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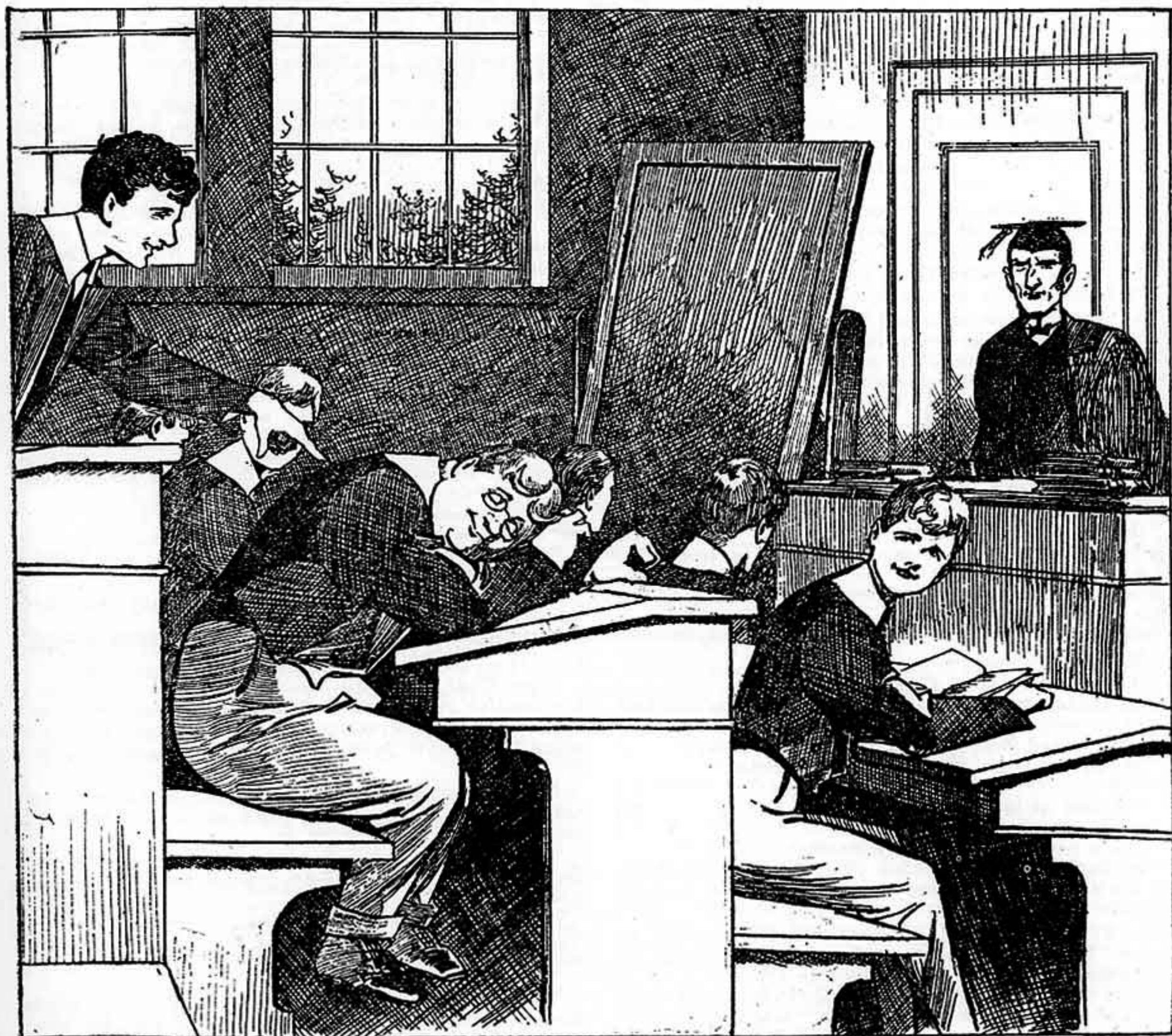
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THE SCOUTS' VICTORY!

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

By FRANK RICHARDS.



Mr. Quelch stared at Billy Bunter. The fat junior's head had fallen forward, and he was fast asleep, and snoring.
"Bless my soul!" ejaculated the Remove master. "Bunter!" Snorrrrrrr. (See Chapter 13.)

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

The Eagles and the Lambs!

"BAA-AA-AA!"

Peter Todd, of the Remove, stood on the steps
of the School House, emitting that remarkable
sound with his mouth wide open.

"Baa-baa-baa-aa!"

Fellows in the Close turned round to stare at Peter
Todd. Peter was in Boy Scout costume, which showed
off his exceedingly slim limbs to great advantage.
Indeed, some of the fellows remarked that Peter Todd's
scout staff was really plumper than Peter's legs. But
that was an exaggeration.

"Baa-baa-aa-aa!" bleated Peter.

Wingate of the Sixth came out of the house, and paused in great astonishment as Peter Todd bleated under his very nose.

"What in thunder are you making that row for, Todd?" demanded Wingate.

"Baa-aaa-aa!" replied Peter.

"You young ass!" said the captain of Greyfriars wrathfully. "Is it a new game?"

"I'm a Lamb," explained Peter.

"Wha-a-at!"

"Lamb!"

"You're a Lamb!" repeated Wingate. "You're sure you don't mean a goat—a silly goat?"

"Baa-aa-aa!" said Peter. And then he gave a sudden yelp as the captain of Greyfriars took hold of his ear. "Yow-ow-ow! Leggo!"

Wingate did not let go; he compressed his finger and thumb, and Peter Todd wriggled.

"This isn't the place to play your funny little games," said Wingate grimly. "You can keep them for the Remove passage."

"Yow-ow! Leggo! I tell you I'm a Lamb!" howled Peter. "I'm bleating to the other Lambs. It's the signal—the scout signal. Haven't you ever heard of Boy Scouts, Wingate? Yow! We're the Lamb Patrol! Leggo!"

"Oh!" said Wingate, letting go at last. "Why didn't you say so before, you young duffer!"

"Ow! Baa-aa-aa!" groaned Peter, rubbing his ear. "You are an ass, Wingate." He backed away out of reach as he made that remark, but Wingate only grinned, and went on his way towards the cricket-ground.

"Baa-aa-aa!" bleated Peter Todd. "Where are those giddy Lambs? You fellows ready?"

This question was addressed to Harry Wharton & Co. of the Remove, who were in the Close in scouting costume. The Famous Five and Squiff were Eagles. There was a scout run planned for the afternoon, and the Eagles were all ready. But of the Lambs only Peter Todd had so far appeared.

"Ready, my lord," said Bob Cherry, "and waiting. You'd better go and dig up your lambs. They'll be sheep by the time they're ready to come out, if you don't buck up!"

"Here comes one of them!" said Squiff.

Alonzo Todd, Peter's cousin, came out in scout rig. He was exactly like Peter, but he looked a little slimmer, if possible. He was the first to join his leader on the steps of the School House.

"Where are the other idiots?" demanded Peter.

"My dear Peter——"

"Baa-aa-aa!" bleated Peter, crescendo.

Tom Dutton was the next to arrive. He was the deaf junior, a very good-looking and sturdy fellow, who certainly looked more like a scout than his leader.

"Oh, you've come at last!" snorted Peter.

"Eh?"

"Got here at last!" shouted Peter.

Tom Dutton looked round.

"Who's passed?" he inquired finally.

The Eagle Patrol chuckled. Tom Dutton's deafness was an affliction, but more to his study-mates than to himself.

But Peter Todd only grunted, and did not try to answer Dutton's question. He glared instead at Hazeldene, who was the next Lamb to arrive.

"Didn't you hear me bleating?" demanded Peter.

"I had to stop and finish my toffee," said Hazel.

"Toffee! I'll toffee you!" howled Peter. And he brought up his staff to the charge. Hazel gave a roar as he received a powerful prod in the ribs.

"Why, you silly ass, wharrer you at?"

"Enforcing discipline," said Peter. "When the signal is given Lambs are not supposed to stop and finish their toffee. Suppose the Germans landed, you ass, would you stop and finish your toffee then?"

"No, I should bunk!" said Hazel.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Prod!

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"You'd bunk, would you?" said Peter ferociously. "Take that, then, and that!"

"Ow! Wow!" Hazel brought his own staff into play, and it was Peter's turn to yell. The crowd of fellows in the Close were about to be treated to a quarterstaff encounter, when Harry Wharton's staff interposed.

"Peace, my infants!" said Wharton soothingly. "This isn't a circus, you know. This is a scout run, if you're ready before dark."

"Bleat away, Peter!" chorussed the Eagles. And Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, the Indian member of the Eagle Patrol, advised Peter to let the bleatfulness be terrific.

"Baa-aa-aa!" snorted Peter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Micky Desmond came out with a smear of jam on his mouth. Apparently still another Lamb had stopped to finish something eatable.

"Sure, and here I am, Peter darling!" said Micky. "Are ye ready, bhoys?"

"You're late!" howled Peter.

"Faith, and I only stopped for the tarts—— Yow-ow-ow!" howled Micky. "Kape that staff away, ye thafe of the world, or I'll be afther braining you!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Still one more to come," grinned Bob Cherry. "Where's Bunter? Getting the giddy Lambs on the warpath is like extracting teeth. Go and dig Bunter up, Peter."

"Baa-aa-aa-aaaah!" bleated Peter Todd.

But Billy Bunter did not appear. Billy Bunter was not a very keen scout; indeed, anything in the shape of exertion was detestable to Billy Bunter, and he would have given the next postal-order he was expecting to be left out of that scout run. But Bunter had the misfortune to be Peter's study-mate, and Peter had imposed compulsory service upon his study. Bunter had no choice about the matter. It was in vain that he told Peter that this was as bad as beastly Prussian conscription, and declared that Britons never should be slaves. Peter was not to be argued with. He always had a cricket stump handy when there was too much argument in his study. And with a cricket-stump argument was difficult. The stump always had the best of it.

"Baa-aa-aa-aaa-AAAAH!"

"Go it, Peter!"

"Oh, my hat!" said Peter Todd. "The fat bounder must be able to hear me——"

"Ha, ha! I should think half the county could hear you!" said Nugent.

Billy Bunter was evidently like the celebrated Dying Gladiator; he heard it, but he heeded not.

Peter Todd gave up bleating at last. He took a businesslike grip on his staff, and rushed into the house.

He mounted the stairs three at a time, and came along the Remove passage like a cyclone, and burst into No. 7 Study.

A fat junior was seated comfortably in the armchair there, eating toffee. He blinked up in alarm as the captain of the Lambs burst in.

"Not changed yet!" howled Peter, observing that Bunter was in Etons. "Why, you fat owl! You—you—you——"

"Look here, I'm not coming!" said Bunter. "I think this scouting is all rot. I say, Peter, I've had a remittance."

"Get up!"

"We'll have a feed instead. Yaroooooh!" roared Bunter, as he caught the end of the staff with his waistcoat. "Yow-ow! Yawp! Leave off! Can't you see I'm getting up as fast as I can, you beast? Yow-ow!"

"Get your things on!" roared Peter. "I give you one second!"

"Yow! They're in the dorm——"

"Get a move on, then!"

"Ow! Help!"

Prod, prod, prod, prod! Billy Bunter was driven out of the study before a prodding staff, and he let out a wild yell at every step. The patrol leader of the Lambs drove him up to the dormitory with merciless prods.



"I'm a lamb!" explained Peter Todd. "What! You're a lamb?" cried Wingate, catching the Removite by the ear. "You're sure you don't mean a goat—a silly goat?" (See Chapter 1.)

"I say, Toddy—I say, old chap, think of a ripping feed! Yow-ow! I'm changing as fast as I can, you utter beast!" wailed Bunter.

Billy Bunter crammed himself into his scout garb. It fitted him like a glove. His fat figure seemed in danger of bursting through at every point.

Never had William George Bunter made so rapid a change. When he was finished, the prodding staff drove him out of the dormitory. He went downstairs with a really remarkable speed, and a series of agonised howls.

A shout of laughter greeted him as he rolled out gasping into the Close.

Peter Todd followed him out, red with wrath.

"Now we're ready," he announced.

"I say, you fellows——"

"Silence in the ranks!"

"Look here," howled Bunter. "I've had a remittance—a whacking remittance from my pater! Suppose we have a picnic instead."

Prod!

"Ow, you awful beast!"

"March!" rapped out Peter Todd.

And the Lambs marched, and the grinning Eagles marched with them, down to the school gates.

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NEXT
MONDAY—

"THE OLD BOYS' CHALLENGE!"

THE SECOND CHAPTER, Bunter the Scout!

HARRY WHARTON & CO. were in great spirits that afternoon. There was only one glum face in the merry band that marched down Friardale Lane. Billy Bunter was morose.

The Owl of the Remove did not like exerting himself; and a scout run, with Peter Todd looking after him, meant no end of exertion. Moreover, the fat junior was in funds. His father, lately very prosperous on the Stock Exchange, had taken to sending him handsome tips—and one of those handsome tips had arrived that very afternoon. Bunter, generally in a state of impecuniosity, and expecting a postal-order that never came, was now the happy possessor of "quids."

To waste an afternoon scouting when he might have been "bluicing" his funds in the tuckshop was very hard lines, so Bunter considered.

So his fat face was wreathed in frowns, instead of smiles, as he tramped away with the Lambs and the Eagles. He didn't want to be a Lamb at all; but Peter Todd's word was law on that point.

"Buck up, Bunt!" said Peter, giving him a prod with his staff as he lagged, eliciting a howl from Bunter. "This will do you more good than guzzling, you know."

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"I'll tell you what," gasped Bunter. "Suppose we go on to the village, and I'll stand you chaps a feed at Uncle Clegg's—Ow! Keep that staff away, you beast!"

"Halt!" said Wharton.

The scouts halted in the lane by the old stile.

"Now, then," said the leader of the Eagles. "The idea is for one chap to go ahead, and the other chaps to track him down. If we catch him, we wallop him, as an encouragement."

"Hear, hear!"

"Better make one of us the hare," said Bob Cherry. "Those giddy Lambs would be no good."

"Fathead!" said Peter Todd politely. "It wouldn't take us long to put salt on the tail of a silly Eagle! One of us had better go."

"Any old thing," said Wharton. "Pick your man."

"Bunter!"

"Hallo!" said Bunter.

"You're going."

"I'm not!" roared Bunter.

Prod!

"Yow! I mean, I'll go with pleasure," wailed Bunter.

"You've ten minutes start, and you're to leave as little trail as possible," said Peter. "I warn you to exert yourself. If we catch you we wallop you."

"I say, I've had a remittance—"

"You can send that to the Belgian Fund," said Peter. "Now, you know what you've got to do. Get over that stile."

"I say, Peter, old chap, let's go and have a feed, and I'll send a quid to the Belgians. I really want to help the Belgians, you know. Let's chuck this, and—Yow!"

Prod! prod! Bunter got over the stile.

"Ten minutes!" said Peter. "And when we catch you, my hat!"

Bunter disappeared into the wood.

"It won't take us five minutes to catch that fat duffer!" grunted Johnny Bull. "We're wasting time, Toddy."

"We're doing Bunter a good turn," explained Peter. "It's up to us as scouts to do a good turn every day. When we've given Bunter a run we'll have some real scouting."

"Oh, bow-wow!"

The scouts waited in the lane, Peter Todd with his eye on his watch. Meanwhile, Billy Bunter was scouting through the wood.

The fat junior's eyes were gleaming behind his spectacles.

