bunter?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Good! Now tell me your yarn—just what happened to you that time," said Drake.

"I was—was pacing the quad," said Bunter. "Suddenly there was a fearful yell, and about thirty Hindus rushed at me with drawn scimitars—"

"For goodness' sake, tell Drake the truth, you fat fool!" shouted Wharton.

"Oh, really, Wharton——"

"Let him run on," said Drake, with a smile. "I've had some training at disentangling the truth from the lies——"

"Oh, really, Drake, if you think I would tell you a whopper—or even exaggerate——"

"Get on with the washing, old top!"

Bunter grunted, and proceeded with his thrilling yarn. Evidently his tale of adventure had grown since the break-up at Greyfriars. It was now a thrilling, fearsome narrative.

But Jack Drake listened to it patiently.

Doubtless he was easily able to pick out the facts from the fiction and to reduce Bunter's startling yarn to the proper proportions.

"The man seems to have gone to Greyfriars specially for the candles?" the boy detective remarked.

"So he said," answered Bunter.

"He wanted Wharton's study, not one of the others——"

"Yes."

"He seemed to know that the parcel had been sent by post to Wharton."

"Must have," said Bunter.

"It's jolly queer how the man knew anything about the candles at all," Harry Wharton remarked.

"They contained some sort of a Christmas surprise for us; but how a stranger could get on to it is a giddy mystery! Must have been spying on Inky somehow."

Jack Drake nodded without speaking.

He sat in silence while the taxi buzzed on to the station, evidently thinking the matter out.

Bob Cherry and Johnny Bull and Nugent were waiting outside the station for Wharton. They came up quickly as the taxi stopped, and Wharton waved to them from the window.

"Got him!" said Bob Cherry, with satisfaction. "Good old Drake! Jolly glad to see you! Are you going to recapture those blessed candles for us?"

"I'm going to try," said Drake, with a smile.

"What's the first move? We've told the police here about it; but, of course, they can't do anything—the man's vanished long ago!"

"Better get on to Inky's," said Drake.

"But——" Wharton hesitated.

"We—we don't like turning up without the candles, Drake. If there's the faintest chance of recovering them——"

"I think there is," said Drake quietly. "But you told me, I think, that the candles are not to be produced till to-morrow, when they're to be put on the Christmas-tree——"

"That's so."

"Then you needn't mention to Inky that they're lost," said Drake. "I've got twenty-four hours to work in, and in that time I may be able to hand over the candles, and it will be all right."

"Good!" said Nugent. "That will be all right. Are you coming on to Inky's with us?"

"Yes; I'm a guest, you know."

"I mean, about looking for the thief and——"

"Never mind about that now."

Nugent looked surprised.

"Oh, all right! I—I thought——"

"Leave it to Drake," said Bob Cherry. "Drake has his own giddy, mysterious methods. I shouldn't wonder if he's got his eye on the thief already, and is going to produce him out of his hat like a conjurer."

Jack Drake laughed.

"It's not quite so easy as that," he said. "But you can leave it to me to do the best I can. Now let's get on to Inky's."

And the juniors crowded into the taxi and started for the mansion in Trumpington Square, the residence of the Nabob of Bhanipur and his esteemed uncle the Jam Sahib Bahadur Munny Singh.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER

INKY IN ALL HIS GLORY!

BRIGHT lights gleamed from a score of windows into the December dusk. The great doors stood

wide open, giving a glimpse of a vast hall blazing with light and colour. Gorgeous Persian rugs covered the wide stone steps, and lay glimmering across the pavement. As the taxi stopped, a dusky footman, in the magnificent Oriental livery of Bhanipur, opened the door and salaamed profoundly. Harry Wharton & Co. blinked a little. They had expected Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh to "spread" himself a little; but they had scarcely looked for this magnificence. From somewhere within the mansion came sweet strains of music.

"Salaam, sahibs!" said the six-foot-three of dusky magnificence, bowing to the carpeted pavement.

"Top of the afternoon, old top!" answered Bob Cherry affably.

"Will it please the huzoors to alight?"

"Blessed if I know what a huzoor is, but it will please us to alight," murmured Johnny Bull. And the juniors grinned.

They alighted.

The bags were lifted out by dusky servants in gorgeous garb, who appeared to spring from nowhere.

