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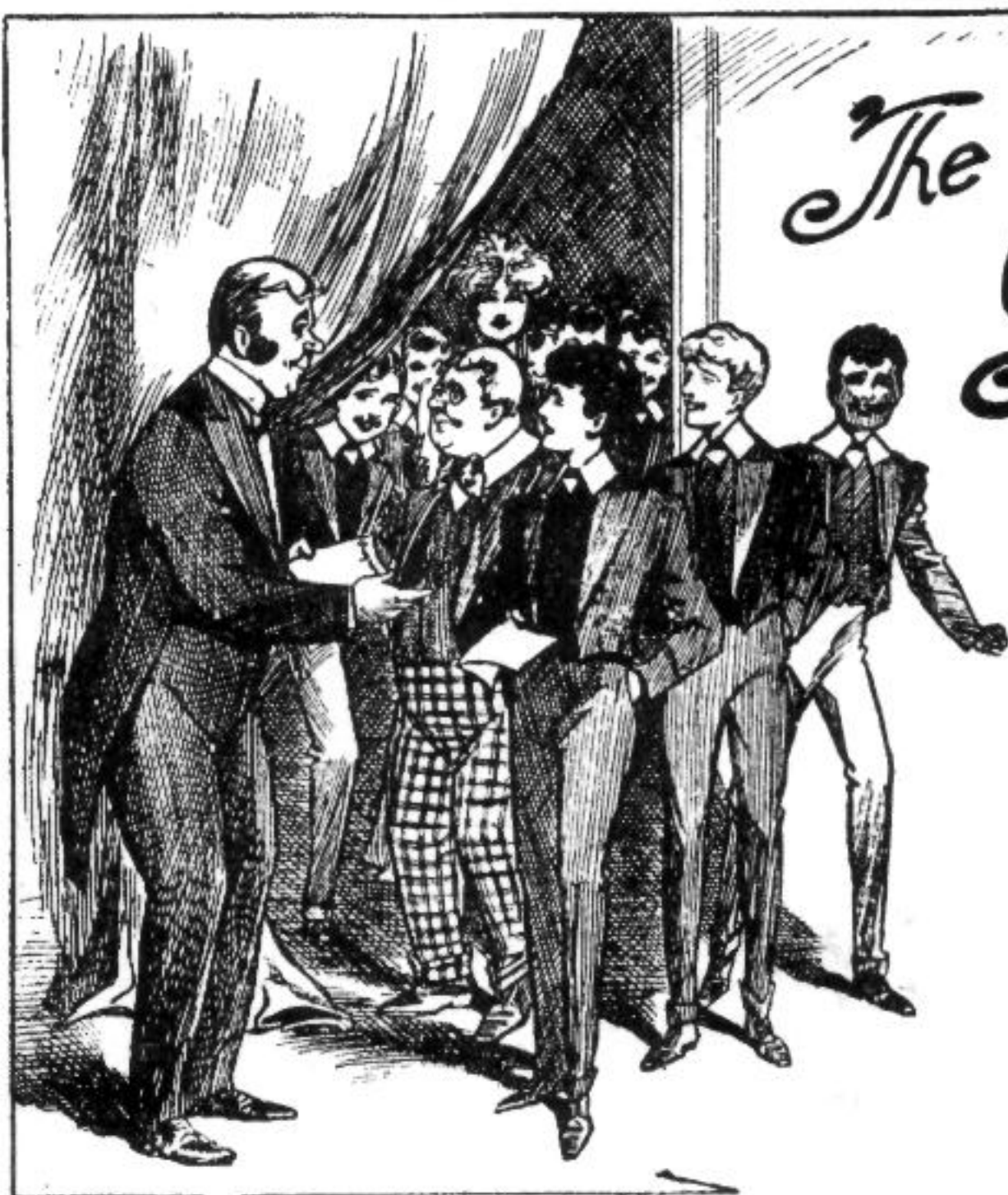
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The Greyfriars Pantomime

A Splendid New, Long, Complete School Tale of Harry Wharton & Co. and Lord Mauleverer.

- BY -

FRANK RICHARDS.

THE FIRST CHAPTER. Not Wanted.

"DARLING—"

"Eh?"

"My own sweet pet—"

"What?"

"I will die for thee, loved one!"

"My—my hat!" gasped Temple of the Upper Fourth, gazing at Frank Nugent in amazement. Temple had just entered Study No. 1 in the Remove passage at Greyfriars. Frank Nugent was in the room by himself, and he was kneeling before a chair. He took no notice of the new arrival.

"As long as life lasts, I will die for thee!" he said dramatically.

"You—you silly ass!" shouted Temple, "are you off your rocker?"

"Sweet one—"

"Oh, crumbs!" ejaculated Temple, "he's mad! He's suddenly gone clean off his chump! He's dotty!"

"Who's dotty?" inquired Hobson, of the Shell, looking into the study. "Didn't I hear you say somebody's dotty?"

"It's Nugent!" gasped Temple. "I came in here to borrow Wharton's Latin dictionary, and I found Nugent here. Look at him! He's gone mad!"

"Rot!" said Hobson, crossing over to Nugent. "What's Temple jawing about, Nugent? He says—"

"You are the only girl for me, Cindy!"

"Eh?" gasped Hobson, aghast. "Great Scott, what's up with him?"

"He's mad!" said Temple firmly.

"He—he can't be! Yet I thought he was rather queer to-day in the dining-hall. So was Wharton, and Cherry, and Johnny Bull. They all seemed far away, but Nugent didn't act like a giddy love-sick coon!"

Hobson grasped Frank Nugent's shoulder and shook it.

"I say—"

"Go away!" roared Nugent.

Hobson and Temple breathed a sigh of relief. Nugent's wrathful outburst was proof positive that he was certainly not "off his rocker." But he was undoubtedly acting in a strangely unaccountable manner.

"What's up with you, Nugent?" demanded Temple.

"Cindy, my love-light—"

"Oh, that's done it!"

The study door opened wider, and Bob Cherry, of the Remove, walked in. He glanced round with a look of inquiry on his sunny face.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! What are you chaps doing in here?" he asked cheerfully.

"It's Nugent," explained Temple.

"Nugent? What's up with him?"

"Blessed if we can make out," said Hobson, of the Shell. "He's been raving at us about sweet pots and own loved ones!"

"And cinders and things!" added Temple.

Bob Cherry looked puzzled for a moment, and glanced across at his chum. Then a light of understanding entered his eyes, and he grinned.

"Oh, it's all right," he chuckled. "Franky's only acting—"

"Acting the giddy ox!" growled Temple.

Frank Nugent turned a wrathful face towards the two visitors.

"Can't you buzz off?" he roared.

"Oh, go easy, Franky," grinned Bob Cherry. "You've given the show away by rehearsing your giddy part in the study! Temple and Hobson want to know if you're qualifying for a lunatic asylum!"

Frank Nugent snorted.

"Can't a chap rehearse in his own study now?" he demanded crossly.

"Rehearse?" repeated Temple curiously.

"Rehearse what?" asked Hobson.

"You fatheaded chumps!" yelled Nugent, exasperated. "don't you know what rehearsing is? The Remove is getting up a ripping pantomime, and I've been running through my lines! Can't you let me alone? I shall be mixing Cinderella up with the Fairy Queen soon!"

"My—my hat!" ejaculated Temple. "A pantomime!"

Nugent looked at him pityingly.

"Never heard of one?" he asked sarcastically.

"Why—why, you idiot!" yelled Hobson, "how the dickens can you produce a pantomime at Greyfriars?"

"It doesn't matter to you how we're going to do it," said Frank Nugent. "We are! It's going to be the biggest pantomime that ever—ever panted!"

"That ever which?" asked Temple, with a grin.

"Oh, go away, for goodness' sake," said Nugent. "If you be good, you'll hear all about it before long. Run off!"

Hobson and Temple looked warlike.

"Look here, you cheeky Remove kid," began Temple wrathfully.

"Oh, dry up!" said Bob Cherry. "You'd better go easy, my sons! You're in the enemy's camp now, and if you start rowing, there'll be a whole crowd of Remove chaps down on you."

Hobson and Temple glanced at one another, then, with a sniff, turned and marched out of the study.

"Silly asses!" said Hobson loftily.

"Yes, rather!"

But Temple and Hobson were decidedly interested. Hobson met Hoskins, of the Shell, in the Remove passage, and he immediately told him of the great new undertaking of the Remove. Temple hurried off to his own study in the Fourth Form passage, and his two chums, Dabney and Fry, were put into possession of the news. So far the thing had been kept a strict secret by the Removites, but now that Nugent had let it out the whole of the Lower School was talking about it half an hour afterwards.

Out in the Close the shadows were gathering thickly, for the January day was drawing to a close. It was just upon tea-time and the juniors were busy preparing for that important meal.

Harry Wharton, Johnny Bull, Tom Brown, and two or three other Removites hurried in from the playing-fields, where they had been punting a footer about in the fading light. The air was crisp and keen, and they looked flushed and warm after their exertions.

"I—I say, you fellows—"

"Hallo, Bunter, what's up with you?"

Billy Bunter, the fat junior of the Remove, rolled up through the dusk.

"I wanted to speak to you about something, Wharton—"

"About the postal-order that never arrives?" grinned Harry Wharton.

"Buzz off, Bunter, we're in a hurry," said Johnny Bull. "We're not lending out money to-day, thanks!"

"I—I say, you know, I don't want to borrow anything—"

"My hat!" gasped Johnny Bull. "Did you hear that, you chaps?"

"Who said the age of miracles had passed?"

"Oh, really, Brown—"

"Didn't I say we're in a hurry?" shouted Bull.

"Y—yes, but I wanted to ask you about the pantomime," said Billy Bunter eagerly. "The fellows are all jawing about a giddy pantomime the Remove is getting up!"

"My hat, the secret's out!" exclaimed Harry Wharton.

"Yes, Nugent was found rehearsing his part by Temple of the Fourth, you know," said Bunter. "He started calling Temple his loved one, or something!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Johnny Bull.

"Well, it doesn't matter now," said Wharton. "The first dress rehearsal comes off to-morrow night, so it's about time the rest of the chaps knew. We've kept the secret jolly well, I consider."

"Rather," agreed Tom Brown, the New Zealand junior. "There's no time now for anybody else to chip in and forestall us."

Billy Bunter blinked at all the juniors through his big spectacles.

"I say, you know, you didn't let me into it," he said reproachfully. "I'd have made a jolly fine attraction with my ventriloquism—"

"Yes, I don't think," said Harry Wharton. "We have quite enough of your rotten ventriloquism biznai every day, without shoving it in the pantomime! Buzz off, Bunter, you're not wanted!"

"Oh, really, you might have told me about it at first," said Bunter in an injured tone. "I should have been able to—"

"Give the giddy show away before we'd got it properly arranged?" suggested Bull. "No, my fat friend, we didn't want the whole school to know of our little game! We've been preparing the panto for over a fortnight now, and it's all ready for the first dress rehearsal. I reckon it'll be a ripping affair!"

"I'd be willing to act in it now, if you like," said Bunter generously.

"Very kind of you, but we'd rather not, thanks!"

"Oh, really Wharton, I should make a first-class Dame," said the Owl of the Remove eagerly. "If you'll stand me a jolly good feed or two, I'll—"

Johnny Bull snorted.

"You fat fraud!" he roared. "Clear off!"

"Or if you gave me an advance of five shillings—"

"Oh, bump him!" said Harry Wharton in desperation. "Bump the rotter!"

Two or three pairs of hands reached out to grasp Bunter, but he wriggled out of the way with remarkable dexterity, considering his bulk. When he had retired to a safe distance, he turned.

"Yah, you beastly rotters!" he shouted.

"Oh, come on!" said Wharton; and the Removites crossed the Close to the School House.

"I don't want to be in your rotten old pantomime!" yelled the Owl derisively. "I wouldn't act in it if you asked me now!"

"Well, you won't get asked," shouted Tom Brown, "that's one thing!"

Billy Bunter glared across the Close.

"Beasts!" he murmured as he rolled away through the dusk.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Many Applicants.

HARRY WHARTON & CO. were not left in peace for long. Everybody wanted to know if the rumour was correct, that a pantomime was to be produced at Greyfriars. Such an undertaking had never before been attempted, and the fellows were unusually interested. Temple, Dabney & Co. declared it was all "swank," and said that the Remove couldn't produce an ordinary, common, or garden play, let alone a pantomime. To which Harry Wharton replied that they would see what they would see—which was undeniable.

After tea a meeting of the Remove was held in the common-room, to discuss the all-important question of the first rehearsal. Certain members of the Remove had not been let into the secret. Vernon-Smith & Co. were the most prominent of these. The Bounder and his associates were in considerable disfavour at Greyfriars just at present, and Harry Wharton & Co. had as little to do with them as possible. Frank Nugent, Mark Linley, and others, had only just returned to Greyfriars, after being driven out by Vernon-Smith, and the juniors were very bitter against the Bounder.

Vernon-Smith, however, was as cool as ever as he strolled

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Coker & Co. placed Mr. Tracey down upon an assortment of pantomime costumes which had been extracted from Harry Wharton's hamper. "You young scoundrels!" roared the furious comedian. "What does this mean?"

into the common-room with Snoop and Stott. The room was crowded. Harry Wharton stood near the big fireplace, with a crowd of Removites round him.

"What's this rot about a pantomime?" asked the Bounder.

"Mind your own bizney," said Frank Nugent coldly.

"Oh, certainly! I don't want anything to do with your rotten old show!" said Vernon-Smith loftily. "I only came in to offer a word of advice."

"It's not wanted!"

"Buzz off!"

"Scat!"

"I think I've got as much right in this room as anybody else," said the Bounder coolly. "I was only going to say that you'd better not produce your rotten pantomime at all! It will be a disgrace to Greyfriars——"

"Shut up!"

"If you can't talk sense, don't talk at all!" shouted Bulstrode.

"We'll rag you to death if you don't dry up!"

"The ragfulness will be terrific!" murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "The Honourable Smith had better wisely shut his esteemed mouth!"

Bob Cherry jumped on a chair.

"Gentlemen, are we to be interrupted by a rotten outsider

like Vernon-Smith?" he shouted. "I put it to the meeting that if he doesn't dry up we'll chuck him out into the passage on his neck!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Begad!" murmured Lord Mauleverer, the dandy of the Remove. "I quite agree with you, my dear fellow. The meeting will be better without the presence of Vernon-Smith!"

"Of course, if you won't take advice——"

"We won't!"

The Removites were beginning to get excited. The door opened a little, and two grinning faces looked in. They belonged to Tubb and Paget, of the Third.

"I hear there's a pantomime being prepared," said Paget.

"Well, what of it?" demanded Johnny Bull.

"Only we've come to offer ourselves for the principal parts," grinned Paget. "Of course, we know there's nobody in the Remove who can act, and so——"

"So we thought we'd offer ourselves," added Tubb generously.

There was a roar.

"You cheeky young asses!" shouted Frank Nugent

"Buzz off!"

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"There's gratitude for you!" exclaimed Tubb dolefully. "Why, I thought—"

But what Tubb thought cannot be recorded. Three or four of the Removites made a move towards the door, and the two fags scuttled off, chuckling. The door opened again in a moment, however, and Temple, Dabney & Co. presented themselves.

They looked round condescendingly, and nodded loftily to the crowd of Removites. Harry Wharton looked at them grimly. The captain of the Remove guessed what their object was.

"We've come!" announced Temple calmly.

"Well, now you can go!" said Bob Cherry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Half a minute. About this giddy pantomime of yours. We just looked in to say it's rather a good idea."

"Thanks very much!" said Harry Wharton sarcastically.

"Good-bye!"

"Don't be in such a beastly hurry!" protested Temple.

"We consider that the panto would be greatly improved if you adopted one or two of our suggestions."

"Oh, rather!" agreed Dabney.

"All suggestions are barred!" said Bob Cherry cheerfully.

"Oh, rot!" said Temple warmly. "I've got a jolly good idea."

"Who gave it to you?" asked Bolsover major, grinning.

Temple turned red.

"Nobody gave it to me," he said. "We—that is, Fry, Dabney, and I—take a kind of interest in this show you're going to produce, and as we've got some decent suggestions to offer, we thought we'd give you a look in. Of course, if you don't want to hear 'em we'll clear out."

"Oh, good!" said Bob Cherry.

Temple glared.

"Look here, Cherry—"

"Don't ask me to," grinned Bob. "It hurts my eyes!"

"You cheeky Remove rotter—"

"Hold on!" interrupted Harry Wharton. "Don't get rowing here, you asses! What's this ripping idea of yours, Temple? If it's worth adopting, we don't mind adopting it. Of course, we don't expect it to be anything, but there's a bare chance of it."

"I guess it's all spoof!" said Fisher T. Fish, the American junior.

"Sure, an' ye're right intirely, Fishy darling!" said Micky Desmond.

"Spoof be hanged!" exclaimed Temple. "It's a jolly good idea!"

"Oh, rather!"

"Well, get it off your chest!" roared Harry Wharton, exasperated.

"No hurry. All we want to say is that we think the pantomime is liable to be mucked up," said Temple coolly.

"If you Remove kids are left all to yourselves, you'll simply make a horrible muddle of everything! Therefore we thought we'd just come along and offer to take the three principal parts ourselves."

"That's the idea," said Fry. "Of course, we should be able to look after things generally, and see that the affair went off without any hitches. Without us in it, the panto will simply fizzle out. What do you think of the idea?"

The Remove gasped.

"Why, you—you burbling idiot!" gasped Wharton. "Do you mean to say that's your ripping idea?"

"Of course!" said Temple in surprise.

"You ass! You fathead! You awful duffer!"

"Here, steady on—"

"Turn the bounders out!" roared Bulstrode wrathfully.

"The cheeky rotters!"

"The awful swankers!"

"The conceited asses!" gasped Bob Cherry. "Sling 'em into the passage!"

Temple, Dabney & Co. protested loudly, but the Removites were wrathful, and the Fourth-Formers found themselves swept off their feet and hurled out of the room. They shot into the passage with yells of indignation and protest.

"Look out, you young asses!"

Three youths were about to enter the common-room, and Temple, Dabney & Co. sprawled at their feet in a heap. Coker & Co.—for such the three new-comers were—tripped over them before they could come to a halt, and the Fifth-Formers sprawled headlong through the doorway.

"Hallo, you've arrived!" grinned Bob Cherry. "Come in!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You young scoundrels!" roared Coker, staggering to his feet. "What did you come butting out like that for?"

"I'm smothered with dust!" howled Potter.

Temple, Dabney & Co. picked themselves up and glared into the common-room. A score of grinning faces looked

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out at them, and Coker & Co. seemed angry. Temple snorted.

"Oh, rats!" he growled. "Come on! We'll keep our suggestions to ourselves another time!"

And the dusty Fourth-Formers stamped off down the passage. The Remove grinned, and Bob Cherry elaborately held the door open. Coker glared at him.

"What are you trying to do, you young ass?" he demanded.

"Oh, I'll close the door when you're gone!" said Bob blandly.

"Well, you'll have to wait there a long time," said Coker, walking further into the room with a fatherly air. "We've come to talk!"

"Oh, here's some more of 'em!" groaned Frank Nugent.

"They'd better not make any more suggestions like Temple's," murmured Harry Wharton grimly. "We're just about fed up with suggestions! This pantomime is going to be run by the Remove, and all outsiders are barred!"

The Removites were just ripe for mischief. Without knowing it, Coker & Co. had walked into the lion's den. If they started talking about taking part in the pantomime there would be trouble. Nothing could avert it. Temple, Dabney & Co. had exasperated the Removites, and they certainly wouldn't put up with any of Coker's inevitable "swank." Coker wasn't at all a bad fellow at heart, but he had a great idea of his own importance, and Potter and Greene, his particular chums, were always ready to stand by their leader. This was mainly owing to Coker's generous expenditure of money. Potter and Greene were always supplied with ready cash, provided they stuck to their leader.

Coker looked round the common-room with a patronising air.

"About this pantomime," he began.

"We've discussed all that," said Harry Wharton. "If that's all you've come about you can kindly buzz off!"

"Bosh!" said Coker. "I've got something to say!"

"You generally have!" grinned Mark Linley, the Lancashire junior.

Coker loftily ignored the remark.

"I want to know what the show will be like," he demanded.

"What's it going to be—'Dick Whittington' or 'Robinson Crusoe' or 'Puss-in-Boots'?"

"If you were playing in it it would be Ass-in-Boots!" said Bob Cherry blandly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You cheeky bounder!" said Coker angrily. "I'll—"

"You'll follow Temple, Dabney & Co. if you don't buck up," said Nugent grimly. "The panto's going to be 'Cinderella,' if you want to know!"

Coker sniffed.

"'Cinderella!'" he sneered. "Rotten show!"

"Look here, are you looking for a row?" demanded Harry Wharton warmly. "It's our pantomime, and you can jolly well clear out! We're busy, and we haven't got any time to waste on Fifth Form bounders!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Faith, an' ye'd better go while ye're safe, Cokey darling!"

"There'll be a bust-up if you stop here!"

"The bust-upfulness will be terrific!"

"Oh, rot!" said Coker. "I've come to offer a suggestion!"

"Another suggestion!" roared Frank Nugent.

"No, this is the only one," said Coker, looking surprised.

"You see, I know that if you Remove kids are left to yourselves you'll simply mess the pantomime up! I shouldn't bother to offer my services, only I have the honour of the school to think about!"

"The honour of the school!" gasped Wharton.

"Exactly!" said Coker coolly. "If you're left to yourselves

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you'll simply end in disgracing Greyfriars! It's out of the question to suppose that you could manage a pantomime properly, so I've come to offer my services as a sort of general manager!"

The Remove breathed hard, and stared at one another in silence. If Coker had had his wits about him he would have realised that the safest place for him was outside. But he looked round with a smile of condescension.

"Is that all?" asked Nugent caustically. "Wouldn't you like to take the principal part?"

Coker looked pleased.

"I was just coming to that," he said calmly. "I'm glad to see you realise that I shall manage the show better than any of you. Now, in a pantomime, it's absolutely necessary to the success of the show to have a first-class comedian to take the funny man's part. You all know what a really ripping comedian I am when I like——"

"You're funny enough now, anyhow!" Harry Wharton exclaimed.

"Even when I'm not trying to be," said Coker triumphantly. "So, you see, when I made up my mind to be funny I should simply bring the house down. George Robey and Harry Lauder simply wouldn't be in it with me, when I really got going! Now, I propose to make the pantomime a screaming success."

"By keeping out of it?" suggested Tom Brown.

"No, you ass, by taking the principal comedian's part!"

Bob Cherry jumped.

"That's my part, you fathead!" he roared.

"All the more reason why I should take it!" declared Coker blandly.

"You—you—you awful chump!" yelled Bob Cherry. "Do you think I'm going to give up my part so that you can have it?"

"Certainly!"

"Kill him!" gasped Bob. "He's too funny to live!"

"My hat! The awful cheek of the rotter!" said Frank Nugent faintly.

"I—I say Cokey, old man," muttered Potter uneasily, "we'd better shift!"

"Better shift?" repeated Coker. "What the dickens for?"

"You're making these kids wild, and they'll go for us soon," said Potter.

"Wild? Why, you chump, they've jumped at my suggestion to act as general manager," said Coker. "I'll jolly soon talk Cherry over. He'll see that it'll be best all round for me to take the part of principal comedian. Everybody knows how funny I can be when I make up my mind to it, and——"

Coker was interrupted by a roar from the Removites, a roar of laughter. At first they had been wrathful, but it was impossible to listen to Coker any longer. Whether he was a comedian or not, he had certainly succeeded in being funny now!

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the Remove, unable to restrain itself any longer.

"Oh, my hat! Ain't he too funny to live?" gasped Nugent.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Why, you young asses, what are you yelling like that for?" demanded Coker indignantly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, of all the——"

"Collar him!" ejaculated Harry Wharton. "We'll show him how valuable his giddy services are! We'll show him how we deal with conceited asses!"

