

"THE POSTAL ORDER CONSPIRACY."

The Magnet Library

No. 133 |

Grand, Complete School Tale of Harry Wharton & Co.

| Vol. 5.



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The Postal Order Conspiracy

A Splendid, Long,
Complete School Tale
of
Harry Wharton & Co.
at Greyfriars.

— BY —

FRANK RICHARDS.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

A Most Important Anniversary.

"IT'S lucky it comes on a half-holiday!" Billy Bunter remarked.

No one replied.

Bunter's remark was not made to anyone in particular, and no one in particular felt bound to make any answer.

Besides, no one knew to what the remark referred. Billy Bunter had been sitting quite silent and thoughtful, in the armchair in No. 1 Study, for a good five minutes. He had broken the silence with that observation, and Harry Wharton, or Frank Nugent, or Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, hadn't the faintest idea what he was driving at.

So, as they were busy in mending the "busted" handle of a bat, and had their attention fully occupied, they didn't even look at Bunter.

The fat junior blinked at them through his big spectacles.

"I say, you fellows——" he remarked.

Wharton gave a grunt.

"I say, you know. It's lucky it's a half-holiday."

"It's not a half-holiday," said Nugent, looking up at last. "What are you jabbering about? To-day's Tuesday, and Tuesday's not a half-holiday."

"I wasn't speaking about to-day, Nugent."

Nugent grunted.

"I was speaking about to-morrow," said Bunter, with emphasis, "and I said that it's lucky it comes on a half-holiday."

"Ass! Wednesday's always a half-holiday, isn't it?" growled Nugent. "Are you off your silly onion?"

"Oh, really——"

"Oh, cheese it, Bunter!" said Harry Wharton. "Can't you see we're busy?"

"Oh, really, Wharton, I think you might give me a minute, on an important occasion, that occurs only once a year."

"Eh?"

"To-morrow being a half-holiday, we shall be able to celebrate it——"

"Celebrate what?"

"IT!" said Bunter.

"And what is it?"

"Oh, really, you can't have forgotten!" said Bunter indignantly. "I mentioned it to you yesterday."

The three chums of the Remove Form at Greyfriars stared at him.

"You mentioned what?"

"About to-morrow," said Bunter. "You know jolly well that it's an anniversary, and ought to be celebrated—at least, by this study."

Harry Wharton shook his head.

"Blessed if I know what you're driving at," he said. "I don't know of any anniversary on that date. It's not Founder's Day."

"Oh, really—"

"And it's not Empire Day or Christmas," said Nugent.

"Or the esteemed Good Friday," remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "I know little of the English movable or immovable feasts, but I believe that Good Friday seldom or never comes on a Wednesday."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Nugent. "Never, I should say."

"Well, hardly ever!" grinned Wharton.

"I say, you fellows, you might be serious, on a serious occasion like this," said Bunter. "It's a much more important date than those. It's my birthday."

"What?"

"It's my birthday."

"Well, what is there important about that?" asked Wharton.

"Oh, really! I suppose this study is going to get up some little celebration," said the fat junior indignantly. "I should think you would have the decency to stand some sort of a feed, anyway."

"If we stand you, I think that's enough," said Nugent.

"Look here—"

"What rot!" said Wharton. "We don't celebrate our own birthdays, except with a few extra tarts for tea, or something of that sort. And you—"

"But it's different in my case."

"How so?"

"Well, I don't want to blow my own trumpet," said Bunter. "You know what a modest chap I am—never put myself forward in any way. But I suppose you'll all admit that this study would be very different if I weren't in it."

The three chums admitted it at once, cordially.

"Well then," said Bunter, "as the most important member of the study—"

"Eh?"

"As the most important member of the study, I ought to have my birthday celebrated in some way."

"Well, of all the cheek—"

"I don't see it. I was thinking of a big party, with all the best fellows in the Remove invited, and the girls from Cliff House. I think it would be ripping, and as it fortunately comes on a half-holiday, it's very convenient."

Harry Wharton & Co. looked at one another. The astounding coolness of the Owl of the Remove took their breath away.

Billy Bunter did not seem to see it. He blinked at them from the armchair with a perfectly satisfied expression.

"But where are the funds to come from?" Wharton asked, at last.

Bunter snorted.

"Isn't that just like you?" he exclaimed. "I call it a low, money-grubbing mind, that's always thinking of considerations of that sort. I take a much higher view of things. The money will come from somewhere."

"From somebody, you mean," said Nugent.

"Well, I'm expecting a postal-order this evening," said Bunter. "As a matter of fact, I'm expecting several postal-orders to-morrow, as it's my birthday. I expect to have quite enough funds. But in case there should be any delay in the delivery of my postal-orders—"

"There might be, you know," Nugent suggested sarcastically.

"Well, in that case, I suppose you fellows would be ready to stand something, and I could settle it afterwards when my remittances arrived. Besides, I've got an idea of getting up a Form subscription."

"A Form subscription, to celebrate your birthday!" exclaimed Wharton.

"Yes. Why not?"

"Well, my hat!"

"Money will have to be raised somehow," said Bunter. "As I've got guests coming, it's necessary."

"Guests—ch? What guests?"

"Well, there are the Cliff House girls—Marjorie and Miss Clara and Wilhelmina. I've asked Hazeldene to bring his sister and the other two, and he said he would. Then there's D'Arcy."

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 133.

NEXT
WEEK:

"ALONZO, THE TERRIBLE."

"D'Arcy!"

"Yes, D'Arcy of St. Jim's, you know. I visited him once at St. Jim's, and he stood me a decent treat, and I felt I ought to ask him back."

"You—you—"

"I hope you don't think I ought to accept a chap's hospitality without asking him back, Wharton," said Bunter, with dignity. "I'm not that sort of a fellow, I hope. That kind of thing may do for you, but I'm different, I suppose. I never could do anything at all mean."

"My word!" murmured Nugent.

"The wordfulness is terrific!" said the Nabob of Bhanipur.

"So—so you've asked the Cliff House girls, and D'Arcy of St. Jim's, and we've got to stand a feed to keep up appearances!" exclaimed Wharton.

"That's a rotten way of putting it, Wharton. I—"

"You fat young scoundrel! Do you think we're going to be bounced out of a fortnight's pocket-money in this way?" Wharton exclaimed indignantly.

"Well, the guests are coming now—"

"I tell you—"

"If I happen to be short of funds at the time—"

"If!" ejaculated Nugent.

"Yes, if," said Billy Bunter firmly. "If I happen to be short of funds, I suppose you won't let honoured guests go away hungry. It'll give 'em a nice opinion of Greyfriars hospitality, I must say."

Harry Wharton & Co. looked at one another, and rose.

The same thought was in every mind. Billy Bunter blinked at them inquiringly.

"Well, have you thought over it?" he said.

"Yes."

"And made up your minds?"

"Yes."

"And what have you decided upon?"

"We've decided to give you a jolly good bumping for your fearful cheek," said Wharton.

Bunter jumped up in alarm.

"Here! I—I say! I say, you fellows! Oh!"

They grasped him firmly.

Bunter yelled and wriggled. It was his way to yell before he was hurt; but on this occasion he was destined to be hurt, too.

"Ow! Leggo! Help! Murder! Fire!"

"Bump him!"

"Hurrah!"

They seized the fat junior by his fat ankles and his fat shoulders, and swung him in the air. Bunter's head swam.

"Oh! Help! Yow!"

Bump!

"Yaroo!"

Bump!

"Yoop! Help! Oh!"

Bump!

"Ow!"

And then the fat junior was swung to the doorway, and sent along the passage with a powerful heave, which sent him skidding on the linoleum almost to the head of the stairs.

He stopped there, and sat blinking. The chums of the Remove looked at him, grinning, from the door of the study.

Bunter blinked round at them and gasped.

"Ow! Beasts! Look here! I say, you fellows—"

The study door slammed, and Bunter was left to address his eloquent discourse to the desert air.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Trouble in the Form-Room.

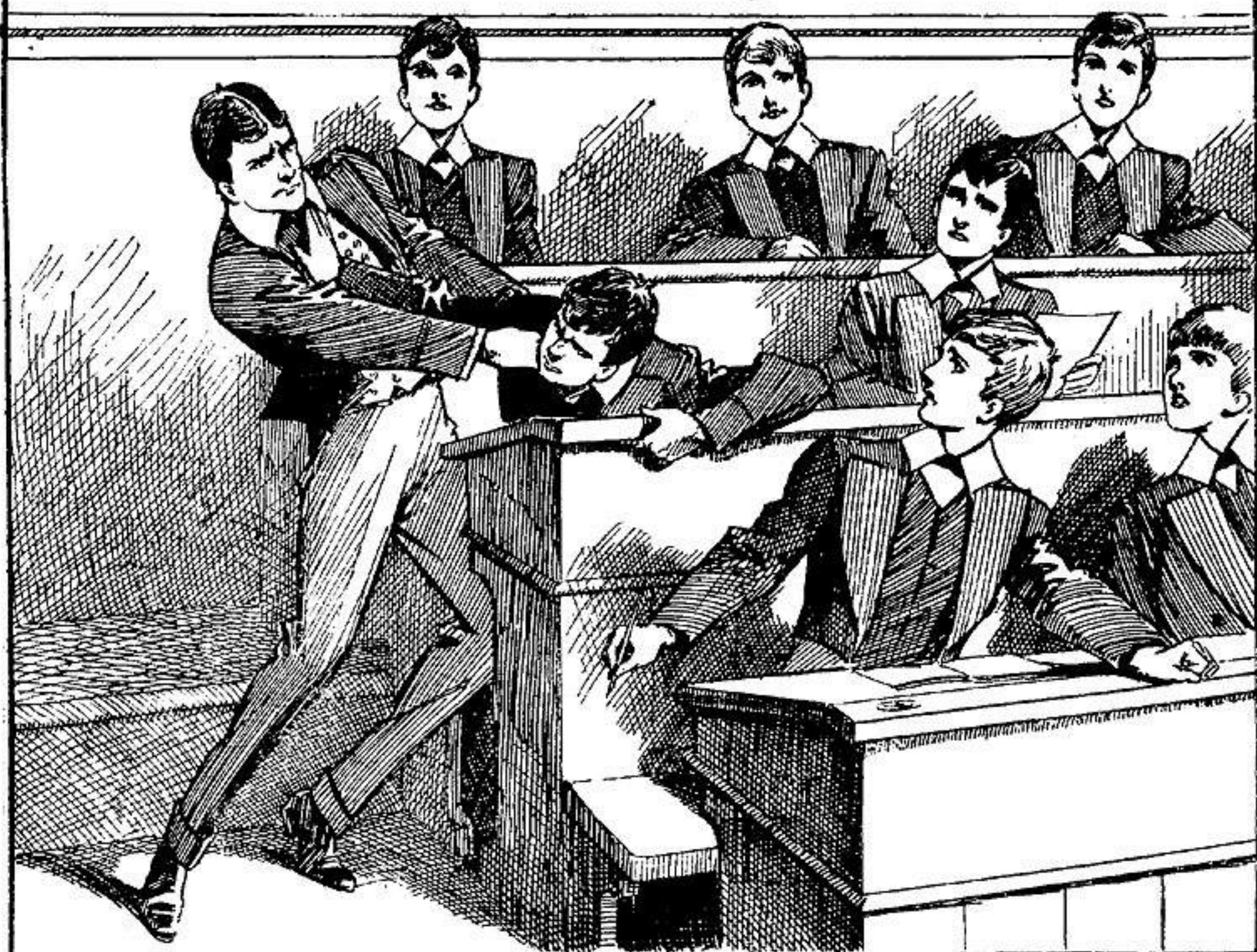
HARRY WHARTON had a cloud upon his brow when he entered the Remove Form-room that afternoon. As a rule, Wharton's face was quite serene, though perhaps not so merry as Bob Cherry's or Tom Brown's. But this afternoon it was clouded. And there was reason for it—the Bouncer was returning to Greyfriars.

Vernon-Smith—known all over Greyfriars as the Bouncer—had been away on a long holiday. His father's influence with the Head—an influence which the boys did not wholly understand, but which was evidently real enough—made it possible for Vernon-Smith to do many things the other fellows could not do. Dr. Locke was the last person to be guilty of favouritism, as a rule; but certainly Vernon-Smith had many relaxations. But the boys felt no envy; they were only too pleased when the Bouncer was granted an extra holiday. There were few who missed him.

He was coming back that day Wharton had heard, and indeed was expected before afternoon lessons. Hence the cloud on Harry's brow.

There would be trouble when the Bouncer came, he knew.

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By FRANK RICHARDS.



"If you won't make room for me, I'll jolly well shove you off the form!" exclaimed the Bounder, grasping Skinner by the shoulders.

Trouble, in an ordinary sense, Harry cared little for; he could always face it cheerfully. But the Bounder was cunning, and he had few scruples, and an open, honest lad, as frank as the daylight, felt at a great disadvantage in dealing with him.

Bunter noted the cloud on Harry's brow as the young captain of the Remove took his place in class, and leaned over towards him.

"I say, Wharton," he whispered.

Harry looked at him.

"I don't bear any malice," said Bunter confidentially.

"I know that was only your little joke in the study to-day. I'm going to let you have a hand in the business to-morrow, you know. Don't be downhearted."

Wharton stared.

"You silly young ass!" he replied politely.

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"I wasn't thinking about you or your rotten birthday," said Harry. "I—"

"Cave!" said Mark Linley.

Mr. Quelch, the master of the Remove, came in. The lesson had just commenced when the door of the class-room reopened, and a somewhat weedy-looking fellow, with a face that was half sulky and half insolent, entered.

There was a murmur in the class.

"The Bounder!"

Vernon-Smith glanced about him, and went to his place. But during his absence there had been some changes in the form arrangements, and his usual place was taken by Skinner. Skinner did not move.

Mr. Quelch glanced at the Bounder with a frown.

"You are late for class, Smith," he said.

"I only arrived to-day, sir," said the Bounder.

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 133.

"Very well; take your place."

"Let me sit down, can't you?" growled the Bounder.

"No room on this form," said Skinner.

"Make room, then."

"Listen to his lordship," said Bulstrode, with a grin. "Why don't you slide off on the floor, Skinner, and make room for him?"

"Make room!"

"Go and eat coke!" said Skinner.

The Bounder snapped his teeth.

"If you don't make room for me, I'll jolly well shove you off the form!" he exclaimed.

Skinner grinned.

"Go ahead with the shoving," he said.

"Will you move?"

"Not much."

The Bounder's eyes gleamed, and he grasped Skinner by the shoulders. The juniors round stared in amazement. It was an unheard-of proceeding in a class-room, and they wondered at the nerve of it, even in the Bounder.

Skinner stuck fast to his seat.

The Bounder dragged at him savagely. Mr. Quelch heard the shuffling and scuffling, and looked round to see what was the matter. Then his voice was heard like a thunderclap.

"Smith!"

Vernon-Smith looked round.

"How dare you make that disturbance in the Form-room?" demanded Mr. Quelch angrily.

"Skinner's got my place," said the Bounder sullenly.

"There are other places. Take the bottom place—at once! And take fifty lines, and bring them to me this evening!" exclaimed Mr. Quelch sharply.

NEXT
WEEK:

"ALONZO, THE TERRIBLE."

A Splendid Tale of Harry Wharton & Co.
By FRANK RICHARDS.

The Bounder sullenly went to his new place. Bulstrode gave a soft chuckle.

"Smithy's come back in the same frame of mind," he murmured. "He went away a nice dear fellow, and he's come back the same."

"Looks like it."

"He'll get into trouble again, if he goes on like this," Tom Brown remarked.

"What-ho!"

"The troublefulness will be terrific," murmured Hurreo Singh.

"Silence!"

And the muttered comments died away.

The lesson proceeded, and Mr. Quelch was very easy with the Bounder, realising that his long absence from lessons must have thrown him behind the others. But he did not neglect him wholly, and the Bounder found himself in hot water several times through sheer slackness and inattention.

As the afternoon wore on, Mr. Quelch lost patience with him, and called him out before the class.

The Bounder hesitated a moment, as if in doubt whether he would obey the summons or not. Harry Wharton saw the Form-master's hand tighten on the pointer, and his lips grew hard. Perhaps the Bounder saw it, too, for he left his place, and came out.

Mr. Quelch eyed him sternly.

"I have been making allowances for you, Smith," he said, in his most cutting tones. "But you must understand that you are here to work and learn. I cannot allow laziness or slovenliness in my class. As this is the day of your return, I excuse you. To-morrow I shall expect something very different. Take that as a warning."

The Bounder stood biting his lips.

He had a hard and sullen pride; not the kind of pride which makes a fellow strive hard for distinction. It did not make him stick to his work; but it made him feel humiliated when he was called over the coals before the class.

"I've done my best," he muttered.

"You must contrive to do better to-morrow."

"I can't!"

"What?"

"I can't do better; I think it's good enough."

The Remove drew a deep, deep breath. What reply was Mr. Quelch going to make to that remark?

The Form-master grasped his pointer more tightly.

"Hold out your hand, Smith," he said. "I shall punish you severely for the insolence of that reply to me!"

Vernon-Smith set his teeth.

"Do you hear me, Smith?"

The Bounder put his hands behind him. Mr. Quelch turned almost pale.

"Smith!"

"I appeal to the Head, sir," said Vernon-Smith.

There was an audible grunt in the Remove. They knew that old dodge of Vernon-Smith's; he had a right to appeal to the Head, but it was simply a means of escaping punishment, in his case, for the Head either could not or would not punish him.

Harry Wharton's eyes flashed as he heard the Bounder speak. The wildest of the Remove felt that it was "bad form" to defy the authority of a Form-master, but Vernon-Smith did not understand any ideas of that sort.

The Remove waited tensely.

But Mr. Quelch was quite a match for the Bounder. The appeal to the Head had been worked on him before, and had succeeded. It did not succeed this time.

"You appeal to the Head?" he repeated.

"Yes," said the Bounder.

"I shall allow you to do nothing of the sort," said Mr. Quelch. "It is not my duty to have the head-master disturbed over every trivial matter that occurs in this Form-room. I take the matter into my own hands, Smith. Hold out your hand!"

Smith gasped a little, and drew back.

"I appeal to—"

"Hold out your hand!"

"I won't!" howled Smith. "I—"

"Very well, then."

Mr. Quelch spoke harshly through set teeth. He stepped suddenly forward and grasped the Bounder by the collar. The junior made one attempt to wrench himself away, but he was in a grasp of iron.

Thwack! Thwack! Thwack!

Vernon-Smith had refused to hold out his hand, but the thrashing across his shoulders was much more painful. He writhed and yelled.

Mr. Quelch released him when he deemed he had been punished sufficiently.

"Go back to your place, Smith," he said curtly. "And remember, I shall expect better work to-morrow."

And the Bounder went without a word.

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 133.

NEXT WEEK: "ALONZO, THE TERRIBLE."

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

The Bounder is Flattered

AFTERNOON lessons ended, the Remove poured out into the wide-flagged passage, in a joyous crowd. It was a fine summer's afternoon, and most of them were looking forward to cricket. There was plenty of daylight in these days for a great deal of cricket after school. Not so, however, Vernon-Smith or Billy Bunter. The Bounder went to his study with a sullen brow and an aching back, and Billy Bunter did not follow the crowd to the cricket-pitch. He had his birthday to think of. On the morrow the celebration feed was to take place; and the guests were coming. And as yet there was no preparation made, and as for getting in supplies, that was all in the air so far. Bunter's available funds amounted to one halfpenny. True, he was expecting postal-orders—several postal orders. But his postal-orders had oft-times been expected without coming. Bunter's postal-orders were a very rotten reed to lean upon.

The return of the Bounder, which had been far from pleasing most of the fellows in the Lower Fourth, had a different effect upon Bunter. That Vernon-Smith was rolling in money, the fat junior knew. There was no reason why the Bounder should not contribute liberally to the birthday feed. He had heaps of money if he only chose to contribute it. The question was—how was he to be got to do so.

Bunter thought the matter over, and hung about Vernon-Smith's study door for some time. He finally made the plunge, and knocked and opened the door.

Vernon-Smith was sitting by the window, with a scowl on his face, and a little book in his hand. Had Bunter been less short-sighted, he would have seen that it was a betting book; but he hardly noticed Vernon-Smith slip it into his pocket. He was thinking about other things.

The Bounder looked round with a frown.

"What do you want?" he growled ungraciously.

Bunter blinked at him with his most ingratiating smile.

"I—I want to speak to you, Vernon-Smith," he said, taking great care to give the Bounder his double-barrelled name. "I want to welcome you home, you know."

The Bounder sniffed.

"It's so—so pleasant to have you back," said Bunter, beaming. "The place hasn't seemed like—like home without you, you know. You'd be surprised if you knew how much you'd been missed."

"What do you want?"

Bunter coughed.

"Ahem! I don't want anything, Smith—I mean Vernon-Smith, except—except to tell you that I—I want to welcome you home."

The Bounder eyed him grimly.

"Well, you've told me now, and you can get out," he remarked.

"Ahem! There's one more little matter—we're having a bit of a feed to-morrow afternoon, to celebrate my birthday, you know. If you'd care to come—"

The Bounder started.

For a moment a softer expression came into his face.

In spite of his hard heart and his sullen pride, there was human feeling somewhere in the Bounder of Greyfriars, and he had felt in a dim way the coldness of his reception on his return, and had half wished that there was somebody who would be more pleased than not to have him there.

"Go on," he said quietly.

"It won't be much of an affair," said Bunter modestly. "About a dozen fellows coming—but really decent fellows, you know, and—"

"You want me?"

"There will be D'Arcy, of St. Jim's—a really decent chap—and—"

"And you want me to come?"

"Haven't I said so. The other fellows aren't so keen about it, but I said at once that the party wouldn't be complete without Smith—without Vernon-Smith, I mean—and they soon saw it."

The Bounder regarded him intently.

"Why do you ask me?" he said.

Bunter coughed.

"Well, I want all the fellows I like," he said.

"You like me?" said Smith, in his hard, uncompromising way.

"Yes, rather! When you first came to Greyfriars, I said to Wharton, 'That's a chap I'd like to chum with.' I did, really."

"Because I was rich?"

"Oh, really—"

"Well, if you want me to come to-morrow, I'll come," said the Bounder abruptly, "but if you're asking me because you think I want to come—"

"Er—not at all!"

A Splendid Tale of Harry Wharton & Co.
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"Or because I've no friends in Greyfriars——"
 "Not a bit of it!"
 "Very well, I'll come."
 "I'm so pleased!" said Bunter, with majesty of manner.
 "We'll try to give you a good time, Smithy!"
 "Thanks."

The Bouncer took out his little book again. He evidently regarded the interview as over. Not so Billy Bunter. From his point of view, the most important part of the interview was yet to come.

He coughed a little to attract the attention of the Bouncer, who looked up from his book.

"By the way, Smithy—Vernon-Smith," said Bunter hesitatingly, "there's another little matter I forgot to mention."

"Yes?"

"It's just a trifling matter——"

"Well, go ahead."

"I'm expecting a postal-order this evening," explained Bunter. "It will be for a considerable amount, and I am going to use it to pay the exes to-morrow."

"Well, that's all right."

"Yes, but—but in case of accidents—you know how uncertain the post is, especially in the country—in case of accidents, if the remittance shouldn't arrive in time, I suppose you wouldn't mind making me a small advance?"

The Bouncer's brow darkened. He began to understand.