A fat and imposing major-domo, glittering in a jewelled turban, appeared to conduct the guests into the mansion.

In the hall, in the blaze of light, stood Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh, to receive his chums.

They almost jumped as they saw him.

Inky of the Remove had vanished out of all knowledge; in his place stood the Nabob of Bhanipur.

Instead of the accustomed dress, Hurree Singh was clad in the native garb of a prince of India.

His costume, which rivalled Joseph's celebrated coat in its colouring,

glittered with jewels of price. His spotless turban was fastened with a gigantic diamond, which fairly blazed in the electric lights.

Only his smiling, dusky face was familiar.

There was a new stateliness in the Nabob of Bhanipur, but he was still the same cheery Inky of old in his friendly greeting to the chums of the Remove.

He salaamed graciously, a form of salutation never used in the Remove passage at Greyfriars, but which seemed quite in place in Inky's present magnificent surroundings.

Then he shook hands and grinned.

"Welcome, my esteemed and honourable chums!" he said. "The gladfulness of again beholding your handsome and ridiculous chivvies is enormous and terrific."

"Good old Inky!" said Bob Cherry. "I say, old bean, you're rather going it, aren't you?"

Hurree Singh grinned.

"It was the wishful desire of esteemed uncle that he should see me in proper style of Indian prince," he explained. "At first there was little difficulty in keeping excellent turban from falling off-fully. I have grown out of habit of wearing esteemed Indian headgears. But it is bit of all right and first chop style—what? I am glad to see my esteemed old pal Drake. Trot in, old beans—I mean, honour me by deigning to soil your feet upon my humble floor."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Other esteemed chums have already arrivefully turned up," said Hurree Singh. "Smithy, and Browney, and Toddy, and Squiffy, and Redwing, they are all here. But what is this?"

The nabob looked at Bunter.

Bunter wiggled forward, with his

most ingratiating smile upon his fat face.

"Jolly glad to see you, Inky!" he said. "I say, this show of yours reminds me of Bunter Court. It does, really!"

For a moment the nabob had an inward struggle. The sight of Billy Bunter did not seem to increase his pleasure on the joyful occasion. But hospitality came before everything. He salaamed to Bunter.

"The esteemed and fat Bunter is welcome," said Inky.

"Of course!" said Bunter. "I couldn't leave you in the lurch, Inky. I say, I'm rather hungry."

"Don't blame us for Bunter," said Nugent. "The fat bounder waylaid us at the station——"

"Oh, really, Nugent——"

"And wedged into the taxi," said Johnny Bull. "I'll sling him out on his neck if you like!"

"Oh, really, Bull——"

"All are welcome at this season of esteemed festivity," said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "Kalouth!"

The magnificent major-domo loomed up.

Hurree Jamset Ram Singh spoke to him in his own language, which Bob Cherry always declared sounded to him like cracking nuts.

"Kalouth will show you to your quarters, old beans," said Hurree Singh; and the juniors passed on with the dusky major-domo.

Kalouth performed the office with great gravity and stateliness. The Greyfriars party were ushered up a vast staircase, to a suite of rooms that almost dazzled their eyes.

There was a room for every fellow, and every room of magnificent size, and furnished with Oriental gorgeousness, regardless of expense.

There they were left to their own



A PRINCELY WELCOME FOR THE GREYFRIARS GUESTS!

Specially drawn for the "Holiday Annual" by C. H. Chapman.

devices for the present, to remove the stains of travel.

"I say, Wharton"—Bunter blinked into Harry's room—"I say, I haven't brought anything with me, you know. I suppose you can lend me some pyjamas?"

"My bag's gone," said Harry. "I shall have to borrow some things of someone myself."

Billy Bunter rolled towards Frank Nugent's room.

He caught sight of Jack Drake in the corridor, strolling round and looking about him. Drake disappeared amid the gigantic tubs of palms that decorated the corridor. Billy Bunter grinned and scudded into Drake's room.

A dusky valet had been assigned to each of the visitors, and Bunter found a man laying out Drake's clothes in his room.

"Speak English?" asked Bunter.

"Yes, Sahib."

"I've changed rooms with Drake. You can clear. Understand! Bunk off!"

"To hear is to obey."

The dusky valet glided noiselessly from the room. Bunter promptly locked the door after him.

Then he examined Drake's possessions with an appraising eye.