A crowd of Removites surrounded Coker & Co.

"Steady on!" said Coker, beginning to realise that he had let himself in for it. "Don't play the goat! I'll——"

The circle of juniors grew smaller.

"You young rotters!" yelled Coker, in alarm.

"Make a dash for it, Cokey!" said Potter and Greene. And the two Fifth Formers broke through the crowd of juniors, and made for the door. The Removites didn't stop them. It was Coker they wanted. Coker looked round him wildly.

"My only Uncle Bill!" he ejaculated. "Well, you ungrateful little bounders——"

But the juniors simply hurled themselves at the amazed Coker, and he was borne to the dusty floor. He lay there, panting. Bob Cherry sat on his legs, Harry Wharton on his chest, and Mark Linley and Johnny Bull grasped either arm.

"I—I—what—— What's the meaning of this?" spluttered Coker.

"It means, my son, that we've had enough suggestions for one night," grinned Harry Wharton. "We don't want you to general-manage the pantomime, and we don't want you to take Cherry's part as comedian! And what's more, if you act the giddy ox again we'll rag you till you can't stand! You can keep your rotten ideas to yourself, Coker, old chap, and leave us to produce the show!"

"You—you——"

"Pass over a handful of soot, Inky!" said Wharton cheerfully.

Murree Singh grinned, and complied with alacrity. He

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placed his hand just at the side of the chimney, and succeeded in obtaining a handful of soot without burning himself. Coker struggled wildly.

"You bounders!" he roared. "You're not going to shove that over my chivvy!"

"I had an idea I was," Wharton grinned. "Hand it over, Inky!"

"By Jove, you—you—— Ooh! Yaroooooop!"

Coker's face disappeared behind the soot. He struggled violently, and the grinning Removites suddenly let go. Coker sprawled over, and scrambled to his feet, blazing with wrath. The juniors roared.

"That's to show you we don't want suggestions!" yelled Bob Cherry.

Coker choked.

"I'll—I'll muck up your rotten pantomime for this!" howled the Fifth-Former furiously. "I'll—I'll—— Great Scott, I'll——"

"Your jaw wants some ile, I think!" grinned Johnny Bull.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'll——"

Coker gasped. Words failed him, and he strode across to the door. He wrenched it open, staggered out, and banged the door to with a crash. A roar of laughter followed him, and he set his teeth with rage.

"I'll make 'em pay for it!" he muttered wrathfully. "My hat, they'll jolly well wish they'd agreed to my suggestions before I've done! I'll smash their rotten pantomime to smithereens!"

With which cheerful reflection Horace Coker hurried off to wash himself.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Coker & Co.'s Little Scheme.

FISHER T. FISH stopped abruptly as he walked under the old elms in the Close the following morning before first lesson. The junior from "over there" had been taking a little constitutional in the keen, frosty atmosphere, and he stopped because he heard his name called.

He looked round.

"Want you half a minute," said Coker of the Fifth, coming up.

"Well, I guess I'm here."

"About that pantomime of Wharton's——"

"Haven't you had enough of that yet?" grinned Fish.

Coker frowned.

"Yes, I jolly well have!" he growled. "I just wanted to tell you that I'm going to have nothing to do with the rotten affair. If Wharton comes to me and begs me to play in it I sha'n't do it. See?"

"Yep," said Fisher T. Fish. "But I don't guess Wharton will do much asking!"

"Perhaps not," said Coker carelessly. "Anyhow, I sha'n't even turn up at the beastly rehearsal when it's held to-morrow night."

"To-night," corrected Fisher T. Fish. "I guess the giddy dress rehearsal is going to take place to-night. I'm in it, you bet. I admit my part ain't exactly a big one, but I shall be the chap to make the show go!"

"Nothing like modesty," said Coker. "Oh, so the rehearsal's coming off to-night? Fat lot of dress about it, though! The costumes haven't arrived yet, have they?"

"Nope."

"Well, it looks to me as if you'll be disappointed."

"No, sir, not us!" said the American junior. "I guess we don't do things that way in the Remove. Wharton had a letter this morning from the costumier's saying that the hamper would arrive by the midday train. I guess it'll be up here soon after dinner. Don't you worry yourself, Cokey; the costumes'll turn up all right!"

"Let 'em," said Coker carelessly. "I sha'n't."

"I guess nobody asked you to!" said Fisher T. Fish. "We can do quite well without your assistance—some! Fifth-Formers are barred, my son. I reckon you oughter realise that by now!"

"Oh, go and eat coke!" growled the Fifth-Former.

Coker strolled across the Close, and then strolled up the steps of the School House. Finally he strolled into his study in the Fifth-Form passage. And the instant he was in, and had closed the door, a grin made itself apparent upon his face.

"You're looking pleased," said Potter, who was in the study.

"Yes, rather! I've got reason to be pleased!" chuckled Coker. "Look here, Potter, old man, I told you last night that I'm going to muck up that rotten pantomime—and I'm jolly well going to do it, too!"

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Potter looked startled.

"You ass!" he exclaimed. "It can't be done!"

"Can't it?" grinned Coker. "You wait, my son!"

"But you don't mean to say you're going to turn the lights out when the show's in progress, or do some fatheaded thing like that?"

"Not a bit of it," said Coker easily. "I'm going to work it so that the giddy asses can't hold the show at all. What are they going to do if the costumes don't turn up? You don't suppose they'll have the show in Etons, do you?"

"No. But how the dickens can you prevent the costumes turning up?" asked Potter, puzzled. "They might be here, for all you know."

"They might be—but they're not!" grinned Coker. "Just now I pumped young Fish—the one and only Fisher T. Fish! He's smart—I don't think! In two minutes, I'd learned that the costumes hadn't arrived, and that they'll be down by the midday train to-day."

"My hat!" ejaculated Potter.

"See the wheeze?" grinned Coker.

"You—you mean that we can collar the costumes and prevent them coming up to the school?" gasped Potter. "My only topper, that's rich! Ha, ha, ha! Those kids of the Remove will be absolutely dished!"

"Dished, diddled, and done!" agreed Coker. "Fishy also let out that they weren't going down to meet the hamper at the station. He said that he guessed the hamper would be up here soon after dinner. You see, the train arrives just at dinner-time, and they wouldn't think of missing dinner for it. But we shall; we'll see that giddy train in and collar the basket and hide it up. My hat! Wharton & Co. will be in a terrific stew when it doesn't arrive!"

"Yes, rather!"

The two Fifth-Formers chuckled hugely over the scheme, and then sallied out in search of Greene, who hailed the plan with enthusiasm.

Coker & Co. were looking extremely contented with themselves when they strolled into the Fifth-Form room a few minutes later. Mr. Prout, the Fifth-Form master, noticed that they were extremely careful in their work that morning—a most unusual state of things for Coker & Co.

When the time came for dismissal the three Fifth-Formers strolled carelessly out into the Close. Coker glanced at his watch.

"If we buzz off in about twenty minutes we shall arrive at the station just about the same time as the train. Wouldn't do to go too early. We don't want to be seen hanging about Friardale."

On the steps of the School House a crowd of Removites were animatedly discussing something of importance, and Coker & Co. saw Harry Wharton glance at his watch once or twice.

Coker & Co. grinned.

"Talking about the hamper!" chuckled Greene.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Potter.

"Shut up, you ass!" said Coker warningly. "Do you want to give the whole show away with your cackling? Those Remove kids are jolly sharp at times, and they might jump to something. We want to keep our little game dark!"

And Coker & Co. sauntered across the Close, arm-in-arm, looking as innocent and harmless as possible. There was still a good fifteen minutes to waste before they need start for Friardale. Neither of the Fifth-Formers noticed a fat form roll out of the gates and turn towards the village.

It was Billy Bunter. The Owl of the Remove had extremely important business to transact at Uncle Clegg's, the village tuckshop. Bunter reckoned that he would just have time to trot down to the village and get back in time for dinner. Bunter was rather anxious about the time, for to risk missing dinner was a dreadful thing.

"I shall do it all right," he muttered contentedly, as he entered the village High Street. Curiously enough, Billy Bunter was in funds—sufficient funds, at least, to purchase a supply of tarts and jam-puffs to supplement his dinner. He had passed the little school shop, presided over by Mrs. Mimble, with a sniff. Mrs. Mimble wasn't making any fresh pastry until the next morning, and Bunter preferred his pastry fresh.

He rolled into Uncle Clegg's little shop. Then a startled gasp entered his throat. The tuckshop was occupied by three youths already—Ponsonby, Gadsby, and Vavasour, of Highcliffe School. Ponsonby & Co. grinned as they espied the new-comer.

"I—I say, you fellows," gasped Bunter. "no larks, you know!"

"Oh, no!" grinned Ponsonby. "We'll be as good as gold!"

"Absolutely!" yawned Vavasour.

"I—I'm in a hurry," said Billy Bunter incautiously. "It's dinner-time, you know, and I have to get back—"

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"THE GEM" LIBRARY,
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"THE PENNY POPULAR,"
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The Highcliffians exchanged glances.

"Awful catastrophe if you happened to miss dinner, of course!" said Gadsby, with a shake of the head. "Now, suppose Bunter, my son, you did happen to be late for dinner? What would you do?"

"Oh, really, Gadsby, you gave me quite a turn!" said Bunter, glancing anxiously at the clock. "There's heaps of time for me to get back if I hurry. I say, Uncle Clegg—"

"Half a minute," interrupted Ponsonby, with a grin. "No need to give your order yet, you know. No hurry!"

"But I've got to get back!" protested Billy Bunter blankly.

"Suppose you come with us?" suggested Gadsby, with a wink at his two chums. "We'll take you for a nice walk round the village!"

"Oh, really, Gadsby—"

"Ready, you fellows?" asked Gadsby.

"Absolutely!" agreed Vavasour languidly.

"Come on!" said Ponsonby. And he and his chums gently but firmly grasped hold of Billy Bunter and propelled him out of the shop. The Owl of the Remove protested vigorously.

"Oh, really, you fellows!" he exclaimed indignantly. "I shall be late for dinner, you know. I—I say, if you let me go, I'll give you half-a-crown each out of my next postal-order. I'm expecting one to-night, you know, from a titled friend—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Ponsonby & Co.

"I shall be late for dinner!" yelled Bunter frantically.

"That's the idea!" grinned Gadsby. "We're going to take you for a nice little walk round, Bunter, so that when you get up to that rotten hole you call a school, you'll be too late to get anything to eat. We're really doing you a good turn, you know! Your great fault, Bunter, is over-eating, and we're just treating you to a little exercise to run down some of your fat!"

Billy Bunter gasped.

"You—you rotters!" he yelled. "Let me go!"

"Yes, in about ten minutes!" grinned Gadsby.

They marched Billy Bunter off, protesting and struggling. The Owl of the Remove was no match for the three Highcliffe juniors, and he was forced along quite easily. Ponsonby & Co. thought it a huge joke to deprive Billy Bunter of his dinner, and took no notice whatever of the Owl's protestations.

"You—you beasts!" roared Bunter helplessly. "Let me go! Cads! Rotters! Beastly cads! Let me go!"

"Hasn't he got a fine flow of language?" grinned Ponsonby.

"Absolutely!"

"My dear Bunter, this walk's doing you all the good in the world!" said Gadsby. "We'll just take you past the station for about half a mile, and leave you there to walk back alone. Don't you understand that it's for the good of your health?"

Billy Bunter didn't understand it, and he said so in emphatic language. But Ponsonby & Co. took no notice of it, and dragged the Owl along with them. Suddenly Billy Bunter changed his tone.

"You might let me go!" he wailed. "I—I say, I'll treat you all to a bottle of ginger-pop at Uncle Clegg's if you let me go!"

Ponsonby & Co. staggered.

"My only hat!" gasped Ponsonby. "Isn't he generous?"

"I didn't know you were a giddy millionaire, Bunter!" said Gadsby wonderingly. "How can you manage to throw your money about like that?"

"Oh, I've got a lot of rich friends, you know!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the Highcliffians.

Billy Bunter glared at them wrathfully, realising that they were laughing at him. In vain he protested, in vain he struggled. He was forced along by Ponsonby & Co. until all chance of getting back to Greyfriars in time for dinner was lost. They were in an open country lane now, and Gadsby glanced at his watch.

"I reckon we've given you enough exercise for one day, Bunter," he said, stopping. "What do you think, you chaps?"

"Absolutely!" agreed Vavasour. "Let the bounder go!"

The three Highcliffe juniors released the perspiring and furious Bunter. The Owl wrenched himself away and ran off towards Friardale at his top speed.

He turned after he had covered fifty yards, and glared back.

"Yah!" he yelled. "Rotten sneaks! Cads! Beasts!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the three Highcliffians.

Billy Bunter hurried on, puffing and blowing despite the keen, frosty air; and at last the houses of Friardale appeared in sight. The station was about the first building he espied, and as he trotted down the road, somewhat exhausted, he saw



Into Billy Bunter's cunning brain an idea presented itself, and a slow grin spread over his fat face. The Fifth-Formers were still in sight, and Billy Bunter determined to follow them. "My only hat!" he muttered excitedly. "The rotters are pinching our costumes, are they?" (See chapter 3.)

three youths leave the station yard with a hand-barrow. On the barrow was a large, square, wicker-basket—obviously a theatrical "property" basket.

Billy Bunter recognised it instantly. Those kind of things were not common in Friardale, and Billy Bunter came to a halt.

"My hat!" he gasped. "The pantomime costumes! Those three chaps are Coker and Potter and Greene of the Fifth! What the dickens are they doing with that hamper?"

Billy Bunter was cunning, and Coker's threat of the previous night reverted to his mind. It struck Bunter immediately that Coker & Co. were up to some little dodge, otherwise they would never have dreamed of taking the Removites' basket home on a hand-barrow. The thing was perfectly obvious, and a startled look came into Billy Bunter's eyes.

"My—my only hat!" he muttered excitedly. "The rotters are pinching our costumes, are they? I don't care a dash, though. That beast of a Wharton wouldn't let me ventriloquise in the pantomime, so I don't see what it's got to do with me. I'll— Great Scott!"

Billy Bunter broke off abruptly. Into his cunning brain an idea had just presented itself, and a slow grin spread over his fat perspiring face. Coker & Co. were still in sight, and Billy Bunter determined to follow them.

He had seen an opening whereby he himself could make a very good thing out of Coker & Co.'s little jape.

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THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

No Costumes.

BILLY BUNTER chuckled to himself. It was a chuckle full of satisfaction. For the time being Bunter had forgotten the loss of his dinner. A more important matter occupied his thoughts.

"My hat! Coker thinks his little game hasn't been spotted!" he thought gleefully. "I shall follow the bounders and see what they're going to do!"

The Owl of the Remove, although of considerable bulk, could be fairly nimble when occasion demanded, and he followed Coker & Co. without the Fifth Formers being in the least aware of his presence. Coker was under the impression that all the Greyfriars fellows were at dinner: and, indeed, it was only by pure chance that Billy Bunter was not at the Remove table gorging himself to his full capacity.

"My only uncle!" chuckled Coker. "Wharton and his set will be tearing their hair out when the giddy hamper doesn't arrive! It'll simply mess the panto. up! I tell you, my sons, when I make up my mind to do a thing, it's going to be done."

Potter and Greene grinned. They always grinned when Coker made a remark of that description. They pushed the hand-barrow along sharply over the hard road. It had been a simple matter to get it from the station. Coker hadn't

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objected to paying the carriage; the jape was well worth the money.

"The little asses will never dream of looking for the costumes in the old barn!" went on Coker. "It's over a mile away from Greyfriars, and on another road. Once we've hidden this giddy basket we can cut across the fields and be at Greyfriars by the time the fellows are out. The Remove will never dream that we've been on the track!"

"It's a ripping wheeze!" grinned Potter.

"Yes, rather!" agreed Greene.

So confident were the Fifth Formers that they did not think of glancing back along the road. Had they done so, they would certainly have seen a fat form cautiously following them up. Billy Bunter was on the track, and he was on tenterhooks all the time lest Coker & Co. should spot him. But the Fifth Form combine proceeded with their task, sublimely unconscious of the Removite's near proximity. They arrived at an old dilapidated barn, which was situated on a little-used lane which led somewhere in the direction of Pegg Bay.

There were one or two smaller sheds adjoining the barn, and Coker & Co. wheeled the barrow into one of these. Billy Bunter watched from behind the hedge, his eyes gleaming with cunning excitement through his big spectacles. In two minutes Coker & Co. reappeared. They carefully shut the door, and Coker produced three or four old keys from his coat pocket. After three tries one of the keys fitted the rusty old lock—which was of the usual common pattern—and the key turned with a rusty squeak.

"Got it!" exclaimed Coker, with satisfaction. "There you are, my sons, what do you think of that? Who else but me would have thought of bringing those old keys? I was pretty sure one of 'em would fit."

"You're a marvel, Cokey, old man!" said Greene admiringly.

"Absolutely a wonder!" agreed Potter.

Coker grinned, and the trio hurried off across the fields to Greyfriars. Never a suspicion entered their heads that they had been watched. So sure of themselves were they, that they never even looked back.

Billy Bunter moved out from his place of concealment, and a fat chuckle escaped his lips.

"Oh, ripping!" he murmured. "I can see some first-class feeds jolly soon!"

Bunter had not the least intention of proving loyal to the Remove and revealing the hiding-place of the costumes. No; he had a much deeper game on hand. And now that the excitement was over, he suddenly remembered that he was half-starved, and he hurried off to Greyfriars.

He arrived breathless and perspiring. The fellows were still in the dining-hall, but it was altogether too late for Bunter to go in and ask for his. The Remove would almost be on the point of saying grace.

Therefore, the Owl of the Remove rolled into the school tuckshop and proceeded to raid Mrs. Mimble's pastry. After all, stale pastry was better than none at all. Bunter tried hard to get a reduction, but Mrs. Mimble was firm. The Owl expended every farthing of his money, and still felt somewhat hungry. He eyed a pile of sausage-rolls with longing eyes.

"I—I say, Mrs. Mimble, just let me have another dozen of those rolls," he said eagerly. "I—I've no more money left just at present, you know, but I can pay you all right to-night."

Mrs. Mimble eyed the Owl rather doubtfully—she knew him.

"Are you sure, Master Bunter?" she asked.

"Oh, yes, quite sure, Mrs. Mimble!" said Bunter eagerly.

Without waiting for the good dame to give her consent, he proceeded to raid the sausage rolls. Mrs. Mimble knew that she would get the money some time, so she didn't worry. Had the pastry been fresh she would certainly not have agreed to Billy Bunter's rather doubtful proposal, but it was stale, which was lucky for Bunter.

Needless to say, he hadn't the slightest intention of paying up for the rolls by the time promised, but that didn't worry him. Billy Bunter would rather tell falsehoods than speak the truth. They rolled off his tongue with perfect ease; though it was a dull fellow indeed who allowed himself to be taken in by the Owl's ready lies. Somehow, all Bunter's "whoppers" were very obvious "whoppers," and the Remove were quite accustomed to them.

He was still cramming sausage-rolls into his capacious mouth when Bob Cherry and Johnny Bull strolled into the tuckshop. The two Removites regarded Billy Bunter with considerable curiosity.

"Why, the bounder's here!" said Bob Cherry, in surprise.

"Something fishy about this!" said Bull, shaking his head.

"World must be coming to an end, I should think, when Bunter prefers to pay for his dinner rather than have it in hall! Either that, or he's going off his chump!"

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"That's it! The poor chap's dotty!"

"Oh, really, Cherry," mumbled Bunter indignantly, his mouth full of pastry, "I couldn't get here in time for dinner!"

Bob Cherry stared.

"Why not, you ass?" he demanded.

"Some of those Highcliffe rotters got hold of me in Friar-dale!" said Bunter indignantly. "They dragged me right up past the station, the beasts! They knew it was dinner-time, and kept me—"

The two Removites exploded.

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

"The Highcliffians have done something really sensible at last!" grinned Johnny Bull.

"Oh, really, you fellows—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Billy Bunter got no sympathy from his Form-mates. The mysterious absence of Bunter and its explanation soon spread, and the Removites chuckled over it. Bunter was indignant.

"Beasts!" he murmured. "I don't care! I sha'n't let out where their rotten hamper is!"

It was some satisfaction for Bunter to watch the crowd of juniors gathered at the entrance gates waiting for the local carrier to bring the costume-basket from the station. Harry Wharton & Co. were there in force. They were in high spirits, for the prospect of the coming pantomime was a pleasantly keen one. Everybody was interested in the affair; with the possible exception of Coker & Co., and Vernon-Smith and his cronies.

"Lot of tommy-rot, I call it!" said Vernon-Smith sneeringly.

"Yes, rather!" agreed Stott.

"Kids' game!" giggled Snoop.

"Then kids had better buzz off!" said Harry Wharton wrathfully. He reached out and gave Snoop's ear a twist. Snoop howled.

"Oh! You rotten cad!"

"Oh, shut up, you little sneak!" said Wharton disgustedly.

"I reckon—"

A shout interrupted him.

"Here it is!"

"Here's the giddy carrier's van!"

"Now for the costumes!"

"Good!" said Harry Wharton. "We'll have the blessed hamper taken straight into the Rag— That's where the rehearsal's going to be held. Break away, you fellows!"

The van drove up to the gateway and came to a halt. The driver grinned as he saw the crowd of juniors.

"You'd better unload the giddy thing here!" said Harry Wharton, stepping forward. "We can carry it into the house. As it's addressed to me, I'd better sign for it now."

"That's the idea!" said Bob Cherry.

"Buck up!"

"The buck-upfulness is terrific!"

The carman stared down at Harry Wharton.

"Wot say, sir?" he queried.

"Hark at him!" said Wharton. "I say I'll sign for the hamper now!"

"Hamper!" repeated the carman, puzzled.

"My hat! What do you call it, then? It's a hamper—a theatrical dress-basket—a trunk— Blow! Hand the thing out and I'll sign!"

The carman shook his head.

"But it's addressed to Mr. Prout, young sir!" he protested.

"Rot!" said Bob Cherry. "The thing's for Harry Wharton!"

"Of course!" Wharton said.

The carman turned and bent over the seat of the van. Then he straightened up and held out a small brown-paper parcel.

"This 'ere's for Mr. Prout—"

There was a yell.

"That's not it!" roared Wharton. "You chump, we want the dress basket!"

"There ain't no dress-basket 'ere," said the carman. "There ain't nothin' else for Greyfriars! This is the only parcel!"

Harry Wharton & Co. stared at the carman blankly.

"Ain't the giddy hamper come, then?" gasped Frank Nugent.

"Of course it has!" said Harry impatiently. "It came off the midday train. It must be at the station now."

The carman shook his head.

ANSWERS

"That it ain't," he said firmly. "I took everything there was at the station! There wasn't no big basket off the midday train."

The carman did not know that Coker & Co. had taken possession of the basket before the carrier's cart arrived at the station. He spoke with confidence, and the juniors naturally thought that he had met the train, and therefore they did not dream of a jape. They took it for granted that the hamper hadn't arrived. Coker, who was standing at the back of the crowd, grinned triumphantly.

"My—my hat!" ejaculated Johnny Bull. "It hasn't come!"

"Well," said Mark Linley practically, "we shall have to wait till the giddy costumes do come."

"But we wanted to hold the first dress-rehearsal to-night," said Wharton. "To-day's Tuesday. Well, on Thursday we were going to have the proper show. Great Scott! If the costumes don't come to-day, we're diddled!"

"Look here!" exclaimed Linley. "There's still twenty minutes before afternoon lessons. Suppose one of us buzzes down to Friardale, and sends off a wire to the costumier's? Tell 'em that if the basket hasn't been sent off to bung it on the next train!"