Bunter was not much of a scout. But necessity is the parent of invention. Bunter had to avoid the licking that was due to him if easily caught. And Bunter was determined that he would feed that afternoon, in spite of all the Peter Todds in the wide world. So Billy Bunter showed an unusual keenness, which would have surprised the Eagles and the Lambs if they had been aware of it.

He trotted into the wood till he was out of sight of the juniors in the lane, and then cut off to the left, and reached the lane again where it made a bend in the direction of the village. While Harry Wharton & Co. were waiting at the stile, Billy Bunter emerged into the lane again about a hundred yards from them, but quite out of sight round the bend. Once in the lane, he ran on towards Friardale as fast as his fat little legs would carry him.

He grinned breathlessly as he ran.

The scouts would expect him to keep in the wood, as arranged, and would be hunting for "sign" there, what time William George Bunter was feeding up to his fat chin in Uncle Clegg's tuckshop in Friardale. Certainly he was leaving no "sign" on the hard, dusty road.

In a quarter of an hour after leaving the scouts Billy Bunter rolled breathlessly into Mr. Clegg's little shop.

He rapped on the counter. He was anxious not to linger long lest the scouts should, by chance, get on the track. Old Mr. Clegg came out of his back parlour, and grunted at the sight of Bunter. Bunter was so seldom blessed with ready cash that he was not a welcome customer.

But old Mr. Clegg ceased to grunt as the fat junior rang a sovereign on the counter.

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"Afternoon, Master Bunter!" he said, quite affably.

"Gimme some tarts, quick!" said Bunter. "I'm in rather a hurry. I want a lot of things. I'll tell you while I'm doing the tarts." The first tart was in his mouth already. "I want you to make up a bundle for me. Those beasts may—"

"Eh?"

"I mean I'm in a hurry," said Bunter. "A pound of doughnuts." The second tart was started on. "Gimme some ginger-pop—I'm dry. Thanks! A seed-cake and a currant-cake—this is good ginger-pop—and a dozen tarts in a bag, and half a pound of bullseyes, and a tongue—a whole one—and half a pound of ham, and—and some toffee, and biscuits, and some bottles of ginger-beer, and—and—"

"My heye!" murmured Uncle Clegg.

He set out the many articles ordered so hurriedly by Bunter. The fat junior, between bites at his tarts and swipes at his ginger-beer, stacked his purchases into his wallet till it was crammed almost to bursting point. Then the rest of the articles were made up into a bundle and tied.

"That's better!" said Bunter. "Some more ginger-beer, please! This is prime! The beasts don't know I'm here, but I won't stay long. Still, I'll have some more tarts before I go—I'm frightfully hungry—and some cake, too, and some more ginger-beer. Buck up!"

Uncle Clegg was kept quite busy.

He changed Bunter's sovereign, and gave him three-pence change. But Bunter did not mind. He had plenty of money for once—and how could money be better spent than in taking care of his inner Bunter? If Billy Bunter had been expecting to be besieged, he could hardly have laid in a bigger stock of provisions. He sat on the stool at the counter surrounded with good things, and tucking away as though his life depended on it. Uncle Clegg watched him in wonder.

Meanwhile the Eagles and the Lambs were on the track.

As soon as the ten minutes grace was up the rival scouts of the Remove had plunged into the wood on the trail of the Owl.

They did not expect to be long in running down Bunter, and that "good turn" having been done, the serious scouting of the afternoon was to begin. But Bunter was not so easily run down, as it happened.

They found sign enough to lead them on the track, in trampled grass and broken twigs, and slowly but surely the keen scouts followed the sign till they came to the border of the wood, and the lane was before them. There the sign ended.

"He's taken to the road," said Bob Cherry.

Peter Todd frowned.

"But it was understood that the fat owl was to keep to the wood," he said. "We can't scout along high roads and through the villages."

"I fancy Bunter's fed up with scouting, and has cleared off," said Bob, with a chuckle.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"My hat! If he has I'll skin him!" ejaculated Peter. "He wouldn't have the cheek!"

"Well, here's his hoof-marks down to the road," said Wharton. "There's none going back into the wood."

"Might have walked backwards," suggested Squiff. "That's a scout's trick."

"Hasn't brains enough."

"He's in Uncle Clegg's long ago," said Johnny Bull, with a grunt. "Let's get on with the scouting, and let Bunter go and eat coke!"

"Rats! He's here somewhere," said Todd obstinately. "Didn't I give him orders?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The scouts spent another ten minutes hunting for sign, and then they gave it up. Either Bunter had covered up his tracks with unexpected skill or he had cleared off.

They came to the conclusion that he had cleared off.

"The fat rotter!" said Peter, in great wrath. "Anyway, we've got to track him down. I could do with a ginger-pop, too. It's not far to the village. Come on!"

"Wasting time!" growled Johnny Bull.

"Oh, come on! If he's there, we'll make an example of him."

And the scouts jumped out into the road, and ran lightly in the direction of Friardale. There was no need to look for "sign"—they were pretty certain that they were upon the track.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

A Masterly Retreat!

BILLY BUNTER rolled off the stool in Uncle Clegg's little shop, and rolled to the doorway. He blinked out cautiously into the quiet, sleepy village street. He knew what to expect if Peter Todd captured him there, and he was not taking chances. But he had left it too late!

"Oh, crumbs!" he ejaculated, in dismay.

Just entering the old High Street from the lane, only a hundred yards away, came a bunch of figures in scout garb.

Bunter popped back into the tuckshop.

His fat face was the picture of dismay. His retreat was cut off; he could not step out of the tuckshop without being seen. And then it would be only a matter of minutes for the scouts to run him down.

"I—I say, Uncle Clegg, I—I want to get out of the back way!" he stammered. "There's some beasts after me—awful beastly rotters, you know; going to rag me, you know. Show me out of the back way."

Uncle Clegg grunted as Bunter hastily caught up his parcel.

"I—I say, tell 'em I haven't been here," gasped Bunter; "anyway, keep 'em back for a bit. Don't tell 'em anything. Here's half-a-quin; send me some things up to the school to-morrow—cakes and tarts and jars of jam, you know."

Uncle Clegg's face melted. He had to oblige a good customer.

"This 'ere way!" he said.

Bunter followed him hastily through the little back parlour. A minute more and he was in the garden at the back of the little house.

"You go out of that there gate," said Mr. Clegg, "you'll find yourself on the towing-path."

"Good!"

Bunter cut off as fast as his late heavy meal would allow him.

There was a sound of hammering on the counter in the little shop, and Uncle Clegg returned there in a leisurely manner.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Here you are!" said Bob Cherry. "Has Bunter been here, Mr. Clegg?"

"Anything I can serve you?" said Uncle Clegg.

"Yes—ginger-pop all round," said Johnny Bull. "And tell us whether Bunter has been here."

Mr. Clegg did not seem to hear the question. He proceeded stolidly to serve the ginger-pop all round.

"He's jolly well been here," said Hazeldene, "judging by the plates and glass, somebody's been having a feed here; and look at the crumbs."

"He's been here right enough," said Harry Wharton. "Uncle Clegg!"

"'Ullo!" said Mr. Clegg.

"How long is it since Bunter went?"

"Not werry long," said Mr. Clegg.

"Then he has been here?"

"Yes, he's been 'ere."

"Which way did he go?" demanded Peter Todd.

"I ain't seed him since he left the 'ouse," said Mr. Clegg, stolidly. "Anythink else for you, young gents?"

"The fat bounder!" said Peter Todd. "We've got to run him down."

"Waste of time," grunted Johnny Bull. "I knew it would be no good if it was up to one of you silly Lambs." Peter Todd snorted.

"Well, Bunter's giving us a run, isn't he?" he demanded. "One of you Eagles would have been caught long ago. You can't catch my fat Lamb, anyway."

"Oh, we'll keep on the track," said Wharton, laughing. "Blest if I know how he gave us the slip. He wasn't in the street when we came along. Look here, he's left a tart half-eaten—he must have left suddenly."

Peter Todd looked suddenly suspicious.

"Perhaps he isn't gone at all!" he exclaimed. "Cleggy, old man, is our fat tulip anywhere about the house?"

"He's gone," said Mr. Clegg stolidly.

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"Then he never went by the street," said Peter positively. "Did you let him out of the back way, you old spoofer?"

Uncle Clegg did not reply, but Peter was watching his face keenly, and the look on the crusty old countenance was enough for him.

"That's it!" howled Peter. "Bunter must have spotted us, and this old spoofer let him through the house. Did you or did you not, Cleggy?"

"Hanythink more I can serve you with?" asked Mr. Clegg, calmly.

"Come on!" shouted Peter.

"'Ere, don't you rush through my 'ouse!" yelled Uncle Clegg, in great wrath, as the long-legged Removite disappeared into his parlour. "Come back, you young varminths!"

The scouts followed Peter's lead with a rush.

"Come back!" roared Uncle Clegg. "You ain't paid for the ginger-beer! You young raskils, I tell you—"

But the scouts did not heed. They knew they were hot on the track again, and they rushed on. The ginger-beer could be paid for later. They streamed through the house, and rushed out into the garden. They left Uncle Clegg making emphatic remarks.

"This way!" yelled Peter Todd, and he sprinted down the long garden.

The scouts came out with a rush on the river bank.

There they paused, to stare round for Bunter.

Close by rolled the shining Sark, glimmering in the sunshine. At some distance, towards the wood, was the little tributary of the Sark, crossed by a plank-bridge. Peter Todd pointed and yelled.

"There he is!"

A couple of hundred yards away a fat figure was crossing the plank. With a whoop, the juniors dashed along the grassy bank of the river. Billy Bunter heard the whoop, and he turned his head. Then he rushed across the plank to the other side of the little stream.

The scouts were speeding down on him.

Bunter ran a few yards, towards the wood, and then turned back to the plank he had crossed. He knew that he could not escape by flight.

He dropped on his knees, laid down his bundle, and dragged furiously at the end of the plank where it rested on a large stone.

"Back up!" yelled Bob Cherry. "He's shifting the plank!"

The scouts ran their hardest.

Harry Wharton and Bob Cherry were in the lead, and they came on with lightning-like speed.

But Billy Bunter was desperate.

With a final furious yank, he dragged the plank from its position, and the end nearest the scouts slid away from the bank just as they reached it. Bob Cherry made a clutch at it a few seconds too late, and nearly pitched head-first into the stream. Wharton collared him, and dragged him back.

The plank splashed into the water, and floated away down the centre of the stream towards the river.

Billy Bunter panted.

Somebody would have the task later of recovering that plank and replacing it; and until then, pedestrians who came that way were likely to be exasperated at finding their path cut off. But Bunter did not worry about little things like that. He rose to his feet, panting and grinning.

"Yah!" he roared, feeling quite secure now. "Beasts! Rotters! Yah!"

The scouts shook their fists at him across the stream.

It was far too wide for jumping, and the pursuers were "done."

Bunter blinked at them, and grinned. He felt that he had executed a master-stroke.

"You can't catch me, you silly owls!" he chuckled.

"Go and eat coke!"

"Oh, you fat rotter!" panted Peter Todd.

"Yah! Where did you get that face?" asked Bunter from the safe side of the stream. "Do you call it a face?"

"What?" yelled Peter.

"Where did you dig up that nose?" Bunter further inquired.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Why, I—I—I'll skin him!" yelled the exasperated Peter.

"Did you ever see such legs?" went on Bunter. "I say, Toddy, which is the staff, and which are your legs? I can't see any difference."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What are you silly asses cackling at?" bawled Peter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bunter, quite serene now, kissed a fat hand at the juniors, and trotted away. Harry Wharton & Co. were left stranded. Billy Bunter, with a fat chuckle, disappeared into the wood.

"My sainted aunt!" gasped Peter. "Cheeking me! Me! I'm going over! I'll swim it——"

Wharton dragged him back.

"No, you won't, ass; it's too dangerous—you'd be swept out into the Sark. There was a man drowned there once. We shall have to go round."

"It's a mile round!" hooted Peter.

"Can't be helped. Come on! Bunter's done us!"

"Well, after all, you'll have to own up that you couldn't catch a Lamb," said Peter Todd. And Peter was much comforted by that reflection.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

A Surprising Meeting!

"BY gum, this is something like!"

Billy Bunter murmured that remark in tones of fat satisfaction.

He had put a good distance between himself and the spot where he had left the baffled scouts. He knew how determined Peter Todd was, and he did not mean to give the determined Peter a chance. He had plunged into the very heart of the wood, first following a well-worn path so as to leave no trail, and then penetrating into the thickest part of the wood.

He had stopped at last in the old woodman's hut—an old and long-disused building, now in ruins and thickly overgrown with brambles and creepers. The roof of the little building was gone, but arching branches over it made a green and leafy roof, through which came a glimmer of sunshine. It was a quiet and secluded and shady spot, and Bunter gave a grunt of satisfaction as he plumped down on the grass that grew thickly over the ancient earthen floor.

Then he unpacked his bundle and his wallet, and set to work. The feed at Uncle Clegg's had only taken the edge off his tremendous appetite. He was quite ready to do full justice to his provisions. And he had a large supply of ham and tongue, and biscuits and cakes, jam-tarts and doughnuts, with bottles of ginger-beer to wash down the solids. The thought of how he had baffled the scouts gave an added zest to his enjoyment.

He sat in the grass and ferns, leaning back against the old wall of the hut, and fed. No wonder he declared that it was "something like"!

It was indeed something like.

"The beasts!" murmured Bunter. "Catch me wasting time scouting! These tarts are good! Why, it's a topping afternoon for a picnic! Silly asses! Let 'em scout! This suits me, and that skinny idiot Peter can go and eat coke!"

Gurgle—gurgle! He dwelt with enjoyment upon his fifth bottle of ginger-beer. He had to drink from the bottle, but that could not be helped. He tilted up the bottle, and let the refreshing liquid gurgle into his capacious mouth, closing his eyes with enjoyment.

A sudden rustling sound made him open them again quickly. He gave a start, and then a yelp, as some of the ginger-beer trickled over his neck.

"The beasts! They can't have——"

He blinked round in alarm.

He was certain he had heard a rustle, and he thought he had heard a footstep, but he was still alone. His eyes met nothing but the old walls of the hut round him and the thick mass of bushes and creepers that grew within the old building. The fat junior was greatly relieved.

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"Blessed if I didn't think the beasts had run me down!" he murmured. "Hallo! Where's that pie?"

His eyes opened wide behind his big spectacles.

He had placed a veal-and-ham pie close at hand, ready for consumption, and now he blinked for it in vain.

It had vanished.

Bunter looked round him in amazement.

"Where on earth's that pie?"

Where was it?

"I—I can't have eaten it and forgotten it," murmured Bunter. "I know I haven't. But where is it, then? My aunt—my only sainted aunt! Where's that pie? Is the blessed place haunted?"

He blinked and blinked, with growing amazement. The pie had been within reach of his hand a few minutes ago, and now it had disappeared. He had closed his eyes for only a few moments. In that brief space the pie had vanished. It is said that riches take unto themselves wings and fly away, but that could not be the case with pies. And there was only one possible conclusion—someone had taken it.

Bunter started to his feet in great wrath, and gripped his staff.

"Some blessed kid doing this for a joke, I suppose!" he muttered. "I'll warm him! Can't be those scouting idiots! They'd have collared me, the beasts! I'll warm him!"

Bunter rolled out of the doorway of the hut, and blinked round wrathfully in search of the raider of his pie.

But there was no one in sight. Round him the wood lay thick and green and shady, and there was no sound save the twittering of the birds among the foliage overhead.