"You see, the postal-order's pretty certain to come, but if it doesn't, I should be stumped to-morrow, just when I need the money," Bunter explained. "It will come to-morrow night for certain, but that will be too late. My idea is that you should advance me a certain sum, and take the postal-order when it comes."

"You worm!"

"Oh, really, Smithy——"

"Do you think I haven't heard your lies about your postal-orders before?" said Smith contemptuously, rising as he spoke. "You fat rotter! You came here to cadge money from me, that's all!"

"I hope you don't think I'd borrow money I couldn't pay?" said Bunter, with a great deal of dignity.

The Bouncer laughed shortly.

"It's only in case of delay in the post," explained Bunter. "I don't see that it makes any difference to you."

"You worm!" repeated the Bouncer, his eyes glinting. "You came here to yarn to me, and make me think—— Pah! What a fool I was! Get out of my study!"

"But——"

"Get out!"

Bunter blinked at him.

"If you don't mind, Smithy, I'd rather have the money before I go."

Smith made a threatening gesture. There was a dog-whip on the table, and the Bouncer's glance fell upon it.

"You cad! Outside!" he snapped.

"It would only be till to-morrow night," urged Bunter.

Vernon-Smith made a step towards the table.

"I could do with five quid."

"Are you going?"

"Well, make it a couple of pounds——"

The Bouncer grasped the dog-whip, and ran towards Bunter. The fat junior gasped in alarm, and made a bound for the door.

As he did so, the long lash of the whip curled round his fat legs, and he gave a jump and a wild roar.

"Take that!" snarled the Bouncer.

"Ow! Yow!"

Bunter plunged wildly through the doorway. The lash curled round his legs again, and he stumbled, and he reached the passage on his hands and knees, puffing and blowing.

The Bouncer ran after him, and the dog-whip lashed and lashed. Bunter had caught about half a dozen lashes before he succeeded in rolling and scrambling out of the Bouncer's reach. He ran down the passage, and ran into Bob Cherry, who was coming out of his study.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" exclaimed Bob, throwing his arms round Bunter and holding him in a tight embrace which squeezed out what little breath was left in the junior's fat body. "Whither bound, my Bunt?"

"Ow! Don't stop me—he's mad!"

"Eh?"

"It's the Bouncer!"

"What's the matter with him?"

"I—I asked him to come to a little party to-morrow—my birthday-party—and he suddenly snatched up a whip and went for me!" gasped Bunter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I can see anything to cackle at!"

"Ha, ha! I'm afraid you haven't told the exact truth, Bunt!"

"Lemme go!"

"I'm holding you up."

"Yow! I'm all right! Leggo!"

"You can't stand alone—you're out of breath," said Bob Cherry, compressing his grasp round the fat tubby body, something in the manner of a boa-constrictor. "You'd better

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 133.

NEXT
WEEK:

"ALONZO, THE TERRIBLE."

EVERY
TUESDAY.

The "Magnet"
LIBRARY.

ONE
PENNY.

let me support you. No good gasping there without any visible means of support."

"Ow!"

"Shall I hold you tighter?"

"Ow!" gasped Bunter, in an expiring voice. "Ow! Leggo!"

"Not till you've got your breath back," said Bob firmly. "I'm not going to desert you at a moment like this, Bunter."

"Ow!"

"What on earth's the matter?" asked Mark Linley, coming out of Study No. 13. "What on earth are you up to, Bob?"

"Helping Bunter."

"What?"

"He's out of breath, and I'm supporting him till he gets his second wind," said Bob.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Leggo! Yow! Yoop!"

"Feeling better, Bunter?"

"Yow! Murder!"

"Is it coming?"

"Owp!"

Bunter collapsed in Bob Cherry's arms, and hung a dead weight upon him. Bob wasn't built to stand a strain like that, and he promptly let the fat junior slide to the floor. He winked at Mark Linley, and walked on with the Lancashire lad, leaving Billy Bunter sitting on the linoleum, trying by slow and painful degrees to recover his wind.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Bulstrode Has an Idea.

BULSTRODE, Hazeldene, and Tom Brown the New Zealander were in their study when the door opened, and a pair of large spectacles glimmered in. Behind them came the fat face of Billy Bunter. The three juniors looked round at Bunter, and Bulstrode's hand strayed idly towards the inkpot. Bunter was too short-sighted to see that, or to notice Bulstrode's expression, and he came cheerfully in.

"I say, you fellows, you haven't forgotten about to-morrow?" he said.

"No," said Hazeldene, "that's all right."

"Your sister is coming—and Miss Clara?"

Hazeldene laughed.

"Yes; if there's a feed I'll bring them. I shall not say a word to them about it until the feed's a dead cert., though."

"Oh, really——"

"We know you, you see, Bunt."

"Oh, that's all right! I've written to Marjorie, and told her you're coming over to fetch her," said Bunter, blinking at him.

Hazeldene jumped.

"The dickens, you have!" he cried. "You cheeky young beggar!"

"Well, I thought I'd better give Marjorie plenty of notice," said Bunter. "She might want to wear something special, you know, on the occasion of my birthday. But I really came here to speak to Bulstrode. If you fellows wouldn't mind giving me a minute——"

Tom Brown rose, with a grin, and Hazeldene looked at Bulstrode. The burly Removite shook his head.

"Don't trouble to go," he said. "Bunter may want a private interview with me, but I don't want one with him. I know his game."

"Oh, really, Bulstrode——"

"And I'm not going to give him any money."

"I hope you don't think I came here to ask you for money, Bulstrode," said Bunter, with dignity.

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By FRANK RICHARDS.

The burly Removite stared at him in astonishment.

"Well, didn't you?" he exclaimed.

"Certainly not."

"What do you want, then?"

"Go ahead," said Hazeldene. "It must be something odd, anyway. Fancy Bunter not wanting money!"

"Oh, really, Hazel—"

"What do you want?" said Bulstrode. "If you don't want money, I suppose the age of miracles has come again, and so it's possible that you want to pay some of what you owe me—a good many pounds by this time, I think."

"I keep careful account of any little sums I borrow," said Bunter. "I'm not the kind of fellow to be under monetary obligations to anybody, I hope."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I can see anything to cackle at. Look here, the trouble is that the country post is so unreliable, and I may not get a remittance I'm expecting."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"So if you liked to advance me five pounds, I'd give you my written promise to pay—"

"Better make it five hundred," said Tom Brown sarcastically, "then I'd contribute a halfpenny."

"Well, I could make a pound do."

"Don't stint yourself," said Bulstrode. "You're quite as likely to get five pounds out of me as one."

"Well, you see, I must have the money, and I don't think my guests ought to go away hungry because my postal-order hasn't arrived. D'Arcy of St. Jim's is coming, too."

"Have you done?"

"Yes," said Bunter, blinking.

"Well, there's the door."

"Eh? The door?"

"Yes. A door's an article used for keeping silly asses out of a room," explained Bulstrode patiently. "You go out into the passage, close the door behind you, latch it, and then it's all right. Savvy?"

"Oh, really—"

"You've got all you're likely to get here," said Hazeldene. "You may as well cut."

Bulstrode's hand closed on the inkpot now.

"But, I say, you fellows—"

"Do you want anything more?" asked Bulstrode.

"Yes. I—"

"Well, here it is!"

Bulstrode's hand jerked, and a skilfully-projected stream of ink caught Billy Bunter fairly upon his fat little nose, and scattered over his fat face.

The Owl of the Remove gave a wild yell.

"Oh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Beast! I—"

"Want anything more?" asked Bulstrode kindly. "I've some gum here. Hand over the gum-bottle, Brown."

"Here you are."

But Billy Bunter was already outside the study.

The three juniors roared with laughter as the door closed. Bunter went down the passage, dripping with ink, greeted with loud laughter by all he passed on his way to the nearest bath-room. In Bulstrode's study there was no sound but laughter for several minutes.

"The cheeky ass!" said Hazeldene at last. "That's his way—to ask fellows to a feed, and then expect them to stand the exes. It's Bunter all over."

Bulstrode grinned.

"I've got an idea!" he exclaimed. "Bunter's expecting postal-orders. Why shouldn't he have some?"

"Eh?"

"Well, you can get 'em for a shilling each," said Bulstrode; "and a lot of fun could be got for ten bob that way. By Jove, I'll do it! There's time to get down to the post office before the next collection."

"But—"

"Keep it dark!" exclaimed Bulstrode, getting up, and taking his cap. "I'll explain when I get back. No time to lose."

"But—"

But Bulstrode was gone.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Dutton Misunderstands.

"LETTER for you, Bunter!"

Mark Linley called it out, as he glanced up at the letter-rack in the hall. Billy Bunter was coming downstairs. He had cleaned off the ink, though there were streaks of it on his collar, and a sinudge round his ears. He came eagerly towards Linley, as the Lancashire lad called to him.

"Letter for me, Linley?"

"Yes. Here you are."

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 133.

NEXT
WEEK,

"ALONZO, THE TERRIBLE."

Bunter took the letter. The postmark was "Rylcombe," and he knew by that who it was from. A shade of disappointment came over his face. For a moment he had entertained a wild hope that it might be a remittance.

He opened the letter.

"D'Arcy's coming, you fellows," he said, turning to Harry Wharton & Co., who were coming downstairs. "This is his answer."

"Oh, is he?"

"You can read it."

Bunter passed the letter to Wharton, who glanced through it. He remembered well the small, elegant hand of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's.

"School House, St. Jim's, Sussex.

"Dear Bunter,—Thanks very much for your kind invitation. It will be a great pleasure to me to come to Greyfriars on the occasion of your birthday, and I trust it will prove a most joyous occasion. It is very decent of you to think of me, and I assure you that I appreciate it very much.

"With kindest regards to yourself and all the fellows,

"ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY."

Harry Wharton smiled.

The letter was very like D'Arcy of St. Jim's.

"He's coming, you see," said Bunter. "I suppose you fellows realise now the importance of making an effort?"

Wharton's smile changed to a frown.

"You worm!" he said. "You've got us into a fix, as you usually do. We shall have to look after D'Arcy, of course, and the girls."

"Why not get shoulder to shoulder, and make a big effort, and have a really ripping birthday celebration?" urged Bunter. "After all, it isn't every fellow that has a friend like me."

"No; some chaps are more lucky."

"Oh, really—"

"We shall have to do something I suppose," said Nugent.

"Of course!" agreed Bunter, with a nod. "The best thing you can do is to raise a decent subscription in the Form, and place it in my hands, and—"

"Oh, scat!"

"But, I say, you fellows—"

"Go and eat coke!"

And Harry Wharton & Co. walked indignantly on. They felt that Bunter had them cornered, as usual, and it really looked as if the young rascal was to score all along the line, because he had placed them in an awkward situation. Either there had to be a big birthday feed, in which Bunter would score, or the visitors to Greyfriars would be badly treated—which was impossible to contemplate. All the fellows liked D'Arcy, of St. Jim's; and the Cliff House girls were still more important to consider. There must be no question of want of hospitality.

But the idea of Bunter's succeeding in screwing a big feast out of them in this manner made the chums of the Remove very angry; and their very helplessness in the matter added to their annoyance.

Bunter was not wholly easy in his mind either. Whatever the Famous Four decided upon, certainly their manner was most unpromising. Bunter would not have cared very much for the hurt feelings of guests; he never had any feelings to hurt himself, and he didn't understand that sort of thing. But he cared very much whether he missed the feed. He turned over in his mind a list of the fellows who had money.

"There's Brown, but he's no good; and Bulstrode, he's an insulting beast. Todd, but he never keeps any money; and Dutton, he's as deaf as a post, but he has a good allowance, and I could let him come—I shouldn't be bound to talk to him. I think I'll try Dutton."

Billy Bunter looked out for Dutton, the deaf junior. Dutton was a good-natured fellow, and usually had money.

Bunter found him in the common-room, reading. Dutton was a great reader. As a matter of fact, his affliction precluded much conversation. It was too great an effort for the fellows to talk to him; and Dutton was very touchy, and he would get ratty if he imagined a fellow was speaking to him from kindness. Also, he usually misunderstood what was said to him, owing to his deafness, and there was seldom any telling what meaning he would attach to any given sentence, and whether he would take offence at it or not.

Bunter tapped him on the shoulder as he came up to him, and that was a bad start.

Dutton looked up at him with a frown.

"What do you want to poke me for?" he demanded.

"Can't you speak?"

Bunter nodded, with his pleasantest smile.

A Splendid Tale of Harry Wharton & Co.
By FRANK RICHARDS.



"I say, Bulstrode," said Billy Bunter, "will you cash this postal-order for me? You know you can get the money on it." "Rats!" said Bulstrode with a grin. "You weren't going to let me have a single tart! My dear chap, your coolness is too good! (See Page 8.)

"Well, speak, then!" said Dutton. "I'm a trifle deaf; but I can hear you if you raise your voice just a little. No need to shout. What is it?"

"Could you lend me a little money?"

"Funny, is it?" said Dutton. "My deafness, do you mean?"

"I didn't say it was funny!" exclaimed Bunter hastily, alarmed by Dutton's expression. "I said could you lend me a little money? I'm expecting a postal-order—"

"Of course it's a disorder; but it's nothing to be ashamed of," said Dutton. "It's no worse to be deaf than blind, anyway."

"I didn't mean to say that. I—"

"Oh, yes, you are! You're as blind as a mole; you're blinder than I am deaf!" said Dutton. "You're a sponging young humbug, too, for that matter!"

"I say, Dutton, you know—"

"Go? Go yourself!"

"But—"

"Oh, get out!"

"But I want you to lend me a little tin until my postal-order comes; and then I'll settle up, honest Injun!" said Bunter persuasively. "I'm standing a birthday feed to-morrow, you know, and I want you to come."

"Eh?"

"It's my birthday to-morrow," shrieked Bunter.

"Sorrow? Who's sorry?"

"My birthday to-morrow! Standing a feed!" yelled Bunter.

"Look here, you're talking rot, and you know it!" said Dutton warmly. "Standing to feed? Horses stand to feed, but—"

"Standing a feed!"

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 133.

NEXT
WEEK:

"ALONZO, THE TERRIBLE."

"Oh, standing a feed! Why couldn't you say that at first?"

"So I did; but you couldn't hear!"

"Wasn't here? I was here all the time! It's my belief that you're going off your rocker, Bunter."

"Oh dear!"

"No fear? Rats! You are, and I warn you of it."

"Will you come to the feed?" yelled Bunter in Dutton's ear; and the deaf junior heard that.

"Certainly," he said, "I'll come! When is it?"

"To-morrow," shrieked Bunter.

"All right! Count me in!"

"It's my birthday. If you could lend me a little cash—"

"Eh?"

"Could you lend me a little money, in case my postal-order doesn't come in time?"

"In time?"

"Yes, my postal-order, you know."

"Nonsense! I sha'n't be slow. I'll come in time, if you let me know just the time you're standing the feed."

"I—I—"

"It's all right! You can rely upon me," said Dutton, taking up his book again. "No need to jaw any more about it. And, look here, it makes me tired talking to you. It's my belief that you're deaf."

"Eh?"

"You don't seem to understand anything I say, or to talk sense, anyway," said Dutton. "Lots of people are deaf without knowing it. I should advise you to have it seen to."

"I say, Dutton—"

"It's all right! I'll come. Cheese it now!"

And Billy Bunter gave it up in despair.

A Splendid Tale of Harry Wharton & Co.
By FRANK RICHARDS

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Bunter Receives a Postal-Order.

"LETTERS!" said Harry Wharton. "Anybody expecting a letter? Here's the evening post."

Bunter came quickly forward. "I'm expecting a postal-order," he remarked. "Any for me, my man? Name of Bunter."

"Yes, sir!"

"Oh, good!"

Billy Bunter took the letter. He opened it at once, and uttered an exclamation of satisfaction.

"It's come!"

A dozen pairs of eyes were upon him at once.

"What's come?"

"Not the postal-order?"

"Great Scott!"

"The great Scottfulness is terrific!"

Billy Bunter smiled serenely.

The envelope addressed to him had contained a postal-order. There was no letter with it; but Bunter did not mind that. The letter had doubtless been forgotten; but Bunter did not mind the letter being forgotten, so long as his correspondent did not forget the postal-order.

An interested ring of juniors gathered round Bunter. The Owl of the Remove had talked so much about his expected postal-orders, and he received them so very seldom, that the event was a really interesting one.

"It's a real postal-order," said Ogilvy, as Bunter unfolded it. "Warranted genuine!"

"Faith, and ye're right," said Micky Desmond.

"Wonders will never cease, intirely."

"How much is it for?" asked Hazeldene.

Bunter blinked at it in the light.

"H'm! It's not a very big one," he confessed. "But

"It's a bob!"

"A shilling!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, a shilling's a shilling!" said Bunter, blinking round at the juniors. "This isn't really the postal-order I was expecting—this is another. I'm expecting a much bigger one, you know."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But I can get a snack with this, anyway," said Bunter; and he crossed over to the tuckshop at once through the dusky Cloze.

Bulstrode and Skinner and several more juniors followed him. Bunter rapped on the counter in a most important manner, and Mrs. Mimble came out of her little parlour with a grim frown. Only half an hour before, Billy Bunter had striven to get her to give him a penny tart for a half-penny, and relations had become very strained on her refusal. Bunter had expended his last halfpenny on nuts instead; but the nuts had not lasted him long. Mrs. Mimble had no doubt that the fat junior had returned to make another desperate attempt to get credit from her.

Bunter blinked at her as she came in grimly.

"I want you to cash a postal-order for me, Mrs. Mimble," he said.

"Oh!" ejaculated Mrs. Mimble.

"Here it is."

"Dear me! You really have a postal-order, then!" exclaimed Mrs. Mimble, in astonishment, which was really not very complimentary to Bunter.

The fat junior glared.

"You just cash it, and hand out some tarts!" he exclaimed.

"Good!" said Bulstrode. "We'll all have some tarts, as Bunter's standing treat."

"I'm sincerely sorry, Bulstrode, but the money won't run to it. You see, I've only got a bob, and that's not really enough for myself. I'm not greedy, you know, but I have to keep up a delicate constitution by taking constant nourishment. That's how it is."

Mrs. Mimble was looking at the postal-order dubiously. She put on her glasses and blinked at it through them, and Bunter blinked at her.

"Well, what's the matter?" said Bunter sarcastically. "Do you think it's not a good one? Think I wrote it out myself in my study?"

Mrs. Mimble shook her head.

"I'm afraid I can't cash this, Master Bunter," she said. "I don't think I could get the money for it myself."

"What rot! I—"

"You see, it's made payable to you by name, and the post-office where payment is to be made is filled in," explained Mrs. Mimble. "It's all right, but you'll have to go down to Friardale yourself to cash it at the post-office."

Bunter snorted.

"It's too far, and the gates are locked now, too."

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 133.

NEXT
WEEK:

"ALONZO, THE TERRIBLE."

"I'm sorry, Master Bunter; I can't help it."

"Let me have the tarts, and take the postal-order as security?" suggested Bunter. "I'll go down to the village to-morrow and cash it."

Mrs. Mimble replied with a shake of the head. The disconsolate junior turned to Bulstrode, who was grinning with enjoyment.

"I say, Bulstrode, will you cash this for me? You know you can get the money on it."

"Rats!"

"Oh, really—"

"And you weren't going to let me have a single tart!" said Bulstrode, with a grin. "My dear chap, your coolness is too good. The best thing you can do is to write to the chap who sent you that postal-order, and blow him up for his carelessness."

"Oh, I couldn't do that," said Bunter. "It's from my rich uncle—"

"What!"

"It's from one of my rich uncles, you know, and I shouldn't care to offend him. I expect to get about ten thousand pounds in his will."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bunter blinked at him.

"Blessed if I can see anything to cackle at, Bulstrode. I've got several rich uncles, and a good many titled relations, and I get my postal-orders from them."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, really, Bulstrode—"

"But I thought there wasn't a letter with this postal-order," suggested Bulstrode. "How do you know which uncle it's from?"

"Oh, I recognised the writing, of course."

"The writing!" shrieked Bulstrode.

"Yes, certainly. I suppose I ought to know my rich uncle's writing."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What's the matter?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And Bulstrode staggered out of the tuckshop, roaring with laughter. Billy Bunter blinked after him in astonishment; he didn't know why his recognition of the handwriting of his rich uncle should afford Bulstrode so much merriment.

He took up the postal-order.

"You're sure you can't cash this, Mrs. Mimble?" he asked.

"I'm sorry, Master Bunter, but I'm quite sure."

"If I have to take it down to the village, I shall spend it at Uncle Clegg's shop, you know," said Bunter warningly.

"Very well, Master Bunter."

Bunter grunted.

"I think you're a most unreasonable woman, Mrs. Mimble. You'll lose one of your best customers, one of these days, from your lack of business ability."

Mrs. Mimble smiled, and returned to her little parlour, and Billy Bunter disconsolately left the tuckshop.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

More Postal-Orders.

THERE was a weight upon the mind of William George Bunter for the remainder of that evening. His face was clouded when he went up to bed with the rest of the Remove. It was not only that he had no prospect of raising the promised feast for the morrow, unless his friends came to his aid—it was not only that he had been very roughly treated in his efforts to raise a subscription for the noble and benevolent purpose of celebrating his own birthday, but he had a postal-order upon him which was uncashable. He had never been in such a situation before, and he found it most unpleasant.

He had tried to palm the postal-order off on other fellows, in vain. He had offered it to Gatty of the Second Form for ninepence, but Gatty wasn't taking any. Even Snoop wouldn't give him sixpence for it. Snoop knew very well that the postal-order could only be cashed by Bunter himself, and so he would have to trust it into the fat junior's hands for that purpose. And once it was in his hands again, by Bunter's peculiar mental processes, he would certainly regard it as his own, and would keep the shilling.

Bunter was not to be trusted, and so, although he explained almost with tears in his eyes that the postal-order was as good as solid money, and had Government security for its goodness, he couldn't persuade anybody to give him solid money for it.

In his mind, Bunter had spent that shilling a dozen times already. Mentally, he had devoured it in the form of tarts, in the form of cakes, of doughnuts and table jelly, of cream puffs and ginger-bread. Sovereigns would not have really purchased the delicacies Bunter felt he could have had if

A Splendid Tale of Harry Wharton & Co.
By FRANK RICHARDS

he could only have turned that piece of printed paper into money.

But he couldn't.

"Got rid of the postal-order?" asked Bulstrode, when the fat junior came into the Remove dormitory.

Bunter blinked at him reproachfully.

"No, I haven't," he said. "If you like to take it—"

"Why not send a wire to your rich uncle?"

"Oh, really—"

"You know which one it is, by the handwriting, you know," said Bulstrode.

And there was a roar of laughter. Bulstrode had confided his little plot to a good many of the Remove, and most of the others guessed that Bunter was being japed in some way. But the fat junior never thought of that himself. He could never have understood anybody parting with hard cash for a jape; and if Bulstrode had confessed to him, Bunter would probably not have believed a word of it.

Bunter went to bed in a sulky temper. He was hungry as usual, and all the more so because he had, as it were, six twopenny tarts, or twelve penny ones, or a dozen buns, in the form of paper money, which he could not eat. Bob Cherry's suggestion that he should eat the postal-order was received with laughter by all the juniors excepting Bunter, who preserved a sulky silence.