Harry Wharton slapped the Lancashire junior on the back. "Good idea, Marky!" he cried enthusiastically.

And in three minutes the captain of the Remove was whizzing down to Friardale on his bicycle.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Billy Bunter Knows Something!

"HERE'S the giddy wire!"

Treluce, of the Remove, made the remark.

A crowd of juniors were collected round the steps of the School House immediately after afternoon lessons. They had hurried out into the Close immediately on finding out that no telegram had been delivered. It was getting dusky now, and over at the entrance gates a small form could only just be distinguished.

There was a buzz at Treluce's words.

"Where?" asked Newland and Hazeldene together.

"Yes, where?" demanded Harry Wharton.

"Just coming in the gates," said Treluce. "That's the telegraph-kid from the village."

"By Jove, so it is!"

A crowd of Removites hurried across the Close, and surrounded the telegraph-boy.

"That wire for me?" asked Wharton.

"It's for Master Wharton," said the boy, grinning.

"Good!" said Harry. "Hand it over!"

The wire was promptly handed over, and Harry Wharton tore it open with a rather important air. It was not a common occurrence for juniors to receive telegrams at Greyfriars. An admiring and anxious audience looked on. Wharton unfolded the form, and read the contents. Then he gasped.

"What is it?" asked a dozen voices. "What's in the giddy wire?"

"My hat!" ejaculated Wharton blankly.

"Your hat!" grinned Bob Cherry. "That's a funny thing to be—"

"Oh, dry up, Bob!" put in Nugent. "Don't be funny now! Hand over that wire, Harry!"

Wharton passed it over, and Nugent read it out.

"Wharton, Greyfriars, Friardale. Costumes despatched according to order. Should have arrived Friardale noon."

"Well, I'm blessed! Then the giddy things are here!" ejaculated Nugent.

"Looks like it!"

"I'm going to scoot down to the station," said Wharton.

"I'll be back before you've got tea ready, Franky."

"Right-ho!" said Nugent.

Wharton lost no time in getting off. In twenty minutes he was back, hot and breathless after his brisk pedalling. He burst into Study No. 1 in the Remove passage, with an excited look in his eyes. Frank Nugent, Bob Cherry and Johnny Bull looked at him inquiringly. A fragrant smell of freshly-made toast was in the air, and the study looked cheerful and inviting. The table was spread for tea, and a tea-pot steamed merrily by the fire. But Wharton noticed none of these things.

"We've been japed!" he gasped breathlessly.

"Japed!" echoed the juniors.

"Absolutely and completely japed!" said Wharton indignantly. "The giddy costumes are here all the time. Some frightful asses have been down to the station, while we were having dinner, and collared the costume-basket!"

The juniors stared at one another blankly.

"Great Scott!" ejaculated Frank Nugent.

"My only Aunt Jane!" said Bob Cherry.

"How do you know?" asked Johnny Bull quickly.

"The clerk said that three chaps went down there, and carted off the basket on a barrow," said Harry Wharton

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warmly. "Who the dickens can have done it? The clerk's a new chap, and didn't recognise the three chaps. I reckon it's above a joke to—"

"I'll bet I know who's done it!" said Johnny Bull, with conviction.

"Who?" asked the others.

"Why, Coker & Co., of course," said Bull. "Didn't Cokey say he'd muck the panto up? He's hidden up the giddy costumes so that we can't have the show! We can't do anything, either. If Coker doesn't tell us where the costumes are, we're dished!"

"Absolutely!" said Wharton blankly. "We couldn't possibly tell the Head. That would be sneaking. My hat! We'll skin Coker alive if he doesn't tell us where the costumes are! Come on, we'll go and interview the rotter!"

And, forgetting all about the carefully prepared tea, the Famous Four hurried out into the passage. In the Fifth Form passage they ran into Blundell, of the Fifth.

"I say," asked Wharton eagerly, "were Coker, Greene, and Potter away from dinner to-day?"

"Yes," answered Blundell, grinning. "Had important business, or something like that, in Friardale."

The Famous Four were certain now. They burst into Coker's study with angry brows. Coker & Co. were just sitting down to tea. Coker looked up at the Removites in surprise.

"Hallo, what the dickens are you kids doing in here?" he demanded. "Do you want to get mopped up? We don't allow Remove kids to burst in—"

"What have you done with our giddy costumes?" roared Wharton.

"Your what?" asked Coker.

"Your which?" added Potter.

"Your how much?" said Greene innocently.

"Costumes!" yelled the Famous Four. "You fetched 'em from the station, and carted them off somewhere. Where are they?"

Coker shook his head sadly.

"They're off their rockers!" he said gravely.

"Oh, quite."

"You—you—" gasped Wharton.

"I—I—what?" grinned Coker.

"You awful spoofer!" yelled Bob Cherry indignantly.

"We've found out that you've pinched the costume basket from the station! Don't try to deny it, because—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Coker & Co.

"You rotters!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Fifth-Formers roared.

"You'll have to play the giddy pantomime in Etons!" chuckled Coker. "It's no good coming to us for your old costumes! How should we know where they are? It's your business to look after them."

"Where are they?" demanded Wharton sulphurously.

"No good asking us, my dear kid!"

"If you don't tell us we'll rag you till you can't see!" exclaimed Nugent hotly.

"That's not the way to talk to your seniors!" said Coker, with a fatherly air. "Buzz off—we're busy!"

The Famous Four glared for a second, then banged out of the study. Coker & Co. let themselves go, and roared. They had, as Coker remarked, the Removites absolutely on toast. The juniors simply couldn't do anything without the costumes, and as the costumes were safely hidden away, the pantomime was consequently "mucked up."

While Coker & Co. were still chuckling over their victory the door opened again, and a fat form insinuated itself into the study. Coker frowned.

"Clear off, Bunter," he said. "You're not wanted!"

"Oh, really, Coker—"

"Yes, really, you fat porpoise!" said Coker sharply.

Billy Bunter closed the door. A confident smile was upon his face, and his greedy little eyes gazed longingly at the appetising eatables upon the table. Bunter calmly drew a chair up, and sat down at the table.

"You—you cheeky rotter!" roared Coker. "Clear out of this study! They'll stand your sponging habits in the Remove, perhaps, but I'm jolly well not going to. Scat!"

Billy Bunter blinked coolly.

"I'm going to have tea, you know," he announced.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" gasped Coker, rising from his chair.

"You're going out of this study, you cheeky tub of fat! My hat, I—"

Coker reached out to grasp the Owl of the Remove. Bunter dodged.

"Oh, I—I say, he gasped, "I—I've got something to say, you know!"

"Well, you're going to say it outside—"

Billy Bunter wriggled.

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"I missed my dinner—" he began.

"And you're jolly well going to miss your tea—so far as this tea is concerned, anyhow!" shouted Coker. "If you're not out in ten seconds we'll chuck you out on your fat neck!"

"I—I missed my dinner because I was down in Friardale," said Bunter meaningly.

Coker looked at Bunter sharply.

Billy Bunter grinned.

"Pass over those tarts, Potter, old man!" he said coolly.

Coker caught his breath in, and looked at Bunter with considerable interest. Coker had begun to realise that the fat Removite knew more than was comfortable for the perpetrators of the jape.

"You were in the village?" he asked slowly.

"Exactly," said Bunter, beginning on the eatables. "I happened to be there, you know, and I happened to see something. There was a barrow, and a big basket, and three Fifth Form fellows. I happen to be going their way, and I saw 'em take the basket to an old barn on the Pegg road—"

"Great Scott!" gasped Potter and Greene.

"You—you blessed spy!" ejaculated Coker. "You rotten Peeping Tom!"

"Oh, really, Coker—"

"You spy!" repeated Coker, looking at his two chums in consternation. He knew that there was not much chance of the secret being kept unless Bunter was heavily bribed. "You rotten Nosey Parker—"

"I say, you know, I couldn't help it!" protested Bunter. "I just happened to see you at the station, so I thought I'd follow you and see what your game was. I won't say a word, Coker—not a word!"

Coker breathed freely.

"So long as you treat me to a good feed or two!" added the Owl cunningly.

"You're a beastly blackmailer—that's what you are!" said Coker disgustedly. "Well, you've got the drop on us, Bunter, so I suppose we'd better give way to you. Suppose we kick you out of this study—"

"I'd jolly soon tell Wharton where the giddy costumes are!" grinned Bunter.

Coker shrugged his shoulders. Fortunately the table was extremely well spread—enough for two meals—but, when Bunter had finished, the table was bare and clear, save for a few crumbs. The fat junior sat back contentedly. Until he became hungry again, at least, he was safe. The prospect of another free meal was sufficient to keep his tongue quiet.

"Now you can sling your hook," said Coker savagely.

Bunter was quite willing, and he rolled heavily down the Fifth Form passage, grinning contentedly. When he entered the Rag—a large room used occasionally for junior meetings—he found the room packed with Removites. They were all talking excitedly, and took no notice of the Owl.

"It's a rotten trick!" growled Bulstrode angrily. "Coker ought to be made to tell us where the things are! It's above a joke when it comes to messing up a show that's taken weeks to prepare!"

"I guess the only way out is to let Coker take Cherry's part, after all," suggested Fisher T. Fish thoughtfully. "After all, I reckon Coker could act the comedian as well as Cherry—"

"You fatheaded chump!" roared Bob Cherry. "I'm not going to give up my part for anybody. If I don't act in it the show won't be held at all!"

"That's right," said Harry Wharton. "We thought of the wheeze, and as the principals, we absolutely refuse to produce the show unless we can do it in our way."

"I don't see why we should be shoved off by a measly Fifth Form bounder," said Nugent. "What's the good of us talking about the giddy pantomime if we're not going to have it? I'm fed up with the whole thing! Coker ought to be boiled!"

"We're absolutely at the rotter's mercy," said Johnny Bull thoughtfully. "If he chooses to keep mum we simply can't have the panto, at all."

"You could get another set of costumes," suggested Mark Linley.

"Oh, could we?" said Nugent. "How about the giddy expense? We're not millionaires. Besides, we had to give the order for this lot of costumes over a fortnight ago. Another lot would take as long to get down here—you know how rottenly slow those sort of firms are—and by that time the panto would be stale and out of date. No, my sons, it's now or never!"

Lord Mauleverer stroked his chin thoughtfully.

"Begad, I've got an idea, my dear fellows!" he announced.

"Oh, dry up, Mauly!" said Bob Cherry. "We're worried about this—"

"Yaas, I know—"

"Then don't interrupt now, there's a good chap!"

The schoolboy millionaire smiled. Lord Mauleverer was THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 256.

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possessed an unruffled temper; he was one of the most good-tempered fellows in existence. Although something of a slacker, he was extremely popular in the Remove, and the manner in which he spent his money sometimes made the juniors gasp. Mauleverer's allowance was practically unlimited, and he was extremely careless about his money. It was nothing new for him to mislay a couple of five-pound notes and never trouble to look for them. As there were plenty more five-pound notes the search would be too fagging.

"Looks to me as if we can't have the blessed panto—" began Wharton gloomily.

"That's nothing to worry over, my dear fellow," smiled Lord Mauleverer.

Harry Wharton stared.

"Nothing to worry over, you ass!" he exclaimed. "Great Scott—"

"An idea has been in my mind for some considerable time," went on the schoolboy earl. "A junior amateur pantomime is all very well in it's way—"

"You—you chump!"

"But it's nothing to be compared with a real professional show. Of course, I don't mean to say that the Remove show wouldn't be first-class," said Mauleverer; "but you will admit, my dear fellows, that a proper pantomime would be infinitely better."

The Removites stared at Lord Mauleverer in surprise.

"Of course," said Bob Cherry sarcastically, "there's a pantomime coming to Friardale, isn't there? Perhaps it'll be the Drury Lane production, all complete! I should say they would do great business down here for a month's run!"

Lord Mauleverer smiled quietly.

"I don't say the Drury Lane show will come to Greyfriars," he said coolly, "but I don't see why we shouldn't have a really decent pantomime down here for one night. That would be miles better than the Remove show—you must admit that, my dear fellows—and Coker & Co. would be simply done!"

"A real professional company?" gasped Harry Wharton.

Lord Mauleverer nodded.

"Yaas," he agreed. "What do you think of the idea?"

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Bunter Catches It.

LORD MAULEVERER looked round at the juniors with a smile. The Rag buzzed with excitement. The startling proposal had taken the Removites' breath away. They had been looking forward to the amateur production; but to have a real, first-class pantomime brought down to Greyfriars was simply startling.

"My hat!" ejaculated Bob Cherry, aghast.

"It couldn't be done!"

"Rot!"

"Bosh!"

"Piffle!"

"Out of the giddy question!"

Lord Mauleverer looked round.

"Begad, you seem to disapprove of the idea—"

"No, we don't!" said Harry Wharton. "It's a ripping idea, but it couldn't be done, Mauly, old man! It would cost pounds—"

"I'll pay all expenses, my dear fellow!"

"And no company would come here for one night—"

"Money will do anything," smiled the schoolboy earl.

"Besides, the Head would simply put the kybosh on it! It's all very well to have a junior show, but to think of having a real panto. down is simply out of the question. Of course, it would be stunning if we could have the show—miles better than our old production; but— Well, it couldn't be done."

And Harry Wharton practically dismissed the matter.

"My dear fellow," said Mauleverer, "you are making a lot of fuss over nothing. In the first place, I will provide the whole show; in the second place, it will be a ripping feather in the cap of the Remove; and in the third place, I will go to Dr. Locke myself and ask his permission to engage a company to come down. I'm quite sure he will give his consent."

"My only Aunt Priscilla," gasped Bob Cherry, "it seems feasible!"

"It's as simple as rolling off a form," drawled Lord Mauleverer.

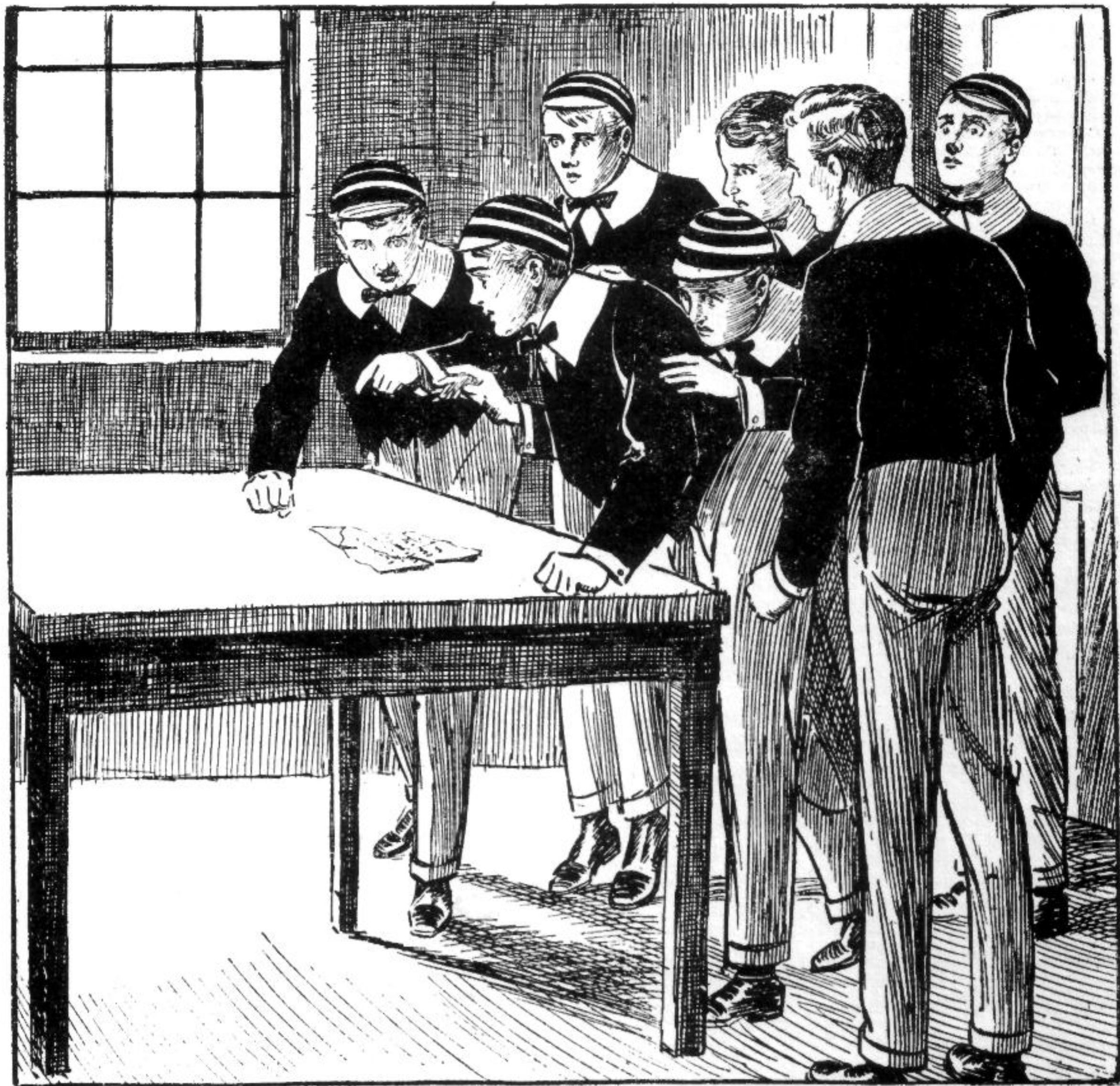
"But it will cost quids, and quids!" protested Wharton excitedly.

The schoolboy millionaire waved his hand.

"That's my affair," he said coolly. "I'll provide all the tin."

The Removites stared at one another in excitement and anticipation.

"My—my hat!" ejaculated Johnny Bull.



Figgins bent over the table excitedly. The words on the paper were easy to read now, and stood out quite distinctly. They were in Tom Merry's handwriting, and read thus: "In woodshed. Tell chaps to be ready for jape against Figgins & Co. immediately after tea. Castle ruins. Meeting time 6.15 exactly." (For the above incident see the splendid, long, complete story of Tom Merry & Co., entitled "THE NEW BOY'S SECRET," by Martin Clifford, in this week's issue of our companion paper, "The Gem" Library. Out on Wednesday. Price One Penny.

Vernon-Smith pushed his way through the excited crowd.

"It's all rot!" he sneered. "You're a set of silly asses if you listen to Mauly's drivel! He may have a heap of tin to chuck about, but I call it downright blatant swanking to talk about hiring a pantomime company for one night! It would cost every penny of—of fifty quid!"

"Yes, it's too much, Mauly!" said Harry Wharton.

Lord Mauleverer looked at Vernon-Smith with redly-tinged cheeks.

"I think I'm the chap to say whether it'll cost too much or not!" he said quietly. "I ask all you fellows now to be my guests for one night at a pantomime. I meant what I said, and if the Head gives his permission, there's nothing more to do except make the arrangements."

"Well, the Head won't give his permission!" sneered the Bouncer.

"That remains to be seen!"

"Anyhow, it'll be a rotten fifth-rate company!" said Snoop, with a sneer.

"It will be the best travelling show that I can procure."

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said Mauleverer quietly. "I'll go to the Head this very minute, my dear fellows, and ask his permission!"

And his lordship crossed the Rag, and passed out through the door. He left the Removites talking and shouting with excitement. A professional pantomime, with chorus, comedians, and everything complete would be simply grand! The juniors completely forgot their own production in this fresh excitement, and waited anxiously for the schoolboy earl's return.

"By Jove, it would be ripping!" said Wharton enthusiastically.

"Too good to be true!"

"Faith, and ye're right, Cherry, darling!"

"The rightfulness is terrific!" agreed Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, the Nabob of Bhanipur. "The honourable Head will regretfully put the esteemed kybosh on the wheeze!"

The Removites waited with impatience for Lord Mauleverer's return. At the end of ten minutes the door opened, and his lordship appeared, smiling gaily.

"Here he is!"

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"What's the verdict, Mauly?"

"Is it a go?"

Lord Mauleverer smiled at the excited Removites.

"It's all right, my dear fellows——"

"Has the Head consented?" asked Vernon-Smith curiously.

The juniors pressed round.

"Begad! Let a fellow breathe!"

"What does the Head say?" roared Bob Cherry.

"He says that we are at liberty to have the pantomime," announced Lord Mauleverer coolly. "Of course, he says that it will have to be a really decent show, devoid of all vulgarity, and——"

There was a roar.

"Then you're going to do it?" gasped Harry Wharton.

"Certainly! The Head says that we can have the hall for the evening. The big masters' platform will serve first class for a stage; it is quite large, and capable of accommodating twenty or thirty people at once——"

But Mauleverer was interrupted. The Removites yelled with excitement and joy. They would have thought nothing much of attending a pantomime in an ordinary theatre; but to have a show at Greyfriars, in the Big Hall, was a very different thing. It would be something to remember.

Billy Bunter looked rather alarmed. He had reckoned upon extracting at least half a dozen more feeds from Coker, but now it seemed as though he would be foiled. The Removites wouldn't use the amateur costumes now, in any case. Therefore, the wily Owl of the Remove realised that his blackmailing dodge would fall to the ground.

"It's rotten!" he muttered disgustedly. "I'd better go along to Coker's study now, before he gets to know of this new beastly wheeze of Mauleverer's! It'll be all over the school in no time!"

And Bunter hurried off to the Fifth-Form passage, and walked unceremoniously into Coker's study.

Coker glared.

"You fat rotter!" he exclaimed. "What the dickens do you mean by bursting in like that? Clear out before you——"

"I want five shillings," said Billy Bunter, blinking at Coker through his spectacles. "Only until to-morrow, you know! I've got a postal-order coming to-morrow, from a titled——"

"You rotten blackmailer!" growled Coker angrily.

"Oh, really, Coker! I—I——"

"I won't give you a penny!" shouted Coker. "Buzz off!" Bunter's eyes glittered behind his glasses.

"Oh, all right!" he said, moving towards the door. "I'll go and tell Wharton where the blessed costumes are! Then they'll be able to hold their rotten pantomime!"

Coker ground his teeth.

"You—you beastly fat fraud!" he said savagely. "I'll give you the hiding of your life when this affair's finished with!"

"I say, you know," said Bunter nervously. "I haven't done anything! I—I'm only asking for a—a loan! Five bob, Coker, until to-morrow——"

Coker thrust a hand into his pocket. He was in Bunter's power, so far as the costume-basket was concerned. The door opened, and Blundell looked in.

"Heard the latest?" he grinned.

"Latest?" asked Potter and Greene together.

"Yes," grinned Blundell. "That ass Mauleverer, of the Remove, is going to get a whole giddy pantomime company down! As their own show seems to be fizzling out, they're going to get a proper company to come here!"

"My only aunt!" ejaculated Coker.

"It is a bit startling!" chuckled Blundell.

Coker looked at Bunter.

"Then—then—— You rotten sharper!" he roared.

"Oh, really, Coker!" protested the dismayed fat junior.

"You fat fraud!" shouted Coker. "You knew this, and came here to get some money out of me before I heard about it! It doesn't matter twopence now whether Wharton knows where the costumes are or not! My hat, I'll——"

But Billy Bunter didn't wait. With a gasp of consternation he turned and dashed out of the study. Blundell stood in the way, and he went flying. Bunter fled down the passage.

"You young scoundrel!" roared Blundell furiously.

The Owl of the Remove dashed along the passage, and burst into the Rag. The room was still crowded, and Harry Wharton & Co. gazed at Bunter in surprise as he came flying into the room.

"Hallo, what's up with you?" asked Johnny Bull.

"I—I—I——" gasped Bunter.

"Go hon! You didn't!" said Bob Cherry, in surprise.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I—I say," gasped Bunter, "I know where the giddy costumes are!"

"What?" shouted Harry Wharton.

"Where are they?" shouted a score of voices.