Greatly puzzled, Bunter turned back into the hut.

Then he gave a yell.

A large cake and a bottle of ginger-beer had gone!

Bunter's eyes almost started through his spectacles.

While he was blinking round outside the doorway his provisions had been raided again. There was a gap in the wall of the hut on the opposite side, and Bunter streaked across to it, and glared out into the wood behind the hut. There was no one in sight.

"Where are you, you rotter?" roared Bunter. "You pilfering cad! Where are you? I'll warm you! Bring back my cake, you thief! You rotter! I'll smash you! Do you hear?"

Only the echo of his voice answered him.

With his eyes gleaming with wrath through his glasses, Billy Bunter lunged into the bushes near at hand with his staff.

He knocked down showers of leaves, and startled the birds, who rose twittering, but he did not discover the raider.

In disgust, he turned back to the hut, and squeezed in again through the gap in the wall.

Then he stood rooted to the ground.

The other cake was gone, and his sole remaining pie, and a bag of doughnuts. They had vanished as completely as if the earth had opened and swallowed them up.

"Mum-m-mum-my hat!" stuttered Bunter.

He stood blinking down upon his diminished feed, almost dumbfounded.

Who had taken the tuck?

Someone seemed to be playing hide-and-seek with him, dodging in at one side when he went out on the other. Bunter's fat fingers closed tightly on his staff. His little, round eyes burned with rage. He rolled out of the doorway again, and blinked round; and then stepped back very quietly and cautiously to the wall of the hut, and peered in through one of the crevices. He hoped by that means to take the unknown raider by surprise.

He was right.

He had not been on the watch for more than a couple of minutes when there was a movement in the hut.

To Bunter's surprise, the movement came from the bushes that grew thickly inside the hut. A head appeared from them, and a pair of keen eyes looked round cautiously.

Then Bunter understood.

The raider was in the hut all the time, hidden behind the bushes that grew over half the space of the old building. Bunter watched him grimly. It was a man

who crept out of the bushes—a man in tattered and muddy clothing, with a thin, hungry face and gleaming eyes; a man of foreign look. He was the hungriest and raggedest tramp Bunter had ever seen.

He simply threw himself upon the provisions. He crammed food into his mouth and munched away, at the same time collecting up several paper bags to carry off to his hiding-place behind the bushes. But he was not to escape undiscovered that time.

"You rotter!" roared Bunter. "I've spotted you!"

The man gave a convulsive start.

Bunter shook a fat fist at him through the crevice in wall. The man stood in a crouching attitude, his face white and desperate.

The terror in his looks was only too evident. It made Bunter feel unusually courageous. If the man was so terribly afraid of him, it was evident that he had no reason to be afraid himself.

The fat junior rolled into the hut again, and the stranger did not attempt to hide. It was useless now that he had been discovered.

"Well, you rotter," said Bunter, "so it was you? Put my grub down! Do you hear? What have you done with my pies and my doughnuts? What?"

The man did not reply.

He stood quite still, his eyes fixed on Bunter's face, his looks full of terror. The fat junior swelled with importance. It was the first time he had seen anybody tremble at the terror of his glance. In that moment of self-satisfaction he could almost forgive the raider for seizing his tuck.

"What have you got to say for yourself?" demanded Bunter. "I'm going to give you a jolly good hiding! Do you hear?"

Still the man did not speak.

"Who are you?" demanded Bunter. "You look like some blessed foreigner. Some rotten German, perhaps—what?"

The man trembled.

"Well, you are a blessed funk!" said Bunter contemptuously. "I'm not going to eat you. Who are you, I say?"

"Ayez pitie de moi."

The man spoke at last—in French.

Bunter blinked at him.

"What does that mean? Can't you speak English? You foreigners are such a blessed ignorant lot!" said Bunter.

"Pitie!"

"I suppose that means pity," said Bunter reflectively.

"Are you a Frenchman? If you're a Frenchy, I don't mind standing you some grub, if you're hungry."

"Non."

"Then what are you, fathead?"

"Je suis Belge!"

"Je suis!" murmured Bunter. "That means I am—je suis, tu es, il est! You're a giddy Belgian?"

The man nodded eagerly.

"Well, if you're a Belgian, you can have a whack in my feed," said Bunter generously. "You can pile in! Why didn't you show yourself and ask permission? There wasn't any need to sneak it. Pile in!"

"Comment!"

"What the deuce do you mean with your commong?" said Bunter peevishly. "I say you can pile in—mangez, you know."

The foreigner did not need a second bidding. He squatted down in the grass, and piled in.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Bunter's Belgian!

BILLY BUNTER sat down, too, and piled in.

The discovery that the hungry foreigner was a Belgian, evidently a refugee, touched the fat heart of the Owl of the Remove. He was willing to "whack out" his feed with the Belgian. But he wanted an innings himself. The hungry man was eating away as if for a wager, and Bunter put on speed, too. They ran each other very close, and for some time no sound was heard in the woodman's hut but the clamping of jaws.

It was fortunate that Bunter's supply of tuck was so ample, or the Owl's hospitality might have failed him. As it was, Billy Bunter had as much as he could eat, and

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when he could eat no more, the foreigner was still tucking into the fragments of the feed.

Billy Bunter watched him curiously.

The fat Owl was feeling very pleased with himself. He could sympathise with a fellow who was hungry; it was a kind of suffering that he could understand and feel for. And the foreigner looked as if he had not eaten for days and days. He had evidently already eaten the pies and cake that he had purloined, but the edge did not seem to be taken off his appetite. He was devouring everything that came to hand, with the ravenous keenness of a famished wolf.

It rather pleased Bunter to be playing the role of succouring a Belgian refugee. For once he was doing a good deed, and the novel sensation was very gratifying. He felt very kindly towards the Belgian.

"Go it!" he said hospitably. "Tuck in! Tuckez-vous in! Vous avez a good appetite. J'aime to see a fellow eat as if he enjoys himself. Allez on!"

Bunter, as a member of the Remove, was supposed to know some French. Harry Wharton & Co. when on a holiday in France, had found that Lower Fourth French presented certain difficulties to the natives of that country. But Bunter was rather proud of his French. Monsieur Charpentier, the French master at Greyfriars, was not satisfied with it, certainly, but Bunter was satisfied. Bunter proceeded to talk French to his new acquaintance, but if the man had not understood English, Bunter's French would probably have been a great mystery to him.

"Commey vous call yourself?" asked Bunter. "Wha' your name, you know? How do you appelley?"

"Je m'appelle Jacques Flon."

"Jack Flong!" said Bunter. "I didn't know Jack was a French name. You come from Belgium, what?"

"Oui!"

"Run away from the beastly Huns?"

"Comment?"

"You've dodged the filthy Prussians?"

"Oui!"

"You understand English, then?" said Bunter.

"Un peu."

"Now, what does he mean by un peu, I wonder?" murmured Bunter. "P'r'aps that's a Belgian dialect."

"A leetle," explained Jacques Flon.

"Oh, a little! I see—je vois," said Bunter. "Vous etes hungry, what?"

"J'ai faim."

"J'ai—that means I have," said Bunter thoughtfully. "Farm—I suppose he means he's a farmer. You were a farmer in Belgium, eh?"

The foreigner nodded. Bunter certainly ought to have known that "faim" was French for hunger, but the obliging foreigner did not mind.

"What's become of your farm now?" asked Bunter.

"On a tout brule."

"Bruler is to burn—regular verb!" murmured Bunter. "I suppose he means they've burnt him out. The beasts! They'd do the same here if they could get here. Then I might have to go hungry!" Bunter shuddered.

The foreigner had finished the last crumb, and finished the last drop of ginger-beer. He looked round as if in search of more; but there was no more.

"Still hungry?" asked Bunter. "Vous avez encore hunger?"

"Mais oui."

"May we what?" asked Bunter.

"Comment?"

"Bit off his rocker, I suppose!" murmured Bunter indulgently. "Must have been through an awful time, if he couldn't get any grub. I say, Jack, how did you get here?"

"Je me suis sauve."

"Eh?"

"I run," said the foreigner, breaking into English. "I fly! Maintenant je suis ici en Angleterre, n'est-ce pas? Les Boschies ont tout brule dans mon pays."

"Blessed if I know what you're talking about," said Bunter. "That isn't like the French we have at Grey-

friars. I dare say you don't speak very first-class French in Belgium, though."

"Comment?"

"What do you mean with your blessed commong?"

"Je ne comprends pas."

"Comprong pah!" repeated Bunter. "You don't understand? Well, I suppose you wouldn't. What are you doing here?"

"Rien."

"Reong," said Bunter. "Lemme see—rire is to laugh; he can't mean that he's laughing. Blessed if I understand his French. I say, what are you hanging about this wood for? Why don't you go to a place for refugees? There are lots of people looking after Belgian refugees, you know, and they'd take you in like anything."

"Je n'en sais rien."

"Oh, my hat! Look here," said Bunter. "You come away with me, and I'll ask Mr. Quelch to send you somewhere."

"Comment?"

"Venez avec moi," said Bunter. "Je connais un monsieur qui—qui—qui—" Bunter's French failed him. "Qui—qui—qui'll find you a home."

"Je ne veux pas."

"Why not?"

"J'ai peur."

"Lemme see. That means that he's afraid," said Bunter. "Look here, Flong, there's nothing to be afraid of here. You're in England, you know. The filthy Huns can't get here. Britannia rules the waves, you know. The beasts are shut up in their ports and can't get out! And if they did get here, we'd eat 'em. Nothing at all to be afraid of. Besides," added Bunter, "I'll look after you."

Jacques Flon, to give him the name he gave himself, fixed his eyes upon Bunter. There was a very peculiar look in his deep-set, light-blue eyes, which the short-sighted Owl of the Remove did not notice.

Bunter was feeling very benevolent. He rather fancied himself as the protector of the oppressed. He was really prepared to take some trouble to help the hapless refugee from Belgium.

There was a short silence. Bunter was thinking of some more French to help in his conversation, and the foreigner was thinking strange thoughts, to judge by the curious glitter in his eyes. Once his hand closed upon an empty ginger-beer bottle, as if to use it for a weapon, but it unclosed again. It was Jacques Flon who broke the silence.

"Vous etes tout seul ici, monsieur?"

"Eh?"

"Is it you are alone wiz you here?"

"Yes, rather!" said Bunter. "I've left the other chaps a mile away. They're trying to find me, but I don't suppose they will."

"Ach!"

"Blessed if that doesn't sound like a German," said Bunter. "That's a grunt just like old Gans at Greyfriars."

"Monsieur, you are verree good to me—"

"Oh, that's all right!" said Bunter, with a wave of his fat hand. "It's up to us to stand by the Belgians, you know."

"You say noting of to have meet me here."

"Why not?" asked Bunter, in surprise.

"J'ai peur."

"But I tell you there's nothing to be afraid of. Don't you understand that you're in England now?" said Bunter. "There are places where you can go, where you'll get enough to eat, and be looked after, first-rate. You'll be found work, you know, till the Germans are turned out of Belgium, and you can go home. See—voyez?"

The man was watching him closely. A keener fellow than Billy Bunter might have suspected that Jacques Flon was not exactly what he represented himself to be. But the Owl of the Remove had no suspicion.

"J'explique," said the man at last, watching Bunter closely to judge the effect of his words. "Je suis soldat—"

"Yes, all you Belgians are soldiers, I know that," said

Bunter. "You have conscription in your country, the same as in Germany."

"I have been in ze battles, in many battles. I have kill ze Bosches."

"Good for you!" said Bunter.

"My bayonet he run wiz Cherman blood—"

"Grooh!"

"Zen I am wounded. I am sent back to ze base, zen to Angleterre—ici. Ze doctor say I cannot go back to ze front."

"Hard lines," said Bunter.

"So I run away. I will go back."

"Oh!"

"But now zat I run away, zat is called to desert—"

"My hat!"

"I dare not be seen—je n'ose pas," explained the refugee. "I shall get back to my pays—my country—I shall enlist under ozzer name—vous voyez—zen zat shall be all right. But if I am found before zat I get back, zey will say zat it is desertion, and I am put in prison, and cannot go back to ze fighting."

"By Jove!" said Bunter. "I say, where are you wounded?"

"In ze leg. It is bad, but not verree bad. I can fight for my country, and I vill not stay in hospital. But to leave wizout permission, zat is deserting. I am in danger till zat I get back to Belgium. Zen it is all right, for vunce again I take my rifle and shoot ze Bosches."

"Phew!"

"So monsieur say noting."

"But—but how are you going to get back to Belgium if you can't show yourself anywhere?" asked Bunter. "You can't take the Channel boat, you know."

"I go in little boat."

"Too jolly risky," said Bunter. "Besides, where are you going to get a boat?"

"I have friend among ze fishermen—when I find him. He help me wiz his boat, and take me over ze water, and I rejoin my comrades to fight for my country. Zat is why I am here. I hide in ze wood till I can see my friend."

"Oh, I see!"

"But if I am found I am called deserter, and zen—puff! Bang! I am shot!"

"My hat!"

"I risk ze life to get back to ze fighting."

"Well, you must be a plucky beggar," said Bunter. "You must be an ass, though, to run that risk. Why couldn't you wait till you were discharged from the hospital?"

"I am wounded. I limp—limp wiz ze leg, and ze doctor say I never go back. Zey keep me work in hospital. But I vill go back to ze fighting."

"I see. I don't blame you," said Bunter. "You're a plucky beggar. But it's jolly risky; they shoot deserters in war time."

"Mais oui! But I run ze risk. Ze Bosches burn my home, and I go back to fight zem."

"Quite right," agreed Bunter.

"Zen you keep the secret?"

"Oh, yes!"

"Not a visper, hein?"

"Not a giddy syllable," said Bunter. "I don't want to get you shot, just because you want to go back to the front."

"Monsieur is verree kind. Ze brave English are good friends to us. Perhaps monsieur vill help me? In zis wood I starve."

"The sooner you get away the better," said Bunter. "Hallo! My only hat! There's somebody coming. Those beasts have run me down!"

There was a sound of brushing in the thickets, and a murmur of voices approaching the woodman's hut. The foreigner sprang to his feet, his eyes dilating, and his hand gripping an empty bottle.

"Hold on!" whispered Bunter. "Get out of sight—quick! It's my friends, you know; you dodge out of sight, and keep mum."

Jacques Flon stared at him for a moment, and then gave a quick nod, and darted into the bushes in the corner of the hut. He vanished from sight, and a moment later Peter Todd looked in at the doorway.



"Hullo, Tubby!" cried a voice, and Billy Bunter fell down in astonishment, as the face of Peter Todd looked down at him from the box-room window. (See Chapter 11.)

THE SIXTH CHAPTER. Bunter's Secret!

"**H**ERE he is!"

"Run down, by George!"

"The rundownfulness is terrific!"

Billy Bunter blinked at the scouts as they crowded into the hut. The Eagles and the Lambs had run him down at last.

"I say, you fellows——"

"Feeding, of course!" exclaimed Peter Todd, with a glare at the remnants of the feast and the empty ginger-beer bottles.

"I say, Toddy, old man——"

"Now you are going to die the death!" said Peter.

"I—I say, you fellows, I've given you a good run, and what more do you want?" said Bunter, dodging Peter's prodding staff. "You've taken all the afternoon to find me, anyway. I'm a jolly better scout than any of you!"

"What!"

"Haven't I led you a dance all the afternoon?" demanded Bunter.

"You chucked the plank away, you fat villain! That isn't in the game," said Bob Cherry.

"Oh, rats! That's a scout's dodge," said Bunter.