Billy Bunter went to sleep after lights out; few things, short of earthquakes and tornadoes, would have kept him awake. But his sleep was troubled; he could not help dreaming of the postal-order which he could not turn into eatables. He woke up several times in imaginary efforts to convince Mrs. Mimble that, as a business woman, she was bound to take the postal-order, and immediately hand out the required jam-tarts. Once he dreamed that he actually had the tarts, and was eating them; and from this blissful vision he was aroused by the clang of the rising-bell.

Bunter blinked, and sat up in bed.

No one looked at him in particular, and a frown gathered on the brow of the fat junior. He felt that his natal day ought to be taken some more notice of than that.

"I say, you fellows," he began.

"Rising-bell's stopped," said Bob Cherry. "You'd better get up."

"I say, it's my birthday, you know."

"Well, you have to get up on a birthday, same as any other day."

"Well, I think you might wish a chap many happy returns of the day, at all events," said Bunter indignantly.

"But we don't," said Nugent. "If you're as much trouble on all other birthdays as on this one, the fewer you have the better."

"Oh, really—"

"Anyway, you'd better turn out," said Harry Wharton, "otherwise some prefect will come up and celebrate your birthday for you with a licking."

Bunter drew the bedclothes round him.

"I think I should like an extra little snooze this morning," he remarked. "It's pretty hard cheese if a chap can't have an extra snooze on his birthday. Suppose you went to the Head and mentioned it, Wharton?"

Wharton laughed.

"Get up, Billy, and don't be an ass!"

Bunter unwillingly turned out of bed.

He was the last down of the Remove, as usual; though he did the least washing in the morning. But as he reached the bottom of the stairs, Skinner called out to him.

"Expecting a letter this morning, Bunter?"

"Yes, rather!" said Bunter, quickening his footsteps.

"Is there one for me?"

"Yes."

Bunter came up with a rolling run.

The letter was there, sure enough. It felt very thin, and when he opened it, he found that there was nothing inside but a postal-order. But Bunter would have preferred a postal-order to any number of letters.

"My hat!" said Bulstrode. "It's raining postal-orders."

Bunter blinked at him.

"That's the best of having rich relations and titled friends," he remarked. "A fellow is bound to get decent tips."

"Is that from your rich uncle?" asked Bulstrode, with interest.

"Yes—another rich uncle."

"How ripping, to have a bagful of rich uncles," said Bulstrode. "I suppose you know which uncle it is, by the handwriting."

"Yes," said Bunter, blinking at the postal-order. "It's only for a bob, but that's a mistake; he meant to put in a pound one as well, and make it a guinea. However, this will do for a snack before breakfast."

"Mrs. Mimble hasn't opened yet," said Trevor, as the fat junior hurried off to the door.

"She'll jolly well have to open, then."

And in two minutes Billy Bunter was pounding at the door of the school shop. Mrs. Mimble opened it after some

EVERY
TUESDAY,

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minutes delay, displaying the curl-papers which she had not yet removed, and which were only partly concealed by a shawl. She did not look very pleased at seeing Bunter.

"Really, Master Bunter, you should not come here before the shop is opened!" she exclaimed, with asperity.

"I've got a postal-order—"

"I've already told you I cannot cash it."

"But this is another one, from another uncle," said Bunter. "You must cash this one, Mrs. Mimble. The name of the office isn't filled in."

"Well, give it to me," said Mrs. Mimble ungraciously.

Bunter handed her the postal-order.

"I'll have tarts," he said. "Jam tarts—"

Mrs. Mimble uttered an exclamation.

"I cannot take this, Master Bunter."

"What! Why?"

"It's crossed."

"Crossed!" ejaculated Bunter.

"Look at it!"

Bunter blinked at the two pen-strokes crossing the postal-order from top to bottom, and then blinked at Mrs. Mimble.

"Well?" he said.

"Well," said Mrs. Mimble impatiently. "When a postal-order's crossed, it can only be paid through a banker. You ought to know that. It is of no use to me."

"Oh, really, Mrs. Mimble—"

The dame closed the door with a slam.

Bunter stood with the postal-order in his hand, his fat face full of dismay.

"Well, of all the rotten things, I think this is about the rottenest!" he exclaimed. "Fancy a chap being loaded up with postal-orders, and not being able to get any grub. It's rotten—it's awful!"

Bunter toddled back to the school-house. Snoop stood in the doorway waving a letter.

"That for me?" asked Bunter.

"Yes; you overlooked this one."

"Oh, good!"

Bunter took the letter—another very thin one. There was a postal-order inside when he slit the envelope. It was for a shilling, and to his great relief it was not crossed.

"Mrs. Mimble will take this," he remarked, with satisfaction.

Snoop chuckled as he looked over his shoulder.

"She won't," he remarked.

"Why not?"

"It's payable to you at the post-office in Courtfield. You'll have to walk to Courtfield to cash it."

Bunter gave a gasp.

"Oh, really—"

"Careless of your uncles," said Bulstrode, with a grin. "Another uncle, I suppose?"

"Ye-es," stammered Bunter.

"Never knew a chap with so many careless uncles," said Bulstrode. "You must have brought them up very badly, Bunter. Ha, ha, ha!"

Bunter did not laugh. He had three postal-orders, and not one of them was worth a twopenny tart to him at the present moment. Billy Bunter looked at them, and his feelings were too deep for words.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

Todd in Trouble.

ALONZO TODD smiled across the table to Bunter as the Remove sat at breakfast. Bunter did not see him, as his vision was not so extensive, and Todd smiled and nodded several times in vain. Todd was overflowing with benevolence. Todd was called the Duffer of Greyfriars, and with good reason; but there was not a more good-natured chap in the school, or in the world, for that matter. Alonzo's attempts to make himself useful, and to do obliging things, frequently led to disaster, but no one could deny that his intentions were all right.

Having failed to attract Bunter's attention by nodding and smiling, Todd cast round for other means. He had just realised that it was Bunter's birthday, and Todd felt that it was a time to be very friendly. He wanted to wish Bunter many happy returns, and assure him that one fellow in the Remove, at least, was interested in the anniversary. Mr. Quelch was at the head of the table, and in the Form-master's presence conversation was not allowed among the juniors at meals, excepting for such remarks as "Please pass the salt," or "Will you have some bread?"

Todd tossed a bread pill across the table to Bunter, and caught him on the nose. It attracted Bunter's attention, but unfortunately made him utter a sharp exclamation.

"Oh!"

Mr. Quelch looked down the table.

"What is the matter with you, Bunter?" he exclaimed.

"N-nothing, sir."

"Then why did you cry out in that absurd way?"

"S-s-something hit me on the nose, sir."

"Nonsense!"

"It did, sir. Somebody chucked something at me, sir."

"Did anyone throw anything at Bunter?" asked Mr. Quelch, frowning.

Todd blushed.

"I did, sir," he said. "I—I wished to attract his attention, sir. I was far from desiring to cause him any bodily hurt or inconvenience, sir. It was not a practical joke. My Uncle Benjamin always warned me against the perpetration of practical jokes, sir."

"Good old dictionary!" murmured Bob Cherry.

"That is enough, Todd," said Mr. Quelch. "Don't do it again."

"Certainly not, sir. Under the circumstances——"

"That will do."

"But I should like to explain——"

"Silence!"

"Certainly, sir, if you desire it, but——"

"If you speak again I shall punish you, Todd!" exclaimed Mr. Quelch angrily.

"Punish me, sir!" exclaimed Alonzo, repeating the words, a curious habit of his when he was startled or confused.

"Yes, you absurd boy!"

"Absurd, sir!"

"Will you hold your tongue, Todd?"

"M-m-my tongue, sir."

"Take fifty lines."

"Lines, sir!"

The Remove chuckled, and the fellows at the Upper Fourth table, next to them, were grinning, too. Mr. Quelch turned pink.

"Todd, be silent at once. Do you hear me?"

"Hear you, sir?"

"How dare you repeat my words?"

"R-r-repeat your words, sir."

Mr. Quelch rose to his feet, and pointed to the door.

"Leave the room at once, Todd. You are incorrigible!"

"Incorrigible, sir?"

"Go!"

Todd blinked at him—and went. He took a cup of tea in one hand, and a doubled slice of bread-and-butter in the other. He was willing to go, but he saw no reason why he should leave his breakfast behind.

"Poor old Toddy," murmured Nugent; "always in the wars! And it's all Bunter's fault, of course, as usual."

"Oh, really, Nugent——"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" ejaculated Bob Cherry. "Look!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Todd was progressing towards the door, and he had to pass the end of the Fifth-Form table. Blundell, of the Fifth, thought it would be very funny to put out his foot and trip up the Duffer of Greyfriars, and bring him to grief with his cup of tea.

Todd did not see the foot; Todd seldom saw anything till it was too late. He walked right on to it and stumbled helplessly.

But the result was not so funny to Blundell as he had expected.

"Oh!" gasped Todd—"oh, dear!"

He made a wild effort to save his balance.

He threw out both arms, and the contents of the tea-cup were flung fairly into Blundell's face, while the bread-and-butter sailed through the air and alighted upon the Upper Fourth table.

Blundell jumped up with a yell.

The hot tea was streaming down his face, and for the moment Blundell was blinded, and hardly knew what had happened.

"Oh!" he roared. "Ow! Yow! Yaroop!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The biter bit," grinned Bob Cherry.

And the Remove roared.

Blundell dashed the tea from his face with his hands. The Duffer of Greyfriars had fallen upon his knees after wildly stumbling and staggering to and fro. He slowly regained his feet, and stared dazedly at Blundell.

"You chump!" roared the Fifth-Former. "You dangerous ass!"

"Oh, dear!"

"See what you've done."

"Oh, dear! Goodness gracious! How very odd!"

"You fathead!"

"I—I'm so sorry," stammered the Duffer. "I fell over something, you know—there was something in the way." He blinked round him in search of it. "I cannot see it now, but it was certainly there, for I stumbled over it."

Blundell gasped, and mopped his face with his handkerchief. The other Fifth-Formers were grinning at him. His

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 133.

NEXT WEEK: "ALONZO, THE TERRIBLE."

attempt to trip up the Duffer might have been funny, but Blundell's getting the tea in his face was funnier.

"I'm so sorry," said Todd. "I really think that some silly and inconsiderate person must have deliberately tripped me up with his foot, you know."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And Todd walked on to the door, leaving Blundell very wet and very angry and very crimson. Even Mr. Quelch's frowns could not quite suppress the chuckling at the Remove table.

Alonzo Todd waited in the hall for the Remove to come out. He had had only half a breakfast, but he was as good-tempered and cheerful as ever.

The boys came out of the dining-room, and Bob Cherry brought a folded slice of bread-and-butter, with a lump of jam in the middle of it, concealed under his jacket, and he passed it into Todd's hand.

The Duffer gave him a grateful look.

"That is really very kind and thoughtful of you, Cherry!" he exclaimed.

"Oh, rats!" said Bob.

"But it is, really, you know, and you must allow me to acknowledge it. My Uncle Benjamin always impressed upon me to acknowledge any benefit I received," said the Duffer earnestly. "My Uncle Benjamin——"

"Good old Benny!" said Bob.

"Really, Cherry——"

"But give him a rest," said Bob kindly. "I've no doubt that Uncle Bendigo——"

"Benjamin," Todd corrected, mildly.

"My mistake! Benjamin is an estimable old sport, but one can get fed up with him, you know. Give him a five-bar rest."

And Bob walked away, leaving Alonzo looking somewhat perplexed.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

A Pleasant Prospect for Bunter.

HARRY WHARTON wore a worried look.

He signed to his chums to join him as he went out into the Close after breakfast for the brief interval till morning prayers.

"We've got to settle about this afternoon!" he exclaimed. "Bunter has invited D'Arcy, and D'Arcy's coming. We shall be glad to see him, of course, but it's a difficult position. That young cad has no right to invite people he can't entertain. We might all be occupied this afternoon, for all he knew or cared."

"The mightfulness is great."

"Fortunately, we are not. We've the time to look after guests, but not the tin. I'm in a pretty nearly stony state."

"Same here," said Bob Cherry.

"The samefulness is terrific."

"What about you, Nugent?"

Nugent turned his trousers-pockets inside-out. The action was eloquent enough, without words.

"And Wun Lung's low down, too," said Bob Cherry. "He's generally got tin, but he's in a low state now, I know, or I'd borrow of him."

"There's only one chap in the Remove rolling in money," Nugent remarked.

"Who's that?" asked Harry quickly. "If it's a friend of ours——"

"It isn't."

"Oh, you mean the Bounder!"

"Yes; Vernon-Smith has come back richer than ever, to judge by the way he flashes his sovereigns about."

"I wish he hadn't come back at all," said Harry, frowning. "He will soon be at his old caddish tricks again, I know that. But never mind him now. Bunter has asked D'Arcy, and he's coming. He's asked the girls, and they ought to come—though they won't, I'm pretty sure, unless they hear from us. But we ought to manage it."

"Certainly."

"To stand a decent feed costs money, but we can raise it if necessary. Shall we decide to do it?"

"Don't see any choice about the matter, if it can possibly be done," said Nugent. "But how are you going to manage it?"

Wharton coloured a little.

"I shall ask Mr. Quelch to advance me some of my pocket-money," he replied. "He has said that he would do so if I ever needed it."

The chums were silent.

Such a resource was not unknown at Greyfriars, but to Harry Wharton, who had a strong feeling against getting into debt, it was peculiarly repugnant. But Bunter's action had left him no alternative.

"Well, it seems the only way," said Bob at last.

"Looks like it."

A Splendid Tale of Harry Wharton & Co.
By FRANK RICHARDS.



"Well," said Dr. Locke, in a portentous voice, as the four postal orders fluttered from Bunter's pockets. "Well, Bunter?" "I—I don't understand it, sir," stammered Billy Bunter. "I—I gave them to Bulstrode, and—and he wouldn't give them back!"

"The onlyfulness is terrific."

Wharton nodded abruptly.

"Then I'll do it," he said. "That's settled."

"But hang it all," said Nugent, "it's a bit thick if Bunter is to score all along the line like this, after acting the goat in that way. It will encourage him to do it again, too, whenever he wants a feed. He'll only have to ask somebody whose feelings we don't want to hurt, and then he'll get what he wants."

Wharton smiled grimly.

"He'll get more than he wants," he said. "Bunter has met his match this time. We're going to stand the feed because he's let us in for it, but Billy Bunter's not going to be there."

"What?"

"Bunter won't be there."

"Ha, ha! Not at his own birthday feed?"

"It's not going to be his birthday feed. We'll have the little party, and Billy won't be there—and it will be a lesson to him."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But how will you keep him away?" asked Nugent. "Wild horses wouldn't drag Bunter away from a feed, if he once got on the scent of it!"

"We'll have the feed in the open air, as the weather's so fine," said Harry. "We can manage it *al fresco*. We'll have it under the trees near the old tower."

"Good!"

"And we'll shove Bunter in the tower, and lock him up there so that he can't get out, and he can have the pleasure of watching us from the window."

Bob Cherry burst into a roar.

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 133.

NEXT
WEEK:

"ALONZO, THE TERRIBLE."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And the juniors yelled at the idea.

The mere thought of Bunter watching his own birthday feast without being able to join in it was excruciating, and there was no doubt that it would be a much-needed lesson to the fat junior. His habit of causing an awkward situation, and leaving it to others to straighten out, was one that called for correction—and if his present scheme had proved a success, there was not the slightest doubt that he would have repeated it often enough.

Before prayers, Harry Wharton went in to see Mr. Quelch, and, with unusual colour in his cheeks, asked him if he could have an advance on his pocket-money. The Form-master asked him no questions, to his great relief, and handed out thirty shillings at once, and Wharton thanked him and departed.

Bunter was looking for Harry, but he did not see him till prayers. Then he captured him on the way to the Form-room.

"I say, Wharton," he exclaimed, tugging at Harry's sleeve—"I say! Have you fellows made any arrangements about this afternoon yet?"

"Yes," said Harry curtly.

"There's going to be a feed?"

"Yes."

"A big one?"

"Yes."

Bunter rubbed his fat hands, and blinked with satisfaction.

"Good!" he exclaimed. "That's the tune!"

"But you won't be there," said Wharton.

Bunter stared.

A Splendid Tale of Harry Wharton & Co.
By FRANK RICHARDS.

"Eh?"

"You heard what I said."

"You said I shouldn't be there," said Bunter, in wonder. "I don't know what you mean. I suppose a fellow is going to be at his own birthday feed?"

Wharton shrugged his shoulders, and made no further reply. He had warned Bunter what to expect, and that was enough.

The Remove went into the Form-room. Mr. Quelch was a few minutes late that morning. Todd leaned over his desk and called to Bunter.

"Bunter! I say, Bunter!"

Bunter blinked round at him.

"Did you call me, Todd?"

"Yes. I understand that it is your birthday to-day?"

"Yes," said Bunter. "I'm standing a big feed."

"Many happy returns of the day, Bunter! I am so pleased to be able to felicitate you!" said Todd, beaming. "It was that I wished to do at breakfast this morning. I really should like to help you to celebrate the occasion in some way. If you will allow me to give you a word of advice, I should not recommend a feed. You see, you eat too much, and the greedy habits you are cultivating may grow on you in later life, and cause injury to your health."

Todd beamed as he gave this good advice. Bunter did not receive it in a like spirit. He scowled.

"It would be better," resumed Todd, "to celebrate the date in a more moderate and temperate manner—say by taking a long walk—and the money you were going to expend on the feed you could put in the poor-box at church, or towards the Lifeboat Fund."

Bunter grunted.

"Don't you think that is a good scheme, Bunter?" asked Todd. "I'm sure that if my Uncle Benjamin were here he would give you exactly the same counsel."

"Blow your Uncle Benjamin!"

"Really, Bunter—"

"And you can take a long walk this afternoon, if you like," said Bunter. "You jolly well won't come to my feed!"

"But—"

"I'm wasting away as it is through want of sufficient nourishment," said Bunter. "If old Quelch did his proper duty as a Form-master, he'd see that I was fed better. But he doesn't care—"

"Cave, you young ass!" whispered Harry Wharton hurriedly, as the Form-master came in.

But Bunter had his back turned to Mr. Quelch, and he went on:

"Old Quelch—"

"Bunter!" exclaimed Mr. Quelch, in a voice of thunder.

The fat junior jumped as if he had been shot. He swung round hastily, and stared at the Remove-master.

"Ye-e-es, sir?" he gasped.

"Bunter! How dare you?"

"Ye-e-es, sir."

"So that is how you allude to me behind my back!" exclaimed the Form-master, very naturally angry.

Bunter trembled.

"No, sir!" he exclaimed. "Certainly not, sir!"

"What! I heard you!"

"Yes, sir, but—"

"You alluded to me as 'Old Quelch,' Bunter!"

"Oh, no, sir! I wouldn't do such a thing!" gasped Bunter, alarmed by the expression upon Mr. Quelch's face.

"Boy! I heard you!"

"Not at all, sir!"

"What!"

"It was an—an—an optical delusion, sir!" stammered Bunter. "I—I mean a mistake, sir—a sort of delusion of the ear, sir! You—you thought—"

"I distinctly heard you, Bunter."

"I'm sincerely sorry, sir, but—but I couldn't think of such a thing!" stammered Bunter, who had a way of floundering from falsehood to falsehood when he was alarmed. "I may have remarked that you were—were elderly, sir—"

"Bunter!"

"But I couldn't call you 'Old Quelch,' sir—it wouldn't be respectful."

"It certainly was not respectful."

"There, sir, you see I was right! I'm so glad you agree with me, sir!" said Billy Bunter, in a tone of great relief.

"What! Bunter! I do not believe you are as stupid as you pretend to be!" exclaimed the Form-master angrily.

"No, sir. I—I am rather clever, I think, sir."

"You spoke in a most disrespectful way—"

"Oh, no, sir! I—I wouldn't, sir! I'd sooner speak disrespectfully of my own grandfather, sir! I respect you very highly, sir. I was only saying to Todd, as you came in, that Mr. Quelch might be elderly, but he was a splendid Form-master, sir!"

"My only hat!" murmured Bob Cherry.

Mr. Quelch looked at Bunter in a very peculiar manner.

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 133.

NEXT
WEEK:

"ALONZO, THE TERRIBLE."

"I was going to excuse your disrespectful allusion, as I overheard it by accident, Bunter—" he began.

"Oh, thank you, sir! You're very good, sir!"

"But your absurd falsehoods cannot pass unpunished," said Mr. Quelch. "Come out here, Bunter. I shall cane you!"

"Cane me, sir?"

"Yes. Stand out here at once."

"If—if you please, sir, it's my birthday."

"Well?"

"I—I'd rather not be caned on my birthday, sir, if you don't mind," said Billy Bunter diffidently.

Mr. Quelch suppressed a smile. It was a novel appeal, and the coolness of it was quite worthy of Billy Bunter. But Mr. Quelch was a good-hearted man, with a sense of humour.

"You may sit down, Bunter," he said curtly.

"Thank you, sir!"

And Bunter was very glad to sit down.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

Bunter Gets Rid of the Postal-Orders.

"LETTER for you, Bunter!"

"What?"

"There's another letter for you."

"My word!"

Letters for Bunter seemed to be raining. The Remove had left the Form-room for the morning recess at eleven o'clock, and as they went out Snoop pointed out the letter to Bunter in the rack.

Bunter annexed it at once, and opened it on the spot.

"Postal-order?" asked Nugent.

"Yes, rather!"

"How much?"

"Ha, ha! Another bob!" said Tom Brown.

"Well, the bobs mount up!" said Bunter. "It isn't every chap who gets a regular rain of postal-orders on his birthday. I think my relations are rallying up in very good style. This makes four bob altogether; and I've no doubt I shall get another by every post to-day. I think it's very decent of my relations and my titled friends to think of me like this."

"Another uncle, I suppose?" said Bulstrode, with a grin.

Bunter blinked at the postal-order.

"No; this is from my cousin, Major Bunter," he said. "He's an officer in the—the Indian army, you know. Very much in society."

"And he can only spare you a bob?" said Frank Nugent. "He should really have left off bridge one evening and saved another shilling, and—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Where does he live?" asked Ogilvy.

"Oh, he has chambers in Piccadilly, and a big country house in—in Shropshire," said Bunter, in his airiest way.

"How curious!"

"What's curious?"

"That a chap who lives in Piccadilly and Shropshire should come to a little village like Friardale, in this part of the country, to buy a shilling postal-order," said the Scottish junior blandly.

"Eh?"

"That postal-order was bought in Friardale last night, as you can see by the stamp on it," said Ogilvy.

"Oh!"

"The major must be staying there," said Ogilvy maliciously. "It would be a good idea for a lot of us to go and see him this afternoon, as he's there, and it's a half-holiday."

Bunter flushed. The major was a figment of his fertile imagination—as the other fellows knew, in point of fact.

"I—I don't think he'd like to be disturbed, you know," stammered Bunter. "I—I think I'd better cut off to Mrs. Mimble with this postal-order. I feel that I ought to have a snack to keep up my strength."

And the fat junior hurried off, leaving the other fellows grinning. They had noticed something about the postal-order which had escaped the attention of the short-sighted Owl of the Remove.

Mrs. Mimble did not look any too amiable as Bunter presented himself with a postal-order in his hand. She was getting "fed up" as it were, with Billy Bunter and his postal-orders.

"I want you to cash this, Mrs. Mimble," said Bunter, with considerable dignity. "It's a new one. I'm getting quite a lot."

Mrs. Mimble glanced at the order.