"They're in an old barn place!" panted Bunter. "On the

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Pegg road, you know—that little lane which leads round back. I—I happened to see Coker & Co. put 'em there this morning, at dinner-time! I'd go and rag Coker till he couldn't stand," he added vindictively.

Wharton's eyes gleamed.

"If you knew this, why the dickens didn't you tell us before I sent that wire?" he asked grimly.

"Well, I—I——" stammered Billy Bunter.

"You acted traitor to the Remove, and tried to blackmail Coker!" said Wharton shrewdly. "You rotten cad! You contemptible humbug!"

"Oh, really, Wharton!"

"Just listen to him!" said Wharton scornfully. "He comes here and expects us to sympathise with him! He knew where the costumes were all the time, and didn't tell us because he wanted to get money out of Coker! Then, when he knew that we weren't going to have our own panto., in any case, he rushed off to Coker and tried to get some more tin! Coker, I expect, heard the news, and fired the rotter out of his study!"

"I say, you know," gasped Bunter, "I didn't see Coker hide the costumes at all! Some chap—a Fourth-Former—just told me about it! I—I haven't seen Coker since this morning, you know!" Bunter realised that things were not going in his favour. "I think it's rotten of the Fourth-Form chap not to have told you before! I didn't mean it when I said I'd seen Coker myself—that was a slip——"

"You awful fibber!" gasped Wharton. "You're simply telling whoppers as hard as you can!"

Billy Bunter looked round wildly at the door.

"I—I——"

"Collar him!" roared Bob Cherry wrathfully. "We'll bump the rotter till he's sore! It doesn't matter about the costumes now, but that doesn't alter the bounder's treachery! He's a traitor to the Remove, and, as such, he's going to be jolly well ragged!"

"Hear, hear!"

"The hear-hearfulness is terrific!" said the Indian junior indignantly.

Billy Bunter was grasped by a dozen hands.

"You beastly cads!" he yelled in terror. "Let me go! It's nothing to do with me! I—I haven't been down the village for days——"

The Removites grasped hold of the terrified Bunter in exasperation. Roaring with fright, the discomfited Owl of the Remove was raised on high; then he descended to the floor with a rush.

Bump!

"Yow-ow!" shrieked Bunter. "Yowooooop!"

"Give him another!" shouted Bulstrode.

Bump!

"Yaroooooh! Ow! Ow!"

"And another!" roared half the Remove.

Bump!

"Ow-yow-ow!" moaned Billy Bunter, more terrified than hurt. "Oh, you beasts! Oh, you rotters, to bully a chap like this! You're a set of cads! You're——"

Bunter was released, and he rolled his fat body towards the door. He turned a red and furious face to the indignant juniors.

"Yah! Beasts!" he roared.

Then William George Bunter fled, and slammed the door.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Coker's New Dodge.

GREYFRIARS fairly hummed with excitement. The great day had come at last. It was five days since Lord Mauleverer had made his startling proposal, and steps had immediately been taken to get the pantomime down to the school as quickly as possible. A really first-class show has been procured from a large town thirty miles distant. The whole production was to be brought over. Of course, the scenery would be that which was used at Greyfriars, but otherwise the pantomime would be identical with the original production. Curiously enough, it was "Cinderella," and the juniors eagerly discussed the coming event. And to-day was the last day of waiting.

The Remove was elated and gay; it was their show, and they were proud of it. The fags of the Second and Third were nearly off their heads; the Upper Fourth and Fifth showed considerable excitement; and even the lordly Sixth were interested. It was an event which didn't occur every day. The hall had altered its appearance altogether; it was packed with chairs, and the platform was now looking like a real stage, with footlights and curtain complete. There was even a roped-off space for the orchestra which was coming with the company.

After morning lessons—which had nearly driven the Form-masters off their heads—a crowd of juniors gathered in the Close, excitedly discussing the great event. The day was a

trifle muggy, and the roads were smothered with thick mud. The Close itself was covered with rain-puddles.

Coker strolled by on his way to the School House.

"You kids seem excited," he remarked.

"Something to be excited about, my son!" said Bob Cherry cheerfully. "Pantomimes don't come every day. Of course, we have rotten old fusty Greek plays by the Fifth and Sixth now and again, but they're piffle in comparison to this!"

"You young ass!" said Coker disdainfully.

"How about messing up the show now, Cokey?" grinned Johnny Bull.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Coker frowned.

"Oh, you can grin!" he said loftily. "You'll see!"

"Go hon!"

Coker passed into the house amid a chuckle. The juniors wouldn't have been quite so light-hearted had they known what was in the Fifth-Former's mind. Coker had sworn to mess the pantomime up; and he still intended to keep his word, if it was at all possible, even though the pantomime was a professional one.

The question was, how to accomplish his object.

It was a half-holiday that day, and at about four o'clock the little group of juniors collected at the gates gave a shout. A couple of waggonettes hove in sight. They drove into the Close with a flourish.

"Here they are!" yelled Gatty of the Second.

"Begad!" murmured Lord Mauleverer from the School House steps. "So they are!"

The actors and actresses were laughing and joking. Evidently they looked upon the affair as a kind of holiday. It was certainly an unusual engagement for a touring theatrical company.

The manager of the "crowd" had already been down to Greyfriars, and he nodded genially to Lord Mauleverer as the schoolboy earl approached.

"Oh, there you are, my boy!" he said cheerfully.

"Yaas, my dear fellow," drawled Lord Mauleverer. "All here?"

"Well, we shall be before the show starts," laughed the manager. "Tracey, the principal comedian, couldn't get away with us, so he's following by a later train. He'll be here by the six-eleven."

"Oh, all serene!" said Lord Mauleverer.

An excited crowd of juniors were surrounding the laughing actors and actresses, and the Close was filled with voices. Coker, of the Fifth, happened to be looking out of his study window, and he distinctly heard the manager's words concerning the principal comedian. For the moment Coker wasn't struck by the news, and he looked down at the animated scene with interest. But when the company had retired into the house the manager's words came back to him.

"So Tracey, the comedy-merchant, hasn't turned up!" he muttered thoughtfully. "That's the part I should have been absolutely great in! Of course, I couldn't do it in this show because I don't know the giddy part, but—"

Coker paused abruptly, and a startled look entered his eyes.

"My only Sunday topper!" he ejaculated, in a loud voice.

Potter and Greene looked up.

"What's up with it?" asked Potter.

"What's up with what?"

"Your Sunday topper!"

"You ass!" said Coker excitedly. "I've got an idea, you chaps—a real, terrific wheeze! It'll be the jape of the century! My hat! I'll teach Wharton to shove me out of his shows as though I were a giddy fag!"

Coker paced up and down excitedly.

"What are you jawing about?" asked Greene.

"I said I'd mess up their giddy pantomime, didn't I? Well, my sons, it's going to be done. I've got an idea—"

Potter turned quite pale.

"But I—I say," he stammered, "you can't do that, Coker! This isn't a junior show!"

"What does that matter? Just now those cheeky Remove kids were jeering at me because they think I sha'n't have the nerve to spoil this show. I'm going to show 'em that when Horace Coker says he'll do a thing it's—it's jolly well going to be done!"

"My hat!" muttered Potter and Greene together.

"My dear fellows, don't look so startled," laughed Coker.

"After all, it's only a jape; I'm not going to kill anybody, or even hurt a hair of anybody's head! All I want to do is to mess up the panto!"

"But—"

"But rats! Listen to this!" said Coker eagerly.

Potter and Greene listened. Then they burst into a fit of hysterical laughter. Coker's plan struck them as being extremely humorous, and they simply exploded with merriment. Coker looked pleased with himself.

"Well, how does it strike you?"

"Oh, absolutely gorgeous!" gasped Greene.

"Yes, if it can be done!" said Potter, wiping his eyes.

"It can be done—and shall!" said Coker decidedly. "This

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comedian-johnny is arriving at Friardale by the six-eleven. It'll be pitch dark then, and we can do the biznai as easily as eating a sausage-roll. Ha, ha, ha! It'll be the biggest triumph of the Fifth in history!"

And Coker & Co. chuckled hugely.

The rest of the school—particularly the Lower School—was excited and anxious for the time to pass. They never dreamed that Coker would take steps to keep his word. He had certainly spoilt the original pantomime; but it was out of the question to suppose he would do the same with this. Harry Wharton & Co., discussing the matter, dismissed it from their minds with a laugh.

But when the six-eleven train entered the station at Friardale three youths were awaiting the arrival of Mr. Tracey, the comedian. Mr. Tracey proved to be a little dapper individual, quietly and smartly dressed. By the look of him he was a sober, conscientious actor—very different from some music-hall artists. He greeted Coker & Co. warmly, for they stated that they had come down to direct him the way—which was undoubtedly true. Coker omitted to mention, however, where they were going to direct him to.

As they walked along the dark road Mr. Tracey kept the Fifth-Formers chuckling with merriment, and Potter and Greene felt rather uncomfortable. They didn't relish the part they had to play—although there was nothing dishonourable in it. After all, Coker's scheme was merely a harmless jape, although it involved a certain amount of discomfort for the innocent comedian.

They strolled along the side-lane which led to Pegg Bay.

"Seems rather a narrow road to the school," remarked the comedian.

"Yes, it is rather narrow," said Coker carelessly. "Not much traffic, you know."

The old barn-buildings hove in sight against the dark sky.

"Greyfriars appears to be a little out of the way—"

"Now!" roared Coker suddenly.

And in a second the three Fifth-Formers flung themselves upon Mr. Tracey, and bore him to the grass beside of the road. The comedian went down without a struggle; the attack had been so unexpected that he never dreamed of defending himself.

"What—ch— You young rascals!" he gasped.

"It's all right, Mr. Tracey," panted Coker; "only a little joke!"

"A joke!" shouted Mr. Tracey angrily. "What do you mean? Release me—"

"Not just yet," grinned Coker. "Hand over the rope, Greene, old man!"

And in less than five minutes the amazed comedian was securely trussed up. To escape from his bonds without assistance was an impossibility. Yet the ropes were passed round him in such a way that he was not in any pain. His knees were drawn slightly up, and his arms were bound to his sides. He raved angrily, but Coker & Co. took no notice of him; they carried him swiftly into the little shed which already held the dress-basket. There was a fireplace of a crude description in the shed, and a fire was burning in it. A lamp was hanging on the wall. Coker & Co. had been making preparations beforehand.

"Here we are," grinned Coker. "Lay him down, you chaps!"

Mr. Tracey was placed down upon an assortment of the pantomime costumes which had been extracted from the hamper.

"You young scoundrels," roared the furious comedian, "what does this mean?"

"Only a harmless little jape, sir," said Coker cheerfully.

"You see, I told the Remove kids that I'd mess their show up, and of course, without you the panto will simply fizzle out! There's no harm in it, Mr. Tracey—I'm very sorry to cause you any inconvenience, but there it is!"

Mr. Tracey's genial face lost some of its fury.

"So you've simply kidnapped me so that the pantomime will be a failure?" he asked. "It's some schoolboy joke?"

"Exactly!" grinned Coker.

"Well, why couldn't you explain that before?" said Mr. Tracey crossly. "I strongly object to being trussed up like a confounded fowl!"

"I'm sorry, but—"

"You've got the better of me," said the comedian, ruefully. "I can see that it would be hopeless for me to try to escape. If you untie these ropes, I will give you my word of honour that I will not come up to the school until about ten o'clock. Is it a deal?"

Mr. Tracey spoke with quiet earnestness.

"Honour bright?" said Coker doubtfully.

"Honour bright!" smiled the comedian, who seemed to be an exceedingly good-tempered individual. "I admit that if you did not take my word, I should be helpless. If you'll

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trust me, I will go back to the village and remain there. On my word, I promise I will not break faith!"

Coker considered. "Oh, all right, Mr. Tracey!" he exclaimed, with some relief. "I'll trust you. After all, I didn't like the idea of leaving you here, bound up. It seemed too much like dirty work! You've got to look upon it as though you're a prisoner!"

"You young rascals!" laughed the comedian, who realised that he was helpless.

And in three minutes he was unbound. Then Coker & Co. hurried to Greyfriars, feeling very much more comfortable in their minds. Coker was quite sure that Mr. Tracey would not break faith—and Coker was right. The comedian happened to be a gentleman, and he took his misfortune with a smiling face.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.
Gosling in a New Light.

COKER looked at his watch. "We shall have to buck up," he said. "The show starts in an hour, and the comedian is sure to appear five or ten minutes after the start! We must get everything ready before the start!"

"Rather," agreed Potter, with a chuckle. "My only hat, what a surprise those Remove kids'll get! Jolly lucky that Gossy has been at the gin and water! If he hadn't been, you couldn't have worked the jape. Even now I'm rather doubtful, Cokey, old man!"

"Rats!" said Coker. "Gossy's as easy to handle as a Second Form fag!"

The three Fifth Formers entered the gates of Greyfriars and saw that the Close was deserted. All the fellows were in the School House, excited and anxious for the performance to commence. The windows gleamed bright and radiant against the dark old walls of the school, and the merry shouts of juniors could be heard.

"They won't be as merry as that for long!" chuckled Greene.

"No fear!" said Coker. "Look here, you two stop here for a tick—I'll go into the house and speak to the manager. He'll begin to wonder when Tracey doesn't turn up."

Coker disappeared into the gloom, and his two chums saw him enter the School House. In three minutes he was out again. He came up grinning.

"It's all serene!" he said cheerfully. "The manager was as busy as the dickens, and only listened to me for a minute. I told him that we had met the comedian, and that he would be up at the school before the show started. He said that would do, as Tracey didn't have to appear before the second scene!"

"But Tracey won't be up—"

"Of course not, you ass! I didn't say he would. I said

that a comedian would be here before the show started—and, my hat, a comedian will be here! I'll bet he'll cause enough roaring!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Potter.

"Quiet, you chump!" warned Coker. "Come on, we'll go and interview the worthy Gossy!"

And, chuckling hugely, the Fifth Form combine made their way to the school-porter's lodge. Gosling answered the knock, and looked at Coker & Co. rather unsteadily. Before going to Friardale, Coker had made Gosling a present of five shillings, and Gosling had evidently been celebrating the occasion. At any rate, he was—as Coker put it—decidedly unsteady on his pegs!"

"Hallo, Master Coker, sir," he said, grinning. "Come in, young gen'lemen! I allus did think you was the three smartest young gents in the school!"

"Quite right, Gossy!" agreed Coker. "You've got sense!"

The three Fifth Formers stepped into the little room. A bottle stood on the table, and a glass stood beside the bottle. The bottle was half empty—the missing liquor evidently being inside the excellent Gosling.

"We want you to do us a favour, Gossy," said Coker eagerly.

"Anything you like, Master Coker," said Gosling readily. "Wot I says is this 'ere—that young gents as treats me as you've treated me, 'as a right to my assistance!"

Coker & Co. sat down.

"You see, Gossy, it's this way," began Coker. "We three fellows have always said that you were one of the smartest chaps in—in England, and I've been wondering if you'll do something to prove it!"

Gosling beamed—and poured out another glass of gin and water.

"Potter, here, says that you'd make a first-class comedian, Gossy," went on Coker persuasively. "He says that if you only went on the stage, you'd make your fortune!"

Gosling took a big drink at his glass.

"Wot I says is this 'ere," he mumbled. "I allus did think as I'd make a hactor! Fact is, though, I ain't 'ad no hopportunity—"

"Ah, that's just where I come in," interrupted Coker quickly. "I'm going to give you the opportunity you want. Look here, Gossy, the comedian who ought to have been playing in this pantomime to-night, won't turn up, for some reason. Now, I propose that you should go on in his place."

Gosling stared.

"My 'at!" he ejaculated, blankly.

"There's nothing startling in it," said Coker. "I'll tell you what you've got to do now, if you'll only seize the opportunity when you've got it!"

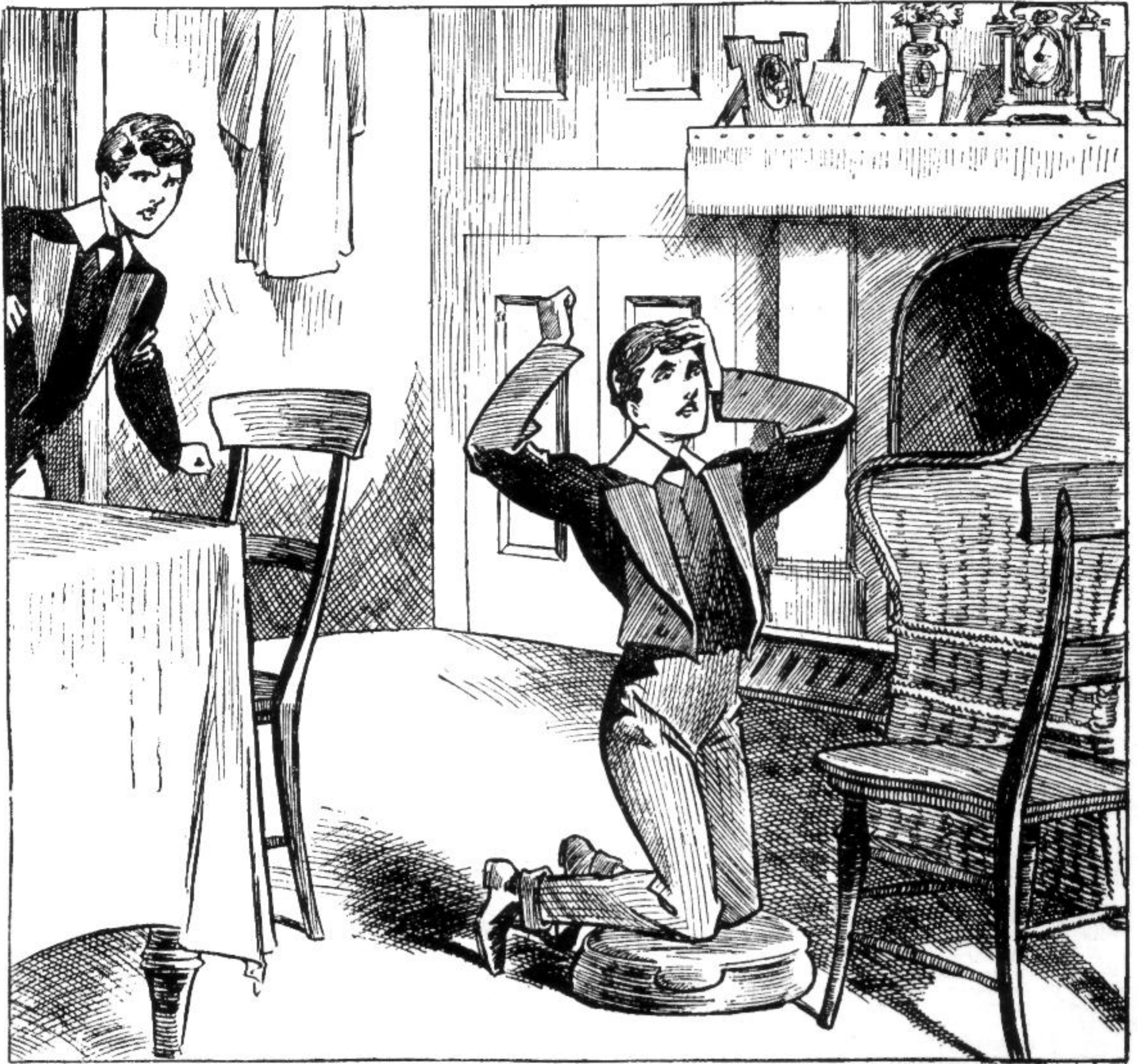
"What I says is this 'ere, I ain't goin' to—"

"But my dear Gossy, you won't get another opportunity like this for years!" said Coker quickly. "Why, if you made a hit, you might find yourself, well, anywhere! You see, the

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No. 11.—MARJORIE : Miss WILHELMINA : CLARA.



"My hat!" gasped Temple in amazement, gazing at Frank Nugent, who was kneeling before a chair in the study. "Are you off your rocker!" Frank Nugent took no notice. "Darling, as long as life lasts I will die for thee!" he said dramatically. (See Chapter 1.)

proper comedian can't turn up, and you're the only chap to take his place!"

Gosling set his glass down with a bang.

"That don't make no odds," he said firmly. "Why, if the 'Ead knew as I was makin' a fool o' meself in a panty-mime, I'd get the sack! What I says—"

"Rot!" said Coker. "I'd see that everything turned out all right if you did happen to make a fool—ahem!—make a slip of any kind! Besides, the part's as simple as A B C. All you've got to do is to go on and say a few lines, and—then come off again!"

"Well, young gents, I allus did say—"

"Of course you did! You'd make a first-rate comedian. Now, if you do this little favour— I mean, if you seize this opportunity, I'll give you a quid when the show's over! It won't cost you a farthing, Gossy, and you'll have a quid for yourself when you're done!"

Gosling's eyes gleamed. Now that Coker had mentioned the little matter of the sovereign, things were altered. Had the porter been perfectly sober, he would never have considered the matter. But he was far from sober, and didn't care, really, what he did. Besides, a pound was a pound, any day!

"What I says is this 'ere!" exclaimed Gosling. "I'll 'ave

the quid, Master Coker! I could jest do with a quid now—"

"But will you take the comedian's part?" asked Coker eagerly.

"Well, if it ain't too 'ard," said Gosling, "I ain't particular! I'd as soon go on the stage, as I would sing a song at the Annual Readin' Room Meetin'! Wot I says is this 'ere—I'll go on the old stage pervided you 'and over the quid!"

Coker looked across at Potter and Greene triumphantly.

"Good!" he exclaimed, "I knew you'd prove our words to be true, Gossy! Now, all you have to do is to walk on the stage when I tell you—I shall be with you—and say a few lines—"

"Which I don't know any old lines!" mumbled Gosling.

"But I'm going to tell you them now," grinned Coker. "There are only six, and you can learn 'em in about ten minutes! I say, Potter," added Coker in an undertone, "buzz into the house and fetch that giddy make-up box!"

"Right-ho!" said Potter.

While Potter was away, Coker carefully taught Gosling his words. Another glass had the effect of making the porter actually eager to become a comedian. Potter returned with

a make-up box, belonging to the Fifth Form Amateur Dramatic Society, and Coker laid it upon the table.

"Wot's that?" demanded Gosling.

"Oh, that's grease-paint and stuff," said Coker. "I'm going to disguise you!"

"Eh?" said Gosling, opening his eyes. "Wot I says is—"

"My dear Gossy, all comedians have to make-up!" said Coker calmly. "When I've done with you, you won't know yourself!"

Potter and Greene nearly exploded. The idea of Gosling stalking on to the stage was distinctly funny. It would be certain to cause a sensation, anyhow.

Gosling was quite willing to be made-up, and Coker proceeded to do it with all speed.

A big wig altered the porter's appearance considerably, and a few touches with the grease-paints altered his features so that even the juniors would not have recognised him as Gosling.

"You'll do!" chuckled Coker, looking at his handiwork. "Now for the giddy overcoat and hat, Potter!"

Potter had brought a big overcoat with him and a top hat. In a minute Gosling was inside the coat, and the hat reposed over the wig. The change in the porter was startling, and that Coker's handiwork was well executed could not be denied. Gosling, although fairly large in build, looked quite slim and gentlemanly in the smart overcoat and silk hat. True, he would not have stood the strain of a strong light; but Coker meant to rush him on without giving the manager time to raise questions.

"All serene now!" said Coker briskly. "Come on, Gossy—"

"Wot I says is this 'ere," said Gosling, with a grin. "I'm goin' to be a comedian! If I make a 'it in the pantymime, I reckon as I'm goin' to London! I ain't goin' to stop down 'ere if I can earn fifty quid a week in the theayters!"

"Certainly not!" agreed Coker. "Oh, you'll earn that!"

"I don't think!" muttered Greene, under his breath.

"Oh, my only hat!"

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

The New Comedian.