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NEXT
MONDAY—

"THE OLD BOYS' CHALLENGE!"

"Any of you fellows wouldn't have thought of a dodge like that."

"There'll be a row about it," said Wharton. "Somebody will have to find that plank and put it back."

"Well, they won't know who did it," said Bunter. "I don't care. The fact is, you fellows ain't much class as scouts, anyway."

"What!"

"You've taken all the afternoon to track me down," said Bunter. "I should have done it in about half the time."

"My hat!"

"Why, you cheeky oyster——"

"The cheekfulness of the esteemed oyster is——"

"Terrific!" growled Bob Cherry.

"Keep that staff away, Todd, you beast!" howled Bunter, dodging his study leader round the hut. "I say, you fellows—ow!—I'll tell you what—yow!—I'll give you a run back to Greyfriars—yaroo!—and I'll bet I'll beat you!"

"Why, you fathead——"

"You wouldn't last twenty yards!" growled Johnny Bull.

"Well, just see," said Bunter, who was very anxious to get the scouts out of the woodman's hut. The

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refugee was crouching, palpitating, behind the bushes. Harry Wharton & Co. little dreamed of the presence of the unseen refugee, and Bunter did not intend to enlighten them. "Come on, you slackers!"

"Slackers!" howled Peter Todd.

"I'm going to have a rest," said Nugent.

Bunter sniffed.

"Oh, if you want to slack about, all right," he said.

"Do you call yourselves scouts?"

"You cheeky porpoise, you've been resting and feeding here for a couple of hours!" said Nugent indignantly.

"I'm as fresh as a daisy," said Bunter loftily. "I keep myself fit!"

"Oh, crumbs!"

"Blessed if I ever saw such slackers!" said the Owl of the Remove in disgust. "For goodness' sake, get a move on! Besides, it's time we got home to tea. Come out, and give me one minute's start, and I'll beat you to Greyfriars!"

The scouts stared at Bunter. It was not like the Owl of the Remove to give himself such an exertion for nothing.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" said Bob Cherry suddenly. "Who's been here with you, Bunter?"

Bunter jumped.

"Eh? Nobody!"

"Ananias!" said Bob. "Look here, you can see where two have been sitting in the grass. Who was it, you fat Owl?"

"Oh, a—a chap!" said Bunter. "One—one of the Highcliffe chaps—in fact, Ponsonby. He came along, and I gave him some ginger-pop."

"You've been up to your old game, playing cards with Ponsonby?" asked Peter Todd suspiciously.

"No, you ass! I—I just gave him some ginger-pop!"

"Where is he now?"

"Oh, he's gone!"

Peter Todd looked fixedly at his fat study-mate. Billy Bunter was a champion Ananias, but his "whoppers" had one drawback; they were always evidently whoppers. Peter Todd could see quite plainly that he was not telling the truth, though why Bunter should lie was a mystery.

"You've been gambling?" he said at last.

"I haven't!" roared Bunter.

"Then what are you telling lies for?"

"Oh, really, Toddy—"

"What was Ponsonby doing here?"

"Oh, he—he was—was scouting, you know!" said Bunter feebly.

"He never scouts," said Todd. "He's too much of a slacker. What has the fat duffer been up to that he's making a mystery about? Come back, Bunter!"

Bunter dodged out of the hut.

"I'm going back," he called out. "If you lazy slackers don't want a run—"

"After him!" howled Peter Todd. "I'll give him slackers!"

The scouts rushed after Bunter with a whoop. The fat junior went plunging away through the wood at top speed, stumbling and falling, and picking himself up again, and dashing on. The juniors whooped after him in great surprise. Why Billy Bunter was showing so much energy all of a sudden was a mystery.

Bunter came out into a footpath, and dashed along it, panting for breath. His object was to lead the scouts as far as possible from the woodman's hut before he was caught.

He was nearly a quarter of a mile from the hut, when Peter Todd's staff touched him in the middle of the back and rolled him over.

"Yaroooh!" roared Bunter.

He rolled in the grass, and the grinning scouts gathered round him, and prodded him, and he yelled.

"Yarooop! Leave off, you beasts! Oh, my hat! Beasts! Ow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Up with you," said Peter Todd. "You're going to give us a run to Greyfriars. It's another two miles yet. Up you get!"

"Yow-ow!"

Peter yanked the fat junior to his feet. It was time

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to get home to tea; and the Eagles and the Lambs kept on the run to Greyfriars, and Billy Bunter had to keep on the run, too. There was no chance of his dodging the scouts and getting back to the hut unseen. Peter Todd kept hold of his fat arm, and kept him on the run. Billy Bunter was gasping spasmodically by the time the school gates were reached.

He staggered into No. 7 Study, and collapsed into the armchair, and gasped and gasped and gasped. He had bellows to mend with a vengeance.

"Feel better for your run?" asked Todd.

Groan!

"Feel bucked up?"

Groan!

"Like scouting?"

"Ow! I'm dying!"

"Go hon!" said Peter unfeelingly.

Groan!

"Stop that blessed row, anyway," said Peter autocratically. "If you're going to die, you can die quietly. No need to bother the whole study."

Groan!

"Shut up!" roared Peter, picking up his staff.

And Billy Bunter ceased to groan. For a long time he sat in the armchair in a state of collapse, while Peter and Alonzo and Tom Dutton had tea. The first sign of returning animation from Bunter was a fat chuckle.

Peter Todd stared round at him.

"Oh, you're coming to life again?" he exclaimed.

"He, he, he!"

"What are you cackling at?"

"He, he, he!" chuckled Bunter. "I could tell you something, but I'm jolly well not going to! He, he, he!"

"What are you driving at?"

"He, he, he! Some fellows think they're jolly good scouts, and they have the wool pulled over their eyes like anything. He, he, he!"

Peter glared at him.

"Who's pulled the wool over our eyes?" he demanded.

"He, he, he! I know what I know!" grinned Bunter.

"Well, that isn't much," remarked Peter. "It could all be written out in about a dozen words. What little game have you been playing, you fat duffer?"

"He, he, he!"

Peter made a clutch for his staff, and Bunter bolted out of the armchair, and dodged out of the study. It pleased him to excite Peter's curiosity, but he had no intention of explaining. Bunter had a secret now—a very important secret—and he liked secrets. He was not a very good hand at keeping a secret, as a matter of fact; but he fully intended to keep this one. He had taken the Belgian refugee under his wing, and he intended to help him, and look after him generally—it gave him an unaccustomed feeling of generosity and benevolence, which was very agreeable.

Later on, when Jacques Flon was gone, he would tell the story, and astonish No. 7 Study. Even the overpowering Peter would have to admit that Bunter had played up well. Indeed, Bunter, in his mind's eye, could already see himself the hero of the Remove, the cynosure of all eyes, and admired on all sides.

But for the present it was a dead secret, and Bunter meant to keep it awfully dark, if only his tongue would let him!

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Very Mysterious!

THAT Billy Bunter had a secret was soon known to all the Remove.

There is a proverb that he who has a secret to hide, should hide not only the secret, but the fact that he has it to hide. But that proverb did not appeal to Bunter. He simply could not keep from talking, and uttering mysterious hints.

The secret itself he was determined to keep. It was quite certain that if he revealed it, Jacques Flon's presence in the wood would soon be known all over Greyfriars, and would spread further. Curious fellows would go looking for the refugee. Then, if Flon's story was true, the man would be in danger of getting shot as

a deserter. Which would be very hard lines, if he had only cleared off from a desire to get back to the front and fight the Huns. The thought that the man's liberty, perhaps his life, was in his keeping, impressed Bunter with the seriousness of the matter, and gave him an unusual sense of importance. He was resolved that he would keep Flon's secret, until the man was able to get back to the Belgian Army in the field, when all would be well, and Bunter would be able to talk as much as he liked, and swank on the subject of the good deed he had done.

But he would probably have burst something if he had not talked at all, and as the secret had to be kept, he contrived to content himself with mysterious remarks, and deep and dark hints of what he could say if he chose.

After tea, the Famous Five found him in the tuck-shop laying in supplies. He was laying some of them in internally, but others he was having made up into a parcel. As Bunter was fortunately flowing with ready cash just now, Mrs. Mimble was serving him with a smiling face. Bunter was a good customer at the school shop when he was in funds. He would have been a good customer at other times, too, if Mrs. Mimble would have allowed him to run up a bill; but that the good lady steadily declined to do.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Going it again?" said Bob Cherry, greeting Bunter with a powerful smack on the back.

"Yow!" roared Bunter. "Chuck it, you ass! Grooh! You've made me swallow my tart, you fathead! Gerrrrrrrr!"

"My hat! He's choking!" said Johnny Bull. "Thump him on the back!"

"Gerrr! Gerroff! I'm not chook-chook-choking!" roared Bunter. "Gerrrr!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Standing a feed in the Rag?" asked Harry Wharton, surveying the pile of purchases which Mrs. Mimble was stacking into a basket.

"Rats! No; I might be standing a feed, and I might not," said Bunter. "Some fellows are generous."

"Some are," assented Wharton. "You're not one of that sort, of course."

"That's all you know!" said Bunter, with a snort. "Not that I'm going to tell you anything!"

"Eh?"

"Some fellows can take some trouble to help a chap who's down on his luck," said Bunter loftily.

"What is he burbling about?" asked Nugent, in amazement.

"I'm not going to tell you anything," said Bunter. "I decline to take you into my confidence on this matter at all!"

"What matter?" asked Johnny Bull.

"Never mind!"

"If Bunter hasn't bought up the whole shop, we'll have some ginger-beer, Mrs. Mimble," said Bob Cherry.

The Famous Five proceeded to discuss their ginger-beer, and watched the provisions that were packed in the basket.

"Put in a knife and fork, Mrs. Mimble, please," said Bunter. "A knife and fork will be wanted. And a mug."

"Is it a picnic?" asked Nugent.

"It might be a picnic, and it might not," said Bunter mysteriously. "Some fellows can keep a secret."

"Eh? What secret?"

"Don't ask any questions, and I won't tell you any whoppers!"

"Well, that would be something new, if you don't tell any whoppers," said Bob. "But we don't expect it. The age of miracles is past!"

"What is the giddy mystery about?" asked Wharton, puzzled. "I suppose you are going off into some corner to guzzle by yourself."

"That's all you know. I might be going to help some fellow in distress."

"You might," said Wharton; "but it would be a jolly big surprise if you did."

"There's such a thing as backing up our Allies," said Bunter. "I'm a patriotic chap, if you ain't!"

"Backing up our Allies!" murmured Wharton. "Are you laying in supplies for the campaign in Belgium?"

"Never mind! I'm not going to tell you anything."

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NEXT
MONDAY—

"THE OLD BOYS' CHALLENGE!"

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ONE
PENNY.

Decent chaps help the Belgian refugees when they get a chance."

"B-B-Belgian refugees!" stuttered Bob Cherry. "Do you mean to say you're buying grub for Belgian refugees?"

"I don't mean to say anything," said Bunter.

"There aren't any Belgian refugees in this district," said Nugent. "That's a whopper already!"

"That's all you know!"

"Have you come across some Belgians?"

"Don't ask any questions, please, and I sha'n't prevaricate," said Bunter. "Some chaps are generous. But I'm not a fellow to brag."

"My mistake. I thought you were. Where's your Belgian, if you've got one?"

"Find out!"

"Well, if Bunter's doing the decent thing for a Belgian refugee, it shows that the age of miracles ain't done with, after all," remarked Bob. "But I should want to see it before I believe it."

"The seefulness is the believfulness," said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, with a shake of his dusky head. "The esteemed Bunter must be whopping."

"I'm not going to tell you anything," said Bunter. "It would be just like you fellows to bag him, and take the matter out of my hands."

"Bag whom?" demanded Wharton.

"Never mind whom. I'm not telling you anything. A fellow can't be too careful when a fellow's life is at stake."

"Eh?"

"A still tongue shows a wise head," said Bunter. "I'm not saying anything. Not a word. You fellows would blab it all out; you've got no discretion. Then all the fat would be in the fire."

"Blab what out?" asked Wharton.

"Oh, nothing!"

Billy Bunter took the well-loaded basket, and quitted the school shop. He left the Famous Five staring at one another in profound amazement.

"Now, what the deuce does that mean?" said Bob Cherry.

"Off his rocker," suggested Johnny Bull.

Harry Wharton laughed.

"He's going to feed a Belgian refugee, unless he was gassing," he said. "It will be a new departure for Bunter, to look after anybody's inside but his own."

"But there aren't any in this district."

"Some spoofer may have passed himself off on Bunter as a Belgian. Blessed if I quite make it out," said Wharton. "Let's get down to the cricket."

The chums of the Remove got down to the cricket, and forgot all about Billy Bunter and his weird and mysterious allusions. But the mystery was destined to be brought back to their minds.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

A Feed for Four!

"HERE you are, old chap!"

Skinner and Snoop and Fisher T. Fish greeted Bunter in the Close, with great affection. They were always affectionate when Bunter was in funds.

"Been looking for you," said Snoop.

"I guess we've missed you this afternoon, Bunter."

"Well, you can miss me again," said Bunter. "I'm busy."

He rolled on, leaving the three juniors staring.

"He's got tuck in that basket," said Skinner. "The fat boulder, he's going to guzzle all by himself, and leave us out."

"I guess he's a mean mugwump," remarked Fisher T. Fish.

"Like his cheek," said Snoop. "Suppose we raid him?"

"Well, he ought to stand a feed, when he's in funds," said Skinner. "We put up with him when he's stony. He's going into the Cloisters."

The Cloisters were the most secluded part of Greyfriars. The three juniors exchanged glances, and strolled after Bunter. They did not see any reason why they should be left out of the feed.

Billy Bunter's manner was so mysterious, that it was evident that he was trying to sneak into the Cloisters unobserved. He turned back several times and blinked round him suspiciously through his big spectacles.

But he did not observe Skinner & Co.; his vision was too limited. He disappeared into the Cloisters, and the three juniors, grinning, followed him.

But they did not find him there. They passed through the Cloisters, and spotted the Owl of the Remove again, just disappearing into the old tower.

"That's where he's going to feed, the fat oyster!" said Snoop.

"I guess we've run him down."

The three juniors approached the old tower. As they did so, Bunter reappeared, and came walking back towards the Cloisters. He was empty-handed now.

Skinner dragged his two companions behind a tree.

They would have been visible enough to anyone but the short-sighted Owl of the Remove, but Bunter passed on unseeing.

He rolled away through the Cloisters, into the Close, and vanished.

"He's left the tuck in the tower," said Snoop, in wonder.

Skinner chuckled.

"Yes; like a blessed dog hiding a bone."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I guess the galoot's standing a feed, and leaving us out," said Fisher T. Fish. "He's gone to fetch 'em, I guess."

"He won't find much grub when he gets back, then," said Skinner. "We'll teach him to stand a feed and leave out his dearest pals; I mean, we'll teach him not to. Come on!"

The trio hurried into the tower.

Unless William George Bunter had hidden away the basket of tuck, as a dog hides away a bone, they could only conclude that he had gone to fetch his selected guests to a feed; and that they themselves were not of the number. Naturally, they were indignant. They had wasted a considerable amount of soft "sawder" on Bunter since he had had his latest remittance, without result, so far.

The trio entered the old tower, and looked round for the basket. It was not to be seen. They hurried up the old stone steps, and looked into the dismantled apartments above, but still the basket was invisible.

"I guess he's hidden it," remarked Fish.