"I can't!" she said curtly.

"Why not?"

A Splendid Tale of Harry Wharton & Co.
By FRANK RICHARDS.

"The name of the post-office at Laverock is filled in. You will have to go there to cash it."

Bunter blinked at the order.

Sure enough, there was the name of a town five miles at least from Greyfriars, and Bunter knew that the return fare by railway would be at least a shilling.

"Oh, dear!" he murmured.

He left the tuckshop disconsolately.

"Well," exclaimed Bulstrode, meeting him, "had a good feed?"

"No!" grunted Bunter. "Mrs. Mimble is so unbusinesslike. She's afraid to take paper money, you see. She won't cash my postal-orders. I suppose you wouldn't mind taking them, Bulstrode?"

"Certainly not."

Bunter brightened up:

"There are four now, and they're for a bob each," he said. "Here they are."

"Sure you don't want them?"

"Oh, yes."

"You want me to take them?"

"Certainly!" said Bunter, wondering why the juniors standing round Bulstrode were grinning. "I shall be very much obliged."

"Oh, all right, then."

Bulstrode took the postal-orders that Bunter held out, put them in his pocket, and walked away.

The fat junior blinked after him, and then ran and caught him by the sleeve.

"I say, Bulstrode, you haven't given me the money!" he exclaimed.

"Eh?"

"The money!"

"What money?" demanded the burly Removite, with an expression of surprise. "I don't owe you any money, Bunter!"

"The postal-orders, you know—it's four bob."

"Nonsense!"

"They're a shilling each, you know."

"Stuff! You gave them to me!"

"What!"

"And all the fellows heard you say that you didn't want them, and that you wanted me to take them!" exclaimed Bulstrode. "Didn't he, you chaps?"

"Yes, rather!" said Skinner. "I heard him!"

"And he never said a word about my handing him any money, did he?"

"He certainly didn't!"

"But I—I say——"

"It doesn't matter what you say now," said Bulstrode loftily. "It's too late. You should have said what you meant at the time."

"But——"

"It's settled now."

Bulstrode walked away again. Bunter stared at him in speechless amazement and rage for a moment, and then bounded in pursuit. Bulstrode quickened his pace, and Bunter followed, the juniors crowding after them in great glee.

The Owl of the Remove caught Bulstrode by the sleeve and stopped him.

"Are you going to give me four bob?" he shouted.

Bulstrode shook his head.

"Will you give me three for them, then?"

"Certainly not!"

"What will you offer for the four?"

"Nothing."

"Then give them to me back, you blessed thief!" exclaimed Bunter. "Give me my postal-orders! Hand them over! Do you hear?"

"They're not yours—they're mine!"

"Look here——"

"Didn't he give them to me, you fellows?"

"Yes, rather!" came the chorus.

"Give them to me!" shrieked Bunter, clinging to Bulstrode as he made a motion to walk away again. "Gimme my postal-orders!"

Bulstrode grinned, and grasped the fat junior to throw him off. As he threw his arms round Bunter, he easily contrived to slip the four postal-orders in a bunch into the fat junior's jacket pocket, without Bunter being in the least aware of the action.

Then he twisted Bunter over and sat him on the ground, and walked away.

Bunter sat dazed for a moment, and then he leaped up like a jack-in-the-box, and dashed after Bulstrode, yelling: "Stop thief!"

EVERY
TUESDAY,

The "Magnet"

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ONE
PENNY.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER

A Little Too Hasty.

"MY goodness!" exclaimed Dr. Locke.

The Head of Greyfriars was stepping out of the School House, and he stopped in astonishment as he heard a shout of "Stop thief!" Bulstrode was striding towards the house, grinning, and Billy Bunter was pelting after him as fast as his fat little legs could go, and the others crowded after Bunter.

Dr. Locke looked at them in surprise.

"Dear me!" he exclaimed. "Bless my soul! Bulstrode, stop! What is the matter? Bunter, what do you mean?"

"The Head!"

"Phew!"

"My hat!"

Bulstrode stopped. Bunter came up panting, and the other juniors quieted down. It was all fun, but there was never any telling how a matter might end when the Head got mixed up in it. Bulstrode was quite cool, however.

"Bunter," said the Head sternly, "how dare you call out such a thing after Bulstrode?"

Bunter panted.

"Let him give me my postal-orders, sir!"

"What!"

"He's got my money!"

"Your money!"

"Yes, sir."

Dr. Locke turned his stern glance upon the Bully of the Remove. Bulstrode met it without flinching.

"Have you any of Bunter's money, Bulstrode?" asked the Head.

"No, sir."

"Liar!" ejaculated Bunter.

"You must not use that word, Bunter."

"But he's got it, sir—postal-orders. It's the same thing."

Dr. Locke frowned.

"I hope you are not merely prevaricating, Bulstrode?" he said severely. "Have you either money or postal-orders belonging to Bunter?"

"No, sir."

"It's a lie!" shrieked Bunter.

"Bunter!"

"He's got four postal-orders, sir. I gave them to him to cash, and he didn't give me any money, and he won't give them back!"

The Head looked worried.

"I cannot understand this," he said. "I cannot think that Bulstrode would keep any money belonging to you, Bunter."

"He's got it, sir!"

"But——"

"Have him searched, sir! I believe he's got the postal-orders crumpled up in his hand, sir. He had just now."

"Open your hands, Bulstrode!"

The Removite obeyed. They were certainly empty.

"Well, he's got them in his pocket, sir," said Bunter.

"He ought to be searched! He's got my postal-orders."

"I haven't," said Bulstrode. "It's my belief that you've got them in your own pocket all the time."

"Liar!"

"Bunter!"

"Well, sir, make him give me my postal-orders!"

"He's got them himself," said Bulstrode.

"I haven't!"

"Turn out your pockets, and let's see," exclaimed Skinner, who had witnessed Bulstrode's trick on the fat junior.

"Rubbish!" said Bunter. "I know I haven't got them. Bulstrode has them!"

"Turn out your pockets, Bunter," said Dr. Locke. "We must first make certain that you have not made a mistake."

"But, sir——"

"Do as I tell you."

"Oh, all right, sir!"

Bunter discontentedly turned out his jacket pockets. Four postal-orders fluttered to the ground.

"M-m-my hat!" gasped Bunter.

He picked up the postal-orders.

"Well?" said Dr. Locke, in a portentous voice, as the fat junior blinked at each order in dismay. "Well Bunter?"

"It's—it's all right, sir!" stammered Bunter.

"They are your postal-orders?"

"Ye-e-es, sir."

"They were in your pocket all the time."

"Ye-e-es, sir. I suppose so."

"And you accused Bulstrode——"

"I—I don't understand it, sir. I—I gave them to Bulstrode, and he wouldn't give them back, and—and——"

ANSWERS

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 133.

NEXT
WEEK:

"ALONZO THE TERRIBLE."

A Splendid Tale of Harry Wharton & Co.
By FRANK RICHARDS

"Let this be a lesson to you, Bunter, not to make hasty accusations," said the Head severely.

"Ye-e-e-es, sir."

"And in order to impress it upon your mind, you will take a hundred lines," said the Head. And he walked majestically away.

"Oh!" said Bunter.

He stood blinking at the postal-orders. The amazement in his face was so absurd that the juniors yelled with laughter.

"I—I don't quite understand!" gasped Bunter. "How did the blessed things come into my pocket? Bulstrode knows he wouldn't give them to me."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You young ass!" roared Bulstrode. "I put them there, you chump!"

"Oh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It—it was a rotten joke," said Bunter. "You ought to have owned up to the Head, and got me out of the row, if it was a jape."

"By George, so he ought!" said Ogilvy.

Bulstrode grunted.

"It's all right; I'll do the lines," he said. "It comes to the same thing. It was too good a jape to spoil."

He walked away, laughing. A hundred lines was not a very heavy price to pay for having made a fool of Bunter so completely, and he chuckled over it. The fat junior blinked round at the laughing juniors.

"I say, you fellows, if you'd like to cash these postal-orders—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'd let you have 'em at a tanner each," said Bunter generously.

"Thank you for nothing," said Ogilvy.

"Faith, and I'll spring threepence for the lot!" said Micky Desmond. "Is it a thrade, Bunter, darling?"

"Oh, really, Desmond—"

"Four a penny," suggested Snoop. "I'll have them at that price."

"Oh, really—"

Bunter was left alone with his postal-orders. Nobody wanted them, even at the low price of sixpence each.

The juniors went in to resume lessons, and the postal-orders were still in Bunter's pocket, and Mrs. Mimble's tarts and doughnuts were still in her shop. And in the heart of William George Bunter there was discontent and wrath.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

Vernon-Smith Comes Down Handsomely.

MORNING school was over at last, and the juniors were free for the remainder of the day; at least, until evening preparation. It was a fine summer's afternoon, and most of the Greyfriars fellows prepared to enjoy themselves. Among the rest, Harry Wharton & Co. were very cheerful. They had made up their minds to accept the situation Bunter had thrust upon them, and make the best of it; and having so decided, there was no reason why they should not have an enjoyable time. So long as Bunter was not allowed to score, all would be well. But upon that point the juniors were determined. Bunter should not be allowed to get into the habit of springing surprises of this sort upon them.

Wharton had plainly warned Bunter what to expect, and if the fat junior did not choose to take warning, that was his own look out. He could not complain that he had not been told.

Immediately after dinner, the juniors were busy. A select party had been invited to the feed, including the famous Four, Mark Linley, Tom Brown, Alonzo Todd and little Wun Lung the Chinese. There were one or two other fellows as well. Then there was to be D'Arcy of St. Jim's, and, of course, the girls from Cliff House. Hazeldene was to bring his sister and Miss Clara to the party. The junior wheeled his bicycle round from the shed

soon after dinner, and Harry Wharton gave him his instructions.

"You'll assure Marjorie that it's all right, and that it's not Bunter's party," said Harry. "I know what she thinks of Bunter."

Hazeldene nodded with a grin.

"That's all right," he said. "I'll make it clear."

"And if your sister and Miss Clara come on their bikes, we can have a spin round and ride home with them afterwards," Bob Cherry remarked.

"Good!"

"And mind you don't come back without them," said Nugent.

"What-ho!"

"Perhaps one of us ought to go and—and help," suggested Bob Cherry, his face suddenly becoming the colour of a beetroot.

Nugent grinned.

"Do you want any help, Hazel?" he asked.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, I—I only thought I'd—I'd help," growled Bob Cherry.

"Ha, ha! He's understudying Todd, and wants to make himself useful," grinned Nugent. "Go it, Bob. Go and be obliging."

"Oh, shut up!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Stop that rotten cackling, or I'll—I'll punch your head!" roared Bob Cherry.

Nugent backed away, still laughing. Bob followed him wrathfully, looking very much as if he would carry out his threat. Hazeldene laughed, and jumped on his machine, and rode away to Cliff House.

Vernon-Smith had been standing near, and he heard the talk. A peculiar expression came over his face.

"So Miss Marjorie is coming to the feed, Wharton?" he said.

Wharton nodded without speaking.

"You've made up the party, I suppose?"

"Yes."

"You don't want an extra guest?" asked the Bounder, half-wistfully and half-mockingly.

Wharton looked at him directly.

"No," he said. "You're not a nice chap to meet Marjorie, Smith, and that's the plain English of it. You'll have to change a great deal before you become friendly with a girl like Marjorie Hazeldene."

"Become more like her brother, I suppose," said the Bounder, with a sneer.

Wharton compressed his lips.

"Hazeldene has his faults," he said. "But you can't deny that you have made him worse since you came to Greyfriars, and while you were away he's become his old self again. You can't expect Marjorie to stand a chap who's exercising a rotten bad influence over her brother."

The Bounder shrugged his shoulders, and walked away.

Wharton and his chums proceeded to make the arrangements for the tea under the trees. Vernon-Smith went away in search of Bunter. He found the fat junior in the tuckshop, trying in vain to induce Mrs. Mimble to advance him anything at all on the security of the postal-orders.

"Hallo, Bunter!" said the Bounder, in a friendly way that quite astonished the Owl of the Remove, after the incident in Vernon-Smith's study the previous day.

"Hallo!" grunted Bunter. "Isn't it extraordinary, Smithy, that women can't ever get to understand business? Here's Mrs. Mimble won't let a chap have any credit, though I've explained to her time and again that the whole system of doing business in modern times is built up on credit. She can't see it."

Vernon-Smith sniffed.

"And here I've got four postal-orders for a bob each," said Bunter, "and she won't take them as security."

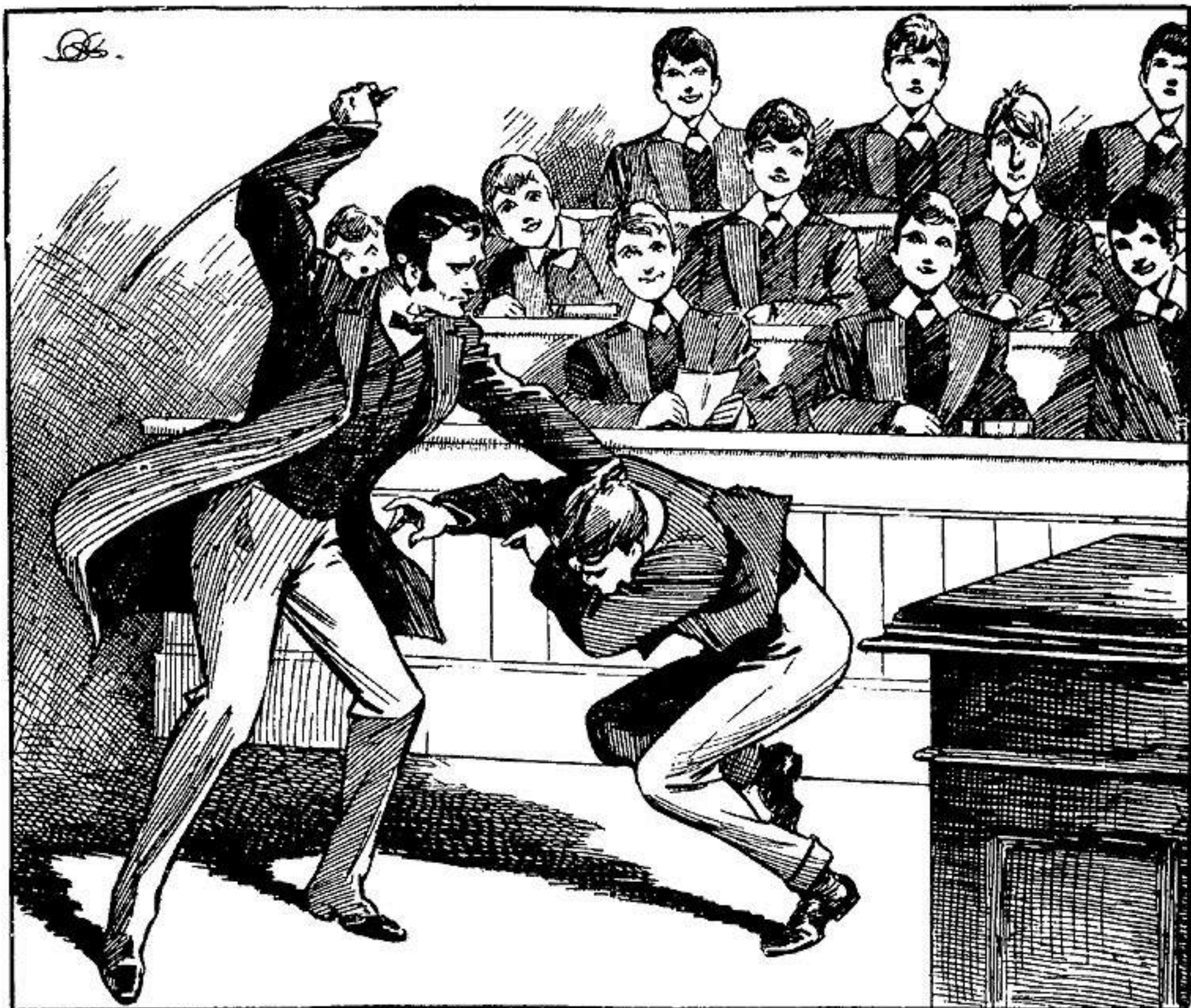
"I should have to trust them to you to be cashed, Master Bunter," said the dame.

"Well, I'd be only too happy to do it, to oblige you, Mrs. Mimble."

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Thwack! Thwack! Thwack! Vernon-Smith had refused to hold out his hand, but the thrashing across his shoulders was much more painful. Mr. Quelch only released him when he deemed he had been sufficiently punished.

"But you wouldn't give me the money."

"Oh, really, Mrs. Mimble, if you doubt my personal honour—"

"All the school knows you, Master Bunter!"

"It's enough to shake one's faith in human nature," said Bunter pathetically. "Women ought to be gentle, trusting creatures, oughtn't they, Smith?"

"I don't know how they would get on in the world, if they were," said Mrs. Mimble acidly. "I am afraid they would be very much swindled by men."

"Oh, really—"

"And you owe me a long account already."

"But that's the old account," explained Bunter patiently.

"I know you owe me the money."

"Isn't it extraordinary, Smithy?" said Bunter, appealing to the Bounder. "A woman doesn't understand that separate accounts ought to be kept separate. An old account is—is an old account, of course. I want to start fresh now, on a cash basis, with postal-orders as security."

"You can talk as much as you like, Master Bunter, but I know you want to obtain goods without paying for them."

"Look here, Mrs. Mimble," said Bunter sternly, "I'm afraid you're a Suffragist. You'll be wanting a vote next."

"I only want my due," said Mrs. Mimble.

"I'll take those postal-orders off your hands, if you like," said the Bounder suddenly.

"How much will you give me for them?" asked Bunter suspiciously, thinking of the trick Bulstrode had played him.

"Face value."

"Oh, really, Smith, that's very decent of you," said Bunter. "Hand over!"

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 133.

Vernon-Smith threw four shillings upon the counter. He tucked the postal-orders carelessly into his pocket. To the Bounder of Greyfriars, the son of the millionaire cotton king, four shillings more or less made no difference.

Bunter's eyes glistened at the sight of the hard cash.

He immediately proceeded to give orders.

"I suppose you're laying in things for the feed this afternoon?" suggested Vernon-Smith.

Bunter hesitated.

"Well, no," he said. "I'm just going to have a snack now, so that I can keep up my strength, to get—er—ready for the feed, you know. You know, I'm jolly delicate, and I can't exert myself without taking some nourishment."

"Wharton was saying something about it's not being your feed this afternoon," the Bounder went on.

"Oh, that's all rot, of course," said Bunter, through a mouthful of tart. "It's only the jealousy I always get in my own study."

"Marjorie Hazeldene is coming?"

"What-ho! She wouldn't be likely to miss anything where I was present!" said Billy Bunter, with a smirk.

"Oh, wouldn't she?"

"No, fear! She likes me, though she keeps it very dark from the other fellows. Just to look on, you'd think she didn't care a bit about me. But I know 'em!"

"Oh, you know 'em, do you?" said the Bounder contemptuously.

Bunter crammed another tart into his mouth.

"Yes, rather," he said, "I know 'em! Groo!"

He choked a little over the tart. Such extremely large mouthfuls did not agree with conversation.

The Bounder watched him with a contemptuous smile, but Bunter was too short-sighted and too occupied with eating to observe that, so it did not trouble him.

"Then it really is your party, and Miss Hazeldene is coming?" asked the Bounder of Greyfriars slowly.

"Yes, of course. These tarts are prime!"

It did not occur to Billy Bunter to offer Vernon-Smith one. He bolted them as fast as he could cram them into his mouth.

"You were saying something yesterday about wanting me to come," Vernon-Smith said, after a pause.

"I jolly well don't want you to come!" said Bunter. "You refused to make me a small loan, though I told you that I had a postal-order coming. You've seen some of the postal-orders for yourself now. You may believe me another time."

"Look here, I'll come!" said the Bounder. "And I'll stand a sovereign towards the feed!"

Bunter's eyes opened wide behind his spectacles.

"Well, that's coming down pretty handsome, Smithy!" he remarked. "Of course, I should only regard it as a loan."

"You can regard it as you like," said the Bounder. "There's a sovereign for you, if you like, if I am one of the party."

"Done!"

"You can arrange it? What about Wharton?"

"I suppose Wharton's not going to dictate to me who I invite to my own party?" said Bunter contemptuously. "Nice state of things that would be! I'm going to have who I like, of course. I shall take you as a particular friend of mine."

"I suppose it will be all right?"

"Of course it will be all right! Where's the sovereign?"

Vernon-Smith laid a sovereign on the counter.

Bunter's eyes gleamed.

"Thanks," he said. "I'll order the things now. Wharton and the others are going to stand some grub, and between us we'll make a good show."

"Where is the feed to be held?"

"I haven't decided yet," said Bunter, with an air of deep consideration. "As it looks like keeping fine, I may decide to have it *al fresco*—either that, or in the wood-shed—but I'll let you know."

"At what time?"

"Well, say four o'clock. That's early for tea, I know, but I'm sure I shall be hungry."

"All right," said the Bounder; and he quitted the tuckshop.

Bunter picked up the sovereign, and bit it, and rang it on the counter. He blinked at it, and his eyes gleamed at it. It was very seldom that Billy Bunter had a piece of gold.

"My word!" murmured Bunter. "That chap must be rolling in money! Of course, he's the son of a millionaire. I wish my father was a millionaire—I don't see why he can't be. It's a duty fathers owe their sons to get rich, I think. I'd swap paters with Smithy if I could. Now, I wonder what I'd better expend this sovereign on?"

Bunter's eye roamed over the tuckshop.

He was getting to the end of four shillings' worth of refreshments, but there were many things there to tempt him. Bunter's appetite was like the little brook of which the poet tells us—it went on for ever.

"Perhaps I'd better have a snack first," he murmured. "Mrs. Mimble, I'll try the pineapples now."

"Certainly, Master Bunter!" said the dame, with much more cordiality in her manner when she saw the glimmer of gold in Bunter's fat fingers.

Bunter tried the pineapples, and he tried something else, and something else, and so on—and so on—and so on—till Vernon-Smith's sovereign melted away like snow in the sun. Bunter was feeling very fat and full—and, in fact, a little uncomfortable—when he staggered from the tuckshop at last; and then it occurred to him that he had not, after all, laid in any supplies for the afternoon's celebration.

"But I suppose Wharton's seeing to it," he murmured.

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

Arthur Augustus Arrives.

WHARTON was, as a matter of fact, seeing to it. Wharton, Nugent, and Bob Cherry were making all the arrangements for the feed—arrangements that did not include William George Bunter, or his particular friend Herbert Vernon-Smith.

Meanwhile Inky was, however, making an arrangement for Bunter. In a room of the old tower, overlooking at a distance the spot selected for the picnic, Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh examined the old barred window, and fitted a key in the lock, leaving it in the outside of the door when he quitted the old tower.

He rejoined his chums with a grin upon his dusky features.

"All serene?" asked Wharton.

"The serenity is terrific, my worthy chum!" murmured

the Nabob of Bhanipur. "When the esteemed pig is in the room, and the door is lockfully secured on the outful side, he will be as helpless as the esteemed fly in the elegant and honourable web of the industrious spider."

Wharton laughed.

"What about the window?"

"The barfulness of the window is terrific."

"Glass there?"

"Yes. In the honourable room I have selected there is glass, too far outside the esteemed bars for the honourable rotter to reach it to break it."