THE big hall was packed with seniors and juniors alike. The juniors were considerably noisy, especially the Remove and the fags' Forms. The Upper Fourth and the Shell were inclined to be rather stiff, regarding the whole affair as below them. Nevertheless, Temple, Dabney & Co., and the others, were equally as eager to see the performance as were the Removites.

A small orchestra had come with the pantomime, and these musicians were now engaged in playing the overture. The pantomime would commence in five minutes' time. All the boys were in their places, and even some of the masters were present. Dr. Locke was not there, for the Head considerably decided that the juniors would be freer to laugh and cheer without his presence.

A head appeared for a moment at the big doors. It was Potter, and he grinned as he saw the packed state of the hall. He withdrew, and rapidly walked down the passage out into the Close.

"It's all serene!" he called, in a low voice. "The show's just going to start!"

"Good!" said Coker. "Come on, Gossy!"

"Wot I says is this—"

"Don't try to talk now!" interrupted Coker. "You've got to dress for the part yet!"

They hurried into the House, and went to the back regions, where several small rooms had been set aside as dressing-rooms for the company. The manager was bustling about in the passage.

"Mr. Tracey's been delayed," said Coker coolly, "and this gentleman's been sent down in his place."

"Delayed!" exclaimed the manager. "Good gracious! What on earth—"

"It's all right!" said Gosling importantly. "I know the part perfectly!"

Gosling had been taught those words implicitly, and he delivered them really well.

The manager looked at him searchingly in the dim light of the passage. It was plain to see that he was dismayed, but there was no time to take any action. And the general manager of the company would scarcely send a "dud" man to fill the part.

"Oh, well, I suppose it's all right!" grumbled the manager. "Rather peculiar the boss didn't wire me, though! You're rather heavy, I'm afraid—"

"Don't you worry, sir," said Gosling. "I shall be all right."

"Well, go and change!" said the manager. "Your cue comes soon after the opening of the second scene!"

"Right you are!" said Gosling. "Come on, boys!"

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Coker & Co. hugged themselves. They had passed through the ordeal which might have resulted in the jape being discovered. Gosling had acquitted himself well; the manager had no suspicion.

"You did it a treat, Gossy!" gasped Coker, when they arrived at the room set aside for the comedian. "Buck up and change into the Baron's togs!"

"I shall make a fine factor!" grinned Gosling, warming to his work.

"Oh, rather!" agreed Coker. "Hurry up!"

Gosling hurried up.

Fortunately the clothes for the original comedian were large and "sloppy," so that by considerable squeezing and tight buttoning, Gosling was able to get into them. The effect, if anything, was funnier than had been originally intended. The clothes were gaudy, and covered with frills and lacings. Gosling looked screamingly funny in them. Coker & Co. simply wept with merriment as they surveyed him.

"You won't need to say anything, Gossy," gasped Greene breathlessly. "Those duds will set the whole house roaring!"

"You leave it to me, Master Greene!" chuckled Gosling.

"And now about the make-up," said Coker. "You've got to go through it again!"

Gosling didn't care. He was reckless now. Perhaps the thought of the sovereign to come had something to do with the excess of good spirits.

When Coker had done with him, the porter looked quite another man. His face was painted in a ludicrous fashion, and he wore a long, bushy moustache which quite disguised the fact that he was Gosling.

"Great!" commented Coker gleefully. "Come on!"

They passed out into the passage. Several members of the company were there, and they looked at Coker & Co. and the new "comedian" with interest. Coker turned to Potter and Greene.

"You cut off!" he said, in a low voice.

"All serene!" said the two Fifth-Formers.

They disappeared, and in a few moments took their places in the hall. The pantomime had commenced, and the fellows were watching with interest. The platform at the end of the hall served admirably as a stage, while the improvised footlights heightened the effect.

At the moment of Potter and Greene's entrance a minor comedian was just finishing his song, and the juniors clapped uproariously. They were in high good humour, and anything pleased them that night, not that the minor comedian's talent was poor. On the whole, Lord Mauleverer had succeeded in obtaining a really first-class company.

"Begad, you know," murmured his lordship. "it's rather good, my dear fellows!"

"Ripping!" agreed Harry Wharton. "You're a brick, Mauly!"

"Rather!" said Frank Nugent. "Better than our show would have been!"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" interrupted Bob Cherry. "Somebody else on!"

The pantomime proceeded merrily, the juniors subsiding into silence. The first scene at last came to an end, and there was a short interval for the second, for, of course, it was impossible to have the customary drop-sheets at Greyfriars. The second scene depicted the Baron's kitchen, and it opened with a group of fairies appearing.

When they had vanished their place was taken by the Demon King, who, of course, told the audience that he was about to foil the fairies, and that he would end in bringing misfortune and disaster upon the innocent Cinderella's head.

The Demon King was a tall, thin, hawklike man, and he rather fancied himself. Harry Wharton described it in a whisper as downright swanking. The Demon King stalked about the stage uttering his diabolical threats, and then settled down to deliver his "big speech." The Demon King thought he came out rather strong in this scene, and he was at his most thrilling moment when a titter arose from the juniors.

The reason for that titter was not apparent to the Demon King, for he was not endowed with the gift of seeing behind him without turning his head. But, from an entrance at the rear, a strange figure had appeared from the darkened stage—a big figure, with ludicrously-fitting clothes.

Coker had just given the Baron his cue.

The Baron walked towards the front of the stage, rather unsteadily, and he blinked in the light of the footlights. The audience, knowing nothing, thought this was all in the part, and undoubtedly Gosling succeeded in being funny. The manner in which he crossed the stage was distinctly humorous, although Gosling hadn't intended it to be.

"Hold, fair lady!" he shouted wildly.

The audience roared, and the Demon King twirled round in amazement.

To be interrupted in this manner by the comedian was altogether too much.

Gosling was quite reckless now, and he flung up one hand towards the ceiling.

"What doest thou 'ere, beautiful one?" he roared. "Fly with me, an' we will—"

The Demon King glared at the Baron with goggling eyes.

"Get off!" he hissed furiously.

"Avast there!" shouted Gosling recklessly. "Wot I says—I mean—'Oo the dickens are you talking to? Fly with me, Cinderella, an' we'll get wedded afore noon! The Demon King ain't goin' to take you from me 'eart!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" shrieked the audience.

The Baron was certainly funny, although the juniors didn't know that all this was not in the book of words. The Demon King literally stuttered with fury and amazement. He lost his temper completely, and stalked up to the Baron with a hiss of rage.

"You fool!" he shouted. "Get off!"

Gosling glared at the Demon King. To be called a fool in this manner wasn't what he bargained for, for Gosling was sober enough to know that the words weren't in the part.

"Wot's that?" he roared. "Call me a fool, would yer! Look 'ere, my man, I'll 'ave yer know as 'ow I don't allow thin rakes like you to call me no names. Git horff, indeed! Git horff yerself, yer skinny old scarecrow!"

The Demon King staggered.

"Oh, hold me up, someone!" moaned Potter, falling into Greene's arms.

The manager, in the wings, was standing there looking on the stage in consternation and amazement. Yet he refrained from going on. Matters might still be mended if the new comedian could be induced to come off.

"I say, sir!" exclaimed the manager in an urgent tone. "You've gone on before your cue. Please come off immediately!"

Gosling sniffed.

"Which ain't likely!" he shouted, thus telling the audience that he had been spoken to from the wings. "I'm blowed if I'm a-comin' horff this 'ere stage till I've said my lines! I'm a comedian, I am, an' what I says—"

"You idiot!" hissed the Demon King. "Do you want to ruin the whole pantomime?"

Gosling swelled with indignation.

"Ijit, am I?" he ejaculated. "My 'at! I'll show yer whether I'm a ijit or no! You little whipper-snapper, I'll wipe up the blessed stage with yer if yer call me names!"

The audience were simply rocking in their seats. Undoubtedly this unrehearsed "business" was infinitely funnier than the real show. So far the audience hadn't recognised Gosling in the weird-looking individual on the stage. Certainly his voice was rather familiar, but the boys were too excited to recognise it. They rolled in their chairs and wept with merriment.

"Down with the curtain!" ordered the manager sharply.

But it was easier said than done. The curtain, for some reason—perhaps Coker had something to do with it—refused to come down, and the manager wrung his hands with consternation. He had reckoned on the show going through without a hitch. And now, almost before it had commenced, it was literally "messed up"—as Coker had intended it should be.

"Call this madman off!" shouted the Demon King loudly.

"I don't think!" yelled Gosling, throwing off his quaint hat, and, unfortunately, his wig with it. "Wot I says is this 'ere: I ain't goin' to leave this 'ere stage till I've done my whack, an' I ain't gon' to be called a madman, neither! Take that, yer hinsultin' warmint! Wot I says is this 'ere—"

What Gosling said took the form of a wild shout as he lunged forward. The Demon King, nothing loth, met him, and in a second the pair were rolling over and over on the stage in a deadly embrace.

The audience were on their feet now. Gosling's familiar phrase, coupled with his well-known tones, could not escape their attention any longer. It was brought home to them, like a bombshell, that the comedian was none other than the school porter! It was simply startling, and the big hall was instantly in an uproar.

"For Heaven's sake get that curtain down!" shouted the manager, nearly crying with vexation.

"What's up?"

"It's Gosling!"

"My only Aunt Matilda!"

"Begad!"

The whole hall was in a state of dire confusion, and clouds of dust rolled up from the stage as the two combatants, in deadly earnest, swayed from side to side. Then, with a rush, the curtain descended, shutting out the battle from the view of the amazed and startled audience.

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NEXT
MONDAY:

"FISH'S FAG AGENCY!"

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ONE
PENNY.

THE TENTH CHAPTER. Coker's Short-Lived Triumph.

"GOSLING!"

"Well, I'm blessed!"

"It's—it's a giddy jape!"

"The japefulness is terrific!"

"Faith, and ye're right, Inky!"

The juniors were all shouting at once. All possibility of the pantomime proceeding was at an end. Seniors and juniors alike were on their feet, uttering amazed exclamations. The knowledge that they had been japed came like a thunderbolt, and the uproar, as the Nabob of Bhanipur would have described it, was terrific. A group of Sixth-Formers in the front row were discussing the matter animatedly.

"Great Scott!" ejaculated Wingate, the popular captain of Greyfriars. "It's simply astounding! Who on earth could have put Gosling up to such a wheeze?"

"Blessed if I know!" said Valence of the Sixth.

"It's a mystery!" exclaimed Courtney. "We'd better go round and make inquiries, Wingate. I expect Gosling will tell us who did it."

The three prefects left the hall and went round the back. They found the combatants had been separated. The Demon King—whose name was Bramley—stood at the back of the stage breathing hard, his eyes glittering with fury.

Gosling, firm in the grasp of the manager, and Mr. Prout, the Fifth-Form master, was protesting weakly. He had several bruises on his face, clearly showing that the Demon King had given a good account of himself.

"Wot I says is this 'ere!" mumbled Gosling faintly.

"This wasn't none o' my doin's! Master Coker, 'e put me up to it!"

"Coker—eh?" said Wingate, frowning. "By Jove!"

"Yes, Wingate, Gosling says that Coker of the Fifth led him to make this absurd exhibition of himself. Please go and find Coker immediately, and bring him to the headmaster's study. I shall be there to explain matters!" added Mr. Prout grimly.

"Very good, sir," said Wingate; and the captain of the School hurried off.

He had no difficulty in finding Coker. That cheerful youth—now somewhat scared—was talking carelessly with Potter and Greene just inside the hall. Coker had expressly told Gosling to mention no names, but as he saw Wingate coming towards him he felt strange misgivings.

"Coker, you're wanted in the Head's study at once!" said Wingate sternly.

"I am?" said Coker. "What the dickens for?"

"You know what for well enough. The Head's waiting for you!"

"Well, my hat, if that rotten Gossy hasn't sneaked!" said Coker blankly.

"What?" roared Harry Wharton. "Then it was you—"

"The rotter!" gasped Bob Cherry.

"The spoofing fraud!"

"The japing bounder!"

"Collar him!" cried Wharton angrily.

"Stop this, you young rascals!" said Wingate sternly, pushing the excited Removites back. "The Head will deal with Coker!"

"And so shall we!" said Johnny Bull grimly. "My only topper, fancy him having the giddy nerve to mess up this show! Why—why, the awful fraud wants boiling!"

Coker marched off with Wingate, grinning rather sheepishly. Fifteen minutes later he came down the passage from the Head's study ruefully pressing his hands to his sides. Potter and Greene regarded him sympathetically.

"How many, old man?" asked Potter, with concern.

"Six!" growled Coker. "Six cuts laid on as hard as the Head could whack 'em! My only aunt, I never knew the Head had such strength!"

"And how about Gossy?" asked Greene.

"Oh, he's all right!" said Coker. "The Head ordered him to go to his lodge and cool down. Of course, I owned up to everything rather than let Gossy get sacked. The Head was jolly wild, but, after all, things might have been worse. He gave me a jolly stiff lecture about being surprised at my japing about, as though I were a Remove kid!"

"Case of going in one ear and out the other!" grinned Potter.

"That's it. My word, though, my hands ache!" said Coker, looking at his red hands with a rueful expression.

"Still, we've done Wharton's panto., haven't we?"

And that was one consolation.

Wingate, having been in the Head's study when Coker told his story, the full facts of the case very soon filtered

down to the Remove. Harry Wharton & Co. were angry and exasperated at the manner in which Coker had kept his word.

"We're simply diddled!" said Bob Cherry disconsolately—"absolutely dished and done! If we'd have known that he was going to play the giddy ox like this, we should have collared him and kept him prisoner till the show was over! As it is, we haven't seen an eighth part of it!"

"Rotten!" agreed Harry Wharton. "Gossy was funny enough when he was on, but that doesn't compensate for having the show messed up, does it? The company's had all the trouble of coming here, and now they'll go away without having given the show!"

"Beastly!" said Nugent disgustedly.

"Horrid!" said Johnny Bull.

"It seems such a blessed waste of time!" Mark Linley put it thoughtfully. "It's not as though one performance out of six had been spoilt. It's having the one and only performance spoilt; that's where the roughness comes in!"

The juniors fell into a disconsolate silence.

"We'll make old Coker sit up!"

"Begad!" ejaculated Lord Mauleverer suddenly. The schoolboy had been listening thoughtfully to the juniors' conversation, and now a hopeful look had entered his eyes. He looked up swiftly. "Begad!" he exclaimed again.

"What are you begadding about?" asked Harry Wharton.

"My dear fellows, I was just thinking—"

Lord Mauleverer broke off abruptly, and walked swiftly away. The passages were crowded with juniors, all of them discussing the one and only topic. The schoolboy millionaire pushed his way through swiftly, and at last found the manager of the company. The worthy gentleman was pacing up and down with an angry frown upon his brow.

"I had my doubts about coming to a public school with a pantomime," he said crossly.

"Begad!" said Lord Mauleverer mildly. "The whole occurrence was unforeseen, my dear sir. If you will allow me a few moments' conversation I should like to make a proposal."

"I cannot see that any proposal will alter matters," said the manager stiffly. "The crowd is getting dressed as quickly as possible, and we shall leave the school at the earliest—"

"Begad, my dear fellow, don't be in such a hurry!" said

Lord Mauleverer, in alarm. "Please listen to what I have to say!"

The manager did listen, and the result was so satisfactory that when Lord Mauleverer made his way back to the Remove passage some fifteen minutes later a quiet smile of satisfaction was upon his aristocratic features. He had paid a short visit to the Head, in addition to interviewing the manager, and the result of the second interview was as satisfactory as the first.

Harry Wharton & Co. looked at him uninterestedly as he walked down the passage. According to the school rules, they should then have been doing their prep., but prep. had been excused for that evening, and they were not likely to set about doing it because the pantomime had fizzled out.

"It's all right, my dear fellows," announced Mauleverer calmly.

"Oh, is it?" said Bulstrode, pushing forward. "I think it's all wrong!"

Lord Mauleverer smiled.

"You're looking happy," growled John Bull. "Blessed if I can see anything to smile about!"

"There's no need to be worried in the least," said Mauleverer coolly. "I have just made arrangements with the manager of the company and with the Head to have the performance to-morrow night, with Mr. Tracey, the comedian, in his original part! The Head refused at first, but when I pointed out to him how disappointed everybody was he turned up trumps, and gave his consent!"

"Wha-a-t!" gasped Harry Wharton, in amazement.

"Begad! Am I to repeat it all?" smiled his lordship.

"Do—do you mean to say that we're going to have the pantomime, after all?" gasped Bob Cherry.

Lord Mauleverer nodded.

"Great Scott!"

"Good old Mauly! Hurrah!"

"It—it can't be true!"

"But how about the giddy expense?" asked Frank Nugent blankly.

"That's my affair, my dear fellow," said the schoolboy millionaire quietly. "I wrote for some more money a day or two ago, and I have got quite sufficient to meet the demands of the case."

"You—you old brick!" said Harry Wharton.

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THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

Billy Bunter in Luck.

HARRY WHARTON & CO. were in high feather at the unexpected turn of events. They had quite given up hope of seeing the pantomime through. Lord Mauleverer's sportsmanlike action made the schoolboy earl more popular than ever at Greyfriars. In an instant all the juniors' drooping spirits were raised, and they laughed and joked merrily.

As Bob Cherry remarked, it was rather a good thing, after all, that Coker had ruined the show. Owing to the Fifth-Former's action the juniors would be afforded another evening's entertainment. The episode of Gosling was, as it were, all free gratis and for nothing.

The Remove retired that night jubilant and merry. So excited were they, in fact, that they had completely forgotten to rag Coker & Co. And when they did remember it they decided that the Fifth Form combine had been punished enough; or, at least, Coker had, and he was the ringleader. Perhaps, if Lord Mauleverer had not made arrangements for the show to be performed a second time Coker would have been painfully ragged.

The following morning broke clear and fine, and the Close was hard and frozen. The juniors turned out in high spirits, and these high spirits refused to be subdued. Lines fell in showers throughout the whole morning, but the juniors didn't care. Mr. Quelch, the master of the Remove, was totally opposed to the whole idea of having the pantomime, and he took no pains to hide his views. Not that the Removites cared one jot, they were too exuberant to take any notice of Mr. Quelch's sarcastic remarks.

Several members of the company had been seen about the school during the morning, for Dr. Locke had given them permission to use the grounds as they liked. The actors and actresses were rather glad of the change, for they were getting paid their salaries just the same as if they had been playing at an ordinary theatre. Mr. Bramley—the Demon King—had shunned the school, and kept to the village. His participation in the unseemly struggle the previous night had caused him to realise that if he went to Greyfriars he would probably be severely chipped by the juniors.

Therefore Mr. Bramley remained in Friardale. But he was sullen and furious still. The man's character was a vindictive one, and he brooded over his wrongs—imaginary for the most part—in black silence. He was extremely unpopular in the company, and not a soul knew anything about his previous record. Had they known the dark secrets of Bramley's heart they would, perhaps, have refused to act with him.

Immediately after morning lessons at Greyfriars the juniors hurried out into the Close. In a few minutes a footer was being punted about, and the old Cloisters rang with the merry cries of the Removites. A fat form crossed the Close, and made for the gates.

"Look out for the Highcliffe cads!" grinned Bob Cherry. Billy Bunter blinked.

"I sha'n't let the rotters catch me this time!" he said. "I—I say, Cherry, I suppose you couldn't—"

"No," said Bob Cherry, "I couldn't!"

"Really, Cherry!" said the Owl of the Remove. "I—I only wanted—"

"Half-a-sovereign, perhaps?" asked Harry Wharton, with a chuckle.

"Oh, really, Wharton! Only a couple of bob!" protested Bunter. "I—I'll pay you back to-morrow, you know. I've got a fiver coming—"

Bob Cherry gasped. "My hat!" he ejaculated. "He's gone beyond postal-orders now! Buzz off, Bunter, we're busy!"

"But, I say—"
"Go and say it to somebody else!" roared Johnny Bull. "Clear out of the way of this ball! You'll get it on your fat nose if you're not jolly careful!"

"Beasts!" muttered Bunter, rolling out of the gates.

He walked quickly down to Friardale. Bunter was, unfortunately, short of cash, and he badly wanted something to eat. At least, he told himself he did. As a matter of fact, the Owl of the Remove would have been in better health if he had fasted for a week. He knew that it was out of the question to get tuck "on tick" from Mrs. Mumble, so he visited the village in the hope that Uncle Clegg would turn up trumps.

As he walked down the High Street—he was the only Greyfriars junior in sight—he was stopped by a tall, thin man, dressed in dark tweeds. The man looked at Bunter thoughtfully.

"You are from Greyfriars?" he asked.

"Can't you see my cap?" said Billy Bunter indignantly.

"Ah, yes! Perhaps you do not recognise me?" proceeded

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NEXT MONDAY:

"FISH'S FAG AGENCY!"

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the stranger. "I am Mr. Bramley, the gentleman who was so grossly treated by that villainous porter of yours!"

Bunter blinked at Bramley through his round spectacles.

"Oh, really!" he said. "So you're the demon johnny!"

Bramley smiled.

"Yes," he replied; "I am that gentleman."

"Pleased to meet you, Mr. Bramley," said Billy Bunter, extending a fat hand. "I—I think it was rotten of the fellows to chip you, you know! They've been saying all sorts of things about you. Even the masters have laughed and joked at your expense! Why, Mr. Quelch actually told us this morning that your conduct was disgraceful, and that you ought to have been kicked out of the school!"

Mr. Quelch had said nothing of the sort, but Bunter wanted to give Bramley an idea that everybody at Greyfriars were rotters with the exception of himself.

"Of course," went on Bunter, "I stuck up for you! In fact, I licked a couple of Fourth Form chaps this morning for calling you a coward in my hearing!"

Mr. Bramley's teeth came together sharply.

"That was very kind of you to take my part," he said quietly. "Perhaps you won't object to telling me your name?"

"Oh, Bunter—William George Bunter!"

"Well, Bunter, suppose we have some little refreshment?"

Bunter's eyes glittered.

"What-ho! I—I mean, thanks awfully!"

"Very well," smiled Bramley. "I saw a little shop—"

"Yes, that's Uncle Clegg's," said Bunter. "You can get ripping tuck there, you know. Of course, it isn't good enough for chaps like me, really, but there's nowhere else in Friardale where they sell such good pastry."

The actor led the way into the tuckshop. It was deserted, and the pair sat down at a little table in a far corner of the shop. Bunter lost no time in stating his wants, and very soon he was surrounded by piles of indigestible pastry. Bramley contented himself with half a meat-pie and a cup of coffee.

"Jolly glad we're going to have the show to-night," mumbled Bunter, with his mouth full.

"You like pantomimes, then?"

"Oh, they're all right in their way," said Bunter. "But, of course, you're in this one, and—and you're worth seeing, you know."

"How many will attend the performance?" asked Bramley carelessly.

"Oh, everybody! Even some of the servants will manage to get a look in at the back. I'll bet there won't be many people about the school while the show's going on—they'll all be in the Hall."

"A rare opportunity for thieves—oh?"

"Oh, rather! They'd have the whole house to themselves," said Bunter, his mind fixed on the good things before him.

"These beef-pies are ripping!"

Mr. Bramley bent forward.

"I suppose there are no thieves about here?" he asked casually.

"Well, there have been some now and again, although lately we haven't had any excitement. If there were any about they'd be able to get their pockets full to-night all right!"

"Perhaps they don't think it worth while?" remarked the actor.

"Oh, don't they, though!" said Bunter, blinking up at Bramley. "Why, there's hundreds of pounds' worth of stuff at Greyfriars! Even Lord Mauleverer, of the Remove—he's a particular friend of mine, you know—keeps fivers and quids about his study as though they were bits of scrap-paper. And he never keeps his study locked, either. I'm always advising him not to be so careless."

"He is certainly rather lax," said Mr. Bramley carelessly.