"Where the deuce can it be?" muttered Skinner. "We know he went away without it. It's here somewhere, right enough. Search in the blessed crannies."

"The fat bounder will be back soon," said Snoop. "Buck up! If he brings a crowd with him they'll boot us out."

The trio made a hurried search. There was a sudden whoop of triumph from Fisher T. Fish. He had discovered the plunder, shoved away out of sight in a deep crevice in the crumbling wall on the ground floor.

"Hyer it is!"

"Hurrah!"

Fish dragged the basket out to light. Skinner cast a hurried look from the window. There was no sign of Bunter returning yet.

"Get the stuff out, quick!" muttered Skinner. "Stack it into your pockets, and take the rest in your paws. We'll leave something else for Bunter."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The basket was soon emptied, and Skinner repacked it with fragments of stone and mortar. Over the top of these new contents he placed a couple of bags of pastry, and then fastened up the basket again.

Then, loaded with plunder, the three young rascals hurried out of the tower.

"He ain't coming back yet," remarked Fish.

There was no sign of Bunter.

Skinner & Co. hurried through the Cloisters, and carried their plunder into the School House. It was

taken to Fish's study. Johnny Bull and Squiff, who shared that study with Fish, were away on the cricket-ground. The plunder was set out on the table, and the raiders prepared to enjoy themselves.

"I say, you fellows—"

The trio started guiltily as Bunter blinked in at the doorway.

"Hallo!" said Skinner.

"I want to speak to you, Skinner."

"Go ahead!" said Skinner.

Bunter blinked at the well-spread table.

"I say, you fellows, I don't mind if I join you. Those tarts look prime!"

Skinner and Snoop and Fish stared at Bunter, and then burst into a chuckle. The Owl of the Remove did not recognise his own feed, and had no suspicion that he had been plundered.

"J-j-join us!" murmured Skinner. "Oh, certainly! Sit down! Eat as much as you like."

"Good!"

"But what about your own feed?" asked Skinner blandly. "I thought I saw you with a basket of tuck."

"Oh, that wasn't a feed!" said Bunter. "Never mind about that. I'll try that cake."

"Oh, do!"

"You chaps must be in funds," said Bunter. "Why, this lot can't have cost less than half-a-quad!"

"Quite that," said Skinner.

"And you're welcome to all you can eat, old chap," said Fisher T. Fish. "I guess you're really entitled to it."

"Pass the tarts."

"We really got this lot rather cheap," said Skinner. "Tuck in, old man!"

There was plenty for all, and Skinner & Co. could afford to be generous, considering the way the feed had been obtained.

Four busy pairs of jaws champed away till the table was cleared. There were even a few tarts left, which nobody had any room for.

"Now, I guess that's O.K.," said Fisher T. Fish. "Much obliged, Bunter!"

"Eh! What are you obliged to me for?" asked Bunter.

"Ahem! I—I mean I'm much obliged to Skinner," said Fish hastily, and he quitted the study chuckling.

"Much obliged," said Snoop, and he followed him.

"Can you manage another tart?" asked Skinner hospitably.

"Well, I—I'll try one more," said Bunter, who never could bear to leave anything uneaten. "I say, Skinner, I want to ask you a bit of a favour."

Skinner's geniality froze up at once.

"Sorry—short of money," he replied promptly.

Bunter snorted.

"Tain't money!" he snapped.

"Eh! You're not expecting a postal-order, and you don't want me to cash it in advance?" asked Skinner, in surprise.

"No, fathead!"

"Oh, all right, then! Go on," said Skinner, genial again.

"I want you to help me out of the dorm to-night," said Bunter mysteriously.

Skinner jumped.

"Out of the d-d-dorm?" he ejaculated.

"Yes."

"What for?"

"I'm going out."

"You young ass!" said Skinner. "You'll jolly well get spotted, if you're thinking of going down to the Cross Keys, like Loder of the Sixth!"

"Tain't that!"

"Then what is it?"

"It's rather a secret," said Bunter. "What I want you to do is to help me to get out, and keep mum—see?"

"Bow-wow!" said Skinner.

"I can't clamber out of that blessed box-room window without help," said Bunter. "I want you to lend me a hand—see?"

"Catch me!" said Skinner. "I'm not going to ask for the sack. You'd better draw a line at breaking bounds

after lights out. I don't mind a smoke in the wood-shed or a little game at nap with Ponsonby on the q.t. But it's no good looking for trouble."

"It isn't anything against the rules."

"Oh, rats! What do you want to go out for, then?"

"It—it's really to do a good and generous action."

Skinner almost fell down.

"You," he gasped—"you do a good and generous action! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Why, you rotter—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Skinner.

"Look here—"

Skinner staggered out of the study in a convulsion of merriment.

"Skinner, you rotter—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Beast! I tell you—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bunter shook a fat fist after the unbelieving Skinner. There was no help to be had from that quarter, evidently. The idea of Billy Bunter doing a good and generous action had been too much for Skinner's gravity. But even if he had credited Billy Bunter's extraordinary statement, Skinner would scarcely have taken the risk of helping the fat junior to break bounds at night.

"Rotter!" murmured Bunter. "Beast! What was he cackling at? Who the dickens is going to help me out to-night?"

Billy Bunter wrinkled his fat brows over that question. Certainly it was a very difficult one to answer.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

Nothing Doing!

HARRY WHARTON & Co. were eating chestnuts in No. 1 Study, and waiting for bed-time, when Billy Bunter came along. Nugent had been reading some news out of the local paper, which was interesting enough to the Greyfriars fellows, concerning a raid on a house along the coast by the police, and the flight of a suspected German who had been signalling at night over the North Sea. As the German's house was only a few miles from Greyfriars, the juniors were naturally interested.

"They ought to have collared him," said Bob Cherry oracularly. "I believe the bobbies always put on their heaviest boots when they're going to arrest a spy, and he hears them coming. This rotter may have been signalling every night for months past, and they've only just spotted him. They want some of the Greyfriars Remove on the job."

"They nearly got him," said Nugent. "He slithered out of a back window as they came in at the front door. They found all sorts of incriminating papers, but they didn't find the German. Still, I daresay he's caught now—this paper is two days old, and it happened last week."

"I say, you fellows—"

"They want Bunter after him," said Squiff seriously. "Such a ripping scout—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I suggest that Bunter offers his services," said the Australian junior. "It's up to Bunter. The only question is, whether the German had a good supply of tuck with him. If he had, I'd back Bunter to track him out."

"Oh, really, Squiff—"

"Where's the basket?" asked Bob Cherry.

"Eh! The—the basket—"

"Yes; the one you were cramming with tuck. Haven't you brought it here with you?"

"No, you ass—"

"Then you can buzz off!"

"I say, you fellows—"

"Bow-wow! Money's tight!"

"Blow your money!" growled Bunter.

"We're going to blow it, all in good time," grinned Bob Cherry. "But you're not going to blow it! Amble away!"

"I want—"

"Don't we keep on telling you money's tight?" said Wharton. "You can have some chestnuts if you like."

"Thanks, I will. I want—"

"Shut up!"

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NEXT
MONDAY—

"THE OLD BOYS' CHALLENGE!"

EVERY
MONDAY, The "Magnet" LIBRARY. ONE
PENNY.

"I tell you I want—"

"Cheese it!"

"I tell you I don't want your beastly tuppences!" howled Bunter indignantly. "I've got lots of money. I've had a whacking remittance from my pater."

"Oh, that alters the case. You're as welcome as the flowers in May," said Bob affably. "You're going to whack it out all round?"

"Why, you silly ass, of course not!" snapped Bunter. "Don't play the giddy goat. I want you fellows to help me to-night."

"Help you to bed, do you mean?"

"Help me to get out."

"But you don't want to get out of bed till the morning," said Bob. "I'll help you out then, fast enough. I generally do."

"Help me out of the house, fathead!"

"Oh, you're going on the ran-dan again, are you? Bunter the Blade come to life again!" chuckled Squiff. "Yes, we'll help you—I don't think!"

"It isn't that. I've got to get out for a very particular purpose. It's really to do a generous action—a really noble action," said Bunter impressively.

The Removites held on to one another, affecting to be quite overcome by that announcement. Bob Cherry fainted in the armchair. Billy Bunter blinked at them in great wrath.

"You thundering asses—"

"Pile it on!" murmured Squiff. "Heap it up!"

"Some fellows can do noble actions," said Bunter disdainfully. "Some fellows feel it their duty to do their little bit at a time like this, when the country is in danger. Of course, you don't! All you think about is playing games and chipping a fellow who's doing a noble action."

"M-m-my hat!" said Bob Cherry, coming out of his faint.

"I've got to get out of the house," said Bunter. "I can't tell you why, because it's a secret. But it's important—awfully important. In fact, fearfully important!"

"The importantfulness seems to be terrific," remarked Hurree Singh. "But what is the whyfulness?"

"I'm not going to tell you anything. It might be to help a Belgian refugee, and it might not," said Bunter mysteriously.

"You're jolly well not going out after lights out to help any Belgian refugee," chuckled Bob Cherry. "I suppose his name would turn out to be Ponsonby, and he would want help with a game of nap?"

"His name's Jack Flong, you ass— I—I mean I don't know his name," stammered Bunter. "Of—of course, I—I'm not going to tell you anything."

"His name's Jack Flong," repeated Wharton, in wonder. "Whose name is Jack Flong?"

"N-n-nobody's," stammered Bunter. "I—I was only—only putting a case, you know. A Belgian refugee might be named Jack Flong, and then again he mightn't."

Billy Bunter thought this was rather masterly. But the juniors stared at him in blank wonder and amazement.

Bob Cherry tapped his forehead.

"Must be off his onion," he murmured. "He never was quite on it, you know. Always a little bit rocky. Now he's right off. Poor old Bunter!"

"You silly ass! If you don't help me, old Flong— I—I mean he—that is, supposing there was such a person—he might starve to death," said Bunter. "Suppose a Belgian refugee hadn't any grub for two or three days. I know what I feel like when I haven't had any for two hours."

"He must be romancing," said Squiff. "Blessed if I

ANSWERS

know why he does it, but he does! If he was going to help a Belgian refugee, the ass could go in the daylight."

"Not with a lot of inquisitive duffers at his heels, scouting, and such rot," said Bunter. "You interrupted us—I mean—that is to say, I refuse to explain."

"My only hat!" said Bob. "You know there was somebody with him in the woodman's hut—we know that. So that was a Belgian, was it, Bunter?"

"I decline to explain."

"If it was a Belgian, why doesn't he show himself?"

"Perhaps his life might be in danger, and perhaps it mightn't," said Bunter, in a non-committal way.

"His life?" howled Bob.

"He might be going to be shot, and he mightn't."

"Shot!" said Wharton dazedly. "Who'd shoot him? We hadn't even a pea-shooter with us."

"I don't mean you, you ass! But I'm not going to explain. It's really a secret, and I can't take you fellows into my confidence at present," said Bunter loftily. "I can't rely upon your discretion."

"Oh, my hat!"

"The question is, will you help me out to-night?"

"We'll help you in if you start getting out," said Wharton, "and we'll give you such a thumping good bumping that you won't want to get out again!"

"Look here, Wharton, when a chap's patriotic, and wants to do a really noble deed—a noble and generous action—"

"Well, when you want to do that it will be time for the giddy skies to fall," said Wharton sceptically. "You want to go down to the Cross Keys, and get yourself sacked from the school. Let me catch you getting out, that's all!"

"Let's give him a bumping as a warning!" suggested Squiff.

"Hear, hear!"

Billy Bunter was outside the study in the twinkling of an eye. He stayed only to yell "Beasts!" and then vanished down the passage.

The chums of the Remove chuckled, and finished their chestnuts. Billy Bunter had succeeded in puzzling and mystifying them, but the probability was that "Bunter the Blade" was going on the "razzle" again, and wanted their assistance to break bounds, and prevarications never cost Bunter anything. Once before, when in possession of funds, Bunter had sought to break bounds at night, with a weird idea in his head of being "doggish."

Harry Wharton & Co. were quite prepared to bump the doggishness out of him every time it cropped up afresh.

In the dormitory a little later Bunter blinked at them and snorted, but did not deign to speak. Bob Cherry shook a warning forefinger at him, eliciting another snort from the Owl of the Remove. The juniors had not much fear that he would break bounds unassisted; he was pretty certain to sleep like a top from the moment his head touched the pillow till the rising bell rang out in the morning. That was his usual custom.

But William

George Bunter was not in his usual mood. The doing of a noble and generous action, as he described it himself, perhaps bucked him up. He went to bed determined to stay awake, and, wonderful to relate, he succeeded.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

Bunter Breaks Bounds!

ELEVEN strokes boomed out from the clock tower.

All was silent and dark in the Greyfriars dormitories. The Remove dormitory was still more silent than was usual at that hour. For the deep and resonant snore of William George Bunter was not resounding.

Bunter sat up in bed, and rubbed his eyes as the last stroke of eleven died away. He listened cautiously, and murmured:

"You rotters awake?"

Only deep and steady breathing answered him. Bunter chuckled silently, and slipped out of bed. He slipped on his clothes as fast as he could. He was dreadfully sleepy, and his eyes were almost glued up behind his spectacles as he put them on. It had cost him tremendous efforts to keep awake.

He was very pleased with himself, however. The juniors were of opinion that nothing short of a fire or an earthquake would drag Bunter from his bed before rising-bell. They would have to own up that he could buck up when he liked, when they heard, later, the story of how he had succoured that unhappy Belgian who was so anxious to get back to the front.

Bunter took his shoes in his hand, and crept silently from the dormitory. He put his shoes on in the passage, and stole away to the lower box-room. There he cautiously opened the window, and blinked out, and shivered.

There was the roof of an outhouse below the window, and to reach it, and thence drop to the ground, was an easy task for most of the juniors. But it was very different with Billy Bunter. He was neither an athlete nor an acrobat. He had a dreadful feeling that he might roll off the roof and land in a heap in the garden.