"Good! Then if he yells, we sha'n't be able to hear?"

"Exactly."

"We don't want the girls alarmed by his yauping—or D'Arcy either, for that matter," Harry Wharton remarked. "We'll excuse Bunter to them—say he can't possibly come, and he's very sorry—that will be the exact truth."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The ha-ha-fulness is terrific."

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "Here's Bunter!"

"I say, you fellows—"

"You look as if you had been celebrating your birthday already," said Harry, eyeing the junior's shiny fat face with extreme disfavour.

Bunter's eyes were rolling a little, and his speech was slow—even he was showing and feeling some of the effects of over-eating for once.

"I—I've had a snack," murmured Bunter. "I shall be quite ready for the feed at four o'clock, though."

"When?" asked Nugent.

"At four o'clock. I've fixed four o'clock for the feed."

"My word! Have you, really?"

"Yes. We'll have it in the woodshed."

"Indeed!"

"I hope you fellows are laying in plenty of grub?" said Bunter, eyeing them dubiously. "I—I don't feel very hungry at present, but I shall at four o'clock. But, of course, I'm not thinking of myself. It won't do to let the guests go away hungry."

"If you want a feed, you can lay in the grub yourself," said Nugent.

"Oh, really—"

"We're going to give a feed to the guests you've invited, but only because you won't, or can't," said Harry Wharton. "You won't be there."

"Of course, I shall be at my own birthday feed. I'm bringing a friend, too."

"Didn't know you had one. Who is it?"

"Smithy."

Wharton frowned.

"Vernon-Smith won't come—I've told him so!" he exclaimed.

"I suppose I can invite who I please to my own party?" said Bunter, with dignity. "You're taking altogether too much on yourself, Wharton! You fellows are assisting me in a small way in providing provisions and that sort of thing, you know, but I can't have you taking the whole matter out of my hands."

"Oh, cheese it!"

"But I say, you fellows— Well, of all the rude beasts—walking away while I'm talking! I say, you fellows—"

But the fellows were gone.

Billy Bunter rolled down to the gates, and rested upon a bench under the elm-tree there. After his great exertions in the tuckshop, he felt inclined for a rest. He wanted to meet D'Arcy as soon as he came, too. That the chums of the Remove had an idea for excluding him from the feast he now knew, but if he were careful to stick close to D'Arcy, they could hardly do anything openly. Appearances would have to be kept up before the fellow from St. Jim's.

But the afternoon was warm, the hum of the insects drowsy, and the corner where the bench stood was quiet and secluded. Billy Bunter soon fell asleep as he sat there, and his head dropped forward, and he became quite oblivious to all that was passing round him.

Alonzo Todd came down to the gates a little later. He knew that the Cliff House girls were coming, and he wanted to greet them when they arrived. Harry Wharton & Co. were busy, but Todd was at liberty, and, as usual, only too ready to be obliging—besides, politeness to the superior sex was a strong point with Todd; his Uncle Benjamin had always impressed upon him the necessity of it.

A youth of about Todd's own age came down the shady lane from Friardale, walking on the belt of grass beside the road. Todd glanced at him with interest. He was a most elegant youth to look at. From the top of his silk hat to the tips of his gleaming boots, from his fancy waistcoat to his eyeglass, he was a picture of elegance. He had an easy, graceful walk, too, and excellently as he was dressed, there was nothing "dressy" about him—nothing to indicate that he wore things because they were expensive. Todd looked at

him as he came along, and the stranger jammed the eyeglass tighter into his eye, and looked at Todd, and stopped.

"Bai Jove!" said the stranger. "Heah's Gweyfwiahs again!"

"Yes, this is Greyfriars," said Todd. "Are you a new boy?"

"Bai Jove! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Really, I do not see anything to laugh at in that remark," said Todd, puzzled. "If you are a new boy, I should be very happy to bid you welcome, and to show you over the school, and befriend you in every way. My Uncle Benjamin always told me that I should be very considerate towards a new boy."

"Bai Jove! Your Uncle Benjamin is a bwick, I should say!" remarked the stranger. "And you are anothah bwick, deah boy! But I am not a new boy, I am an old boy—see? That is why I wegarded your wemak as funnay."

"Oh, I see!"

"My name is D'Arcy," explained the elegant youth—"Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, you know. I'm fwom St. Jim's. My twain's just come in, and I thought I would walk fwom the station, you know. There seems to be only one cab in Fwiahdale, you know, and I looked into it, but bai Jove, I was afwaid it would soil my beastly clothes, don't you know, so I walked! Of course, it was a wotten fag, but it's wathah a fag to exist at all, isn't it?"

"How very odd," said Alonzo. "It never struck me in that light before. My Uncle Benjamin says that life is given to us to make ourselves useful, and to do obliging things to others."

"Bai Jove! I should like to meet your Cousin Benjamin—"

"My Uncle Benjamin."

"Yaas, of course—your Uncle Benjamin," agreed D'Arcy. "As I wemarked before, he is a bwick. I wegard his wemarks as amazingly sensible. Bai Jove, here comes a lot of wotten cyclists kickin' up a dust! How beastly!"

Three riders abreast came sweeping down the lane. There was certainly a considerable amount of dust kicked up by the tyres. They were coming along at a good speed, too. D'Arcy stepped towards the gateway of Greyfriars to get out of the dust.

"Dear me!" exclaimed Todd. "They're coming!"

"Eh? Fwiends of yours?"

"Certainly."

"Then I withdwaw my wemark about wotten cyclists, and apologise," said Arthur Augustus. "It's all wight."

"They're Hazeldene and his sister and Miss Clara," explained Todd.

"Bai Jove! Are they weally?"

D'Arcy turned back into the road again. The three cyclists came up with a whiz, and put on their brakes. Todd ran forward to greet them as they stopped, and, of course, bumped against D'Arcy. It wouldn't have been Todd if he hadn't bumped somebody. At the same moment Hazeldene jumped off his machine, just as Todd bumped D'Arcy towards him. The two met with a bump, and both uttered startled yells, and stumbled over. Hazeldene's machine went down with a clatter, and Hazeldene and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy sprawled across it, and Marjorie and Clara just jumped clear in time, or they would have added themselves to the heap.

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.

Nugent's Things are Useful.

"Bai Jove!"

"Oh, dear!"

"Good gracious!" exclaimed Marjorie, giving her machine to Clara, and running to the aid of the two juniors. "Let me help you up."

"Oh!" groaned Todd.

He was embracing the front wheel of Hazeldene's machine. Hazeldene was embracing the back wheel. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was mixing himself up with the chain and a twisted pedal.

"Gweat Scott!" he exclaimed, sitting up dazedly. "What has happened, deah boys?"

"Ow!"

"Yow!"

"Weally, you know—"

Marjorie took one of the elegant junior's delicately-gloved hands and helped him to his feet. With the other hand D'Arcy groped for his eyeglass, and jammed it into his eye.

"Bai Jove! How vewy kind of you to assist me, Miss Marjowie!"

"I hope you are not hurt."

"Yaas, I feah I am a little bit injahed, but it is nothin'," gasped D'Arcy. "It was worth while for the pleasuah of bein' helped up by you, deah gal."

Marjorie smiled. D'Arcy was nothing if not gallant. If he could have seen himself in the glass at that moment, however, even Arthur Augustus D'Arcy might have doubted whether it was worth while to take such a tumble for the sake of being helped up by Marjorie.

D'Arcy's handsome silk topper was on the ground, and the

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bike was on the topper. One of the pedals was through the crown of it. D'Arcy's elegant jacket was a mass of dust and rents. The light coat he had been carrying gracefully on his arm was a sight to see. His trousers were crumpled and dusty, his waistcoat rumpled, his boots scratched. It seemed amazing that so much damage could be done in a single tumble. But Todd and Hazeldene and the bicycle had all done their share.

Hazeldene scrambled up. His face was black with wrath. Todd was still embracing the bike wheel as if it were a friend he had not seen for a long time.

"Ow!" he groaned. "Help!"

"I'll help you, you clumsy ass!" said Hazeldene grimly.

"I'm—I'm so sorry—"

Hazeldene grasped the Duffer of Greyfriars by the back of the collar, digging his knuckles well into Todd's neck, and dragged him off the bike. Todd clung confusedly to the machine, and dragged it half up, and then let go, and it fell to the ground with a clang and a clatter.

"Ow!" gasped Todd. "I—I'm chok-chok-choking!"

Hazeldene shook him savagely.

"What did you upset us all for?" he roared.

"Upset you?" panted Todd.

"Yes, you ass! What do you mean by it?"

"Mean by it?"

"Did you do it on purpose?"

"On purpose?"

"You blessed parrot!" roared Hazeldene, shaking him.

"By George—"

"Hazel!" exclaimed Marjorie, in alarm. "Stop—stop, please!"

"See what the giddy ass has done!"

"Yes, but—"

"I'm sure I only meant to be obliging," exclaimed Todd, jerking himself away from the furious Hazeldene at last. "I really do not know how it happened. I'm so sorry!"

Hazeldene snorted.

"Well, perhaps you'll oblige next by wheeling my bike in, and then mending it," he exclaimed. "The crank's bent and the pedal twisted. You utter ass!"

"Really, Hazeldene—"

"Yaas, wathah! I must say I wegard the chap as an uttah ass!" said D'Arcy, jamming his eyeglass into his eye and surveying the dusty and remorseful Alonzo. "I weally do not know why he shoved me into the jiggah in that absurd mannah."

"It was an accident," said Marjorie.

"It's a way Todd has," said Clara. "If he didn't upset somebody he would feel that he had wasted a day. Wouldn't you, Todd?"

"Oh, really, Miss Clara, I—"

"Nevah mind," said D'Arcy. "I certainly feel wathah dustay and wagged, and I am weally ashamed to appeah in your pwesence, deah gals, in such a shockin' state. I should be vewy pleased if Hazeldene would take me in and bwush me."

"Come on!" said Hazeldene. "Look after that machine, Todd. It will have to be carried in. The front wheel's bent, and won't go round."

"Oh, certainly, Hazeldene. I shall be very pleased to do anything I can. I'm so sorry—"

"Oh, rats!"

Hazeldene walked in with the girls and D'Arcy. There was a rush of footsteps, and Harry Wharton & Co. came to meet them. Billy Bunter, in complete ignorance of the fact that the guests who were supposed to be his had arrived, slept on on the bench under the shade of the big elm.

"So glad to see you, Marjorie, and Clara," exclaimed Wharton. "And you, too, D'Arcy. You've all arrived at the same time, I see. No accidents, I hope."

He glanced at D'Arcy's battered silk hat, which the swell of St. Jim's was carrying in his hand.

"Only the Duffer!" growled Hazeldene. "He upset us all at the gate. D'Arcy wants a clean up, and if anybody's got a topper to fit him he'd like the loan of one."

"Yaas, wathah! It's too bad to give so much twouble, but, you see—"

"I'm sorry," said Harry. "The Duffer is awfully dangerous when he gets loose. We always keep an eye open for Alonzo Todd. Come this way, D'Arcy."

Hazeldene took his sister and Miss Clara into the house. Wharton marched D'Arcy off to the Remove dormitory to get him cleaned up, and stayed there to help him. The swell of St. Jim's washed himself carefully, and Harry brushed him down, but the signs of the disaster were not easily removed from his elegant attire.

D'Arcy took it cheerfully, but it was evident that the catastrophe weighed upon his mind a little.

"Try one of Nugent's silk hats," said Wharton generously. "He has a new Sunday one—he's just taken the other into

everyday use. I remember that he takes just your size, D'Arcy."

The swell of St. Jim's looked relieved.

"Thank you vewy much, deah boy!" he exclaimed. "I should have been quite willin' to go awound in a cap if you would have lent me one, but I must confess that I should feel more at home in a toppah on an important occasion like this, and in the pwesence of two charmin' ladies."

Wharton smiled, and opened Nugent's best hat-box. D'Arcy tried the hat on before a glass, and looked satisfied.

"It's weally vewy nice," he remarked. "Not exactly the latest thing in bwims, pewwaps, but vewy good indeed. I shall be able to wear this hat with a gweat deal of pleasuah, deah boys."

"So glad," said Harry. "Will you have some collars, too—I mean a collar, of course. I saw a speck of dust on yours."

D'Arcy looked alarmed.

"Did you weally, deah boy?"

"Yes, it's there, right enough," said Wharton, with perfect gravity. "A whole speck—no mistake about it!"

"Bai Jove! I wegard it as awfully good-natured of you to point it out, old fellow. Yaas, I shall be vewy pleased indeed to bowwow a clean collah if you have one my size. Yaas, these are all wight."

"They're Nugent's," said Harry. "Use them as your own, my dear fellow. Everything's at your disposal. Try Nugent's Sunday jacket—he's much about your size, you know, and yours is torn at the elbow and the side."

"Bai Jove, so it is! I will twy Nugent's jacket with gweat pleasuah, deah boy. Pway hold it for me."

"Here you are!"

Harry held the jacket ready, and D'Arcy slipped into it, and he looked at the result in the glass with considerable satisfaction.

"Bai Jove! This is weally vewy good of you, Wharton."

"Not at all, my dear fellow."

"I suppose Nugent won't mind his things bein' used up in this way?"

"He'll enjoy it."

"Vewy well, then."

And Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, clothed, and in his right mind, so to speak, descended with Harry Wharton.

THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER.

The Guests.

"YAW-AW-AW!"

That was the first remark of William George Bunter as sleep rolled from his eyes, and he opened them and blinked. He put his hand to his glasses, which had slid down his nose during his nap, and put them into their place. Then he blinked again.

"I've been asleep," he murmured. "I wonder if my guests have come? I'm beginning to feel hungry, too. I wonder what the time is?"

He rose from the bench, yawned again and stretched himself, and rolled away. He blinked up at the clock tower, but he could not see the time, even with the aid of his spectacles. He called to one of the juniors passing in the Close.

"I say, Russell——"

"Hallo!" replied Bulstrode, stopping.

"Oh, is it you, Bulstrode?" said Bunter, blinking at him.

"What's the time?"

"Quarter-past four."

The Owl of the Remove jumped.

"What!" he roared.

Bulstrode consulted his watch.

"Well, to be exact, sixteen minutes past four," he replied.

"Are you expecting another letter?"

"Yes, but it isn't that——"

"There's one for you in the rack."

"My word, is there? I'm expecting a postal-order from my rich aunt."

"Oh, an aunt is it, this time?" asked Bulstrode, grinning.

"Yes, but—— Hang it all, I've no time to waste talking. My birthday feed's at four, and I'm late. Oh, dear!"

And Bunter cut off. He looked round and up and down for Harry Wharton & Co., but he could not see them. He toddled round to the wood-shed, but there was certainly no feast on there. Save for Trotter, the page, chopping wood, the shed was empty. Bunter rolled back to the house, and as he went in he stopped to take his letter from the rack. Several fellows wanted to know what was in it.

"Oh, only another postal-order," said Bunter, opening the letter.

"For a hundred pounds this time, I suppose?" suggested Ogilvy.

"Oh, really, you know! It's only a bob, but bobs mount up. This is the fifth."

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 133.

NEXT
WEEK:

"ALONZO. THE TERRIBLE."

"But you can't cash 'em!" grinned Bulstrode.

Bunter blinked at him.

"Can't I, though!" he retorted. "That's all you know!" He blinked at the postal order. "H'm! This is made payable to me at Stapleton. Where's Stapleton?"

"Five mile walk," grinned Skinner.

"H'm! I suppose one could go by rail?"

"Eighteen-pence return."

"H'm! I shall have to get Smith to cash it, then."

Bulstrode laughed.

"Yes, I can see Smith taking your worthless bits of paper—I don't think!" he remarked.

"That's where you're mistaken!" said Bunter. "It's a bit careless of my rich aunt to make this postal-order payable in Stapleton; but I can manage it through Smith. He's cashed my other orders."

Bulstrode gave a sort of jump.

"What!" he exclaimed.

"I don't see anything to be surprised at in that, Bulstrode. The postal-orders were worth good money, as soon as they could be cashed."

"But—but——"

"So Smith cashed them, and he'll cash this—— Here he is! Smithy, old man, will you cash another postal-order for me?"

"I've been looking for you, Bunter!" exclaimed Smith, as he came up, a little out of temper. "It's long past four o'clock."

"That's all right! Will you cash——"

"What about the feed?"

"That's all right, I tell you! Will you cash this postal-order? My aunt's made it payable to me at the post-office in Stapleton, so——"

"Oh, give it to me!" said Vernon-Smith impatiently, taking out a shilling.

Bulstrode uttered an angry exclamation.

"You utter ass, Smith!" he exclaimed. "Have you been cashing Bunter's postal-orders for him?"

"Yes. Why not?" said the Bounder.

"You ass!" roared Bulstrode. "You've been spoiling a good jape, that's all!"

"What do you mean?"

"I was planting those postal-orders on Bunter for a jape, you chump! Now you've mucked it all up!"

"Oh, really, Bulstrode, they came from my rich uncles and——"

"You fat chump! They came from Friardale post-office, and I bought them all last evening, and addressed them to you!" retorted Bulstrode. "Mr. Coots promised to post them to catch different posts for me."

"Oh!"

"And to hear the young ass roll out lies about his uncles and aunts!" exclaimed Ogilvy. "And he knew which uncle and which aunt by the handwriting, too!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bunter's face was a study.

Vernon-Smith smiled as he tossed over the shilling to the fat junior.

"Well, it may have been funny, but it seems to me that Bunter scores—he's had the money!" he exclaimed. "Come on, Bunt!"

"Remember me to your rich uncle," said Ogilvy, as the fat junior walked away with Vernon-Smith.

"And me to the major, begorra!" exclaimed Micky Desmond.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bunter's fat face was crimson. He did not speak till he was out in the Close with his companion. Then he stole a glance sideways at the Bounder.

"Of course, that's all rot!" he remarked.

The Bounder nodded carelessly.

"What about the feed?" he asked.

"Bulstrode was only rotting. Of course, I know the handwriting of my own uncles and aunts, Smithy."

"Blow your uncles and aunts!" said Smith. "What about the feed? Did you lay in the grub with the sovereign I gave you?"

"Ye-e-es, I did."

"Where is it, then?"

"It's in a-a safe place," said Bunter, hesitatingly. "But the feed is—is a different matter. Wharton's getting that up. I—I've really given him a free hand in the matter."

"Well, where is it? You said four o'clock, and it's getting near half-past now."

"I'm not quite sure——"

"Wasn't it to be in the wood-shed?"

"Ye-e-es. But—but we changed the plan afterwards," said Bunter. "We—we decided to have it somewhere else instead. You—you see, the wood-shed is—is rather draughty, and—and besides, Chopper is trotting wood there—I—I mean,

A Splendid Tale of Harry Wharton & Co.
By FRANK RICHARDS.

Trotter is chopping wood there, and—and it wouldn't be fair to interrupt him."

Vernon-Smith stared blankly at Bunter.

"What are you talking about?" he demanded.

"I—I—you see—"

"I don't see! Is the feed put off?" demanded the Bounder angrily.

"Well, not exactly put off," said Bunter, cautiously.

"You—you wouldn't say exactly put off, you know."

Vernon-Smith stopped and stared directly at Bunter. The fat junior showed a decided disinclination to meet his eyes.

"Look here," said the Bounder, "what do you mean? If the feed's put off, say so in plain English, and hand back that sovereign. You can have it again when the feed's coming off. I'm not particular as to the date, so long as it does come off, and I'm there to meet your other guests."

Bunter wriggled.

"If you're going to make a fuss about a sovereign, Smith—"

"Well, where is it?"

"I—I've put it in a safe place, Smithy. I—I couldn't very well carry it about with me, you know, under—the circumstances," said Bunter. "It wouldn't have been—been possible. You see, Mrs. Mimble—"

"What has Mrs. Mimble to do with it?"

"Nothing," said Bunter promptly.

"But you said—"

"Well, you see, I just—just said—ahem—well, in fact, you know, I—I think the feed's coming off in the study. I've lost sight of Wharton for the moment, you see, and I'm rather out of touch with the arrangements," said Bunter desperately.

"The feed's not coming off in the study!" said Vernon-Smith grimly. "I looked into the study for you just now, and there was nobody there."

"Oh, no, of course there—there wouldn't be!" said Bunter.

"I was referring to Bob Cherry's study—No. 13—you know."

"There's no one there, either."

"No, I—I suppose not— Hallo, here's Todd!" exclaimed Bunter, in relief. "Let's ask him if he's seen Wharton. Todd! I say, Todd!"

The Duffer of Greyfriars stopped obligingly.

"Yes, Bunter?" he said, with his cheerful nod. "Yes? What can I do for you? I have just been trying to mend Hazeldene's bicycle, but the result seems to be hardly satisfactory. You see, I know very little about bicycles, and even good intentions, I am afraid, do not wholly make up for lack of knowledge in matters of delicate mechanism. But I will have another try presently."

"Have you seen Wharton?"

"Yes, certainly."

"Where did you see him?"

"In the gym."

"In the gym!" repeated Billy Bunter, in surprise. "You don't mean to say that they're giving the feed in the gym?"

"Oh, no! I think not. It's some time since I saw him, you see," explained Todd. "About an hour, I think."

"You ass!" growled Bunter.

"Really, Bunter—"

"I want to know where Wharton is now," cried Bunter.

"Oh, I see! You didn't say so, you know. I am sorry I can't give you any information on that point," said Todd regretfully.

Bunter snorted and walked on with the Bounder. The latter was growing very impatient. It looked as if Bunter was not going to be present at his own birthday feed, and if he was not present, his particular friend could not be present, either. And Vernon-Smith had a shrewd suspicion that in any case, he would never see his sovereign again.

THE SIXTEENTH CHAPTER.

Bunter's Quest.

VERNON-SMITH was growing more and more impatient. That the guests of the tea-party had arrived, he knew, and he felt that the party was probably in progress at that very moment, if only he knew where to find the feast. Bunter was equally anxious. He had woken up from his nap hungry—in spite of the enormous feed that had preceded it—and he was keen on that birthday feed. Besides, it was his own birthday, and it really would have been decidedly rotten to be left out of his own birthday celebrations. But where were Harry Wharton & Co?

"Let's go and inquire at the tuckshop," Bunter suggested. "They must have got the things from Mrs. Mimble for the feed."

Vernon-Smith grunted assent.

They reached the school shop, and inquired of Mrs. Mimble. The good dame gave them information readily about the purchases made by Harry Wharton & Co.

"So they've had the things here?" said Bunter.

"Yee, certainly—a good deal."

"How much?"

"Thirty shillings' worth altogether."

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 133.

NEXT WEEK: "ALONZO, THE TERRIBLE."

EVERY
TUESDAY,

The "Magnet"
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ONE
PENNY.

Bunter's eyes gleamed behind his spectacles.

"Thirty bob! Hear that, Smithy? That shows that the feed isn't put off, doesn't it?"

Vernon-Smith sniffed.

"It doesn't show that we're going to it," he said.

"Oh, that's all right! It's my birthday feed, you know. I say, Mrs. Mimble, did they have pork pies?"

"No," said Mimble. "There was ham, and cold beef, and hard-boiled eggs, and cake—"

"Good!"

"And pineapple, and doughnuts, and mixed biscuits—"

"Oh!"

"Fresh butter and rolls, and—"

"Oh, dear! Do you know where they are gone?"

Mrs. Mimble shook her head.