"Now you wouldn't find me like that," said the Owl of the Remove importantly. "I always keep my gold and bank-notes in my cash-box. They're safe in there—"

"By the by," said Bramley, "could you change me a sovereign?"

Bunter turned red.

"I—I'm sorry," he stammered. "I—I happened to come out without any change!"

"Oh, it's all right," smiled Bramley, summing Billy Bunter up pretty accurately; "I can get change elsewhere! About the valuables at Greyfriars, I presume the headmaster keeps his locked up in a safe?"

"Oh, rather! The Head's jolly careful," said Bunter hastily, glad to change the subject. "But, of course, there are heaps of things worth pinching in the dormitories. And there's the masters' studies; they'll all be deserted to-night. The masters are sure to leave things laying about. But they're safe enough—there ain't any robbers about here. And besides, who's to know the school's going to be deserted?"

Mr. Bramley laughed.

"Of course, who is to know?" he said easily.

For another twenty minutes the actor kept up the conversation, and, although the fat junior was not struck by the fact, Bramley always led the talk back to Greyfriars, if it ever showed signs of wandering off at a tangent.

Bunter sighed contentedly. For once in a while he had eaten until he could eat no more. He wiped the crumbs from his waistcoat, and gazed rather regretfully at a dozen or so tarts which still stood on the table.

"Perhaps I'd better shove 'em in my pockets," he said thoughtfully.

"Why not eat them?" asked Bramley.

"Well, you—you see, I always make a point of leaving off eating when I could comfortably eat as much again. It—it would be against my principles to eat those tarts now; but if I took 'em to the school—"

"Oh, very well, take them!" said Bramley, smiling. "And look here, Bunter, you needn't say anything about this little luncheon, you know. If the other boys get to know that I've treated you they'll probably expect me to treat them."

"Good!" said the Owl of the Remove. "Jolly decent of you, you know, to stand me this feed! It's not often I get such—I—I mean it's not often I meet such a nice chap as you!"

And Billy Bunter, finding that he would just have time to arrive at Greyfriars for dinner, hurried off. He reckoned that the walk up to the school would just serve to get his appetite up again.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

Making Sure.

"LOOK here, Wharton—"

"I say—"

"Rats!" said Harry Wharton cheerfully.

"You ass! I tell you there ought to be at least nine of us to do the bizney," said Tom Brown warmly. "It would be simply rotten if Coker & Co. escaped and started any more of their rotten tricks."

"But we sha'n't let him escape, you chump!" exclaimed Frank Nugent. "He's spoofed us once, but he won't spoof us again. We'll take the bull by the giddy horns and prevent him attending the panto, at all!"

"But six of you won't be enough," said Bulstrode. "I'm in this."

"Six of us will be plenty," said Harry Wharton. "If there are more Coker'll very likely smell a rat, and make himself scarce. There'll be myself, Nugent, Bull, Cherry, Linley, and Desmond. All other applications are useless."

And Harry Wharton waved his hand finally. It was evening, and the Removites were gathered in the common-room before the blazing fire. Tea was just over, and there were two hours to wait before the second performance of the pantomime commenced. The juniors intended that this one should be a success. The only possible danger could come from Coker & Co., and Harry Wharton had proposed to obviate that danger by kidnapping the three Fifth-Formers and keeping them prisoners until the performance was over. It was certainly rather hard on Coker & Co., but the Removites meant to make sure.

As a matter of fact, the Fifth Form trio had definitely decided to give up all hostility and see the show with the rest. Coker reckoned that he had won two victories, so that he could well afford to let the pantomime proceed uninterrupted. Perhaps Coker also thought that if he did create another disturbance the consequences would be rather too painful.

However, the Fates were against him. He, together with Potter and Greene, were sitting in their study, talking. Tea was over, and Coker was just saying that Tracey was a decent sort, and it was only sporting to give him a proper hearing on this occasion.

"I like that chap," said Coker, "and I bet he'll make a ripping fine comedian."

"I don't see how he can be funnier than Gosling!" chuckled Potter.

"Yes, that was rather—Hullo, what's that?"

Something had tinkled on the window-pane, and the three Fifth-Formers gazed out into the dark Close. Again came the tinkle, and this time the pebble was so large that one of Coker's windows cracked.

"The fatheaded ass!" shouted Coker angrily. "Who the dickens is playing the giddy ox in the Close?"

Coker crossed the room and flung open the window.

"Who's that down there?" he bawled. "You've busted one of my beastly windows!"

"Is that you, Coker?" said a familiar voice from the darkness. It was the voice of Mr. Prout, the Fifth Form-master. Coker turned pale.

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"I—I'm sorry, sir!" he said. "I thought it was some silly ass of a junior!"

"How dare you speak like that, Coker?" rapped Mr. Prout's voice. "I want you in the Close immediately. Bring Potter and Greene with you."

"Right you are, sir!" said Coker, closing the window. "Silly old fathead!" he continued disrespectfully. "What the dickens does he want us down in the Close for now?"

"No good asking me," said Potter.

"We'd better go, though," added Greene.

And the three Fifth-Formers went.

They emerged out into the night, and walked round the corner of the School House to the spot where Mr. Prout was supposed to have been. The instant they got round the corner, however, six forms flung themselves forward, and Coker & Co., almost before they were aware of it, found themselves flat upon their backs, with two juniors sitting on each.

"What!" gasped Coker. "What the dickens—"

"It's all right," said Harry Wharton sweetly. "We're only taking precautions, you know."

"You—you—you rotters!" roared Coker. "Let us go! Mr. Prout's waiting for us!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the Removites.

Coker started.

"So it was you, then!" he howled furiously. "My hat, I'll wipe up the blessed Close with you, if you don't let us go!"

Johnny Bull chuckled.

"Yes, you'll do a lot of wiping!" he grinned. "Seems to me as if we're going to do that bizney. Come on, chaps, yank 'em along!"

And Coker & Co. were yanked across the Close. Quite helpless in the sturdy juniors' grip, the Fifth-Formers were bundled into the cycle shed.

"What are you going to do?" asked Potter tentatively.

"Wait and see, my son!" grinned Wharton. "Hand over that rope, Marky!"

Mark Linley, grinning hugely, passed over several coils of tough rope. Coker & Co. eyed it apprehensively. They began to realise that they had fallen into a trap. Without waste of time, the three Fifth-Formers were securely bound and placed in a row.

"This is where you get some of your own medicine, Cokey, old man!" grinned Harry Wharton. "You collared that comedian Johnny and bound him up, and we've served you the same! How do you like it, eh?"

"You—you young rotters!" gasped Coker.

"I think you made that remark before," said Bob Cherry thoughtfully. "Might be a bit of a change if you altered it to something else! You see, Coker, old chap, we thought perhaps you'd have another go at the panto, so we're making sure this time by locking you up out of harm's way!"

"But—but we weren't going to do anything to-night!" said Potter breathlessly.

"Oh, no, of course not!" grinned Johnny Bull. "We ain't going to swallow that, though, you know! Anyhow, you're here, and you're going to stop here until the show's over!"

"You'd—you'd never dare!" yelled Coker furiously.

"Seems to me that we have dared!" Wharton exclaimed. "Where are those handkerchiefs, Frank? We'll make these bouncers silent!"

"No!" howled Coker pleadingly. "For goodness' sake, don't—"

"Dry up!" said Frank Nugent, taking three large clean handkerchiefs from his pocket, brought specially for the occasion. "We're taking no risks to-night, Coker. You must admit you've given us cause to suspect you. We're simply taking precautions against having the pantomime spoilt a second time!"

"But—but—"

Coker's protests were muffled by the application of the handkerchief. In two minutes the others were treated in the same way, and they were unable to do anything except glare furiously at the victorious Removites.

"Now I feel safe," said Wharton cheerfully. "Come on, kids!"

The Removites passed out of the cycle-house, and Coker & Co. were left to their own thoughts. They sat there, side by side, bound, helpless, and angry.

Coker & Co. were done.

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

A Great Success.

HARRY WHARTON & CO. took their places in the hall that night, feeling comfortable and at ease. They felt no qualms for having imprisoned the Fifth-Form combine. Coker deserved all he had got, and perhaps a little more. It was only just that he should be made to miss the show.

The enthusiasm to-night was, if anything, greater than that of the previous night. Before the performance commenced, Dr. Locke appeared for a moment, and made a short speech. He told the audience that it was only by much persuasion on Lord Mauleverer's part that he had consented to allow the pantomime to remain at Greyfriars for a second night, and concluded by saying that if there were any interruptions of any description, the culprits would be publicly flogged, and that the hall would never again be available for use as an entertainment-hall. The Head retired amidst cheers.

"Jolly good job we locked Coker & Co. up," said Nugent. "The silly asses would have done it properly this time if they'd been left to themselves!"

"Yes, rather."

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" said Bob Cherry. "Here comes the giddy orchestra!"

The orchestra took their places and struck up the overture, which consisted of a pourri of all the songs sung in the pantomime, and the juniors kept time with their feet. The din was considerable, but that was a detail.

Even Temple, Dabney & Co., of the Upper Fourth, so far forgot themselves as to sing the chorus of one of the songs. In fact, the Fourth-Formers were just as noisy and just as enthusiastic as the Remove!

"Ripping idea, this panto.!" said Temple. "Better than rotten old Greek plays!"

"Oh, rather!" agreed Dabney.

The hall was simply packed. Nearly everybody at Greyfriars was there—juniors, seniors, and masters. A little crowd of housemaids had squeezed themselves into a corner at the rear, while Gosling, now perfectly sober and penitent, kept guard over the door, acting for the evening as door-keeper. Gosling came in for a good deal of chipping, but he took it all in good part.

The performance commenced amid a cheer of enthusiasm, and then the audience settled down to enjoy the show. This time the Demon King was not interrupted, and when he retired, after delivering his thrilling and blood-curdling speech, he was given a round of applause. But the Demon King was not the sort of man to forget an injury, and he retired to his dressing-room with a black and sullen brow.

Meanwhile, the pantomime was proceeding apace. Mr. Tracey, the principal comedian, made his appearance at the right moment, and the juniors realised what they would have missed had the company left the previous night. Tracey was a genuine comedian, and he kept the hall in shouts of laughter while he occupied the stage.

The passages at the back, almost deserted now that the show was in progress, were silent and still. Nobody saw a tall form steal along and disappear into the interior of the house. It was Mr. Bramley, the Demon King. He had finished his part until the last scene, when he again had to appear and say a few words. For some reason, however, Bramley had changed out of his pantomime costume, and was in ordinary clothes.

Looking furtively from side to side, he stole along the deserted corridors. The lights were all turned low, and Bramley chuckled to himself as he stood for a moment in the Remove passage.

"Nothing easier!" he murmured. "By Jove, this is a bit of luck!"

The Demon King's object was clear. While the school was practically deserted, he meant to ransack the place and clear off with as much booty as he could lay hands on. Billy Bunter's information had been interesting, and Bramley was able to find his way about without difficulty.

Quite coolly and systematically he commenced going through the studies. He carried a small electric torch with him to avoid illuminating the rooms too much. The Fifth and Sixth-Form studies gained his attention first, and in a surprisingly short space of time his pockets were half full of valuable articles. He had found over fifty pounds in money, too, from the various studies—the Sixth Form's footer funds, in Wingate's study, had amounted to a lot, and many gold and silver medals added to the list of plunder.

Bramley was feeling "good," as Fisher T. Fish would have expressed it, and he turned his attention to the masters' rooms. These proved as fruitful as the seniors' studies, for the masters did not think it necessary to lock their money up in burglar-proof safes. The idea of a daring robbery being

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ONE PENNY.

committed while the pantomime was in progress—and by one of the actors, too—never entered their heads.

The Demon King worked quietly, plainly showing that he was not altogether unaccustomed to such work. Yet, in spite of his quickness, he found that time was getting on considerably. And there were the Remove studies to ransack yet. Bramley counted upon reaping a rich haul from Lord Mauleverer's study.

He was not aware as to which of the studies was Mauleverer's, so he had to go through the whole lot until he came to it. It was the one question he had omitted to ask the Owl of the Remove, and, in consequence, he was forced to ransack the whole lot. And, while he was about it, he did it thoroughly, taking everything valuable, and pocketable, that he could lay hands on.

At last, however, he flashed his light upon one of the Remove studies which could belong to no one else but Lord Mauleverer. The room was handsome, furnished in a way that was little short of remarkable, considering that it was a junior study. There were cushions that cost three guineas each, and Japanese jars of fabulous value. The dandy of the Remove had excellent taste, and Bramley almost gasped when he entered the room.

"By Jove!" he murmured. "This is Mauleverer's study, without a doubt!"

Quickly, with no effort to hide the fact that the room had been entered, he set to work. A beautiful inlaid desk stood against the wall, and Bramley crossed over to it. There was actually a five-pound note pinned down by a vase on the top, and the man pocketed this with a chuckle. Then he tried the flap of the desk. It was unlocked, and he pulled it down with his heart hammering fast against his ribs.

So engrossed was Bramley in his work that he failed to hear the faint and far-away sounds of clapping from the Big Hall. Bramley proceeded with his task, oblivious of time and surroundings.

But the first act had come to an end, and the curtain was lowered.

Harry Wharton looked at his chum with a glowing face. The famous Four were sitting together, and Wharton bent forward.

"I say," he said, "isn't the show ripping?"

"Great!" agreed the others. "Miles better than—"

"I—I say," said Nugent doubtfully, "it's rather rotten for old Coker. Suppose we go and release him, and say that he can see the rest of the show if he gives his word that he won't play any tricks? That's what he did to Tracey, and Tracey acted decently. I shouldn't think Coker would give his word and then break it."

"Well, we don't want to risk—"

"No; but it's rather rotten for the bounders," said Harry Wharton. "Come on, there's heaps of time during the interval!"

And the Famous Four left their places and hurried out into the Close.

"By Jove!" exclaimed Johnny Bull. "Snow!"

"Ripping!" said Wharton. "If this keeps on we shall have heaps of fun to-morrow!"

Snow was indeed beginning to fall. The ground was covered by a thin layer of it, and the clouds overhead were dark and threatening.

The Famous Four opened the door of the cycle-house and passed in. Coker & Co. still sat there, helpless, and they looked up hopefully as the Removites entered.

Harry Wharton untied Coker's gag.

"Thank goodness!" gasped Coker. "The show ain't over, is it?"

"The first act is, that's all," said Wharton. "It's absolutely ripping, Coker. Tracey's a comedian to his toe-nails. We've just come to tell you what you've missed!"

Coker glared.

"You young rotter!" he exclaimed.

"Hold on!" put in Bob Cherry, with a grin. "That's not all we've come to tell you. The show's so good that we're taking pity on you; and we've come to release you, provided

you give us your word of honour that you'll sit tight and play no tricks."

"My hat! Do you mean it?" gasped Coker.

The Famous Four nodded in unison.

"Good!" said Coker, brightening up. "You're not such rotters as I thought. Of course I'll give my word! We didn't mean to do anything, in any case. If you let us go now we'll go into the Hall and—and be quiet."

"Like good little boys!" grinned Frank Nugent.

Coker glared for a moment, then he laughed ruefully.

"Well, you've got the drop on us," he said, with a sheepish grin. "Let us get out of these beastly ropes, Wharton. We admit ourselves beaten and thoroughly licked!"

"My hat, what a confession!" chuckled Johnny Bull. "We can't leave the bounders here after this!"

Coker & Co. were too relieved at being released to care about eating humble pie. They were beaten, and they knew it—and, to Coker's credit, he had admitted it frankly.

The ropes were cut quickly; and, leaving the Fifth-Formers to stretch their legs and sort themselves out, Harry Wharton & Co. turned to the door.

"Better buzz back quick," said Bob Cherry.

"Rather!"

They passed out into the Close. The School House was dark and dim; for the studies were deserted, and the windows of the Big Hall looked out on the other side.

Suddenly, however, Johnny Bull uttered an exclamation. He stopped abruptly, and Bob Cherry blundered into him with a crash.

"Look!" exclaimed Johnny Bull excitedly.

He pointed upwards to one of the windows. The others looked up wonderingly, and as they did so a shaft of light passed across the window for a second, then flickered about on the opposite wall of the study.

"That's Mauly's study," said Harry Wharton, puzzled.

"Who the dickens can be in there?"

"Blessed if I know!"

"Looks jolly queer, anyhow!"

"There's something fishy about it," said Nugent quickly.

"I vote we buzz in and see for ourselves."

"Good egg!"

And the Famous Four raced across the Close to the School House steps.

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.

All Serene.

THE Famous Four mounted the stairs three at a time. The Remove passage was silent and deserted, and they raced along it, and came to an abrupt standstill outside Lord Mauleverer's study. Then, after a second's hesitation, the juniors burst in.

"Good heavens!"

The words came in a startled gasp out of the dark room, and the juniors knew instantly that it was a man who uttered them.

Harry Wharton gave a shout.

"Look out!" he yelled. "It's some rotten burglar, or

"Collar him!"

But the Famous Four were unable to see in the dark study. The light in the passage outside was not very brilliant, and was no good whatever. And before the Removites could possibly defend themselves—it all happened in a second—Bramley, with a snarl of rage, hurled himself forward.

"Ow!" roared Johnny Bull, as a bony fist caught him under the ear.

"You young scoundrels!" hissed Bramley.

Again he hit out, and this time Harry Wharton received the blow full upon his chest. He staggered back, with a yell of surprise, and crashed into Bob Cherry. The pair of them rolled over into the passage; and Bramley, with a cry of triumph and consternation, jumped clean over them and rushed off.

"After him!"

"The thieving rotter!"

"He's been ransacking the study!"

"Come on!"

And Frank Nugent and Johnny Bull, being already upon their feet, rushed off down the passage. The other two, scrambling up in haste, followed at top speed. The Famous Four were excited and furious. They realised at once that the man was a burglar, although they hadn't recognised him as the Demon King.

As they dashed out into the Close they caught a glimpse of him flying through the gates.

Wharton let out a shout:

"There he is!"

"My hat, don't let him escape!"

Coker & Co. were just crossing the Close.

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"THE GEM" LIBRARY,
Every Wednesday.

Our Companion Papers.

"THE PENNY POPULAR,"
Every Friday.

"Hallo! What's the giddy excitement?" asked Coker, in surprise.

"Burglar!" shouted Bob Cherry. "Come on! We're going to collar him!"

"My hat!" ejaculated Potter.

"It's a jape!"

"No fear!" said Coker decidedly. "Wharton wouldn't waste time playing japes to-night!"

Coker & Co. didn't waste any more time, but turned their backs upon the School House and hurried to the gates. The Famous Four had passed out a few seconds previously, and they were now rushing down the road towards Friardale. Coker glanced up and down quickly. In the opposite direction to Friardale, close against the hedge, a dark form moved for a second.

"There he is!" yelled Potter.

"My hat, yes! He's running, too!"

The figure had indeed begun to rush down the road. Coker paused for a second, and looked towards Friardale.

"Hi, you asses!" he bawled. "You're going the wrong way!"

Then, without waiting to see what effect his words had, he followed Potter and Greene after the fugitive. They sped after him at top speed.

Meanwhile, Harry Wharton & Co. were rushing down towards Friardale. In front of them a long-legged figure was frantically running away. But obviously he was in bad form, and he staggered now and again. The juniors, on the other hand, were perfectly fit, and they overhauled Bramley quickly. Finally, finding that he was beaten, the rascally actor turned and faced his pursuers.

Without hesitation the Famous Four flung themselves at the man. He was almost spent, and went down like a nine-pin before their rush. He lay upon the snow-covered ground gasping and panting breathlessly.

"Got him!" ejaculated Harry Wharton.

"Great Scott! Who the dickens is he?"

"Doesn't matter who he is," said Wharton. "We're going to take him up to the school. The Head'll find out who he is."

And, dragging the exhausted Bramley with them, the Famous Four returned to Greyfriars. In the grip of the quartette of sturdy juniors the man was helpless. He made one or two feeble attempts to break loose, but they were useless.

For the time being the juniors had completely forgotten the pantomime in this fresh excitement. They realised at once that the man had taken advantage of the school's absence to commit his robberies.

"Straight to the Head's study!" said Wharton grimly.

They arrived there, and walked in without the preliminary of knocking.

Dr. Locke was seated at his desk, writing. He looked up with a frown, then sat back, staring.

"Good gracious!" he exclaimed, in amazement.

Harry Wharton & Co. marched their prisoner into the study.

"What—what—what is the meaning of this?" gasped the Head, rising to his feet. "How dare you enter my study in this manner, boys! Who is this man?"

The Head peered at him keenly.

"Why, bless my soul, I do believe it's one of the members of the company!" he exclaimed, more mystified than ever. "Explain yourselves, boys!"

Harry Wharton stepped forward.

"This chap's been robbing the school, sir," he said quickly. "We found him in Mauly's—Lord Mauleverer's study, and he knocked us down and rushed off down the road. But we've collared the bounder."

"Good gracious!" exclaimed the Head. "Can this be true, Wharton? Is it possible that this man has been acting the part of a thief?"

Harry Wharton stepped to Bramley's side.

"We'll soon see, sir!"

The captain of the Remove dived a hand into the scoundrel's coat-pocket.

When he withdrew it he held up a bundle of banknotes, several gold medals, and a lot of loose gold and silver.

"Good heavens!" exclaimed the Head, aghast.

"I—I—I was tempted, sir," whined Bramley, "and I—"

"Silence, sir!" thundered the Head. "Wharton, kindly turn the man's pockets thoroughly out. We will see what further valuables he has about him!"

Wharton lost no time in obeying the Head's order, and a whole pile of valuable articles, which had been stowed away in every one of Bramley's pockets, mounted up on the table. In all, there must have been at least well over a hundred pounds' worth of stuff, to say nothing of Lord Mauleverer's pocket-book, the contents of which were not examined.

"This—this is amazing!" said the Head, with a black

brow. "I had no idea that this man was such a scoundrel! The company is, upon the whole, a highly-respectable collection of artistes. This ruffian appears to be the black sheep of the lot, and he has seized the opportunity to ransack the school while it was practically deserted. Wharton, will you kindly tell Mr. Prout and Mr. Capper that I want them immediately. When they come, you four boys are at liberty to return to the Hall. I may say that I am exceedingly proud of you for the manner in which you faced and captured this ruffian."

"Oh, it was nothing, sir!" said the Famous Four modestly.

"Police-constable Tozer must be fetched at once—"

There was a scuffle out in the passage. A series of grunting protestations were heard, and then the door flew open with a bang.

"Good gracious!" exclaimed the Head. "What is this?"

The space in front of the door was quite clear, and Coker & Co. stalked in, their faces glowing with triumph and exertion. In the midst of them stood an extremely frightened-looking individual with a scrubby chin and dilapidated clothes.

"We've got him, sir!" announced Coker triumphantly. "The rotter was pinching things out of the studies, sir, and we rushed after him and collared him! Wharton and some other Remove kids came too, but the silly asses went the wrong way!"

The Famous Four burst into a wild shriek of laughter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Coker turned an indignant face towards them.

"Oh, so you're here!" he exclaimed warmly. "They're a nice lot, sir, coming here without the man! Fancy leaving us to—"

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

"What the—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Despite the gravity of the situation the Head's stern face relaxed into a smile. He could see at a glance that it was Coker & Co. who had run after the wrong man, and, moreover, the Fifth Formers had succeeded in capturing somebody who had nothing whatever to do with the affair. A tramp, in all probability, had been hanging about the gates, and had rushed off in sheer fright.

"I am afraid, Coker," smiled the Head, "that you have had your trouble for nothing."

"Rather not, sir!" said Coker quickly. "Why, we collared the chap—"

The Head held up his hand.

"But you've got the wrong man, Coker!" he said quietly. "It was Wharton and his friends who succeeded in laying the true thief by the heels! I am afraid you have given yourselves a lot of unnecessary trouble."

Coker & Co. staggered back blankly.