"Just about right!" he murmured. "The bags will be a bit tight; but I can manage. I shall have to slit the waistcoat at the back; but the dinner-jacket will cover that up. It's all right. I hope dinner won't be late. This Eastern magnificence is all very well, but the grub is the principal thing!"

Billy Bunter proceeded to dress—in Drake's clothes. There were several slits and splits by the time he had finished; but they were all covered up successfully, and Bunter surveyed the

final result, in a tall pier-glass, with great satisfaction.

When he strolled downstairs he felt a slight inward trepidation. He could not help wondering whether Jack Drake might not recognise his own clothes distended on Bunter's fat person.

To his relief, Drake did not appear.

Where he was, or what he was doing, Bunter neither knew nor cared; he was not interested in the pupil of Ferrers Locke. But he was glad that Drake was out of sight.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER

FACE TO FACE!

"DIN DAS?"

Two glittering, black, hawk-like eyes fixed upon Jack Drake questioningly, suspiciously.

"That is my name, sahib! What does the sahib desire?"

"A few words with you."

"The hour is late, sahib."

"My business will not wait!" said Drake quietly.

The Hindu eyed him.

The scene was a Bloomsbury lodging-house, and the Hindu stood at the door of a room, which he had opened to Drake's tap.

It was evident that the dark man would have been glad to close the door again, and shut out his visitor; but there was something in Drake's manner that made him hesitate.

"What is the sahib's name?" he asked at last.

"Drake."

"I do not know the name."

"You may have heard the name of Ferrers Locke," said Drake.

Din Das started. Evidently the name of the celebrated Baker Street detective was known to him.

"I am Ferrers Locke's assistant,"

said Drake. "Will you let me in now, Mr. Din Das?"

The Hindu compressed his lips.

"You have no business with me," he said. "I refuse to admit you." He made a movement to close the door.

Drake put his foot into the doorway.

"Do you prefer me to call in the police?" he asked.

"The police?"

"There is a constable within call."

Again the Hindu hesitated. Then he opened the door wider.

"The sahib may enter!" he said sullenly.

Drake stepped into the room. Din Das closed the door, and stood with his back to it, his glittering black eyes fastened upon the boy detective. Drake gave a careless glance round him. The shabby sitting-room communicated with a bedroom, of which the door was ajar.

"And now, what is your business, Sahib Drake?" asked Din Das, in a low voice that had a ring of menace in its tones.

"I have come for the bag you stole from Harry Wharton at the railway terminus."

"Sahib!"

"With the nabob's candles in it," said Drake.

Din Das breathed hard. His black eyes, set close together over a beak of a nose, glittered like diamonds.

"The sahib talks in riddles," he said coldly. "I know nothing of a bag and candles."

Drake smiled.

"Listen to me, Din Das," he said quietly. "You are a member of the Jam Sahib Bahadur Munny Singh's suite. You are on leave of absence from his service. This evening I have been making inquiries at the Jam's

house, and learned about you from Kalouth."

"For what reason, sahib?"

"I will explain. Four Christmas candles—of some unknown value—were sent to Wharton at Greyfriars by Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. Shortly after he received them a Hindu attempted to steal them from the school."

"I know nothing of it!"

"The same man repeated the attempt on Wharton's way home, after the school broke up," continued Drake. "He made a third attempt at the London railway-station, and succeeded."

Din Das shrugged his shoulders.

"I know nothing of it!" he repeated. "Why do you come to me?"

"I questioned Kalouth," continued Drake. "I figured it out that only a member of the Jam's suite could possibly have known of the existence of the candles—he must have seen Hurree Singh preparing them, and learned all about them—and that was only possible to a resident in the Jam's mansion."

The Hindu smiled sarcastically.

"The Huzoor Jam Bahadur has a hundred servants," he said. "Why do you come to me, who have been absent from the huzoor's mansion for more than a week?"

"Because you have been absent," smiled Drake. "I have a good description of the thief at Greyfriars and I have seen every member of the Jam's suite, and he is not among them. I wanted to find one who was absent, and I learned all I wanted to know from Kalouth. I am looking for a Hindu with a prominent nose and close-set black eyes, Din Das. Do you recognise the description?"

Din Das did not answer, but he breathed hard.