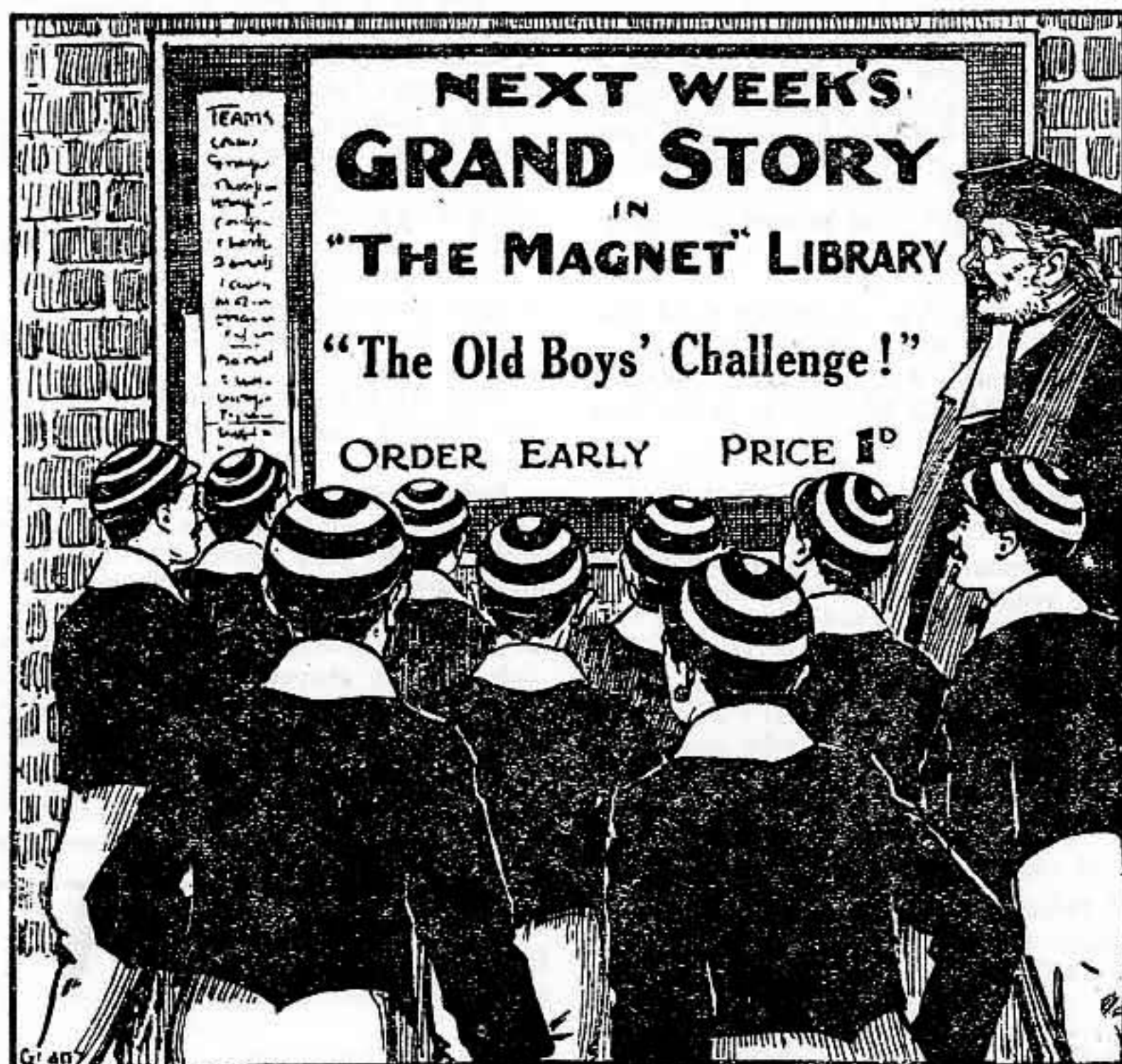
But he had screwed up his courage to the sticking-point. In every quarter where he had sought aid he had met with merriment and refusals. He had to depend on himself. He blinked out of the window for about ten minutes in a state of trepidation.

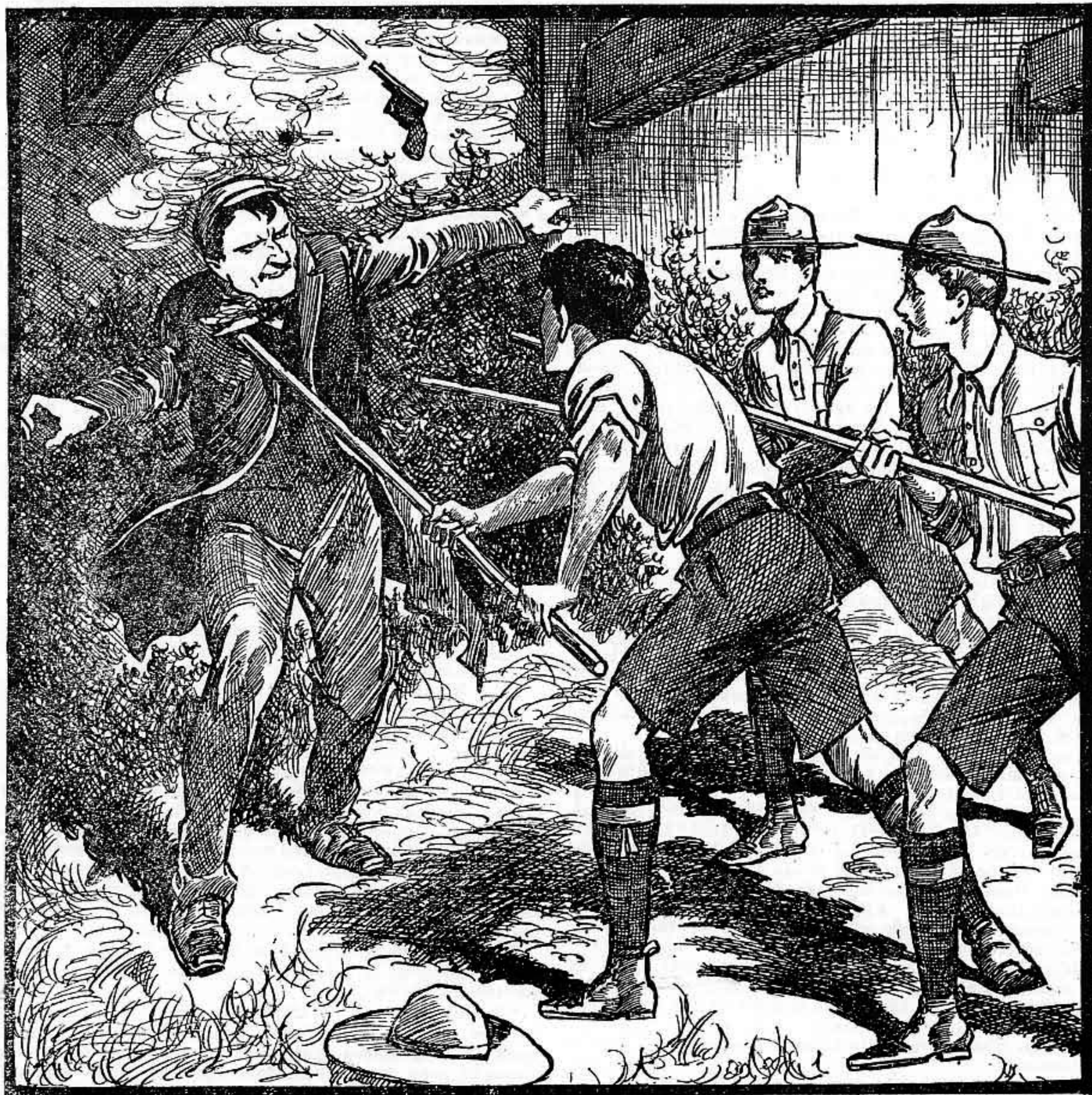
"Ow! The beasts!" murmured Bunter. "I shall fall—grooh!—and break my neck perhaps! Ow! The rotters!"

But he made the attempt at last. He squeezed out of the window, and lowered himself from the sill, and hung on, to drop on the flat roof below. His short, fat legs did not reach to the leads, and he kicked wildly into space.

"Oh, dear!" groaned Bunter. "How far is it? I wonder how far it is? Blow it! Oh, my hat! I shall bust something! I'll go back! Ow-yow!"

He made a wild effort to drag himself on the window-sill again,





The juniors sprang forward. Then the hidden hand came out, and a Browning pistol glinted in it. But Wharton's staff was ready, and it struck the rascal's hand with a blow that made him utter a howl of pain. "On him!" roared Bob Cherry. (See Chapter 15.)

and a thrill of horror passed through him as he found that he could not. Already his fat fingers were slipping from their hold under his heavy weight.

With a gasp of terror he felt himself going.

A wild rush through the air—for nearly an inch and a half—for the leads were only that moderate distance under Bunter's fat toes.

The shock of hitting the leads when he fancied he was falling into space doubled Bunter up, and he sat down violently, and spluttered.

"Oh! Ow! Wow! Ooooh!"

It was five minutes before he recovered sufficiently to crawl to the edge of the roof and blink down into the garden. A thick and strong water-pipe there made the descent easier, and Bunter swung himself upon it, and with many gasps and moans scrambled down. Once safe upon terra firma, he breathed more easily. When he had found his second wind he started off, scuttling

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round the house, and blinking on all sides nervously. The boys were all in bed at that hour, but some of the masters were still up. Lights gleamed from some of the windows into the Close.

The fat junior scudded away across the Close, and dodged into the dark Cloisters. He knew his way well enough there in the dark, and it did not take him long to reach the old tower, and to grope his way to the hiding-place of the tuck-basket.

If he had been a little less excited with his enterprise the fat junior might have been nervous of venturing into that lonely spot at so late an hour. But he had no time now to think of ghosts.

He grinned as he drew the concealed basket out of the crevice. It was just where he had left it. Billy Bunter felt that he had reason to be pleased with his own astuteness. He intended to take that consignment of provisions to the hapless Belgian whom he had taken

under his wing, but, of course, he could not have carried the basket out by way of the box-room. So he had concealed it in the old tower to pick up on his way out.

It did not cross his mind that the basket had been visited in its hiding-place. Skinner & Co. had not told him. They were content to leave Bunter to make the discovery when he went for his feed.

Bunter grasped the basket, and scuttled out of the tower, and made his way to the school wall. Here was another difficulty, but Bunter was quite inventive now. He attached a thick string to the handle of the basket, and tied the other end round his waist. Then he climbed the tree which helped access to the wall, and was soon astride of the wall. Then he pulled the basket up, and lowered it into the road on the other side, and dropped after it.

There was a bright glimmer of moonlight on the road as Bunter picked up the basket and started down the lane towards the wood. The full round moon sailed high in a pale blue sky, and showed up the summit of the Black Pike in the distance.

"My hat! This is heavy!" murmured Bunter, when he had covered about a mile, and was entering the wood.

It occurred to him to lighten the basket after the manner of Æsop of old, but he nobly refrained. He had brought that tuck out for the hapless Belgian, and he would not devour it himself. As a matter of fact, he would have found considerable difficulty in devouring the contents of the basket, excepting for the few bags of pastry Skinner had left on top. The stones and the mortar would have defied even Billy Bunter in his hungriest moment.

The moonlight glimmered down into the wood with a ghostly light. It showed Bunter the way—he had calculated upon that—but it gave him a somewhat eerie feeling. If he had felt himself alone in the wood he would probably have turned back, so eerie did the trees and thickets seem in the moonlight. But the Belgian was there; it was like having a companion to think of him waiting in the woodman's hut. Bunter had no doubt that he had remained there.

The unfortunate Jacques Flon had evidently made the old woodman's hut his hiding-place, and he could certainly not have found a more remote and secure one, or one less likely to be visited. Probably the refugee was hoping that Bunter would bring him food, though he would hardly expect him at night. But there was no doubt that he would be glad to see him.

Billy Bunter was feeling fagged out by the time he reached the old hut. All was silent as he approached. The moon's clear light streamed down on the broken walls, covered with creepers.

Billy Bunter stopped. A sudden movement came to his ears from within the hut, and he started, and thrilled uneasily, though he knew that it must be his friend the Belgian.

"I say, Flong, are you awake?" he called out.

Silence.

"Flong, old man, I've brought you some grub."

The pale, emaciated face of the refugee appeared in the moonlight in the doorway then. He looked blankly at Billy Bunter. The Owl of the Remove gave him a reassuring grin.

"It's all right," he said. "Only little me, you know."

"Ach! I—I—je suis etonne!"

"I don't quite know what you mean by tonny," said Bunter, "but if you mean you're hungry here's some grub. Come out into the light; it's jolly dark in there."

The man came out with a stealthy, creeping motion and a strange light shining in his eyes.

"You—you have come?" he muttered.

"Yes, rather! I knew I should find you here," said Bunter. "I'm really awfully sorry for you, old chap, and I'm going to help you!"

"You are verree kind to the poor Belgian!"

"Well, I'm a kind chap," said Bunter. "I'm not selfish like Wharton and those chaps, you know. Besides, I'm patriotic. I'll be jolly glad to help you get back and kill some more filthy Huns! I—I say, what are you glaring like that for?" stammered Bunter, a little startled by the look that came over his friend's face.

"Ah! Nozzing! Excusez moi! My nerfs are not

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good!" muttered the man. "I am—what you say—reconnaissant."

"Grateful, I suppose you mean," said Bunter. "That's right—you ought to be, you know. 'Tain't every chap that would sneak out of the dorm. in the middle of the night and bring you grub, is it?"

"Monsieur is generous!"

"Yes, I'm a generous fellow," assented Bunter. "I might get a flogging for this, you know, if old Quelchy found me out."

"You have said nozzing of me?"

"What do you think? I can keep a secret," said Bunter. "I haven't uttered a syllable, of course—not a syllable!"

"Das ist—I—I—je veux dire, c'est tres bien," said the man. "You have brought me my food, my noble and kind monsieur!"

"Yes, rather! I'll have a bit of a feed with you—I'm peckish," said Bunter.

He opened the basket, and proceeded to unpack it. Three bags of pastry were turned out, and the refugee began to eat immediately. Then a terrific expression came over Bunter's fat face as he turned out a half-brick.

"Why, what—who—how—which——"

He turned the bag upside down, and the contents shot out. Half-bricks, stones, mortar, rolled into a heap in the grass. Then a yell of rage from Billy Bunter awoke the echoes of the wood.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

So Near Yet So Far!

"OW! The beasts!"

"Ach! Vat is it? Silence mit you—taisez-vous!" muttered the refugee.

"Oh, the rotters! The rotten spoofers!"

Billy Bunter glared at the consignment he had turned out of the basket. Certainly it was not eatable. The very spectacles of the Owl of the Remove seemed to gleam with rage.

"Vat is all zat?" asked the refugee.

"Oh, the beasts! Somebody found the basket and scoffed the grub," groaned Bunter. "That beast, Skinner, I suppose. I know now where he got that grub from, the cad. He must have spotted me. I was awfully cautious, too. Oh, the rotter! Look at it! They've taken the grub, and stacked in that rubbish! I never suspected — Oh, I'll wallop 'em! I'll—I'll——" Words failed Billy Bunter.

There was no feed for Bunter. The refugee finished the tarts almost in a twinkling. There was not a crumb for the fat junior.

"It was vun trick," said Jacques Flon.

"Yes, a dirty trick," said Bunter. "I spent half a quid on that grub—and hid it all ready to bring out to-night, you know, and that spoofing beast Skinner found it and scoffed it. Oh dear!"

"C'est un mauvais sujet ce Skinner."

"He's a regular beast!" groaned Bunter. "I wish another Zeppelin would come, and drop a bomb on his napper. Oh dear!"

"Moi, j'ai faim!"

"Eh?"

"I have hunger."

"Well, you've had the tarts," said Bunter discontentedly. "I've had nothing. And that walk's made me jolly hungry. Oh, what a rotten sell! Of course, the beast didn't know I had the grub ready for a Belgian refugee. Even Skinner would have let it alone if he had known that."

"It is goot zat you keep ze secret. You are verree discreet, young monsieur! I trust you wiz my life!"

"Oh, you can rely on me," said Bunter. "I'm an awfully discreet chap. And I'll tell you what, I'll bring you some more grub to-morrow!"

"Monsieur is verree generous," said the man, looking very strangely at Bunter.

"Oh, we all want to help the Belgians," said Bunter. "We're going to look after you, you know, till those

heavily Huns are kicked out of Belgium. I hope you'll be one of the chaps who get to Berlin and lag the Kaiser. My idea is, you know, that that old duffer ought to be put in a lunatic asylum. What a queer way you have of glaring at a chap, Flong—it quite makes me jump."

"Pardonnez moi—it is my nerfs," muttered the refugee, who had certainly glared at the fat junior like a tiger.

"Well, there's nothing doing," said Bunter. "I suppose I'd better get back. I'll scrag Skinner. I'll manage to get along here somehow to-morrow, if I can keep those beasts off the track. They're awfully inquisitive."