"Wha-a-t?" gasped Coker. "Ain't this the right man?"

"No, my boy—"

"I ain't done no 'arm, guv'nor!" put in the tramp dismally. "All I was a-doin' was jest crouchin' down inside the gates, so's I could get away from the snow! Then these 'ere youngsters kem along an' copped me as though I'd bin a blessed thief!"

"I am sure, my man, you look cold enough," said the Head kindly. "Coker, release him immediately! Here is half-a-crown. You can give it to him, and tell him to get a good night's lodging for himself in Friardale!"

STORYETTES.

THE CANE "STRUCK."

Sadly, but with a determined expression, the village schoolmaster contemplated his class.

They had always been unruly, but on the preceding day a particularly unpardonable breach of discipline had been committed. The dominie accordingly commanded the ring-leader to advance and stand before him.

"Boys," he said, "it seems to me as if I have to work the cane a good deal harder than I ought to work it."

"Yes, sir," said the irrepressible of the class, with a significant look at the cupboard, "and I shouldn't wonder if it came out on strike soon!"

He was quite right, oo—it came out with a vengeance!

THE RIGHT KIND OF MAN.

"Your testimonials," said the business man to an applicant for a situation, "are very good, and you appear to be a very pushing traveller. By the way, I suppose you have never been in trouble of any kind?"

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NEXT
MONDAY:

"FISH'S FAG AGENCY!"

Another Splendid Complete Tale of
Harry Wharton & Co. Order Early.

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ONE
PENNY.

"Y-yes, sir!" stammered Coker blankly.

"You will now kindly take the man away, Coker," said the Head. "And I should advise you to apologise to him for any rough treatment he has been subjected to."

Coker & Co. let him out, feeling as though they'd like to sink through the floor. They had blustered in with all the confidence in the world, but when they found they'd made such a terrific bloomer they felt decidedly small.

Half an hour later P.-c. Tozer, the Friardale constable, arrived, and took charge of the prisoner. Meanwhile, Harry Wharton & Co. and the Fifth Form combine had made their way to the Hall, and were enjoying the conclusion of the pantomime. They had missed a certain amount; but, as Harry Wharton remarked, the chase after the thief, and his subsequent capture, was as good as a pantomime, any day.

Amid wild enthusiasm the performance came to an end, and the old Hall rang with cheers. And then, before the audience could rise from their places, the Head appeared upon the stage. Briefly he explained that the Demon King's absence in the last scene had been unavoidable, as the gentleman had been securely under lock and key at the moment. The Hall buzzed with excitement when it heard the story of the man's raid of the studies.

"But for the quickness and bravery of four Remove boys," concluded the Head, "the loss would have been considerable. The man had ransacked practically every senior study in the school, and valuable prize medals of all descriptions were found upon him!"

"Happily the ruffian is now under arrest. I am glad, my boys, that you have enjoyed this performance, and sorry that it should have been marred so painfully. However, the man richly deserves his deserts, and can expect no sympathy."

The Head retired, and the audience rose, excited and eager to hear more definite details. Harry Wharton & Co. were surrounded by an excited crowd of Removites, and the Famous Four related how they had chased Bramley, and how Coker & Co. had "helped" them. The Remove roared, and Coker, who was within hearing, hastily turned and sought out Potter and Greene. Then the three Fifth Formers went to their study to hide their diminished heads.

In the Hall Harry Wharton jumped upon a chair.

"You've forgotten one thing, you chaps!" he roared.

"And what's that?" asked Bulstrode.

"You've forgotten to give old Mauly a rousing cheer for providing us with such a ripping entertainment!" said Harry Wharton enthusiastically. "I call for three cheers for Mauly!"

"Begad!" ejaculated Lord Mauleverer mildly.

"That's it!" shouted Bob Cherry. "Three hearty ones!"

"Hear, hear!"

"The hear-hearfulness is terrific!"

And the Remove, as one man, lifted their voices and gave the schoolboy earl three rousing cheers. Mauleverer coloured with pleasure, and his back ached from friendly slapping when the Remove had done.

THE END.

(Next Monday's splendid long complete tale of the Chums of Greyfriars is entitled "FISH'S FAG AGENCY!" by Frank Richards. Order a copy of THE MAGNET Library in advance. Price 1d.)

"Once in my life, sir," was the reply. "I was in prison for a month."

The business man started.

"Well—er," he began. "I am afraid that puts rather a different complexion on the case. But tell me what you were sent to prison for?"

"For nearly killing a man who refused to give me an order," answered the applicant.

"Good!" said the business man. "You are engaged."

HE DID NOT STOP LONG.

Two of the local team's best players were absent through illness, and at the last moment a couple of substitutes—a centre-forward and a goal-keeper—had been requisitioned to fill the vacancies.

When half-time was called the goal-keeper had allowed the opposing team to score five goals that might have been cleared by the most diminutive schoolboy, while the centre-forward had spent his time wandering about the field as though looking for his position.

Just before the resumption the centre-forward walked up to his captain, and inquired anxiously what position he was supposed to occupy during the second half.

The skipper scratched his head.

"Blowed if I know," he said bluntly, "unless you go as long-stop to your friend in goal!"

OUR THRILLING NEW SERIAL STORY. START THIS WEEK!

TWICE ROUND THE GLOBE!

THE STORY OF THE GREAT MAN-HUNT BY SIDNEY DREW



Ferrers Lord, millionaire, and owner of the Lord of the Deep.



Prince Ching-Lung, adventurer, conjurer, and ventriloquist.



Nathan Gore, jewel collector and multi-millionaire, Ferrers Lord's terrible rival.

THE FIRST CHAPTERS.

"BY FOUL MEANS OR FAIR, I'LL WIN.

Nathan Gore, millionaire and jewel-collector, clenched his hands furiously, and raved like a madman on the deck of the liner Coronation. He had started specially from America in order to be present at the sale-room in London where the costly diamond, "The World's Wonder," was to be put up for auction. "A telegram for Mr. Gore," a voice rang out through the darkness. The American was told the message, and as he listened, his face came over deadly pale, and he gave vent to a terrible oath. The message was: "Ferrers Lord purchased 'The World's Wonder' privately. No bidders. Price unknown." "I'll win yet," shrieked the man. "By foul means or fair, I'll win!"

"I'LL TAKE THE CHALLENGE!"

Ferrers Lord's house was wrapped in silence. A faint light shone from the drawing-room. Ching-Lung, his Chinese friend, pushed open the door, then a cry broke from him. A man lay face downwards on the floor. There was a ghastly crimson stain on his collar. The man was Ferrers Lord. "Ching—the diamond!" came a hoarse voice. Ching-Lung opened the drawer which Lord indicated, but there was no diamond there. But a message had been left behind: "To Ferrers Lord,—Knowing that you would not sell 'The World's Wonder,' I have taken it. Do your worst. I defy you. The stone is mine.—Nathan Gore." The millionaire rose to his feet. "I take the challenge, Ching," he said. "I'll hunt him down and bring back my diamond." He begins the chase after the diamond thief, and for five months pursues Nathan Gore through Europe, New Zealand, Teneriffe, and back to London, never once being able to catch him up. While in London, he hears that Nathan Gore had bought from the Dutch a remote island named Galpin. Lord immediately purchases an island four miles south of Gore's, christening it Ching-Lung. Learning that Gore is fortifying his island, and has actually fitted out warships for his own use, Ferrers Lord arranges a hurried expedition, and in a few hours the whole party are aboard the Lord of the Deep, bound for the island of Ching-Lung. When they arrive they visit Nathan Gore's island, and find that it is well protected by forts. Ferrers Lord, wishing to end the chase, sends his conditions of peace to the mad millionaire. They are, that he returns the stolen diamond and publishes in all the papers in the world an apology. Nathan Gore refuses, and war is declared. Ferrers Lord divides his forces, leaving Rupert Thurston and Prout on the Lord of the Deep, and himself, with Ching-Lung and a small party, embarking on the launch. The latter craft is wrecked in a hurricane, and driven ashore on Loneland, an island belonging to Nathan Gore. The shipwrecked party are encamped in a cave on the shore, when a booming sound is heard rumbling between the cliffs.

"Hark! Listen!" mutters Ferrers Lord, giving a start.

(Now go on with the story.)

Discovered.

The eyes of the two men met.

"Do you know that sound?"

"Yes," said Ching-Lung hoarsely. "But on Loneland it can't be."

"The fence, the ship, the barred portholes. Do you understand now?"

"I'm going to have a look," said Ching-Lung.

"Oomph! Oomph! Oomph!" came the hoarse roar.

The millionaire loaded his rifle, and filled the magazine in addition.

"We have the wind in our favour," he said; "but we must not shoot except in an emergency."

"Gosh!" said Ching-Lung. "This knocks all the rest into a cocked hat. I must go and have a peep. I don't feel a scrap tired now. Let us stalk. How far off is the gentleman?"

"Not half a mile."

"I can do that on my eyebrows!"

He actually ran across the sand. The ground had a steady rise. Again they heard the long-drawn "Oomph! Oomph!"

"Down!" whispered Ferrers Lord.

They began to crawl up a ridge. As they neared the summit they lost the moon. It flashed out again, and the mystery was revealed.

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Half a dozen tawny lions were grouped in the hollow below him, tearing and gnawing at the carcase of a goat, and one monster, perched on a boulder, was startling the echoes of the night with sullen roars.

These were the grim guardians of Loneland.

Ching-Lung threw more wood on the fire, sipped his tea, and lay back on his pillow of sand. Joe, Maddock, and Barry were sound asleep. The millionaire, smoking silently, was staring into the glowing embers.

"One fact is plain, sonny," said Ching-Lung. "Nat Gore has original ideas, even if they are jolly mad. I wonder how many giddy menageries he bought up in the States and carted over in that old corpse-hulk? Can it be that he wants to keep the race of lions and tigers from becoming extinct?"

"Probably. I have a fancy that it is not his dearest wish to keep us from becoming extinct."

"Dear man," grinned Ching-Lung. "How kind of him! Carnivorous beasts on a Pacific island are a bit of a novelty. Not a bad speculation, either. In about twenty years there won't be a lion or tiger left outside a show, and Gore can advertise big game shooting, and charge any price. A

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notice-board with 'Beware of the lions' licks the old 'Beware of man-traps and spring-guns' to bits. Oh, crumbs, it's too funny for him to fancy his lions and tigers will keep us off the grass!"

The millionaire's eyes twinkled.

"It is certainly laughable, Ching," he answered. "He has turned one half of Loneland into a kind of wild-beast preserve. We ought to take it as a compliment. The island cannot feed them for very long, although it is fairly stocked with pigs and goats. When they get short of food they will be ugly customers. If the climax does not come for some time, it would be rather interesting to make a raid and cut down his fence."

"Glorious!" chuckled the prince. "Gore would squeal a trifle if he found a wild-beast show exhibiting in his back-yard. Oh, he's barmy! This has knocked all the sleep out of me!"

"That shows a lack of system," said Ferrers Lord. "You do not train yourself properly. Sleep with me is a matter of will. I have trained myself into it. Good-night!"

"Night, sonny!" said the prince. "I hope you won't wake up to find a lion has chawed one of your legs off."

They had closed the opening with a couple of boulders. Ching-Lung sank to rest, to dream that he was chasing Nathan Gore in a chariot drawn by lions round the fighting-top of one of Nelson's battleships. The voice of Barry roused him. Brilliant bars of light shone through the crevices of the boulders, and Barry was giving his features a scrub with a wet handkerchief, and humming "The Wearing o' the Green" as he did so.

"What cheer, Irish?" crowed Ching-Lung. "What are you doing, Pat?"

"Troth, harrk at that, now!" said Barry. "What am Oi doin'? Sure, where's the blue, liquid oies of yez at all, at all? Can't yez see Oi'm in me marble bath washin' meself wid scented soap? In the worrds of the barrd, Oi'm givin' meself a swill in the pure and crystal rill. Twig the rill?"

Barry wrung out the handkerchief and held it up for the prince's inspection. Then he kicked Joe and Maddock into wakefulness. They were both stiff, sore, and lazy. There was an argument as to whose duty it was to get breakfast. Both men were asleep again before they arrived at a decision.

"Idle brutes!" said Ching-Lung. "Where's the chief?"

"He went that way," answered Barry, pointing in the recess of the cave. "Oi belave he's got an oidea there's another road out. Bad luck to the snorin' bags of oidleness! Or've a good moind to jump on thim. Faith, Oi'm as tired as twinty min, but Oi'd be ashamed to loi in bed. Where's the matches? Confound the lazy blayguards, says Oi."

Barry then went down on his hands and knees and puffed the sticks into a blaze. Removing the upper boulder, the prince looked out on as fair a morning as had ever dawned. A soft, spicy breeze ruffled the blue surface of the channel, and a thousand sea-birds flitted through the air.

He threw off his clothes and stretched his naked body in the warm sunshine. There was no risk of being seen unless some boat was prowling round. Nathan Gore could not very well mix up sentries and lions. The prince strapped on his belt to which his hunting-knife was attached, for the sea had its lions in the shape of sharks as well as the land. Then he went head foremost into the crystal depths. Barry leaned over the boulder and watched the bather. Ching-Lung swam far out, and Barry remained smoking thoughtfully until a living object attracted his attention.

The object was a plump, red land crab. It was descending the rock like a trained acrobat by means of a rope of dry seaweed. Barry viewed its movements with interest. The creature reached the end of its tether about two feet from the sand, and prepared to drop. Barry reached over with his hat, and the crab fell into it.

Then Barry removed all his tobacco from the tin, placed the crab inside, and clapped on the lid.

"Smokin' afore breakfast," ruminated Barry, as he lighted his pipe, "is a wicked habit. Troth, what a joole of a day!"

He thoughtfully filled the kettle at the little waterfall, and placed it on the fire. The placid beauty of the two sleepers suddenly seemed to strike him. They lay with their mouths open.

"Slape on—slape on!" said Barry, wiping away a tear. "Arrah, what a picture for a magic-lantern! So young, so beautiful, so fair. The soight wud milt a heartt of butther. Joe and Ben, the slapin' beauties. Of what do they drame? Can ut be of beer? Ah, me!"

Barry winked at nothing, and took a stroll along the beach. He was well aware that Joe would make a raid on the tobacco-tin the moment he awoke, for Joe always indulged in a smoke before breakfast. If Joe found the crab, and the crab found Joe, Barry reflected, it would be as well to be absent.

He could see Ching-Lung's black head close to the rocks on the opposite side of the channel, and the occasional flash of the swimmer's glistening white arm. Barry perched himself on a ledge, and had a bet with himself on the result of a

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fight between two soldier-crabs for the possession of a small dead fish.

The battle was at its height when Barry heard a horrible yell from the direction of the cave. He smiled sweetly.

"Oi'm thinkin' Joe's found that 'bacey moighty hot smokin'!" he muttered.

There was a second howl.

"That crab must have formed an attachment for Joseph," grinned Barry. "Arrah, a crab is an affectionate craytur! Ut's a harrd, harrd thing to shake him off wance he takes a loikin' to yiz!"

Smiling like a man who is at peace with all the world, Barry cast a beaming glance over his shoulder. His expression changed in a trice, and his hair stood on end.

"My aunt!" he gasped. "Ow, murther, ut's a lion! Oi'm a corrpse!"

Barry fell off the rock in a heap, and tried to dig a hole with his hands to creep into. He had seen the lion, but the lion had not seen him. The lean, bony brute was gazing about it in a lost kind of fashion. It had a rusty steel collar round its neck, and it was woefully thin. It opened its jaws and let out a roar that made the Irishman's blood run cold.

"Farewell, me native land!" moaned Barry. "In wan minute Oi shall be torn to catsmate intoirely! Ow-w-w!"

Digging was no good, for he had come to salt water. Barry had no weapon except a pipe-cleaner, and that was not a very deadly weapon with which to assail one of the lords of the African forest. Finding himself still whole after some forty seconds, Barry cautiously crept forward and peered round the rock.

The lion was sitting on its haunches, looking at the sea with a suicidal air, and howling plaintively.

"Ut's singin' my dith-song!" sighed the Irishman. "Och, 'twill be afther smillin' me in wan minute! Go home, yez spalpeen—go home! Ut's faadin' toime at the circus, yez goat, and the hyena'll be gettin' yer grub!"

"Oomph—oomph!" roared the lion; but it evinced no intention of departure.

Barry wiped the perspiration and the sand from his brow, and cast a furtive glance across the water. Ching-Lung was heading for the shore, but he was a long way off. Barry longed to yell for Joe and Maddock, but he was terrified at the danger of attracting the brute's attention. He was afraid, too, to make a bolt for the sea.

"Oh, musha, musha!" he sighed. "This is a swate position for an Oirish gentleman! Oi'd give anythin' to be safe out of ut! Troth, Oi'd do anythin', barrin' payin' rint! Go away, will yez, yez sandy-whiskered missionary-swallower! Oi'll be rude to yez in a minute. Ut's little yez know the fearful danger yez are in, ould nigger-chaser! Av Oi wance git howld of yez, Oi'll twist yer collar-bone into watch-springs! Bad luck to yez, go home!"

"Oomph, oomph!" roared the lion wearily.

A lion is one of the most cowardly of the carnivora. It is all a myth about his vaunted bravery or pluck. Barry did not know it, for his experience had been limited to tigers—animals with more pluck in their whiskers than lions have in their whole bodies. So Barry lay low and perspired, thinking, as he told Maddock afterwards, that every moment would be his next.

Ching-Lung was on his back, propelling himself lazily shorewards, and blinking at the blue sky. He rolled over at last, and took a few powerful breast-strokes. Then he raised himself and shook the water out of his ears, just in time to catch a grunting "Oomph!"

"Pip!" said Ching-Lung, catching sight of the lion. "Here's a game! Gosh, and there's Barry!"

His Highness giggled. Barry was on all-fours, with one eye round the rock. Keeping as low as he could, and taking occasional dives, Ching-Lung neared the shore. The sad-looking lion, its nose pointed upwards, uttered melancholy grunts. Down went Ching-Lung to the very bottom, and rose with a large stone in his hand. He swam under water until he felt the sand, and then he sprang erect.

Thump! The big stone hit the lord of the African forest right on the end of his lordly nose; and, before he knew what to think about it, a second plumped into his open mouth, and a third cannoned from his skull. The lion gave one long yell of abject terror, and made the sand fly behind him as he left the locality. Ching-Lung splashed ashore, screaming with laughter.

Barry did not budge, and Ching-Lung winked at the sea. He quite understood how matters were. Barry did not wish it to be known that he had skulked behind a rock.

"The crafty beggar thinks I didn't spot him!" grinned Ching-Lung. "All right, my brave, bold beauty. Here come the boys!"

Joe and Maddock had just emerged from the cave. Ching-Lung whistled to them.

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"Seen the lion?" he shouted.

"No, sir!" said Joe.

"He's just gone past. Look at his tracks."

"By gum, that's so!" said Maddock.

"You chaps have missed a treat," said Ching-Lung, "all through laziness. The beast was sitting here yelping when I swam in. I smacked him over the chump with a few bricks, and you ought to have seen him emigrate! I tell you it was a sight for blind men!"

He beckoned to Joe, and whispered something quickly. Joe grinned broadly, and whispered to Maddock. Then Maddock turned purple in the face, and began to cough.

"Ow far was you off him, sir, when you biffed him?" inquired Joe.

"About ten yards. I biffed him each time. Here, what are you grinning at, asses? Don't you believe me?"

"M'yes!" said Joe "Ow big was the stones, sir?"

"I've a jolly good mind to punch your silly heads!" growled Ching-Lung angrily. "Do you think I'd miss a beastly lion at ten yards? Do you think I can't throw straight? What about this?"

Barry trembled as he heard the sound of approaching footsteps. Ching-Lung placed a stone on the rock.

"Now," he said, "pace off ten yards. That's only about as big as an eye-tooth, but I'll buy you a motor-car each if I miss it!"

Ching-Lung walked to the water's edge and picked up a large and defunct jellyfish and some nice wet weed. He made a ball, and glided towards the rock. Then he flattened the sticky, clammy mass down on Barry's head, and sprang back.

"Good shot, sir!" cried Joe and Maddock.

"Murther!" howled a voice from behind the rock.

"Good gracious, it's Barry," panted Ching-Lung, "and his hair's all out of curl!"

Crowned with jellyfish and decayed seaweed, Barry sprang from his hiding-place, speechless with rage.

"How doth the little lion roar!" cried the prince. "Poor old Barryson Crusoe, I wonder how he could do so? When it gave him a shock, he crawled round a rock, brave old O'Rooneyson Crusoe!"

"Did the wild beast make it tremble, then?" said Maddock.

"Oi'll slay yez! Oi'll slaughter yez!" shrieked Barry, tearing the jellyfish out of his locks.

He caught up a lump of driftwood with both hands, and charged. Another jellyfish from Ching-Lung squelched over Barry's features, checking him for a second. They turned to fly. Something went hissing past Ching-Lung's head, and he sprang round.

"A boat! a boat!" he shouted. "To the cave, lads—to the cave!"

And then the vicious crack of a rifle came from the sea. They were discovered.

Barry always declared nothing on earth could make a man run faster than bullets. In spite of the jellyfish, whose clammy embrace somewhat impeded his vision, Barry had dived over the boulder into the cave just as Maddock's boots vanished. The Irishman arrived on his hands and face, got up, and seized his rifle. Four faces looked carefully over the stone.

The odds were more than four to one. There were seventeen figures in the boat, which was slowly gliding up the channel. Seventeen or seventy amounted to the same thing. The cave was an impregnable fortress, safe against any daylight attack. Right and left, except for the rock, there was no shelter for six or seven hundred yards. The height of the cliff made a descent from above impossible, and an attack from the water would be reckless folly. But, as they all knew, the very strength of their position was its weakness. It was admirably suited for a blockade, and a blockade could only end in capture or surrender.

"It's all that dog-bodied Irishman's fault!" growled Joe. "If he had only chivied the lion away we should have been snug inside, eatin' our grub, and those tramps would never ha' spotted us."

"Thank yez!" said Barry. "Under the circumstances Oi'll let yez live. How cud Oi help ut? Oi put the whole matter to yer commonsense, av yez have a grain of such stuff insoide yez. Did yez iver mate a lion?"

"Go and eat winkles!" snarled Joe angrily.

"Be good, boys, be good!" put in Ching-Lung. "Vent your rage on those chaps yonder, and don't scrap with one another. You two are always at it. If I hear another word I shall kick you both violently."

"And sarve 'em right!" said Maddock. "It's all snappin' and yappin' at wizz 'em day and night. May I never drink grog if it ain't sickenin'! Joe would never have stopped runnin' if he'd seed the lion."

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"THE GEM" LIBRARY,
Every Wednesday.

"And you'd ha' gone up and shook 'ands wi' it—eh?" grunted Joe, with sarcasm.

"Will you shut up?" cried the prince.

"I ain't a blessed telescope!" muttered the ruffled carpenter below his breath, "nor yet a blessed shop!"

They concentrated their attention on the foe. Ching-Lung had his binoculars, and the lenses showed up the minutest detail in the brilliant light. They were resting on their oars. The violent gesticulations showed that a hot argument was taking place. Evidently the disappearance of the four castaways puzzled them. Suddenly they seemed to arrive at some definite conclusion, for the oars dipped into the blue water, and the boat began to forge ahead.

"Lie low!" said Ching-Lung. "They may go past without spotting us."

The boat came abreast of the cave. Three men were standing up in her, staring at the shore, and scanning the cliffs.

"Done!" sighed Ching-Lung, as a white handkerchief was waved. "What a blithering ass I am! I forgot my clothes. Punch my head, Joe, and punch it hard! Oh, what a goat, what a jay, what a juggins!"

Ching-Lung's clothes, lying in a heap outside the cave, had betrayed them. The boat pulled closer.