"You see," exclaimed Bunter, "it's my birthday feed, you know, and by some oversight they haven't told me just where it's to be held. Of course, it's an absurd thing for them to overlook a thing like that—very careless, indeed, of Wharton! Smith's going, too. I suppose you can't tell me where they are? You didn't hear them say anything about it?"

Mrs. Mimble smiled. She had a shrewd suspicion that Bunter was not wanted at the feed. She shook her head again.

"No, Master Bunter, they didn't say anything about it here."

The two juniors left the tuckshop. Vernon-Smith looked grimly at the Owl of the Remove.

"Well?" he said.

"Well," said Bunter, "we'll find them, I suppose. The worst of it is that they may have started the feed already, and all the time we're looking for them the grub may be going."

And at that dreadful thought, Bunter almost wept.

"Well, somebody must have seen them!" said the Bounder savagely. "Let's inquire of every confounded fellow we meet."

"Here's Dutton."

The deaf junior was coming by with a book under his arm. He stopped as Vernon-Smith signed to him.

"Hallo, what is it?" he asked.

"Have you seen Wharton?"

"Eh?"

"Have you seen Harry Wharton?"

"No," said Dutton, looking surprised. "It's a jolly long way, and I've nothing to go there for, that I know!"

"What do you mean?" roared the Bounder.

"No, I haven't been!"

"Been!"

"Yes. Didn't you ask me if I'd been to Courtfield?" asked Dutton, innocently.

The Bounder growled.

"Oh, let's get on," he said. "We sha'n't get anything out of him."

They walked on, leaving Dutton looking very much surprised. He didn't know why Bunter and Vernon-Smith should want to know whether he had been to Courtfield.

Two or three juniors were inquired of, but they knew nothing of the movements of Harry Wharton & Co. Micky Desmond, however, was able to give information at last.

"Faith, and I know where they are, if they haven't come in," he said.

"Come in?" repeated Bunter. "Have they gone out, then?"

"Faith, and they have!"

"But—but there was a feed this afternoon, and—and it's more than time—"

"Sure, I heard Wharton tell D'Arcy he would show him some of the scenery along the river towards Friardale," said the Irish junior. "They went out some time ago, and the girls with them."

Bunter snorted.

"Then they haven't had the feed yet?"

"Sure, I don't know!"

"Let's go and look along the river," said Bunter.

The Bounder shook his head. He was conscious of the absurdity of this hunt for fellows who did not want him to feed with them, and he did not want to appear ridiculous in the eyes of Marjorie Hazeldene. Bunter was quite impervious to such feelings.

"I won't go," said the Bounder sullenly. "You can come and tell me when the feed's on, Bunter."

"Oh, all right!"

The Bounder strode away with a scowling brow. Billy Bunter lost no time in getting down to the Sark.

There was no sign of the juniors there; but Bunter hurried down the towing-path towards the village.

At last, half-way to Friardale, he caught sight of a group

of figures on the bank. As he came nearer the fat junior recognised them.

They were Harry Wharton & Co., with Marjorie and Clara, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of St. Jim's. He had found them at last.

The party commenced to walk on again as Bunter recognised them. Perhaps some of them had seen him.

Bunter paused, panting for breath, and shouted.

"I say, you fellows—"

No one turned a head. But they quickened their pace, and went down the towing-path at a rapid walk.

"Hallo, Wharton!"

No reply.

"I say, you fellows—"

Still there was no sign of the juniors having heard. Bunter broke into a run. He rolled and panted on after the juniors.

"I say, Wharton," he exclaimed, when he was only six feet behind the captain of the Remove, "I say, stop, you know!"

Wharton did not look round.

Bunter put on a spurt, and overtook him, and caught him by the sleeve. Wharton shook off his grasp as if it had been an insect.

"Wharton! I say, Wharton! Are you deaf?"

No reply; and the party walked on.

Bunter ran on desperately, and seized Wharton's arm with both his hands. Wharton shook it, but Bunter was not to be shaken off this time.

"Hold on, Wharton," he exclaimed, "I want to speak to you!"

Wharton looked round at last.

"Hallo, Bunter!" he exclaimed. "Is that you?"

"Yes," said Billy Bunter indignantly. "You jolly well know it is! What do you mean trying to dodge me in this way?"

"Eh?"

"What do you mean, trying to dodge me in this way?" howled the Owl of the Remove.

"What?"

"What do you mean— Look here, you jolly well heard what I said!" gasped Bunter. "I've been getting quite anxious about the feed!"

"What feed?"

"What feed? The birthday feed, of course, you ass!"

"Oh, I see."

Bunter took off his cap to the girls.

"How do you do, Miss Marjorie and Miss Clara?" he said. "So glad you were able to come to my birthday feed."

The girls smiled.

"Bai Jove, it's Buntah!" said D'Arcy, shaking hands with the fat junior.

"How do you do, D'Arcy. I say, didn't you really know I was running after you?" demanded the Owl of the Remove, blinking at Arthur Augustus.

The swell of St. Jim's looked embarrassed.

"Well, you see—" he began.

As a matter of fact, the whole party had taken their cue from Wharton. Harry came to the rescue.

"Have you been looking for us Bunter?"

"Looking for you!" exclaimed Bunter indignantly. "Yes, I should say I have. I've been looking for you for—for hours, I think. When is the feed coming off?"

"Oh, half-past five!"

"And where?"

"Under the trees near the old tower."

"Well, that's all right," said Bunter. "Where are you going now?"

"Strolling along the river to show D'Arcy the scenery. We shall go back through the village."

"It's a jolly long walk!"

"Yes, that's what we're out for!"

"Wouldn't it be better to cut straight back to Greyfriars?" suggested Bunter. "You see, we could have the feed at once, then."

"Go hon!"

"D'Arcy is hungry, and—"

"Not at all, deah boy," said the St. Jim's junior. "I have already explained to Wharton that I had a sandwich in the twain."

"H'm! Marjorie and Clara are hungry, and—"

"Not at all," said Marjorie.

"Not in the least!" said Clara.

"Well, look here, I'm hungry," said Bunter, coming out into the open at last. "I think it would be a jolly good idea to get back to Greyfriars at once."

"So it would," exclaimed Nugent heartily. "There's a short cut through the wood from here, too. Buzz off, Bunter!"

"Oh, really, Nugent—"

"Don't lose any time. You can get back to the school."

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 133.

NEXT
WEEK:

"ALONZO, THE TERRIBLE."

in a quarter of an hour through the wood if you put it on," said Nugent.

"But—"

"Buzz off!"

"Not unless you fellows come, too!"

"Oh, we're not coming!"

"Look here—"

"Let's get on," said Harry Wharton.

"Yass, wathah," assented D'Arcy. "I wegard this wivah scenewy as weally wippin', you know. Let's get on, deah boys!"

And they got on.

THE SEVENTEENTH CHAPTER.

A Little Stroll.

HARRY WHARTON & Co. were very good walkers, and so were the girls, and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had won walking matches at St. Jim's. The stroll down the river, and home through the village, was nothing to them. But to Billy Bunter it was an affliction and a sorrow. It was the fat junior's own fault, certainly, for attaching himself to a party that obviously did not want him. Bunter never cared for considerations of that sort; but he cared if he had to exert himself, and he certainly had to make exertions now. Bob Cherry proposed leaving the river and making a cut through the wood, perhaps with a mischievous knowledge that the way was rugged and broken. Billy Bunter panted over the rough ground with many a grunt.

"I—I say, you fellows," he said at last, as they came into a glade rich with long grass. "Wouldn't it be a good idea to have a rest?"

"Certainly," said Nugent. "Sit down!"

"But you—"

"We'll keep on."

"I'm tired!"

"Poor old Bunter. Stop here an hour or two; you'll have plenty of time to get in before calling over."

Bunter glared at him.

"I'll keep on," he said.

They came into the village at last. As they passed Uncle Clegg's tuckshop, Billy Bunter tapped D'Arcy on the arm.

"Feeling pretty dry?" he asked. "Come in and have some ginger-beer?"

"Bai Jove! I don't mind if I do," said D'Arcy.

Bunter gave Wharton a triumphant look. There was no stopping the ginger-beer now. But Wharton did not want to stop it; he had been about to propose liquid refreshments himself.

They entered the tuckshop and were soon discussing the ginger-beer. Billy Bunter cast a longing eye upon the comestibles.

"Would you like some tarts, Marjorie?" he asked.

Marjorie shook her head.

"No thank you!"

"Miss Clara—"

"Oh, no, thanks!"

"You'd like to try the dough-nuts, D'Arcy, wouldn't you?" said Billy Bunter, persuasively. "I can recommend Uncle Clegg's dough-nuts; they're really good."

"Thank you vevy much, deah boy, but I won't have anythin' now."

"The jam-tarts are fresh to-day—"

"Weally?"

"And the chocolate-cakes are really ripping," urged Bunter.

"None for me, thanks!"

"Well, I think I'll have some," said Bunter, taking a chocolate-cake off the glass-stand, and forthwith jamming it into his mouth.

Uncle Clegg gave a sort of yelp. He knew Bunter, as well as Mrs. Mimble at Greyfriars knew him.

"Master Bunter, that's twopence!"

"That's all right," said Bunter, with his mouth full. "You can put it down to the account, Mr. Clegg."

Mr. Clegg rapped on the counter with a ham-knife emphatically.

"I don't run any account with you, Master Bunter. You owe me ten shillings from last term, and you never pay your debts."

"Oh, really, Uncle Clegg—"

"Twopence, please."

"Pay him, Wharton, will you?" said Bunter, with dignity. "I'll settle with you when we get back to Greyfriars. I've left my money in the study."

Wharton paid the twopence. Bunter was already helping himself to doughnuts, and Harry paid for them, too. Then the party left the shop, and Bunter had to follow, for Uncle Clegg would not have trusted him with a hazel-nut after Wharton was gone.

The fat junior dragged behind all the way to Greyfriars.

A Splendid Tale of Harry Wharton & Co.
By FRANK RICHARDS

He was gasping when they reached the school. He was tired and perspiring, but not nearly so tired as he affected to be. Bunter was what Bob Cherry called a pathos merchant—he was always looking out for sympathy, and seldom getting any.

He staggered in the gateway of Greyfriars, and caught at Bob Cherry for support.

Bob stared at him as Bunter leaned heavily on his shoulder.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" he exclaimed. "What are you up to?"

"I'm exhausted!" said Bunter feebly. "I've not been very well for some time, and I—I feel very bad now!"

"Poor old chap!" said Bob. "Lean on my arm."

"Thank you!"

Bunter leaned on Bob's arm. Bob withdrew it suddenly, and the fat junior, unable to save himself in time, fell upon the ground in a heap.

Bob Cherry stared at him.

"What are you doing that for, Bunter?" he demanded.

"Ow!"

"Is that a new trick of Bunter's?" asked Bob Cherry, looking round innocently. "I don't see anything in it, myself."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yow!"

Bunter scrambled up and followed the juniors in. He did not attempt to gain the support of any other arm, apparently being quite able to walk alone now. The girls went into Mrs. Locke's House, and D'Arcy into the School House with Harry Wharton & Co. Billy Bunter blinked at his watch.

"It's a quarter-past five," he said.

"I was quite aware of that," Harry Wharton replied, carelessly.

"What about the feed?"

"That's at half-past."

"Then hadn't we better be getting ready?"

"Everything's ready."

"What about making the tea?"

"We've got a spirit-stove."

"Good! There will be some cooking——"

"No, there won't! Your services won't be required."

"Now, look here, Wharton——"

"Rats!"

"Is that you, Wharton?" asked Alonzo Todd, coming along. "Good! I hope there is something I can do to help with the feed, as you've been so kind as to invite me."

"Blessed if you're not taking a lot on yourself, Wharton!" grunted Billy Bunter, discontentedly.

Wharton stared at him.

"What do you mean, Bunter?"

"Inviting people to my birthday party. Of course, I don't mind if Todd comes; but I really think the invitations ought to be left to me."

Wharton compressed his lips.

"Look here, Bunter——"

"You're taking too much on yourself. You fellows are doing nothing but standing the grub, and——"

"Well, that's a considerable part in getting up a feed," Todd remarked. "I must observe that that is really a considerable part, Bunter."

"Oh, really, Todd——"

"I hope there is something I can do," added Todd, earnestly. "I think I have told you before, Wharton, that I have a great desire to make myself useful. My Uncle Benjamin always impressed that upon me."

"Yes, I think you have," agreed Wharton, with a grin. "But there's really nothing you can do, Todd, old man. Come along at half-past five, and you'll find it all ready."

"Very good. Thank you so much. But at the same time, do let me carry out the crockery, or something," urged Alonzo.

Wharton gave Bob Cherry a comical look of distress. He would as soon have trusted the crockery to a wild bull as to Alonzo Todd.

Bob winked at the captain of the Remove.

He stepped into his study, and then suddenly came out and rushed down the passage, with a face expressive of the greatest alarm.

"Todd! Todd!"

"Oh, dear! What is it?" exclaimed Todd.

"There's a fire in my study!"

"My goodness!"

"Rush for help at once—quick—there's a fire there!"

"Certainly!" gasped Todd.

And he dashed off at top speed, yelling the alarm. The juniors stared blankly at Bob Cherry.

"What on earth do you mean, Bob?" demanded Nugent.

"There's no fire in your study!"

"There is!"

"A fire!" exclaimed Harry.

"Yes—in the grate."

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 133.

NEXT WEEK: "ALONZO, THE TERRIBLE."

EVERY
TUESDAY.

The "Magnet"
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ONE
PENNY.

"You—you ass! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Let's get out," said Bob, with a grin. "Toddy will be busy for some time now."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And the juniors loaded themselves with the baskets of provisions and other necessities, and hurriedly departed for the scene of the picnic.

THE EIGHTEENTH CHAPTER.

Todd Loses No Time.

"FIRE!"

Alonzo Todd dashed into the junior common-room with the wild alarm.

"Fire! Help! Fire! Where's the hose? Quick!"

The common-room was crowded with fellows fresh in from the playing-fields. They crowded round Todd at once. A whole wing of Greyfriars had once been destroyed by fire, and the matter was still fresh in the memory of the juniors. Naturally, they were alarmed at once. What had happened once might happen again.

"Fire!" exclaimed Bulstrode. "Where?"

"Where is it, Toddy?"

"Where's the fire, you ass?"

Todd gasped for breath.

"In Bob Cherry's study—the end study! Help!"

"My hat!" exclaimed Ogilvy. "We shall have the Remove passage burned down again, as it was before, through that careless ass Cherry."

"Let's get some water."

"Back up!"

"Call the prefects!"

"Somebody tell Quelch!"

The juniors tore out of the common-room in various directions. Some rushed off to find Mr. Quelch, others to alarm the prefects, still more to get the fire-buckets that were kept in a row at the end of every passage in Greyfriars.

Todd was excited, and quite in his element. There was no denying that he was making himself useful now.

His Uncle Benjamin, who appeared to be so careful of his nephew in the matter of instilling profound precepts into his mind, would certainly have been proud of Alonzo Todd if he could have seen him now.

Todd certainly did not let the grass grow under his feet.

Mr. Quelch had just come in from the garden, and he had a book and a packet of manuscripts under his arm, as Todd met him close by the door of his study. Todd grasped him by the arm in his excitement.

"Mr. Quelch—quick——"

"Bless my soul! What is the matter?" exclaimed the Remove-master.

"Fire!"

"What?"

"Fire—in the Remove passage—Bob Cherry's study!"

"Good heavens!"

Book and papers dropped to the floor, and the Form-master dashed off. He remembered only too clearly the last fire at Greyfriars. He joined the crowd of juniors and seniors who were swarming up the staircase. Todd looked round for a fire-bucket, but could not remember where they were kept. But he was not to be baffled by that. He dashed into the nearest study in search of something that would serve. It was Mr. Quelch's study, and as it happened, Mr. Quelch's hat-box was on the table. To throw the silk hat out of it, to dash out of the study with the hat-box, and fill it with water at the tap at the end of the passage, occupied Todd only seconds. Then he tore upstairs.

The crowd had reached the end study already. There was no smoke, no flames, and they ventured right up to the door, and opened it, and looked in.

Then there was a howl.

"There's no fire!"

"Faith, and there's a fire in the grate," said Micky Desmond. "Perhaps that's what the silly gossoon means."

"It's a jape!" roared three or four fellows.

"Todd's been fooling us!"

"Make way, there!" exclaimed Mr. Quelch.

"Stand back, you fellows!"

"It's all right, sir. There's no fire."

"What?"

"It's all serene, sir."

Mr. Quelch looked into the study. Save for the dying embers in the grate, there was certainly no fire. The Form-master's brow grew as black as thunder.

"What does this mean?" he exclaimed.

The fellows were silent. No one knew what it meant, unless it was a jape of Alonzo Todd's. Bob Cherry could have explained, but Bob was far away. He had certainly not imagined for a moment that his little joke on Alonzo

would pan out like this. But it was never quite safe to jape the Duffer of Greyfriars—there was no telling what it would lead to.

"Who first gave the alarm of fire?" demanded the Remove-master.

There was silence.

No one wanted to give Todd away. But at that moment the Duffer of Greyfriars came panting along the passage, with the hat-box brimming with water. It was a very good and handsome leather hat-box, made to hold two silk hats, and it held a great quantity of water without leakage. It was, really, a very useful thing for the purpose Todd had put it to.

"Let me pass!" gasped Todd. "I've got some water!"

"It's all right, Toddy——"

"There's no fire!"

"What! I——"

"Todd, did you give the alarm of fire?"

"Certainly, sir. I—I understood that Bob Cherry's study was on fire," said Todd, blinking into the study in amazement, and holding the dripping hat-box in his hands.

"Dear me! There appears to have been some mistake!"

"Boy, is this a joke?"

"Joke, sir?"

"Did you give the alarm of fire with the intention of causing a great furore for nothing?" thundered Mr. Quelch.

"N-nothing, sir?"

"Answer me at once!"

"Answer you, sir?" stammered Todd.

"What is it you have there?" exclaimed the Form-master angrily.

"Water, sir, for—for the fire."

"Water! Is that a hat-box?"

"Yes, sir."

"You stupid boy! You must have ruined it!"

"I—I thought it was best to waste no time, sir," stammered Alonzo. "In a case of fire it's best to get water on the scene at once, at any damage to private property. It's cheaper than letting the fire get out of hand, sir."

"I think you are the most stupid boy in Greyfriars!" exclaimed Mr. Quelch. "Is that hat-box your own property?"

"Oh, no, sir!"

"Then whose is it?"

"I don't know."

"You don't know! Where did you get it from?"

"It was on the table in your study, sir."

Mr. Quelch seemed petrified for a moment.

"In my study!" he gasped.

"Yes, sir!"

"Then—then—then it is my hat-box!" shouted Mr. Quelch.

"Yes, sir, as it was in your study, it is very probable," said Alonzo. "Of course, it is not certain. Somebody else's hat-box might have been put into your study by mistake. But upon the whole, the probability is that it is your hat-box."

"Boy——"

"I'm so sorry, sir, that it's wetted, but in case of fire——"

"Todd!"

"In case of fire, sir, my Uncle Benjamin has always told me to lose no time, and——"

"Follow me to my study," said Mr. Quelch, in a choking voice. "This is too much. Throw that water away, and come to my study at once."

"Ye-o-es, sir!"

Mr. Quelch stalked off with a black brow, and the Duffer of Greyfriars unwillingly followed. He seldom received thanks for his incessant efforts to oblige people, but in this case Mr. Quelch seemed likely to be worse than thankless.

The fellows in the passage drew deep breaths as he went.

"Poor old Todd!" said Ogilvy. "He'll catch it this time."

"What-ho!" said Elliott.

"Well, I think this was about the limit," grinned Skinner.

"I really think Toddy has surpassed himself this time."

"Quelch's hat-box, too!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But Toddy will catch it."

And the juniors were right.

THE NINETEENTH CHAPTER.

Bunter's Birthday.

"TEA!" said Bob Cherry. "Spirit stove. Kettle of water, and extra jug of same. Sugar, milk, and a tin of condensed milk to fall back on. That's my little lot!"

And he set down his burdens on the spot chosen for the picnic.

"The curiousfulness is terrific," said the Nabob of Bhanipur.

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 133.

NEXT
WEEK:

"ALONZO THE TERRIBLE."

"Eh? What's curious, Inky?"

"I do not understandfully catch on," explained the nabob. "Why should my worthy chum fall back upon the tin of esteemed milk? Is it not likely to burst the tin, and perhaps to hurt my dear chum's honourable and elegant back?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The laughfulness is terrific, but perhaps it is because I do not wholly understand the beautiful English tongue."

"To be used in case of necessity," said Bob Cherry, holding up the tin of condensed milk. "See?"

"The see-fulness is terrific," agreed the nabob gracefully. "The English as spoken in this country is not samefully similar to that I learned of the best native instructor in Bhanipur. I think perhaps it is old-fashioned here."

"Very likely," grinned Bob Cherry. "You've certainly got a variety that's new to us. The best native instructor in the State of Bhanipur must have been a giddy genius."

"Yaas, wathah!" assented Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "By the way, where is Bunter?"

"Bunter?"

"Yaas; I haven't seen him."

"Oh, Nugent's looking after him," said Harry Wharton. "We've got camp stools here, if you fellows like them, and two cane garden chairs for the ladies, and cushions galore."

"Jollay good!"

Harry Wharton looked back in the direction of the school. The old tower blocked up the view, with the green trees round and near it. He wondered how Nugent was getting on with Bunter.

He need not have been anxious. Frank Nugent was quite equal to the task that had been assigned to him. Billy Bunter was following the chums of the Remove to the scene of the picnic when Nugent slipped his arm into his.

"This way, Bunter."

Bunter blinked at him.

"Eh? What for?"

"This way, my son!"

"But——"

"Here you are!"

They had fallen behind the others, and the trees hid them from view. Nugent calmly walked the fat junior off in the direction of the tower. Bunter stared at him in amazement, but with a strong grip on his arm, he was unable to help himself.

"I—I say, Nugent!" he exclaimed, as they entered the tower. "What—what's the little game, you know?"

"Come on!"

"But—but I say——"

"This way!"

They went upstairs to the first floor. Bunter hung back, and sat on the steps. Nugent took a needle from his cuff. He had come provided for emergencies.

"This way, Bunter!" he said.

"I'm not coming. I—— Ow!"

Bunter yelled before the needle touched him. Nugent gave him the slightest prick with it, and Bunter wriggled and yelled.

"Come on, chappie!"

"I—I won't! I—I mean, I will! All right!"

"Buck up, then!"

Bunter rolled into the room that had been prepared for him. He stared about it, and stared at Nugent.

There was a chair in the room, a roll of bread and a jug of water. The room was quite bare of anything else.

"I—I don't understand this," said Bunter.

Nugent pointed to the window.

"Look!" he said.

Bunter went to the window, and blinked out into the Close. In the distance he could see the trees surrounding the spot selected for the picnic, and through an opening in the foliage, he saw the place itself, with a white cloth spread on the grass, and the juniors and the girls round it.

He turned back to Nugent.

"Well, what do you mean?" he asked.

"That's all the feed you're going to have," said Frank, pointing to the bread and water. "Savvy?"

"Oh, really, Nugent——"

"You've acted like a worm," went on Nugent, holding up his finger magisterially. "You've got us into standing a feed this afternoon without our having intended anything of the sort. You thought you could blackmail us—that's the word—into feeding you, because we shouldn't want to look inhospitable to outside people. You thought you had us."