The refugee looked alarmed.

"Do not come if you shall be followed wiz ozzers," he exclaimed. "Better leave me zat I hunger, zan zat I am found."

"I'll be jolly careful," said Bunter. "If I can't get here in the daytime, I'll get out of the dorm to-morrow night, see?"

"You bring me more food? Ven zat I have some food, I can take ze boat and get over ze water——"

"With that fisherman friend you mentioned?"

"Yes, yes!" said the refugee. "Wiz him. Zere are many boats in zat village of Pegg, is it not so—zey are left on ze beach at night——"

"That's so!" said Bunter.

"Ze fishermen do not watch zem?"

"Oh, no; not as a rule," said Bunter. "They kept a watch on them at one time, when a Prussian beast escaped from the concentration camp at Wapshot. But he was caught. What's the name of your friend in Pegg? I might give him a message from you?"

The refugee hesitated.

"Smeet!" he said, at last.

"Smith! I don't know anyone of that name there," said Bunter. "Where does he live?"

"Zat I do not know—in a cottage, I zink."

"It won't be jolly easy for you to find him, then," said Bunter. "I don't see how you're going to get him to run his boat out, if you can't find him."

"I takes ze chance," said the refugee. "Vunce zat I have some food to take in ze boat, zen it is all right."

"But can't this man Smith provision the boat?"

"He is—vat you say—poor. He have no money."

"Oh, I see! Well, I'll bring you some grub," said Bunter. "I'd do more than that for a Belgian refugee, especially as you want to get back and kill some more filthy Prussians. Jolly lucky I'm in funds now."

"I have money," said the refugee eagerly. "I give you some money to get ze food—two, three sovereign!"

Billy Bunter was about to say "Done!" quite promptly, but he checked himself. He was doing a good deed, and he would not spoil it. He had, for once, plenty of money in his pockets, and he was determined to be generous.

"No," he said. "Keep your cash, Flong; I dare say you'll need it. I'm going to stand you as much as you want."

"How can I zank monsieur?"

"Oh, never mind that," said Bunter airily. "This is my way, you know. I'm an awfully generous chap. Now you get back and snooze, and I'll clear off. I'll be along again to-morrow with the grub, or else to-morrow night. Comprenny?"

"Mais oui, je comprends parfaitement. Je vous remercie."

"Oh, don't mench!"

The refugee disappeared into the woodman's hut, and Billy Bunter tramped away through the moonlit wood. He was extremely satisfied with himself. His feelings towards Skinner, however, were ferocious. But for Skinner's raid, the refugee might have got away that very night with that supply of tuck—and now his escape had to be put off for another twenty-four hours. Which meant that the secret had to be kept for another twenty-four hours—and Bunter's self-glorification had to be put off. He was looking forward with great keenness to telling the story in the junior common-room, and relating how he had saved that Belgian refugee—how he, William George Bunter, was responsible for sending a man back to the fighting-line, and putting another nail in the Kaiser's coffin. It would "take the shine" out of anything the Famous Five had ever done—Bunter was sure of that.

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"THE OLD BOYS' CHALLENGE!"

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ONE
PENNY.

He was fagged out by the time he reached Greyfriars—he was not a good walker. Then there was the school wall to negotiate. Bunter could not possibly climb it from the outside, without the aid of a tree-trunk. He clambered over the gate, with great difficulty, and landed breathless in the Close. He was breathing like old bellows as he tramped round behind the School House. He stopped to rest for ten minutes before he began to climb on the out-building to reach the box-room. Two o'clock rang out from the clock-tower.

"My word! I shall be sleepy in the morning!" murmured Bunter.

He clambered on the roof at last, and blinked up at the box-room window. It was still open, as he had left it. But a dreadful discovery dawned on his mind. Standing on the tips of his toes on the leads, he could not get a grip on the window-sill with his fat fingers. His fingertips touched the sill, and that was all.

Bunter stood almost petrified.

He had forgotten about that—or, rather, he had never thought of it at all. How on earth was he to get in?

"Oh, my hat!" groaned Bunter, "I'm done—done in the eye!"

He stood and blinked up at the open window. There was certainly no getting in. The only resource was to go round the house again and throw up pebbles to the window of the Remove dormitory, and wake some of his Form-fellows. He was just as likely to wake a master, or a prefect.

"All the fault of those beasts!" mumbled Bunter. "Oh, dear! Oh, dear! If they'd helped me out, they could have helped me in! That is what comes of being a patriot and a generous chap! Oh, dear!"

"Hallo, Tubby!"

Bunter almost fell down in astonishment as the face of Peter Todd looked down from the box-room window.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

Keeping It Dark!

PETER TODD grinned down at Bunter, and Bunter blinked up at Peter Todd.

The fat junior gasped with relief.

How on earth Peter Todd came to be in the box-room at two o'clock in the morning was a mystery, but he was evidently the right man in the right place.

"Help me in, Toddy, old man!"

"Eh?"

"Help me in! I can't climb in—I forgot I couldn't reach to the window," said Billy Bunter pathetically.

"Blessed if I didn't forget it, too!" said Peter Todd.

"I came out here to stop you from getting in, not to help you in."

"Why, you beast!" mumbled Bunter indignantly.

"You awful rotter, Toddy! How did you know I was out, you beast?"

"I woke up," said Peter.

"Eh? And supposing you did wake up, I don't see

"It wasn't a case of seeing, but of hearing," grinned Todd. "As I didn't hear the rumble of thunder in the dorm. I knew you were out. I knew you'd been asking fellows to help you out to-night, you fat duffer, and when I didn't hear you snore I knew you were gone. So I came out to stop you from getting in again. I've been waiting here for about an hour. I've got a pillow ready to swipe you if you try to get in!"

"Oh, really, Toddy——"

"After I've had a little talk with you I'm going to fasten the window," said Todd. "Then I'm going to lock the box-room door on the outside."

"Oh, dear!"

"This is what comes of being a blade, a dog, and a nut," said Peter. "I can't have any blades, dogs, or nuts in No. 7 Study. You're going to be sacked."

"Look here, you silly ass, Peter! I haven't been out on the ran-dan—not this time. I—I haven't been to the Cross Keys, I haven't seen Ponsonby, I haven't—anything."

"Only been out for a little walk—what?" asked Peter.

"Ye-e-s."

"Well, now you can go for another little walk," said Peter. "Keep it up till morning."

"I—I shall be found out. I shall get the sack!" said Bunter. "Don't be a beast, Toddy. Is that what you call being a pal?"

"Can't pal with dogs and blades."

"I ain't a blade," groaned Bunter. "You know I chucked all that up, Toddy. I tell you I haven't been playing the giddy goat—not this time."

"Where have you been, then?"

"Oh, out, you know."

"Well, you can stay out," said Peter pitilessly. "It's quite a nice night—plenty of moonlight, and not really cold. Any more lies to tell before I shut the window?"

"Yow! Keep that window open, you beast! I say, Toddy, I—I've been out to do a—a good deed."

"Pile it on."

"A—a—a generous action," said Bunter.

"Oh, good! You improve with age. I suppose Ananias would have done the same, if he had lived. But you beat Ananias, hands down!"

"I—I say, Toddy! It's a secret, you know. But—but I've been out to help a Belgian refugee—take him food, you know."

"In the middle of the night?" grinned Peter.

"Ye-es. You—you see, you rotters were watching me all day—"

"And why shouldn't we watch you, and see your giddy Belgian—if there is a Belgian?" demanded Peter.

"It's a secret," groaned Bunter. "His—his life's in danger!"

"Oh, do draw it mild!" urged Peter. "A Belgian's life couldn't be in danger in England. Either you're spoofing me, or somebody's been spoofing you. Tell your Uncle Peter all about it."

"You're an inquisitive beast, Toddy! Ow! Let that sash alone, you rotter! Look here, Toddy, I've promised to keep it a secret—word of honour, you know."

Peter Todd peered at the fat junior in the moonlight. It was not usual for Bunter to tell the plain, unvarnished truth, but he looked as if he was doing so this time.

"If you're giving it to me straight, fatty, somebody's been pulling your leg," said Peter quietly. "Why should a Belgian want it to be kept secret that you're giving him grub?"

"I—I can't explain—word of honour, you know," said Bunter. He felt that he had Peter there, for Peter had often impressed upon Bunter the necessity of keeping his word, even bringing a cricket stump into the argument.

"He can't be a Belgian," said Peter.

"Yes, he is; he speaks French."

"Well, other people besides Belgians speak French," said Peter Todd. "Some spoofer has been pulling your leg."

"I tell you it's all right!"

"And you mean to say you've broken bounds to take food to a Belgian refugee in the middle of the night?" said Peter.

"Yes; only that cad, Skinner, raided the grub, and there was only bricks and mortar in the basket," said Bunter dolorously.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Tain't a laughing matter, you rotter! It's serious enough for a Belgian chap who's had nothing for days excepting the grub I gave him to-day," said Bunter indignantly.

"So you gave him grub to-day?" said Peter Todd. "It was this precious spoofer who was at the woodman's hut with you, then?"

"He ain't a spoofer!"

"Mean to say you've been to the woodman's hut now, in the middle of the night?" said Peter, in amazement.

"Yes, I have."

"Why, you wouldn't have the nerve—in the woods at midnight—scat!"

"Well, I'm awfully brave, you know—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

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"Besides, there wasn't any danger, and the Belgian was there, too," said Bunter, forgetting that it was a dead secret. "He was jolly glad to see me, I can tell you! The poor chap's quite famished. But I'm not going to tell you anything about it, even if you leave me out all night. I'm not going to see poor old Flong shot, not even if I get a flogging!" said Bunter heroically.

"Who's going to shoot him?"

"That's telling."

Peter Todd stared hard at Bunter. There was no doubt now that the fat junior was telling the truth, so far as he knew it. But that a Belgian should be hidden in the wood without food for days was a little too extraordinary for Peter Todd to believe. He was a little more acute than William George Bunter.

It was clear enough to Peter's acute mind that some spoofer had filled Bunter up with a yarn about being a Belgian refugee. And it was very hard lines that Bunter's first good deed should be thrown away on some swindler.

For, astonishing as it was, there seemed to be no doubt that the Owl of the Remove had been doing a good deed, so far as he knew.

"Now let me in, Toddy, there's a good chap!" said Bunter pleadingly. "Look here, I'll tell you all about it later—every word. I can't at present, because I've promised not to while the man's life is in danger. But I'll tell you all of it later on. I meant to all along, you know. I jolly well meant to show you that I can do a patriotic thing."

"When will you tell me?"

"When it's safe. I can't risk his life, you know. As soon as he's got away I'll tell you every word."

"Oh, he's going away?" said Peter. "What is he waiting for?"

"He can't go in a boat without any grub," said Bunter. "He would starve to death at sea, you know."

Peter gave a violent start.

"He's going away by boat?" he ejaculated.

"Well, I suppose he couldn't swim to Belgium, could he?" said Bunter sarcastically. "He isn't Captain Webb, you know."

"Oh, I see," said Peter, in a casual sort of way. "He simply wants to get back to Belgium?"

"That's it!" said Bunter, greatly relieved to see Peter getting into a reasonable mood. "Back to the fighting, you know."

"Well, that's very creditable," said Peter. "But why can't he go by the Channel boat?"

"He can't, you see."

"Doesn't want to show himself, eh?"

"That's it."

"Of course, he's given you some reason?"

"A jolly good reason!" said Bunter. "He would be jolly well shot if they found him. You see, they would look on him as a deserter."

"Bunter, old chap, you might be put in prison for helping a deserter to escape."

"But he isn't a deserter," said Bunter. "That's only how it looks. He explained it all to me, but I can't tell you, because it's a secret. The poor chap was wounded, you know, and the doctor told him he couldn't go back to the fighting line. Can't blame him for clearing off without permission under those circumstances, can you, Toddy?"

"Certainly not," said Todd. "I see how it is. Wounded chap—anxious to get back to the Front—not allowed—clears off to go by himself—afraid of being taken up as a deserter, but all serene when he once gets into the fighting-line—what?"

"That's it exactly," said Bunter. "It was up to me to help him, now. Don't you think so, Toddy? As a patriot, you know."

"I'd help a chap myself in those circumstances," said Peter. "Of course, I should want to be sure those were the circumstances. Ahem! Poor chap! He must have had a hard time."

"Awful!" said Bunter feelingly. "Went without grub, you know. That's what made me feel that I ought to help him. I know what it's like to miss a meal."

"Well, under the circumstances, I think I ought to let you come

in," said Peter Todd. "I suppose you'll be going out again to-morrow night—what? You'll want help?"

"Yes," said Bunter eagerly; "and you can help me, Toddy. You see, I'm going to provide him with grub to take in the boat, and then he's going."

"One of the fishermen's boats, I suppose?"

"Yes. He's got a friend in Pegg, man named Smith, and he's going in his boat," said Bunter. "I don't quite know how he'll find Smith, as he don't know where he lives. But he said it would be all right if he could get the grub. He used to be a farmer in Belgium, and they've burnt him out, the beasts! He's awfully keen to get back and have another go at them. I'd like to tell you all about it, Toddy, really, but I can't till he's gone. Word of honour, you know!"

Peter Todd grinned. Bunter seemed to be unaware that he had already told Peter Todd all about it. William George Bunter had his own ways of keeping a secret.

"Don't you tell me anything, Bunter," said Peter impressively. "You keep it dark! Don't tell me even a whisper."

"I won't," said Bunter.

"Not a word to a soul, you know. Why, if a lot of chaps knew he was hiding in the woodman's hut, they'd go there to see him."

"That's what he's afraid of, you know."

"But I suppose he isn't there all the time, though?"

"Oh, yes, he is! That's his hiding-place," said Bunter unsuspiciously.

"Bunter, old man, you've surprised me," said Peter admiringly. "I never thought you were such a good hand at keeping a secret. Why, you're simply discretion itself!"

"Well, I am rather a discreet chap," admitted Bunter. "Besides, I've given him my word, you know. I'm going to tell you all about it afterwards, Toddy."

"Do!" said Peter. "Now give me your paws, and I'll yank you in!"

Bunter gave him his "paws," and Peter Todd yanked away.

"Oh, my aunt!" said Peter. "I wish I were a steam derrick! Up you come!"

Bunter scrambled through the window, and bumped down into the box-room. Peter Todd closed the window and fastened it.

"Jolly lucky for you I was here," he remarked. "Otherwise, you'd have stayed out all night, and then your secret would have been out. As it is, you can keep it dark—deadly dark. I'm frightfully curious, of course, but I won't ask you any questions, Bunter."

"I'll tell you all about it afterwards," said Bunter.

"Oh, do! Come on!"

They returned cautiously to the dormitory, and turned in. Within five minutes, Billy Bunter's deep snore resounded through the dormitory. But Peter Todd lay awake for quite a long time. Peter Todd was thinking—hard!

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

A Little Sleepy!

SNOR-R-R-R-RR!

Mr. Quelch stared.

It was the next morning, and the Remove were in their Form-room. Mr. Quelch was conducting the Remove through that ancient country which in former times was divided into three parts. And all of a sudden, that deep and sonorous snore resounded through the Form-room.

There was a giggle from the Remove.

Mr. Quelch stared at Billy Bunter. The fat junior's head had fallen forward, and he was fast asleep. And snoring.

"Bless my soul!" ejaculated the Remove-master.

Snorrrrrrrr!

"Bunter!"

Snorrrrrrrr!

"Bunter!"

Snorrrrrrrr!

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Silence!" exclaimed Mr. Quelch. "Wharton, wake Bunter up at once! This is extraordinary!"