"What is ut that's got thim, at all, at all?" said Barry. "Oi cud plug three of thim wid wan shot! Luk at the chap wid the shraw-coloured whiskers! Oi hate the shade! Shud Oi tickle that same spalpeen, sor?"

"For goodness' sake, no!" said the prince. "Don't you see, it's the white flag?"

"Oi wudn't thrust thim, for all that!" answered Barry.

After firing the first shot, the confidence shown by the boat's crew had a suspicious element. Either they had a high regard for the enemy's sense of honour, or an idea that the castaways were unarmed.

Ching-Lung waved his own handkerchief over the boulder.

"Let them see the business end of your guns," he said.

"I'll keep out of sight. They want to talk, I expect. You've the biggest voice, Barry. Yell to them!"

"Ahoy!" roared the bull-voiced Irishman

"Ahoy!"

"What do yez want?"

"A palaver!" shouted a voice. "I reckon, by yer leave, mates, I'll come ashore and chin a few."

Ching-Lung nodded quickly. He could trust Barry to hear and to answer.

"Step ashore!" bellowed the Irishman, as he climbed out into the sunshine.

A flabby-featured man came crunching along the shingle. He was the Yankee adventurer, Captain Hackerden, whom Rupert Thurston had met aboard one of Gore's cruisers.

Peering through a cranny, Ching-Lung scrutinised the stranger, and was favourably impressed. Barry, too, was agreeably surprised. He could not tell why, but he liked the man instinctively, and, much to his own surprise, found himself shaking the extended hand.

"I ain't got my kerred-case," drawled the new-comer, "but my handle is Cap'n Joel F. Hackerden. Mighty pleased to see you, ol' hoss, and to pinch yer flipper! And what bout yer handle be?"

"Barry O'Rooney, ould chewin'-gum!" said Barry genially. "How did you leave the President of the United States?"

"Only so-so!" grinned the American.

"He still takes the same soize in hair-oil, Oi hope?" said Barry.

"I reckon. The last wire I had tells me that he hasn't given up usin' a knife and fork at dinner!"

The two men grinned at each other.

"How's old Gore, sonny?" inquired Barry.

The captain winked. Barry thrust his hand into the cave, murmuring "Rum!" and a flask was passed to him by Maddock.

"Chuck me my togs!" cried Ching-Lung. "And ask the gentleman in!"

Captain Joel F. Hackerden shook hands with them all, and drank their healths. At a sign from Ching-Lung, Barry joined Maddock and Joe at the entrance. He did not expect treachery. The captain appeared to be unarmed, and, in spite of his supreme ugliness, he had an honest, taking look about him that pleased them all.

(To be continued next week.)

In Next Monday's Issue of the "MAGNET"
A GRAND DECORATIVE CALENDAR
FOR 1913 IS GIVEN AWAY.
Order your Copy in Advance. Same Price, 1d.

My Readers' Page.



OUR TWO
COMPANION PAPERS
"THE GEM" LIBRARY
EVERY WEDNESDAY
AND
"THE PENNY POPULAR"
EVERY FRIDAY.

FOR NEXT MONDAY.

"FISH'S FAG AGENCY!"

By Frank Richards.

This grand, long, complete tale of Greyfriars School, appearing in next week's issue of "The Magnet" Library, deals with the latest wonderful notion of Fisher T. Fish, the enterprising Yankee junior of the Remove Form. Lord Mauleverer, the schoolboy earl, finds life so tiring that he hires a number of fags to wait upon him—and this is where Fish's agency comes in. The experiment, however, does not turn out exactly as the enterprising promoter expects, and, though there is plenty of fun while it lasts,

"FISH'S FAG AGENCY!"

has a somewhat short life as a going concern.

No "Magnetite" should miss this grand and amusing tale of school life.

CASH PRIZE AWARDED.

As the result of my recent offer of a Cash Prize for the best postcard criticism of our new companion paper, "The Penny Popular," I received shoals and shoals of postcards from my readers, and a gratifying number of them contained very thoughtful and sensible suggestions. I have had very great difficulty in selecting the best of this huge pile, but my choice has finally fallen upon the postcard sent in by

CHAS. MILLS,
2, Russell Cottages,
Bostall Hill,
Plumstead, S.E.

I have great pleasure in congratulating this reader, to whom the cash prize of 5s. will be sent this week. I must also thank heartily the large number of my chums of both sexes to whom I am indebted for so many useful suggestions.

MORE CASH PRIZES FOR MAGNETITES.

I have great pleasure in announcing to my chums this week a simple and interesting little competition in connection with our grand companion paper, "The Penny Popular." I am offering eight cash prizes to be won in this contest, for which there is no entrance fee whatever, the only condition of entrance being that every competitor should buy an extra copy of "The Penny Popular" for one, two, or three weeks.

Considering the value for money which our grand companion paper gives, I do not think my chums will regard this condition as being very severe! Now, to explain the idea to my reader-friends. All you have to do is this: When buying your copy of "The Penny Popular" on Friday—of course, you all read our jolly little companion-paper—buy an extra copy, and give it to one of your friends or acquaintances who has not seen "The Penny Popular" before. Ask him—or her—to read it through carefully, and next time you meet him, ask him the question: "Well, what do you think of 'The Penny Popular'?"

It is your friend's answer to this question that I want you to write down on a postcard and send to me. In this way I shall get a large number of absolutely straightforward and unbiassed opinions—exactly what I want, of course! I shall specially look out for postcards which give a short, pithy summing-up, fair, helpful criticism, briefly expressed, and terse and very-much-to-the-point comments. To the senders of what I consider to be the four best postcards, containing the most neatly-expressed opinions of hitherto non-reading friends, I shall award cash prizes of 10s. each; to the senders of the four next best postcard-opinions, cash prizes of 5s. each. This contest applies only to three numbers of "The Penny Popular"—Nos. 13, 14, and 15 respectively. Buy an extra copy of either, or each, of these issues of our famous companion-paper, give it to a non-reading friend, write down

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 256.

NEXT
MONDAY:

"FISH'S FAG AGENCY!"

Another Splendid Complete Tale of
Harry Wharton & Co. Order Early.

that friend's opinion on a postcard, and post it to "The Editor 'The Magnet' Library, the Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C." By buying extra copies of "The Penny Popular," readers may send in as many friends' opinions as they like, and this applies to either or all of the three issues of that paper, Nos. 13, 14, and 15. The last day for sending in postcards is Monday, January 20th, 1913—that is, the Monday following the day of issue of No. 15 of "The Penny Popular."

Now, in connection with this interesting little competition, I have a special word for my numerous Colonial readers. I have decided to institute a

SPECIAL COLONIAL SECTION

for their benefit, and to award

FOUR ADDITIONAL CASH PRIZES

—two of 10s. each, and two of 5s. each—for this section alone. Only my "Overseas" chums, who live outside the British Isles, will be eligible to compete in this section, which will be kept open long enough to give "Magnetites" living in the very furthest corners of the world a chance to take part in it. The actual date of closing the Colonial section of the competition will be announced later. The rules for Colonials are exactly the same as those for home readers—send your postcards in to the Editor, and don't forget to put your name and full address on them.

This competition will only be open to readers of "The Magnet" and its companion-paper "The Gem" Library.

MORE WILES OF THE STAMP-FAKER EXPOSED.

The fact that in one or two instances stamps were officially issued with the centre inverted, has been seized upon to help make the stamp-faker's trade profitable. In 1854 the British East India Company issued, in error, several copies of its 4 annas stamp with Queen Victoria's head inverted.

Again, in 1869, the United States printed a number of stamps with inverted centres. Genuine specimens are now worth £18, £20, and £80 respectively. Needless to say, many of these have been imitated by the stamp-faker.

Now, very frequently a stamp's rarity depends on its particular variety of perforation. This, again, is the faker's opportunity. He will quite readily clip off the existing perforation and supply a rarer gauge, matching the paper perfectly. But the operation is one that will not deceive an expert, and, of course, in all cases where fraudulent "grafting" is suspected, immersion in boiling water is an unfailling test, but at the same time a somewhat desperate one, since, if the stamp prove to be genuine in all respects, it will not have been improved by its "hot bath."

There is a class of stamp, much prized by collectors, known as "postal fiscals"—that is to say, revenue stamps made available for postage, generally during some temporary shortage of postage-stamps proper.

Such stamps, to be of any value to the philatelist, must, of course, be in used condition, since, without the postmark, they are revenue stamps pure and simple. Here the faker steps in again to "assist" the collector to the best of his ability.

He secures quantities of these revenue stamps with ordinary revenue cancellations, applied by pen and ink or rubber stamp in banks and other mercantile offices. Cleaning away all traces of these, the faker substitutes forged postmarks, and, presto! there are your "postal fiscals."

The cleaning process, unfortunately for him, is generally betrayed by some slight discoloration or a wearing away of some portion of the stamp proper, besides which there is pretty sure to be some discrepancy in the form and size of the "postmark." Anyhow, the young stamp-collector need not be downhearted, for out of 9,000 standard varieties of the world's postage-stamps, less than 1,000 are likely to be faked or forged.

THE EDITOR.

OUR SPLENDID NEW FEATURE!

SPECIAL COMIC SUPPLEMENT.

A VERY HATTRACTIVE ADVERTISEMENT.



1. Poor old Jinks, the Stores-man, did get it hot—we mean cold—the other morning. Yes, he got his topper knocked off repeatedly by some rude snowballists.

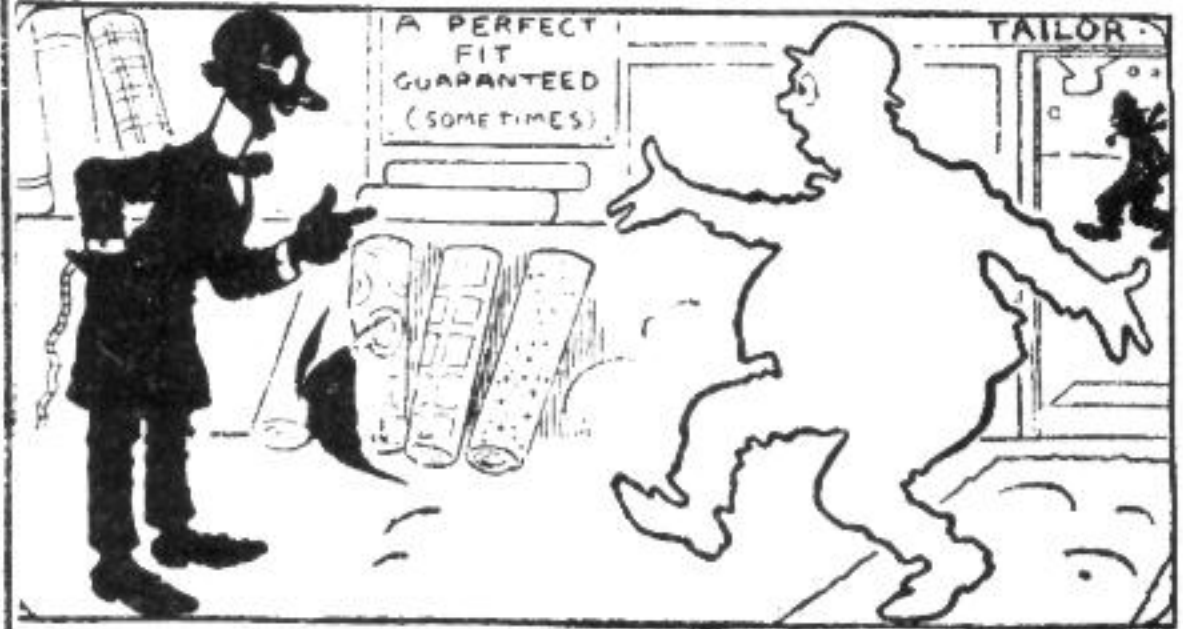


2. So the next time the wily old fellow toddled home to dinner he stuck a few advertisement handbills under his topper. See! And when the snowballs arrived the bills were distributed at no expense.



3. And the artful Jinks did a roaring trade. There was a perfect Suffragette scrimmage at the entrance!

QUITE POSSIBLE!



The Wrathful One: "Look here! The buttons have come off the coat I bought from you!"

The Cloth Snipper: "Ah, when the people admired the coat you swelled with pride, and the buttons burst off, I suppose, eh?"

MORE THAN TRUE!



Captain Thinbones: "How d'you think I look in this new motor coat?"

Millicent: "Immense!"

NOTHING SELLING!



Worrying Canvasser: "Now, this article, sir, speaks for itself!"

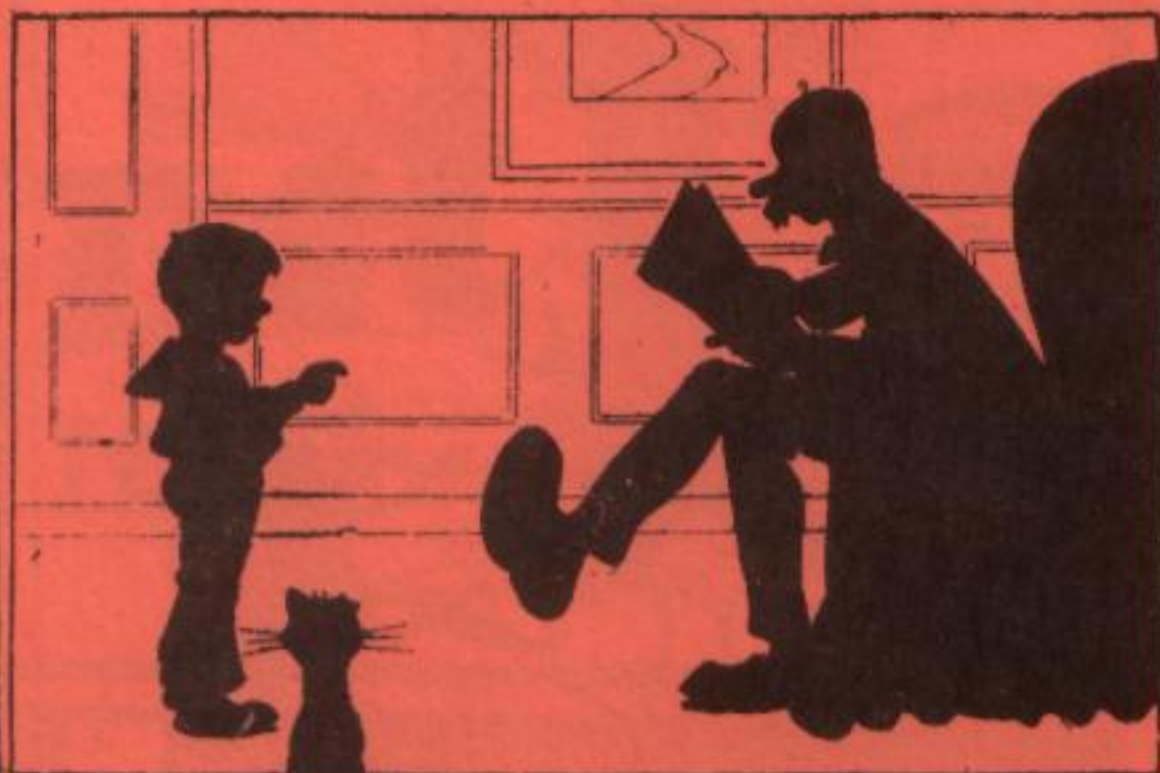
Worried Gent: "Then, for goodness' sake, keep quiet for a few minutes and give it a chance."

A RARE CHANCE!



Giggs: "Yes, I'm going away, and I don't think I'll ever come back."
 Hardup: "What, never?"
 Giggs: "No, never!"
 Hardup: "You couldn't lend me a fiver, old man, could you?"

A HOLIDAY QUESTION!



"I say, pa, is a man from Poland called a Pole?"
 "Yes, my son."
 "Then, pa, why isn't a man from Holland called a Hole?"

A SLY SHOT.



He (a crack shot): "I should like to go in for big game shooting."
 She: "Yes, I suppose you do find it hard to shoot the little birds."

QUERIED HIMSELF!



"Great Scott, Charlie, what's the breed of that awful thing?"
 "He doesn't know himself. Notice how he keeps his tail?"

THE PLAIN FACT!



Nellie: "She never had a sweetheart in all her life."
 Kittie: "And yet she has the nerve to say that her face is her fortune."
 Nellie: "Gracious, it must be one of those unclaimed fortunes we hear so much about."

CAUTION.



Waitress (to diner who is examining the knives): "The knives here are quite sharp, sir."
 Diner: "Oh, that's all right, miss. I was looking for a blunt one. I cut my mouth the last time I was here."

FOR THE SCARECROW.



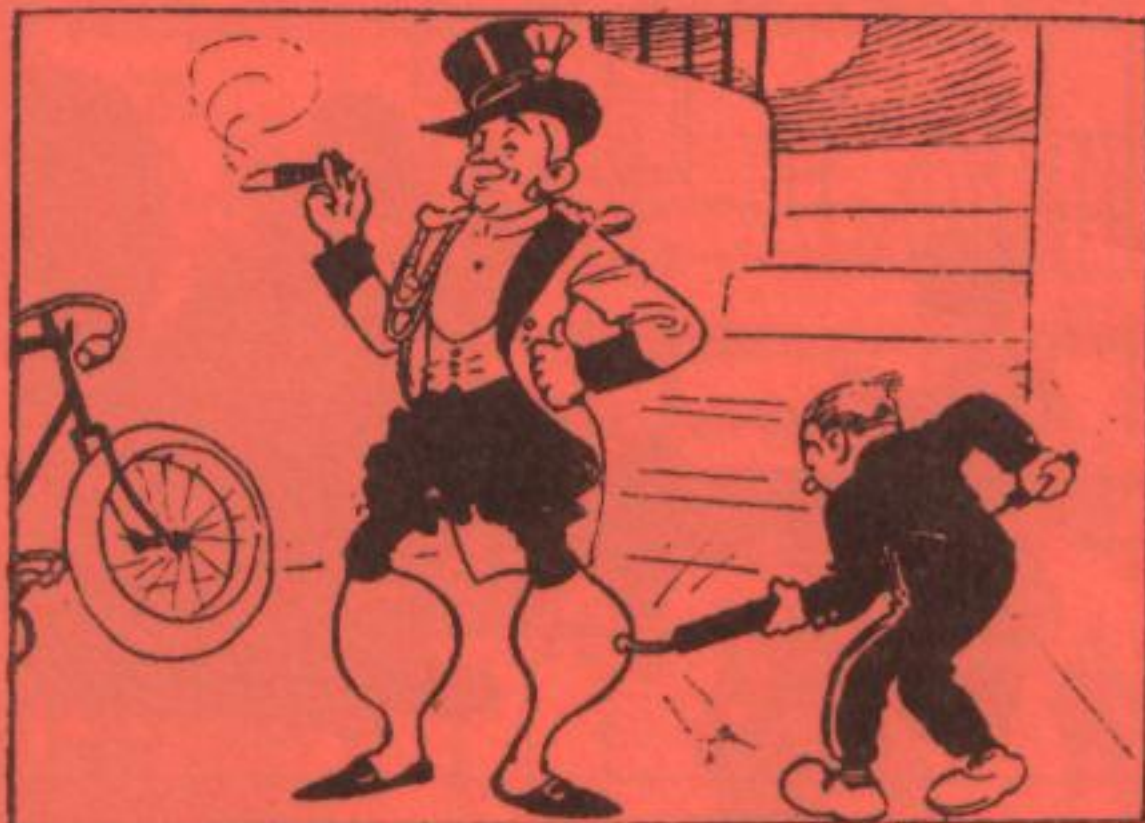
Master: "Would you prefer one of my old silk hats or one of my wife's hats for the scarecrow?"
 Gardener: "One of the missus's, sir, please—the birds have more respect for her."

STEW-PID GIRL.

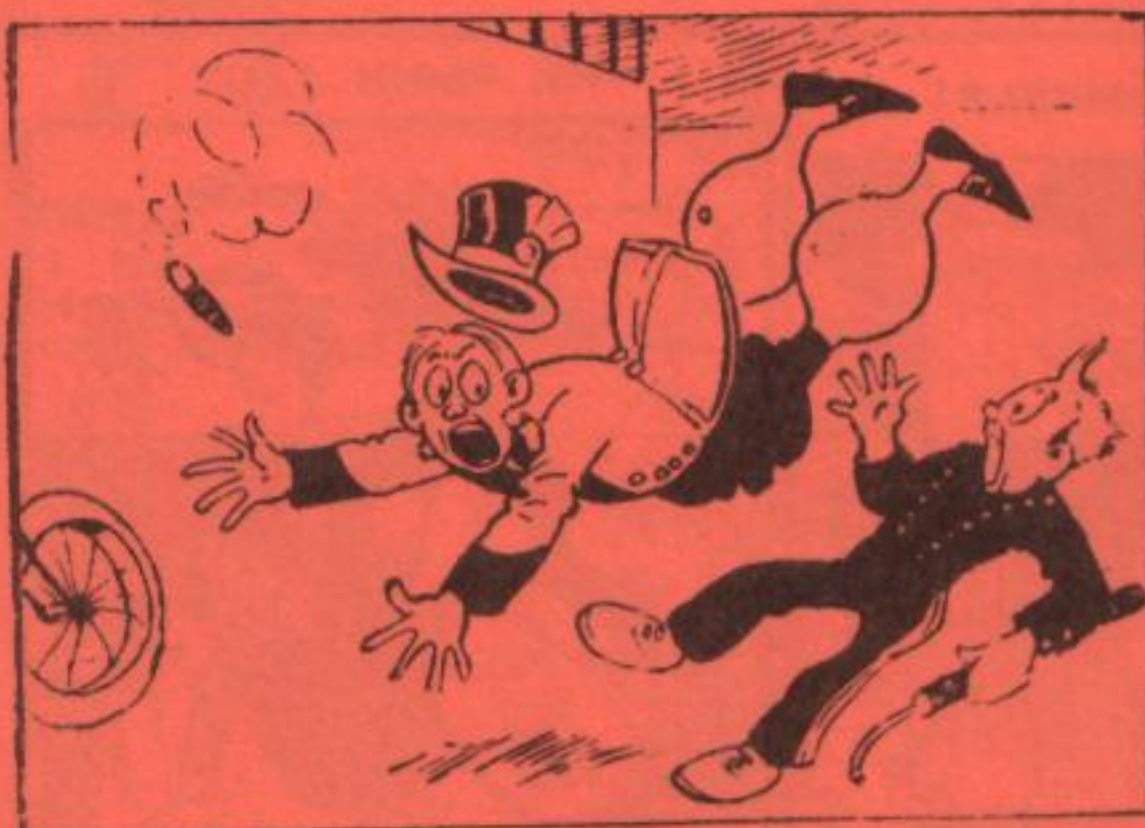


Mistress: "Have you made the chicken broth, Jane?"
 Jane: "Yes, mum, and fed the chickens with it ages ago."

CREATED THE WRONG IMPRESSION.



1. The page-boy was blowing up the flunkey's calves because James was about to meet his last and best girl.



2. But the page-boy rather overdid the pumping business, and James, to his horrification, found himself being carried legs upward.



3. And this is the ridiculous way James met Clara. Talk about being heels over head in love. What! N.B.—Clara's now engaged to the milkman.

THEN ALL WAS SMOOTH SAILING.



1. "Phooski!" cried the merry Cossacks, who were struggling through the snowstorm. "We can't get along like this! What shall we doski?"



2. Then Ivan Ivanovitch had a brain rotation, and they took the old gee out of the shafts, and unhipped the cover of the cart and —



3. Went along very nicely, thank you, just like thiski. Clever old merchants, these Cossacks. What do you thinkovitch?

AN OPTICAL ILLUSION.

Farmer Giles: "Gosh! That must be one o' them living pictures I've heerd so much about!" But it was only the art-dealer taking a picture to the pawnshop.



ANOTHER COMIC SUPPLEMENT NEXT MONDAY. ORDER EARLY.