"Kalouth told me of you, not knowing why I asked," said Drake. "You are the only member of the Jam's suite absent from his house. It must have been a member of his household who learned about the Christmas candles, and knew that they were of great value. I learned from Kalouth where to find you, and now I have seen you I recognise the description. Do you follow me?"

The Hindu did not speak.

"If you prefer I will call witnesses to prove that you are the man, and charge you with the theft," said Drake. "I would rather avoid a scandal, and take back the stolen goods without fuss. You know very well that Bunter could identify you, as well as several other fellows. Do you care to stand the test?"

The Hindu's black eyes were restless.

It was evident that he had deemed himself secure and unsuspected, and that he had only to avoid the Jam's house while the Greyfriars fellows were there, to escape any possible suspicion.

He had not counted upon the pupil of Ferrers Locke.

"I am here to take Wharton's property," said Drake. "Return it to me, and go your way. The Jam will



Jack Drake's eyes were on the watch as the train stopped with a shrieking of brakes. A carriage door swung open farther along the train, and a lithe, swarthy figure leaped out on to the track!

be warned of your dishonesty, and that is all. Refuse, and you will be arrested! Take your choice! I give you one minute."

He waited quietly.

Din Das made a gesture of resignation.

"The young sahib is very clever," he said. "The game is up. You will

find the bag in my bedroom." He waved a dusky hand towards the half-open door.

"Good!" said Drake.

He stepped to the doorway and glanced into the bedroom. On a chair lay a bag, still locked. But the side had been gashed open with a knife. Several articles were streaming out of the gashed side of the bag, and Drake did not need telling that the box containing the candles had been removed.

He looked back at Din Das.

"It is the candles I want!" he said. "You will hand them to me, Din Das. I do not intend to take my eyes off you."

"To hear is to obey!" said Din Das.

He passed the boy detective, and went into the bedroom. As he passed through the doorway a sudden change came over him. Drake was on the alert, but he was not prepared for the Hindu's sudden action.

The bedroom door slammed in his face in a twinkling.

Drake hurled himself on it the next moment.

Click!

The key turned on the other side.

"Open this door!" shouted Drake savagely.

He heard the sound of a drawer being dragged out. Dropping on one knee, he looked through the keyhole. From a drawer Din Das was taking an oblong box, the box containing Hurree Singh's Christmas candles.

He slipped it under his coat, into an inside-pocket, and turned to the window. There was no other door to the bedroom.

Drake sprang up and seized a chair, and crashed it on the lock of the door.

Crash, crash, crash!

In a couple of minutes the lock

cracked open, and Drake hurled back the door and rushed into the bedroom. He sprang to the open window. Outside was a rusty rainpipe clamped to the wall. And as Drake looked down into the misty gloom, he caught a glimpse of the nimble Hindu dropping to the ground.

The boy detective did not hesitate.

He swung himself from the window, and clambered down the pipe with the activity of a monkey.

As he sprang to the ground there was a sound of pattering footsteps, and he followed the sound through a misty entry into the street. In front of the house there was waiting the taxi in which Drake had come. He shouted to the driver.

"Have you seen a man—a Hindu—running—"

The chauffeur nodded.

"Yes, sir. There was a taxi just passing, and he jumped into it. There he goes!"

Drake gritted his teeth. It was sheer ill-luck that a belated taxi should have been passing at that moment. The escaping thief had taken instant advantage of it. Drake stared down the misty streets, and caught the winking lights of the speeding taxicab.

"Quick!" he panted. "After it! Don't lose sight of it! Two pounds if you run it down!"

"Jump in, sir," said the driver, all alacrity at once.

Drake sat panting in the taxi as it throbbed in pursuit of the escaping thief.

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER

RUN DOWN!

"STAND back!"

Jack Drake raced across the platform.

The night express for Dover was

just on the move. A porter and a guard jumped towards the boy detective on either side. But Drake eluded them, and tore at the door of a third-class carriage, the nearest at hand. The door was locked.

"Stand back!"

Drake did not heed.

From the window of a carriage farther up the train a dark face looked, and two black, jetty eyes scintillated.

Din Das had reached Charing Cross Station only a few minutes ahead of his pursuer. In the station yard Drake had left the taxi, a couple of currency notes on the seat for the driver. There was no time to stop. He ran into the station. It was easy to pick up the track of a hatless Hindu. Drake had barely time to take his ticket at the booking-office, where Din Das had taken one a couple of minutes previously, and race for the train.