"Oh, really——"

"Well, we're standing the feed, and we're going to stand it for ourselves, not for you," said Nugent. "You won't have a bite!"

"I——"

"You can celebrate your birthday—if it really is your birthday—here, on bread and water," said Nugent. "Good-bye!"

A Splendid Tale of Harry Wharton & Co.
By FRANK RICHARDS.

"I won't stay here!" yelled Billy Bunter. "You rotter!"

"Stand back!"

"I—I won't! I—"

Nugent laughed, and pushed the fat junior back as he ran to the door. Billy Bunter sat on the floor.

"Ow!" he gasped.

"Good-bye!"

"Oh, really, Nugent! Don't be a beast, you know. I—"

Oh!"

Slam!

The door closed, and Nugent turned the key on the outside. He removed the key, in case anyone should chance to enter the tower; he did not mean to leave Bunter a loophole of escape. With the key in his pocket he left the old tower.

Bunter hammered on the door of the room.

"Nugent! I say, Nugent!"

Only the echo of his own voice answered him.

"Nugent! Come back! I—I say, you know, I'm sorry—sincerely sorry! I won't do it again! Do come and open the door! Help! Fire!"

The echoes answered.

Nugent was evidently gone. Bunter wrenched at the door without being able to open it. The lock was too strong for any efforts the fat junior could possibly make. Bunter gave that up, and went to the window.

Beyond the sunny Close, through the green trees, he saw the shady scene of the picnic, and there he saw bright and merry faces.

The feed was beginning.

Bunter yelled and shouted, in the hope of making his voice heard. But the distance was too great, especially as glass covered the narrow window, and could not be opened. The bars set in the stonework prevented Bunter from reaching the dusty, cobwebby glass outside them.

He saw Nugent cross at a lazy stroll towards the picnickers.

Bunter was red with rage.

He had hoped against hope that it was a joke, that the chums of the Remove did not mean to inflict this well-deserved punishment upon him; but he realised now that the juniors were in deadly earnest.

As he watched the picnic through the barred window, it was borne in upon him that there was no hope!

At the sight of eating and drinking, Bunter felt a wolfish hunger rise within him. He turned to the roll of bread.

He had eaten enough that day for any two fellows; but he was quite ready to begin again. He stood at the window, blinking at the picnic, and munching the roll.

That was Billy Bunter's birthday feed!

THE TWENTIETH CHAPTER.

Todd Makes the Tea.

ALONZO TODD came slowly down towards the picnickers. There was a somewhat strained and pained expression upon his face, and at intervals he rubbed his hands together in a curious way. Bob Cherry looked at him with a grin.

"Did you put the fire out?" he asked.

Todd blinked at him.

"You were mistaken, Cherry. There was no fire in the study."

"Rats! I left one there."

"Only a little bit of a fire in the grate," explained Todd.

"Well, that's what I meant."

"What you meant?" stammered Todd.

"Exactly."

"Really, Cherry—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I—I did not understand it," said Todd, blinking. "You see, I thought you meant that there was a fire. I did not know you were joking. I raised an alarm to have the fire put out. I have heard about a fire at Greyfriars before destroying the whole Remove passage, and I did my best."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I say, you haven't been licked, have you?" asked Harry Wharton, observing the curious way Todd kept rubbing his palms.

The Duffer of Greyfriars nodded.

"Well, yes, Mr. Quelch was angry."

"You didn't call Quelchy, did you?" roared Bob Cherry.

"Certainly. And I filled his hat-box with water to quench the flames."

"Quelch's hat-box?"

"Yes. It seemed to annoy him."

"Go hon! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, of course, there was no time to lose; my Uncle Benjamin has always impressed upon me to lose no time in case of fire," said Todd. "I felt that I was doing my best, and making myself useful. I expected some little acknowledgment; but Mr. Quelch appeared to take a different view."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 133.

NEXT
WEEK:

"ALONZO, THE TERRIBLE."

EVERY
TUESDAY,

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ONE
PENNY.

"It appears to strike you in a comical sense," said Todd. "I do not see the comic element in the matter myself. I am feeling considerable pain in the palms of my hands, and a sense of general discomfort."

"I'm sorry!" said Bob. "I'm—ha, ha, ha!—awfully sorry! I never imagined you would be quite such an ass! Ha, ha! I'm really sorry you've been licked!"

"It was too bad," said Marjorie softly. "It is wrong of you to play jokes of that sort on Todd, Bob!"

Bob looked very repentant.

"Of course it is, Miss Marjorie, if you say so," he assented. "I didn't know Todd was getting into a row, or I'd have been off like a shot to explain to Quelch. I'm really sorry, Toddy, old son!"

"It is all right," said Alonzo. "The expression of sincere regret is a complete indemnification for any injury inflicted, so my Uncle Benjamin has always told me. Unfortunately, it does not remove the pain caused by the caning I have received; but doubtless that will pass in time. Meanwhile, I will endure it with as much equanimity as I can muster for the occasion."

"My hat! I knew that chap fed on lexicons and dictionaries," murmured Nugent, who had just joined them.

"Cheese it!" murmured Bob Cherry. "It's Todd's innings now—he's had a licking through a little joke of mine, and he's entitled to have his head!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"In spite of the pain I am still suffering in my digits, I should be glad to make myself useful in any way possible," said Todd, looking round.

The chums of the Remove groaned in spirit. After what Todd had suffered, it seemed cruel to refuse him, but—

The Remove chums were in the same position as the gentlemen of old, who feared the Greeks when they came with gifts in their hands. They dreaded Alonzo Todd when he wanted to be useful and obliging.

But they felt that, as Bob Cherry put it, they ought to give him his head now, after what he had gone through.

"Certainly!" said Harry Wharton, with a sickly smile.

"Will you make the—the tea?"

Alonzo beamed at once at the prospect of being useful.

"Oh, certainly!" he exclaimed. "With great pleasure, Wharton."

And he set to work. The kettle was already bubbling on the spirit-stove. Todd took the teapot, and dropped it. Fortunately it was a metal one—a metal teapot did not make such nice tea as an earthenware one, but it was safer for a picnic, the juniors thought; and with Todd in the party, it certainly was so.

"Bai Jove, I don't see Buntah!" remarked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. He adjusted his monocle carefully, and looked round, as if he thought that with the assistance of the eyeglass, he might discover the fat junior.

Nugent grinned slightly.

"No, he's not here," he said.

"But he's coming," said D'Arcy.

"I rather think not."

"No. But I understood that it was his birthday party!" exclaimed the swell of St. Jim's in surprise.

"Exactly, and you may be sure he'll come if he can," said Harry Wharton. "He won't fail to turn up unless he's utterly prevented, and in that case, I'm sure you'll excuse him."

D'Arcy nodded unsuspiciously.

"Oh, yaas, wathah!" he exclaimed. "It would be vewy wuff on Buntah not to be able to come to his own birthday feed, but I certainly would excuse him if he were pwevented."

"Good!"

Marjorie Hazeldene gave Wharton a quick glance.

She was not suspicious, but she could not help feeling that there was something a little odd about Bunter's not coming.

But Wharton's face was quite expressionless.

He was cutting ham, and he went on cutting it without moving a muscle, as it were, and Marjorie was half satisfied.

Anyway, there was no ignoring the undoubted fact that the party was better without Bunter. The fact that Bunter was to be in it had made the girls very doubtful about coming. Girls never liked Bunter; if they were distant to him, he would pester them with his unwelcome attentions; if they took pity on him, and were kind, he immediately thought in his vulgar little soul that he had made what he called a "mash." A girl had to be very patient indeed to get on with Bunter, and the reward of her patience was very likely to be that the fat junior would speak of her in a cad-dish way. Which, to use a slang expression, was "not good enough."

"There," said Todd, pouring in the boiling water carefully. "I think you will find the tea a success. I was very careful to warm the pot thoroughly, and to make sure that the water was quite at boiling point."

"I am sure it will be very nice," said Marjorie.

"Ripping!" said Miss Clara.

"Well, let's have some," said Hazeldene. "Pour it out, Todd!"

"Certainly! But perhaps it had better stand a few minutes to gain strength. My Uncle Benjamin thinks that tea should always stand for exactly two minutes, and be timed by the watch."

"Good old Benny!"

"Really, Cherry—"

D'Arcy looked round.

"Fwom what Todd has said of his avunculah wrelative," he remarked, "I have a gweat feelin' of wespect for him, and I must wemark that I wegard him as a vewy estimable old gentleman. I twust Todd has no objection to my makin' the wemark!"

"Certainly not!" said Todd. "My Uncle Benjamin is really a splendid character—he can always give you splendid tips."

"Bai Jove, that's wippin'! My governah gives me pwetty good tips," said D'Arcy. "It's wippin' to have an uncle, too. Does he evah spwing fivahs?"

"Eh?"

"You were sayin' he gave you splendid tips—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Bob Cherry, and then he turned red as D'Arcy's eyeglass was directed upon him.

"It's a mistake!" grinned Nugent. "Todd means tips in the way of moral instruction—such as 'Early to bed, early to rise,' and 'It's the early bird that catches the stone,' and so on."

"Oh, I see!" said D'Arcy. "It was a slight misundah-standin'. Bai Jove, Todd, I should imagine that that tea is weady to pour out by now!"

"Good gracious, I forgot to time it!" said Todd. "Yes, it must be quite done—I mean, quite drawn. Cups this way!"

And Todd commenced to fill Marjorie's cup.

The girl looked at the tea in surprise.

She had remarked that she did not like her tea strong, but she had not expected it to come out the colour of pure water, as it did.

Todd blinked at it.

"Dear me!" he said. "It seems very weak, does it not?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Shake it up," said Harry Wharton.

Alonzo Todd shook up the pot. Then he started on Miss Clara's cup. The tea was just the same colour. He took off the lid of the pot and blinked into it, and uttered an exclamation of surprise.

"Good gracious!"

"What's the matter?"

"Oh, it's all right, only I—I forgot to put the tea in!"

THE TWENTY-FIRST CHAPTER.

Todd Is Useful.

THE Duffer of Greyfriars looked very confused as he made the confession. It was greeted by a roar of laughter. Wharton pushed the tea across to him.

"Shove the kettle on, and try again!" he said encouragingly.

"Oh, certainly! I'm so sorry—"

"Not at all!"

"I'm keeping you waiting—"

"It's all right!"

"But I am really sorry. I will be more careful, and—"

"Go ahead!"

"It's all right," said Bob Cherry. "My dear chap, you've let us off easy. You might have spilt the hot water on us, or poured the tea over Miss Marjorie, or—"

"Shut up, Bob!"

Todd proceeded to remake the tea. He put the tea in this time, and, as if to make sure, spilt most of the packet in the teapot, so it was pretty certain not to err upon the side of being weak.

He was thus engaged when there was a new arrival upon the scene. It was Vernon-Smith. He came up with a clouded brow, and looked round as if in search of Bunter.

The juniors glanced at him grimly.

They did not intend to have the Bounder in the party, and not a word of welcome was said to him. If they wanted more guests, they could have found pleasanter fellows than Vernon-Smith to invite.

The Bounder looked puzzled.

"Have you seen Bunter?" he said, addressing no one in particular.

"He's not here," said Nugent.

"Where is he?"

"Somewhere else, I suppose."

"Is he giving this party?"

"Does it look like it?"

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 133.

NEXT
WEEK!

"ALONZO, THE TERRIBLE."

The Bounder bit his lip.

But there was evidently nothing to be done. He set his lips and walked away, the cloud deepening on his brow. Up and down Greyfriars he went, looking for Bunter, to seek an explanation.

But he did not find the Owl of the Remove.

Bunter was in the last place that Vernon-Smith would have thought of looking for him in, and the Bounder did not once approach the old tower in his quest.

The juniors were all relieved to see him go.

Todd poured out the tea, and it certainly was strong; but by dint of having little tea and much water it was reduced to a satisfactory state.

As for the solid portion of the feed, that was quite satisfactory. The boys and the girls discussed the eatables with bright and cheerful faces. And the viands made a rapid disappearance from the white cloth.

"Bai Jove!" remarked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "It is wathah singular that Buntah does not come, you know."

"I thought he would be pwevented," said Nugent, with a shake of the head. "Poor old Bunter! Nobody will be sorrier about it than he will."

"Yaas, wathah! It is vewy wuff!"

"Ham this way, please," said Bob Cherry. "Let me help you, D'Arcy!"

"Thanks, deah boy, I have finished. I will have anothah tart."

"Jam-tarts, please!"

"Another cup of tea, Miss Marjorie?"

"Thank you!"

"Shove in some more hot water, Toddy!"

"Oh, certainly!"

"And shake the pot!"

Alonzo added the hot water and shook the pot. If Bob Cherry had been a little more thoughtful at the moment, he would have hesitated to give such a direction to the Duffer of Greyfriars.

Todd shook—and shook—and the lid came off the pot, and dropped upon the head of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, and the swell of St. Jim's gave a startled yell.

"Ow!"

Todd swung round in great confusion.

"Oh, dear! D'Arcy—"

"Bai Jove!"

"Did it fall on you?"

"Somethin' fell on me—"

"Look out!" roared Bob Cherry

"Goodness gracious!"

In his anxiety about D'Arcy, Todd had forgotten the teapot in his hand. He was holding it at a slant now, and the tea was pouring from the spout upon the tablecloth, streaming down upon the cake and the tarts.

As Bob yelled his warning, Todd swung round towards him in confusion, and changed the direction of the stream. It poured upon the chest of Hazeldene, who had the misfortune to be sitting next to the Duffer of Greyfriars.

Hazeldene jumped up with a wild yell.

"Stop it! Oh!"

"Oh, dear!"

"You ass! Stop it—oh!"

Todd swung away in wild dismay, and sent a stream of tea over Mark Linley's legs. The tea was hot, and the Lancashire lad gasped as he sprang up.

"Hold on!" he yelled.

"Oh, dear!"

"Drop the teapot, you ass!" shrieked Nugent. "Chuck it down!"

"Oh, certainly!"

In his confusion of mind the Duffer of Greyfriars obeyed literally. He threw the teapot down, and the tea poured out, with the tea-leaves, over the cloth, and there was a splashing of hot drops on every side.

The picnickers retreated hastily. Marjorie and Clara had received a spattering on their pretty frocks, and they were frowning. Marjorie recovered her good humour in a moment, but Clara wore a clouded brow.

"Goodness gracious!" gasped Todd.

"You ass!" roared Bob Cherry.

"You chump!"

"You fathead!"

"I'm so sorry—"

"Rats! Bosh! Sit down!"

"Eh? Sit down?"

"Yes, ass! You're dangerous."

"Dangerous."

"Blessed if he isn't beginning his parrot dodge again!" exclaimed Hazeldene, mopping his chest with his handkerchief, which was soon reduced to a soppy state.

"Parrot dodge," mumbled the Duffer.

"Oh, cheese it, Todd! Back-pedal, old man!"

"Back-pedal!"

A Splendid Tale of Harry Wharton & Co.
By FRANK RICHARDS.

THE TWENTY-THIRD CHAPTER.

The Captive Released.

THE whole party saw Arthur Augustus D'Arcy off at the station. Wharton again apologised for the absence of Bunter. D'Arcy apologised for the necessity of going away in Nugent's hat. He promised to return it by the first parcel post the next day; a promise which he duly kept. Then the Cliff House girls rode home on their bicycles, with an escort of six or seven juniors.

Bunter's name was not mentioned till the chums of the Remove were on the homeward run. Then Bob Cherry broke into a sudden chuckle.

"It's about time we let Bunter out, I think," he remarked.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors put up their bicycles, and strolled to the old tower. It was getting dark, and the room was very dusky as they threw open the door and looked for Bunter. There was a fat form curled up in the chair, and the first sound that greeted the juniors was a deep, prolonged, and decidedly unmusical snore.

Bob Cherry shook the fat junior by the shoulder. Bunter started and awoke.

"Hallo! I—I say, you fellows, what's the row? Why, it's not light yet, and—and I can't hear the rising-bell!"

Bob Cherry roared.

"Ha, ha, ha! He thinks he's in the dorm.!"

"Wake up, Bunter!"

Bunter rubbed his eyes, and adjusted his spectacles on his fat little nose. He stood up and blinked at the juniors. He remembered all now.

"You—you beasts!" he said.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I might have perished with hunger here——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"On my birthday, too! Of all the rotten tricks——"

"The one you played on us was about the rottenest," said Bob Cherry. "You've been caught in your own trap this time, and serve you jolly well right. Don't you think so?"

"Oh, really, Cherry——"

The chums of the Remove left the tower. Bunter toddled after them, and caught hold of Harry Wharton's sleeve.

"I—I say, Wharton, I suppose the feed's all over?"

"Of course!"

"Everything gone?"

"Everything!"

Bunter groaned.

"Ow! I'm hungry!"

Wharton relented.

"Well, you fat young fraud, if you like to admit that you deserved all you got, here's a two-bob piece, and you can cut over to the tuckshop," he said.

Bunter blinked at the silver-piece glistening in Harry's hand.

"Oh, really, Wharton, I—I—of course, I admit it. You're quite right. Gimme the two bob. I'll put it down to the account."

Three seconds later Billy Bunter was in the tuckshop, solacing himself to the exact extent of two shillings. And so ended Bunter's birthday.

THE END.

(Another splendid, long, complete school tale of Harry Wharton & Co. next Tuesday, entitled: "ALONZO THE TERRIBLE," by Frank Richards. Please order your copy of THE MAGNET LIBRARY in advance. Price One Penny.)



STANLEY DARE

The Boy Detective

INTRODUCTION.

Stanley Dare, the boy detective, is investigating a strange case near the West India Docks, on behalf of a man named Gilbert. Fleming, the bearer of a pocket-book containing valuable papers wanted by Gilbert, has been murdered. Stanley Dare, disguised as a merchant seaman, visits the lodging house where the deed was committed. He finds the missing pocket-book; but is surprised and overpowered by a Chinese half-caste, who, after drugging him absconds with the pocket-book. On recovering consciousness Stanley Dare questions the proprietor of the lodging house concerning Peters—the Chinese half-caste—movements and learns that he has travelled to Southampton. At Southampton, Dare loses all trace of Peters, but later on he traces him to a yacht, the Amazon, which is anchored off Cowes. Dare and the Professor are trapped and carried out to sea, where they are set adrift in a boat without sails or oars.

(Now go on with the Story).

A "Sea-Anchor"—Rescued—Martin Gilbert Turns Nasty—The Professor's Adventure.

The half-caste cut the bonds from MacAndrew's wrists.

"If I had my way," he said, "you would be lashed back to back and set adrift like that!"

"It is murder, in any way," replied Dare.

"You are still harping on murder," said Custance, with a jeering laugh. "Sorry I can't stretch my hospitality to entertain you any longer. I wish you a pleasant voyage to wherever you are going. It may be to the next world!"

The professor stood up in the stern of the boat.

"We shall meet again in this world, Harper Custance," he said solemnly. "I have such great faith in a Providence that rights a' wrongs that I wouldna change places wi' ye noo, safe as you appear tae be on the yacht, and doomed as you think we are in this frail craft."

The words and the Scotsman's almost prophetic manner froze the mocking laughter upon the jeering villain's lips. He cursed the professor as the boat was cast off and sent adrift. His lips were grey. He had the appearance of a man who was smitten with a sudden fear.

His curses were the last words they ever heard him utter, but they were fated to see him once again—only once.

The Amazon steamed away, leaving the boat tossing helplessly on the rough sea, in imminent danger, as it was swept on the crest of each succeeding wave, of being capsized.

Their case seemed hopeless, for if the boat was swamped THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 133.

NEXT
WEEK:

"ALONZO, THE TERRIBLE."

land was so far off that the strongest swimmer would not be able to swim to safety through so wild a sea.

"There's a chance for us yet!" cried Stanley Dare excitedly.

"Look here, professor!"

There was a locker in the stern sheets of the boat, and on opening it Dare had found a roll of canvas, some spun yarn, and a few other odds and ends of things which would be useful in keeping a boat's sail and other gear in repair.

These things had evidently been overlooked by the men on the yacht, or they certainly would not have been left there.

"We might make a bit of a sail wi' that canvas," said the professor; "but as we've no mast to set it on tae, it wouldna be muckle guid."

"I wasn't thinking of a sail," replied Dare, "but with this I believe I could rig a sea-anchor. I once saw one rigged by the captain of a ship by way of an experiment, and I remember how it was made."

"Guid, laddie!" cried MacAndrew. "I've heard o' such things, but there are few men, even among sailors, who have ever had tae use them nowadays. It is an age o' floating hotels, and the real art of seamanship is almost lost."

It was necessary to have a wooden frame to lash the canvas to, and for this they had to break up the gratings that were laid across along the bottom of the boat.

Three of the stoutest pieces of wood thus obtained were lashed firmly together in the shape of a triangle. To this framework the canvas was fastened, the base of the triangle

A Splendid Tale of Harry Wharton & Co.
By FRANK RICHARDS

being weighted with a piece of iron that had been used as ballast.

To the three points of the triangle span yarn, many times doubled, was fastened, forming a bridle, to which was secured the end of the boat's painter.

"All ready!" cried Dare, when, after about half an hour's toil, the work was completed.

"Ready it is!" said MacAndrew.

"Then over she goes!"

The sea-anchor was dropped over the bows. It floated in the water perfectly upright, with the weighted base about two feet below the surface.

Roughly, it might be described as a sort of "water-kite," which bore this difference to an ordinary kite in that the pointed part was uppermost when it was in its right position.

The rope-painter tautened, and then the boat rode head to sea as easily as a gull in the water. She drifted very little, and the foam-crested waves, breaking against the sea-anchor without in any way damaging it—for it gave to the impact—passed on each side of the boat without pouring into it. Thus the danger of being swamped was removed.

There was neither food nor water in the boat, although, for the matter of that, they were not likely to be troubled with thirst for some time. It is well-known to shipwrecked men that a good preventive of the pangs of thirst is to saturate the clothes with salt water.

The garments of the professor and Stanley Dare were by this time saturated enough in all conscience, for the waves had been constantly slopping over them during the whole time they had been making the sea-anchor.

The long, dreary hours passed slowly, and there seemed to be no signs of the gale abating. Dare believed they were nearer to the coast of France than England. Occasionally a vessel was sighted, but always a long way off. The nearest one that passed was fully two miles away. The professor stood up and frantically waved his coat, but the signal was not seen.

Indeed, in such weather, with the atmosphere rendered hazy by the flying scud, it would be very difficult to see a small boat at a distance of two miles.

"We maun wait wi' patience, laddie," said the good old Scotsman, as he sat down again. "Nae doot there'll be a ship passing near enough tae us to sight before long."

"We are both fortunately provided with a good store of patience," replied Dare, with a brave attempt to appear cheerful.

Well, the time came when their patience was rewarded. The afternoon was drawing to a close when a steamer was sighted right ahead.

"Hurrah! At last!" cried Dare. "Rouse up, Mac! There's a steamer bearing down on us. We are bound to be seen."

Professor MacAndrew scrambled unsteadily to his feet. He had been sitting in the stern in a half doze, for the long exposure was telling on him, tough as he was.

"A steamer! Laddie, are ye— Ay, ay! There she is!" He pulled off his coat. "We'll no gie them a chance to pass by," he continued. "When she comes within hail we maun yell till oor throats crack!"

It wasn't necessary to go to this extreme. The people on the steamer saw their signal. The vessel was stopped, a rope was thrown to them, and the boat was hauled up alongside.

She proved to be the French coasting-steamer *Ville de Paris*, bound for Cherbourg. It is perhaps needless to say that when they landed at Cherbourg in the early hours of the following morning they had fully recovered from the effects of their recent unpleasant experience.

Shortly after reaching his office the young detective sent a communication to his client, Martin Gilbert, which brought that individual post-haste to Essex Street. His face was dark with suppressed anger, and his solitary eye gleamed with a savage light.

"What am I to understand from this letter, Mr. Dare?" he demanded, flourishing the missive in question. "That you have failed in your task, after having the pocket-book actually in your possession?"

"That letter is simply a brief report of what I have done in the case and what has happened since I last saw you," replied Dare coldly. "I don't choose to consider that a check is a failure."

"Well, I do, so that is where we differ!" snarled the other. "The chances are that we shall never see that pocket-book again or its contents."

"I have not yet seen its contents," said Dare; "but you may take my word for it that I mean to hunt down both Custance and the half-caste—"

"I care nothing about either of them," interrupted Martin Gilbert. "They are nothing to me, and their crimes are nothing to me. I engaged you to recover the pocket-book, and if you have been wasting time in doing ordinary police work I say that you have not fulfilled your part of the contract. From this moment I will carry on the case myself, without your assistance."

"I am very glad to hear it," retorted Dare, for I can assure you that you are not the sort of client that I care to work for."

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NEXT
WEEK:

"ALONZO, THE TERRIBLE."

EVERY
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ONE
PENNY.

"And my opinion," said MacAndrew, who happened to be present, "is that you are—"

"I don't want to hear your opinion!" snarled Martin Gilbert.

"Weel, ye'll hear it, whether ye like it or not," pursued the Scotsman calmly. "Ye're an ill-bred, cantankerous loon, and Mr. Dare is weel advised in washing his hands of ye!"

"Washing his hands of me! I wash my hands of him!" cried Gilbert. "Remember, this business is entirely my affair now. Take heed that neither of you interfere with it."

There was a dark and evil scowl on his face as he turned on his heel and strode from the room.

"I'm not the sort of mon tae take muckle heed of threats," said MacAndrew, "but I dinna like you fellow who has just gone. He is dangerous, laddie—he is dangerous."

"I wish him joy of his search for the pocket-book," laughed Stanley Dare. "And, dangerous though he may be, I fancy he will find his match if ever he comes in contact with Harper Custance and the half-caste."

"Maybe," replied the professor guardedly, "and maybe not. We dinna ken the mon's resources."

However, they soon dismissed Martin Gilbert from their thoughts, for they both had a considerable amount of business to transact in London, which kept them fully employed the whole day.

It was nine o'clock in the evening when MacAndrew bade good-night to the young detective at the door of the West End restaurant where they had been dining.

"Shall I hail a cab for you?" asked Dare.

"No, no! I've been riding in cabs half the day, and a walk will dae me guid. It is not far from here to Chelsea. Good-night, laddie!"

"Good-night!"

The professor strode away, making for the Thames Embankment by way of Vauxhall Bridge Road. Then he proceeded along the Embankment at an easy pace, smoking a favourite old briar, for he was a thorough Bohemian in his habits. Moreover, it was a little bit foggy, both on and near the river, and smoking prevented the fog from getting down his throat.

He had passed the corner by the Chelsea Hospital gardens, which was not more than a quarter of a mile from his house, when he heard a cry of distress in a girl's voice, and looking in the direction whence it came, dimly saw three figures, who appeared to be struggling together.

One of them he made out was a woman.

"Oh, help me! Please protect me from these men!"

It was a sweet, refined, girlish voice that thus made a direct appeal to the professor for help. Evidently the girl had caught sight of him as he strode along. There was no one else in sight.

Such an appeal was one that would not be addressed to MacAndrew in vain. Slipping his pipe into his pocket, he rushed across the road. One of the men had the girl by the wrist, and she was endeavouring, though ineffectually, to wrest herself free from his grasp.

"Release this lady at once, you scoundrel!" cried the professor.

"Mind your own business," retorted the fellow, "and take yourself off, before you get hurt!"

"I'll commence wi' the hurting business myself!" exclaimed MacAndrew, as he hit out straight from the shoulder with his right, and, catching the fellow under the jaw, sent him reeling backwards against some garden railings.

Both the man who was struck and his companion were so amazed at this unexpected attack by the quiet-looking, middle-aged Scotsman that for a few moments they could not do anything but stare at him.

He was a hard hitter, was MacAndrew, for in his younger days he had been a famous athlete, and he was still tough and sinewy.

"Get behind me, lassie," he said to the girl. "Do ye ken anything of these men?"

"I know nothing of them," replied the girl, whose voice trembled with fear and anger. "I was walking along the Embankment towards my lodgings, when they made insulting remarks to me, and then caught hold of me with the intention, I am certain, of robbing me. I don't know how I can thank you, sir, for—"

"Bide a wee, lassie," whispered the professor.

The two men were making a rush at him, one of them loudly expressing his intention of "outing the interfering old buffer" there and then. It seemed as though the Scotsman must go down before that rush; but, with marvellous agility, he dodged between them, hitting out right and left simultaneously.

Both blows told, but his assailants closed on him, and a rough-and-tumble struggle ensued, in which there seemed every likelihood of MacAndrew faring badly.

How it would have ended, it is difficult to say; but as luck

would have it, a soldier appeared on the scene just then, and promptly came to the professor's assistance. The pair of ruffians, concluding that discretion was the better part of valour, promptly took to their heels and disappeared in the fog.

"Many thanks, my bonnie laddie, for your timely assistance," said MacAndrew to his military friend, who was a cavalryman.

"Don't mention it!" was the brisk reply. "I hope that you are not hurt. You must excuse me for hurrying off, but I have only just time to catch my train to get back to barracks."

The next minute he, too, had vanished in the fog.

"Weel, lassie," said the professor, "I'll just see ye safely to the door of your house. I'm thinking that ye said noo that ye are on your way tae your lodgings. But stay, then, ye are not wi' relatives or freends?"

The girl shook her head rather sadly.

"I am alone in London," she replied.

"Ay, ay, is that so?" returned MacAndrew. "It isna guid for a young and pretty lassie like you tae be alone in this big, wicked city. Ye maun just let me be your freend and adviser. Here's my card. Come tae my house to-morrow morning, and just confide in me as you would tae your ain father. I've a guid auld housekeeper who will look after ye."

"Ah, if my dear father were only alive," murmured the girl, with a catch in her voice, "it would be so different! I should not be poor and friendless."

"Not friendless?" interrupted the professor. "Look upon me now as a freend. Ye may do that without fear, for I'm auld enough tae be your father."

Five minutes later they parted, and MacAndrew walked home in a thoughtful mood.

"A queer little adventure," he muttered. "Puir lassie! Weel educated, refined, but poor, and alone in London. I maun help her somehow."

But the "queer, little adventure," as he termed it, was only in its initial stage as yet; and it was after to develop in a manner so remarkable that not even the canny Scot, with all his foresight and mental acuteness, could have predicted the sequel to it.

Stanley Dare's New Client—The Case Takes a New Turn—Off Again

Shortly after noon on the following day, Stanley Dare was rather surprised to see Professor MacAndrew enter his office, accompanied by an extremely pretty and modest-looking girl of about nineteen years of age.

The young detective at once jumped to his feet, and placed a chair for the lady, at the same time looking to the professor for an explanation of the visit, or, rather, for enlightenment as to who his companion was.

MacAndrew formally introduced the two to each other.

"Mr. Stanley Dare—Miss Ethel Selwyn," he said. "Miss Selwyn will be a new client on an old case."

"An old case!" echoed Dare.

"Weel, not so very auld," replied MacAndrew, "for it is the case that we have just been engaged in—the 'Missing Pocket Book,' as I have labelled it in my diary."

"I knew we weren't done with that affair," said the young detective, "although I hardly expected to gain another client over it."

"If it hadna' been for two ruffians— But I'll tell ye the story frae the beginning."

The professor then related his adventure of the previous evening, ending up with the visit of Miss Selwyn to his house that morning.

"I've taken a fatherly interest in the lassie, and I've persuaded her tae tell me something of her history." He turned to the girl. "Noo, if ye'll allow me, Miss Selwyn," he added, "I'll just give Mr. Dare an outline of all the important points in your case."

"I am very grateful to you for all your kindness and the trouble which you are taking on my behalf," replied

Ethel Selwyn. "I am sure you will explain all the facts more clearly than I could hope to do."

The story which the professor told need not be given in his own words, for there were many interruptions and deviations. Briefly, it ran as follows:

It appeared that Ethel Selwyn's father had been a ship's captain, and he had died of fever while on his last voyage. To one of the seamen—a man who had sailed with him for many years—he had entrusted a leather pocket-book to bring home and give to his daughter. It was Captain Selwyn's sole legacy to his only child, for he had not made a will, and, as far as could be discovered, the only money that he could have bequeathed to her was the amount of his pay which happened to be due when he died. This was rather under fifty pounds.

Miss Selwyn believed that the pocket-book only contained letters and papers which had belonged to her mother, and which she would naturally treasure. But Professor MacAndrew was of opinion, as Dare had been from the first, that the pocket-book contained something of great pecuniary value.

"The initials on the pocket-book are 'R. S.,'" concluded MacAndrew, "so there can be nae shadow of doot that it is the same one that we have been after. Mairover, the mon John Fleming is the unfortunate fellow who was murdered."

Stanley Dare nodded, but he did not reply. He was standing at the window, looking down into the street, as though something interested him out there. But it was the thoughts which were moving rapidly through his brain which only interested him just then. Presently he turned round sharply.

"We must find the yacht Amazon again, Mac," he said. "That is the first thing to be done. There is no doubt that Custance is still on board of her. And he is the man who has the pocket-book."

"If he hasna' got it, Martin Gilbert has," replied MacAndrew. "But we maun go on the track of Custance first."

"It is not possible that those two can have met yet," said Dare.

"No, not yet," admitted the professor. "But they will meet, mark my words."

"I am going down to Lloyd's to find out if the Amazon has been signalled anywhere," pursued Stanley Dare. "We may have to leave London suddenly. Would a quarter of an hour's notice give you time to pack up?"

"Five minutes would suffice," replied MacAndrew. "My emergency kit-bag is packed, the same as yours. I'll escort Miss Selwyn home the noo, an' then I'll wait by 'my ain fireside,'—he laughed cheerily—"until I hear from ye."

"Good!" said Dare.

He bade good-bye to MacAndrew and the girl at the corner of Essex Street, and then jumped into a hansom and drove off in the direction of the City.

Twenty-four hours passed, however, before MacAndrew heard from the young detective. The telegraphic message was brief.

"Amazon reported at Brest yesterday evening," it ran. "We must leave London by 3 p.m. train for Southampton. Then cross over by mail steamer.—DARE."

It was necessary for them to cross over to Cherbourg, where they arrived early on the following morning, and then took the train on to Brest.

But on reaching that naval port they learnt, to their disappointment, that the yacht had sailed an hour before they arrived there. Her destination was believed to be Bordeaux.

From careful inquiries which Stanley Dare made among the harbour officials, he learnt that both Harper Custance and the half-caste—who did the duties of steward—were still on board.

And he also gathered a very important item of information from the pilot who had taken the Amazon out of the harbour.

Another long instalment of this thrilling detective story next Tuesday.)

For Next Week



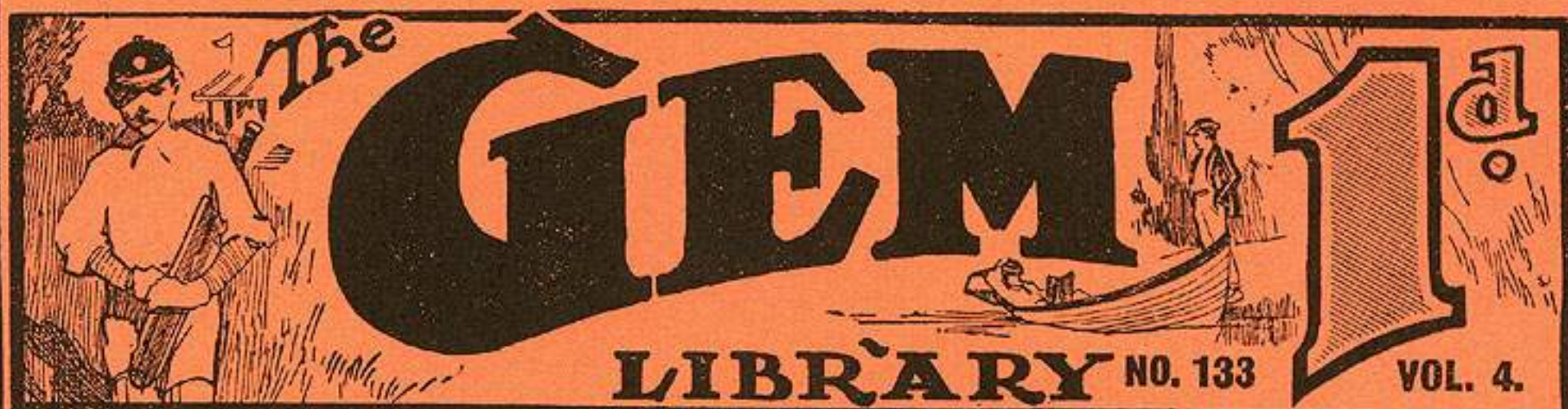
"ALONZO, THE TERRIBLE."

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The Editor

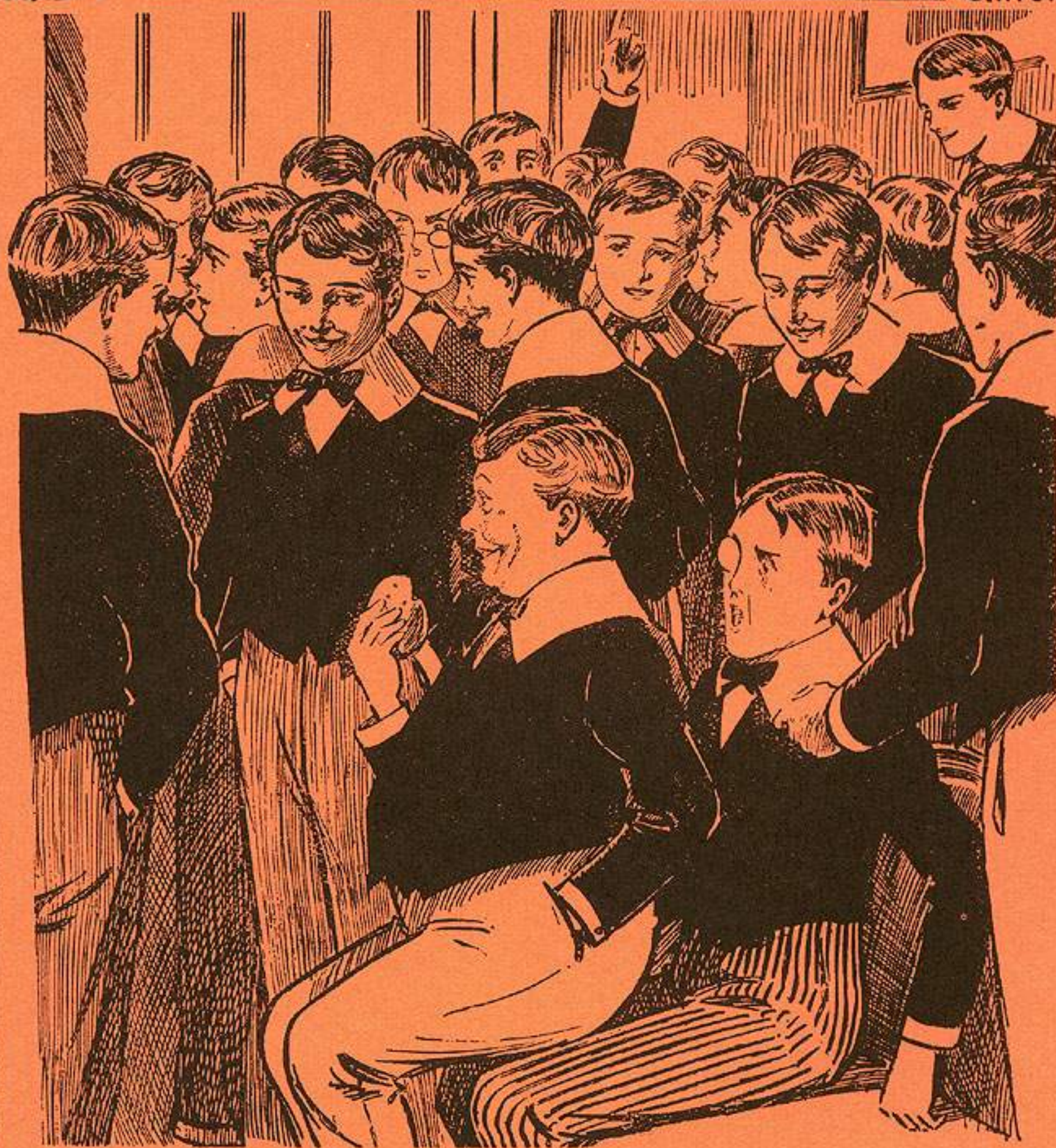
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Tale.

A Tale of the Terrible Three.

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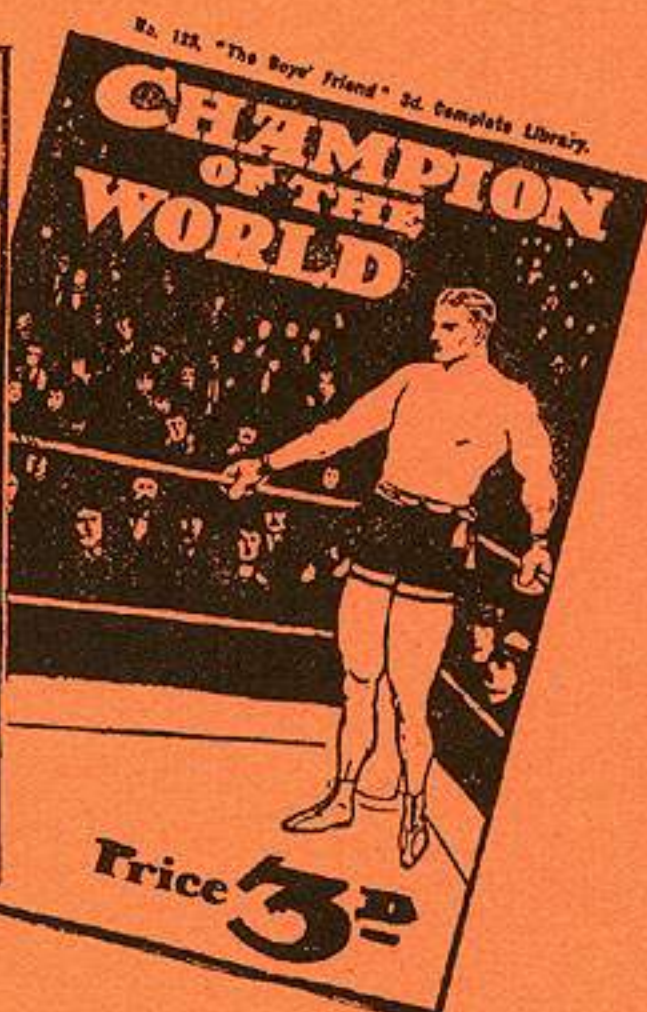
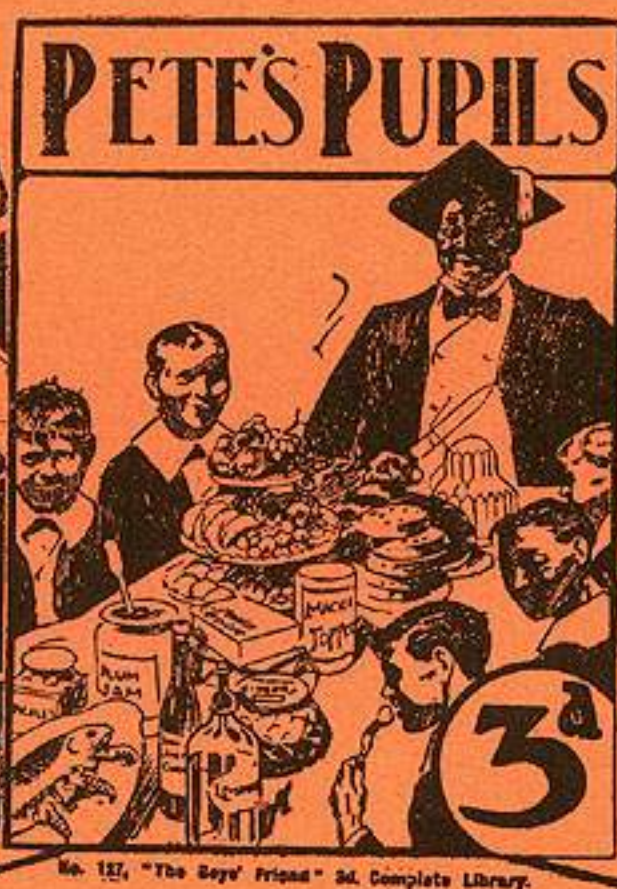
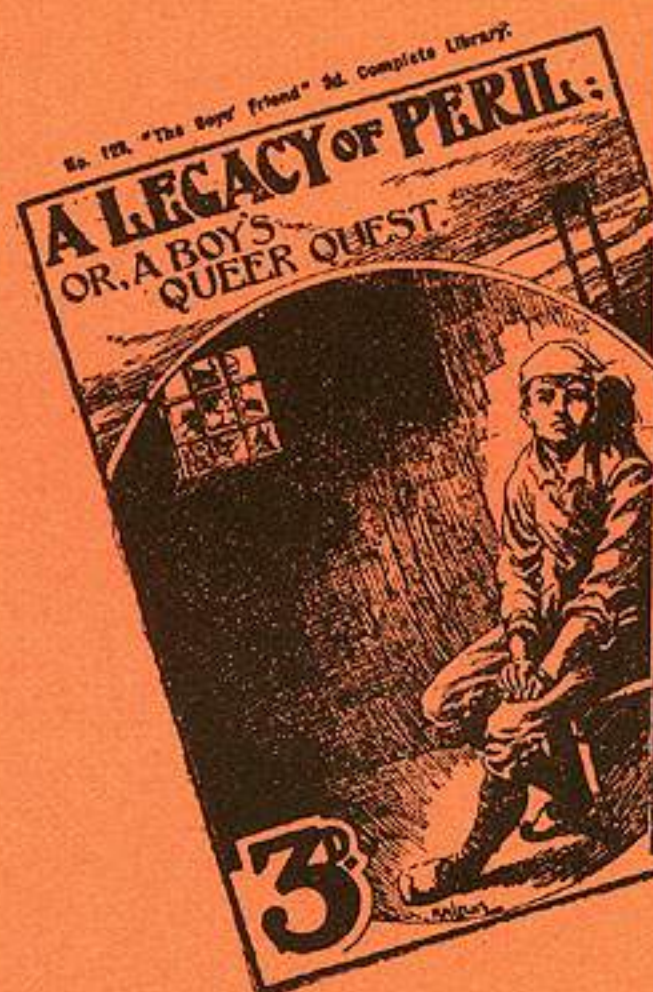


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