Din Das grinned breathlessly as he watched from his window. The carriage door was locked, and the porter's extended hand was only a yard behind Jack Drake.

But the boy detective was not to be beaten.

He grasped the door, of which the window was down, and fairly shot into the carriage, head first.

His heels disappeared from the eyes of the astonished porter behind him.

The train was moving.

There was an exclamation of amazement from two or three passengers in the carriage. They blinked at Drake.

"Nearly lost it, young 'un!" remarked one.

Drake picked himself up breathless, and nodded with a smile.

"Nearly!" he said. "A miss is as good as a mile!"

Drake sat down next to the window.

He was in the same train with Din Das. He knew that. The Hindu's desperate flight had not thrown him off the track. He could guess the thief's object. But for his discovery by Drake, Din Das would undoubtedly have remained in London, and resumed his place in the Jam's household after the Greyfriars fellows were gone. That was impossible now. The thief could only hope to save his plunder and his liberty.

Drake looked out of the window, and smiled as he saw a dark face projecting from a window three carriages away.

The Hindu's eyes blazed at him, and then the dusky head was withdrawn from view.

The express raced on, gathering speed.

It was not a corridor train, or Drake would have proceeded to the Hindu's carriage at once. But he was not uneasy.

He had only to watch the train, and alight as soon as Din Das alighted.

The train slowed down.

Drake looked out watchfully. But there were no lights of a station; the train seemed to be stopping on the open track.

"What's up, I wonder?" said the passenger who had spoken to Drake before. "There's no stop here. Something's wrong."

"Somebody's pulled the communication-cord," said another.

Drake's eyes gleamed.

He knew that the express must be nearly half-way to Dover now, in open, lonely country. He could guess who had pulled the communication-cord.

The train stopped with a shrieking of brakes, and Drake's eyes, from his window, were on the watch.

A carriage door swung open, and a lithe figure leapt out. One flashing glance was cast towards Drake's carriage as the Hindu fled into the night.

Drake did not hesitate a second.

He squeezed through the window, dropped to the track, and darted off. The guard was coming along the train with a lantern, and he shouted to Drake. The boy detective did not heed—he scarcely heard.

He could hear the Hindu running and stumbling down the steep embankment in advance, and he had no eyes or ears for anything else.

There was a fence at the bottom of the embankment, and Drake caught a glimpse of a clambering figure. The next minute he was over the fence, in the lane on the other side.

Behind him the lighted windows of the train were gliding away; the express was in motion again. With a rattle and a roar, the train plunged on through the night.

Drake did not heed it.

On the wind the sound of pattering feet came to his ears, and he ran in steady pursuit.

Stars were glittering in the sky overhead. In the dim light Drake caught sight of the fugitive again, and realised, with a thrill of triumph, that he was gaining on him.

Closer and closer he drew to the fleeing figure.

The Hindu stopped at last.

He spun round, panting, and there was a glitter of cold steel in the starlight. Drake stopped as the knife flashed before his eyes.

His hand went into the pocket of his coat. The Hindu, his lips drawn back in a snarl from his white, set teeth, made a spring at him like a tiger. Jack Drake's hand flashed up with a levelled revolver in it.

"Stand back!" he rapped out.

The Hindu was almost upon him, but he leapt back from the levelled barrel. He stood panting, gripping the knife, his dusky face ablaze with rage and hatred.

"Drop that knife!" said Drake curtly.

Din Das muttered a savage curse in his own tongue. But he did not dare to come on in face of the revolver. He could read in the boy detective's face that he would not hesitate to pull the trigger if it were necessary.

"Drop that knife, or I'll put a bullet through your arm, Din Das!" said Drake, in low, steady tones.

Clang!

The knife clattered on the ground.

"Step back!"

Jack Drake advanced, and the Hindu, panting, receded, and Drake kicked the knife away into a ditch.

"Now put up your hands, Din Das!" he said firmly. "Mind, if you try any tricks I'll drop you where you stand!"

With a glare that spoke volumes of hate, the Oriental lifted his dusky hands above his head.

With the revolver in his right hand ready for use, Drake tore open the Hindu's coat with his left.

The pocket where the box of candles had been thrust sagged heavily. Drake thrust his hand into it, and drew out the box. The black eyes blazed at him.

Drake dropped the box of candles into his overcoat pocket. The prize was recovered at last.

Din Das stood trembling with rage.

Drake never allowed his eyes to move from the Hindu's face. Din Das muttered something under his breath, turned on his heel, and in a moment



Bump! "Ow! Yow-ow! If you burst——" howled Bunter. Bump! There was a rending sound of parting cloth. That second bump had done it—with fatal results to Drake's trousers!

had disappeared. Drake gave a sigh of relief, smiled, and set out for the nearest village to hire a car.

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER

LIGHT AT LAST!

"MY only hat! The cheek of the worm!"

Thus Bob Cherry. The chums had gathered in one of the magnificent rooms on the ground floor of the stately mansion. And Billy Bunter was with them. It was the clothes which Bunter wore which brought forth Bob's ejaculation.

Billy Bunter was wearing a pair of evening trousers only too evident not his own—they were so tight he could hardly move.

"The rotter!" exclaimed Harry Wharton. "They're Drake's bags

he's got on. And Drake—— Bump him, you fellows!"

"Look here——" began Bunter.

The juniors did not stop to hear what Bunter wanted to explain. They grasped him and whirled him off his feet.

Bump!

"Ow! Yow-ow! If you burst——" howled Bunter.

Bump!

There was a rending sound of parting cloth. That second bump had done it—with fatal results to Drake's trousers.

"My hat!" ejaculated Bob Cherry.

"Merry Christmas! Good old English game! What, what!" chuckled the genial Jam.

Suddenly, even above Bunter's roars, there came to the juniors' ears the sound of a car in the road outside

Harry Wharton caught his breath as he heard the car stop. The thought was in his mind at once that it was Drake. Bob Cherry's eyes met his.

"Drake!" whispered Bob.

"I—I hope so——"

Harry Wharton hurried down the stairs. He was in time to see Drake enter, bowed in by the magnificent major-domo.

"Drake, old chap——"

"Here we are again!" Drake smiled. "Am I in time?"

"Yes, if—if——"

"I've got them. Here they are."

"How on earth——" began Wharton.

Drake laughed.

"It's a long story," he said. "I'll tell you another time!"

Harry Wharton returned to the festive gathering, with the box of candles in his hand. Hurree Jamset Ram Singh smiled as he entered. It looked as if the captain of the Remove had been to his room for the box of candles, and Inky little dreamed of what strange scenes that box had been through, or of the boy detective's desperate night's work to recover it.

"Got it?" ejaculated Bob Cherry.

Wharton held up the box.

"Oh, good!"

"My esteemed chums, place the honourable candles on honourable tree, in places arrangesfully prepared."

"Right-ho!"

The four Christmas candles were arranged on the tree, each with the label attached bearing the name of the owner. The juniors gathered round curiously. Jack Drake came in, looking merry and bright, as the candles were arranged, and the Jam Bahadur lighted them with a long taper.

The juniors watched breathlessly as the candles burned. They were aware that something was going to happen.

Pop!

It was a little explosion as the first candle burned down half an inch. Pop, pop, pop, came from each of the candles in turn.

"My hat!"

Out of each of the candles, as the explosion came, rolled a little ebony box.

Wharton and Johnny Bull, Nugent and Bob Cherry picked them up in wonder.

The lids snapped open.

"Great Scott!"

"Oh, Inky, you old ass!"

From each of the little boxes blazed a magnificent diamond pin! There were exclamations of admiration as the diamonds blazed and sparkled. Harry Wharton & Co. stared at them blankly. They had expected a surprise, but they had not expected this!

The nabob smiled beamingly.

"This is the little delightful surprise and honourable Christmas present to esteemed pals!" he explained.

"So that was it!" murmured Drake. "No wonder that dark beggar was after the candles, when he knew what was hidden in them!"

"Good old Inky!"

For the rest of that festive evening four Greyfriars juniors were adorned with sparkling diamond pins. The diamonds were too magnificent to be worn at Greyfriars, certainly, but they were quite in keeping with Harry Wharton & Co.'s present gorgeous surroundings. And before the merry party broke up for bed Jack Drake was called upon to tell the story of the recapture of the precious prize. And the whole party, from the Jam and the nabob to Billy Bunter, listened breathlessly to the story of the mystery of the Christmas candles.

THE END