Harry Wharton grasped the Owl of the Remove by the

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ONE
PENNY.

shoulder, and shook him. Billy Bunter started out of the land of dreams.

"Grooh! Yaw-aw-aw! Lemme alone! 'Tain't rising-bell," mumbled Bunter drowsily.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bunter! Do you hear me, Bunter!"

"Oh, lor'!" gasped Billy Bunter, coming into wide wakefulness now, and blinking round him. "Oh, crumbs! I—I wasn't asleep, sir!"

"You were fast asleep, Bunter!"

"Oh, no, sir! I just closed my eyes for a moment; I always listen better with my eyes closed, sir," explained Bunter.

"You were snoring, Bunter."

"Oh, no, sir!" said Bunter. "I never snore. Perhaps it was Wharton you heard, sir, or Cherry!"

"You were fast asleep and snoring, Bunter. How dare you fall asleep in the Form-room?" exclaimed Mr. Quelch. "Did you not sleep last night?"

"Like a top, sir; never opened my eyes once," said Bunter mendaciously. "I always sleep like a top, sir."

Mr. Quelch looked at him suspiciously.

"You were not out of your dormitory last night, Bunter?"

"I, sir? Oh, no, sir!"

"Very well. Do not fall asleep again!"

"Certainly not, sir."

Bunter rubbed his eyes, and blinked, and the lesson proceeded. About ten minutes later, Mr. Quelch's voice was interrupted by a deep and resonant sound.

Snorrrrrrrrrr!

"Goodness gracious!" exclaimed Mr. Quelch, while the Removites grinned. "That boy is asleep again! Bunter!"

Snorrrrrrrrrrr!

"He cannot have slept last night!" exclaimed the Form-master. "Is it possible that Bunter has been breaking bounds? Bunter!"

Wharton shook the Owl of the Remove again, and Bunter's eyes opened, with some difficulty. The eyelids seemed to be glued together.

"Oh, dear!" murmured Bunter. "Yaw-awa-aw!"

"Bunter, this is extraordinary! Are you sure you slept well last night?" exclaimed the Form-master, puzzled and angry.

"Nuino, sir," mumbled Bunter. "I—I had indigestion, sir, and it kept me awake most of the night. I'd like to go and lie down a bit, if I may, sir."

"You have stated that you slept soundly all night, Bunter."

"Oh, dear! I—I was speaking generally, sir."

"You are not telling me the truth, Bunter. I suspect that you were out of your dormitory last night."

"Oh, no, sir! I never opened my eyes once."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Silence! This boy's absurd falsehoods are not a subject for mirth!" exclaimed Mr. Quelch. "Bunter, you are contradicting yourself. You are speaking untruthfully!"

"Oh, dear! What—what I really mean to say, sir, is that I—I—I—I—"

"Well?"

"I—I—I—I—" Bunter's eyes closed in spite of himself, and he finished with an echoing snore. Snorrrrrr!

"Dear me!" said Mr. Quelch. "The boy is actually asleep again. This must be inquired into. Todd, take Bunter to the dormitory. He cannot do his lessons in this state."

Peter Todd jerked Bunter out of his seat, and the fat junior opened his sleepy eyes and blinked and struggled.

"Lemme alone! I'm sleepy! I'm not going to get up yet!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, dear!" Bunter blinked round him, and realised once more that he was in the Form-room. "I—I—I—I— Oh, dear! Yaw-aw-aw!"

"Take him away, Todd!"

Peter Todd led the fat junior out of the Form-room. Bunter fell asleep walking, in the passage, and Peter woke him with a slap on the shoulder.

"Yow-ow! Beast!"

"Oh, you ass!" said Peter. "Is this the way you keep a secret? Come on, you lubber!"

They reached the dormitory at last, and Bunter rolled on his bed. He gave Todd one sleepy blink, and then—Snorrrrr!

Peter Todd removed his spectacles for him, and threw a rug over his feet, and then left him to snore. He returned grinning to the Form-room. When Bunter had recovered from that extraordinary attack of sleepiness he would have to undergo an examination in Mr. Quelch's study, which would put his powers as an Ananias to the test.

Bunter did not return to the Form-room that morning. When the Lower Fourth were dismissed, some of them went to have a look at Bunter. He was still extended on his bed, deep in slumber, and snoring away as if for a wager.

"Well, that takes the cake," said Bolsover major. "What has he been up to? Must have been out on the tiles last night."

"The silly ass must have got out, after all," said Skinner.

The Famous Five were not among those who looked in on the fat junior. As soon as the Remove were out from lessons, Peter Todd called the Famous Five, and Squiff, and Mark Linley into the Close, with a mysterious manner that excited their curiosity at once.

"What's the little game?" asked Wharton, puzzled.

"I want you," said Peter.

They followed him under the elms in the Close.

"Do you know anything about Bunter's getting out?" asked Bob Cherry.

Peter Todd nodded.

"Yes; I let him in."

"Then the fat boulder did go out!" exclaimed Wharton.

"Yes. Not on the tiles, though. He went out to do a good deed."

"Oh, draw it mild!"

"It's a dead secret. Bunter isn't going to say a word. I screwed it all out of him, and he isn't in the least aware that I know all about it," explained Peter. "I'm going to tell you chaps, and then we're going."

"Eh! Going where?"

"To the old woodman's hut."

"What on earth for?"

"To catch the German the police have been looking for the last four or five days."

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.

Run to Earth!

HARRY WHARTON & Co. looked at Peter Todd as if wondering whether he had taken leave of his senses.

"The—the German?" said Bob Cherry.

"Yes. You remember what we read in the paper—a German spy giving secret signals at night over the North Sea. They raided his house, and he scooted out of a back window and vanished."

"Yes, we know that," said Wharton. "He's probably a hundred miles away by this time."

"He's two and a half miles away," said Todd.

"How the dickens do you know?"

"My dear chap, he hasn't been caught yet. I've looked into this morning's paper to see. He hasn't shown up anywhere. He's hiding somewhere."

"I suppose so. But—"

"Listen, and I will a tale unfold," said Peter Todd, in the best manner of the Remove Dramatic Society. "Lend me your ears—"

"Oh, get on!"

"Yesterday Bunter found a man in the woodman's hut. He was a Belgian refugee—talked to Bunter in French. He was wounded, sent to hospital in England, couldn't go back to the fighting, so deserted, to go back on his own."

"My hat!"

"If he's caught before he gets back, he will be treated

as a deserter. But once he's back in the fighting, of course they'll be glad to have him. That's the yarn he told to Bunter."

"Well, it's possible," said Nugent.

"And, of course, he's got to go secretly," said Todd.

"So Bunter's going to provide him with grub, and he's going to take a boat at Pegg and scoot out to sea."

"Great Scott!"

"He's told Bunter that a fisherman friend in Pegg is going to help him; but he seems rather vague about that fisherman," resumed Peter. "My idea is, that that fisherman hasn't been born yet, and the giddy refugee is going to steal a boat."

"But—"

"I say, this is rather a new departure for Bunter—shelling out to help a chap in distress," said Squiff, in wonder.

"Didn't I tell you I was making a man of Bunter?" said Todd. "I've nearly broken a cricket-stump on him already. He's improving. Only, you see, he's a howling ass, and when he begins doing good deeds, he puts his foot in it. Of course, he's not used to good deeds yet."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"My idea is, that this giddy refugee has been spoofing him with a tall story, and that he's no more a Belgian than I am," said Todd. "My suspish is that he's that German who bolted and disappeared, and that he wants to get a boat to escape in, not to join the Belgians, but to join the Germans."

"Oh!"

"Bunter is an ass—he would swallow anything. But think it out, and think which is more likely," said Todd.

"There's not much doubt about it," said Harry Wharton. "He has been spoofing Bunter, of course. He's not a Belgian."

"Of course he isn't. The yarn is possible—just possible enough to impose on a blinking duffer like Bunter. It's jolly lucky he was imposed on, too," said Peter thoughtfully—"jolly lucky."

"I don't see why."

"Bunter found him hiding in the woodman's hut, and he told a yarn about being a Belgian. Of course, he's a cunning rascal, and he sized Bunter up as a silly ass. But if he hadn't been able to take Bunter in, he would have scragged him. He wouldn't have let the duffer come away to tell everybody that there was a hungry man hiding in the woods. My idea is, that if he hadn't been able to spoof Bunter, he would most likely have throttled him."

"Oh, crumbs!"

"He's a desperate johnny, or he wouldn't think of chancing the Channel in an open boat. He'll get ten years



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at least for spying, even if they don't shoot him—and they shoot spies sometimes," said Todd. "He told Bunter he was in danger of being shot. It may be true—but not as a Belgian deserter, but as a German spy."

The chums of the Remove looked very grave.

Billy Bunter's life had been in danger. It was fortunate for the fat junior that he had believed the outcast's story, and resolved to help him. A good deed is never wasted, and Bunter's first good deed had probably saved his life.

"We ought to cut over to Wapshot, and get some of the Territorials," said Nugent.

Peter Todd shook his head.

"There's one chance in a thousand that he was telling Bunter the truth," he said. "If that's so, we don't want to give the poor beggar away. We're going to take the matter in hand ourselves. You fellows are game?"

"What-ho!"

"Then get your staves, and come on. We may need the staves if there is a scrap. He may be armed."

The juniors looked at one another. A desperate German with a revolver was not exactly a pleasant person to tackle in a lonely wood. But they did not shrink from it. It was their duty as Boy Scouts to "back up." They made up their minds.

"Lead on, Macduff!" said Bob Cherry.

"There are eight of us, and we're enough for him, if he's got a machine-gun in his pocket," said Peter. "We shall be late for dinner, but that can't be helped. Get in and change, and let's get off."

Nothing more was said. The chums of the Remove hurried to the dormitory, and changed like lightning into their scout rig. Billy Bunter was still snoring on his bed, and they grinned as they saw him. The fat junior was probably dreaming of jam-tarts and mince-pies—certainly he never dreamed of what was about to happen to his Belgian.

The scouts hurried out.

They took the path to the wood, and covered the ground quickly. It was a good distance to the woodman's hut. They would have to be back late for dinner, however the adventure turned out, but that could not be helped.

The more they thought about the matter, the more certain it appeared to them that the refugee had deceived Bunter. His story was too extraordinary to be easily credited by anyone a little less obtuse than the Owl of the Remove. But they meant to give him a chance. If he was a genuine Belgian, they were his friends. But he would have to prove it.

Harry Wharton, as chief of the Eagles, took the command as they came through the thick wood and approached the lonely hut. He whispered his directions. The scouts spread out into a circle, to approach the woodman's hut from all quarters. Their orders were to collar the man if he fled, and to "pile in" with their staves if he resisted. With the circle of keen scouts round his hiding-place, the refugee was not likely to get away.

They came in sight of the old hut at last.

Half-buried in leaves and creepers, it lay silent in the sunlight that filtered through the thick branches above. It was silent, without life—it looked utterly solitary and deserted. Harry Wharton uttered cautiously the signal-call of the Eagles. It was answered by the scouts from all directions. The hut was surrounded.

Then Wharton strode out from the trees, and walked boldly towards the hut.

There was not a sound or a movement.

The schoolboy scout entered the hut and looked round. The sunlight gleamed in through the branches overhead. In the corner, the mass of thickets that grew within the ruined walls was quite still.

Was the man there?

Wharton smiled a little at the sign of fresh footprints in the grass that overgrew the old earthen floor. Someone had been there quite lately.

Wharton gave the Eagle-signal again, and there was a brushing in the thickets, as the scouts closed in on all sides.

"You may as well show yourself, Monsieur Jacques Flon," said Wharton, in a steady voice; "we know you are there."

There was no sound—no movement! Was the man gone? Wharton stepped towards the bushes and thrust

in his staff. His heart beat a little faster. If the man was there, and if he was a German, it was not impossible that he might reply with a bullet. There was a movement in the bushes now. Wharton's staff had touched a body among the ferns and leaves.

"Venez!" he said, in French.

"Monsieur! Ayez pitie de moi!"

The refugee staggered from the bushes. His face was white, and his eyes were burning. One of his hands was in the pocket of his ragged coat. Wharton suspected at once that it grasped a hidden weapon, and he was upon his guard. But the refugee was evidently intending to play his game as a Belgian first—he must have heard the rustling which showed that the hut was surrounded.

"If you are a Belgian, we are your friends," said Wharton.

"Oui, oui, je suis Belge."

"Come in, you fellows, Bob and Marky and Toddy," called out Wharton. "The rest of you keep guard!"

"Aye, aye, captain!" grinned Bob Cherry.

The outcast's eyes dilated as three juniors entered the hut and joined Wharton. He was fairly cornered, and unless his story was true, he was fairly done!

THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER.

The Scouts' Victory!

"A YEZ pitie de moi!" murmured the outcast, his eyes gleaming, with a hunted look, at the juniors.

"Je suis Belge—soldat—"

"If you're a Belgian soldier, we're all friends here," said Mark Linley.

"Only you must prove it," said Wharton.

"Mais, c'est vrai—it is all true, messieurs! I am Belge!"

"You look more like a German than a Belgian," said Wharton. "But we'll see. Have you any objection to being searched?"

The man's look grew desperate.

"Mais pourquoi?" he exclaimed. "J'ai dit que je suis Belge—"

"Yes, you've said that you're a Belgian," assented Wharton. "But you've got to prove it. There's a German spy skulking about somewhere, and my impression is that you're the man. But you must have something about you to prove one way or the other. If you are a Belgian soldier, you have your papers?"

"Tout perdu—"

"All lost," said Bob Cherry—well, you've got something—especially if you're a German. If you're a Belgian, we apologise in advance, and we'll take you to our giddy bosom like a long-lost brother. But we're going to make jolly sure that you're not a Hun!"

"You've got to be searched," said Peter Todd. "If you're all right, it won't hurt you. No need to waste time."

The refugee backed away as the juniors advanced upon him. Wharton was watching the hidden hand, and he had his staff ready.

"Mais, messieurs—je ne veux pas—I will not be searched!" said the outcast. "Go away mit you and leave me—"

"No jolly fear!"

"You're going to be searched," said Wharton; "and you can take it quietly or not, just as you like. Collar him!"

The juniors sprang forward. Then the hidden hand came out, and a Browning pistol glinted in it. But Wharton's staff was ready, and it struck the rascal's hand as it appeared, with a blow that made him utter a howl of pain, and the Browning dropped to the ground.

"On him!" roared Bob.

The refugee struggled furiously in their grasp.

He made a savage effort to get at the fallen pistol, but Mark Linley kicked it away into the bushes, and the man went down with the juniors clinging to him. But with a terrible effort he flung them off, leaped up, and

sprang away through the doorway of the hut. Wharton yelled as he rolled in the grass:

"Stop him!"

The man bounded out into the wood. He bounded right into Squiff, who seized him instantly, and clung to him like a cat; and Nugent and Hurree Singh were on him the next moment, and then Johnny Bull. The outcast went down, fighting like a tiger. Harry Wharton & Co. came pouring breathlessly out of the hut, and piled in, and the rascal was quickly secured.

He lay panting in the grasp of eight juniors, with a powerful grasp on every limb, and on his throat, and his hair, and his ears. There was not much chance of escape for the outcast then.

"Rather looks as if he isn't a Belgian—what?" grinned Bob Cherry.

"The Hunfulness of the esteemed beast is terrific!" said Hurree Singh.

It was plain enough now—especially as the captured rascal was pouring out a stream of fierce exclamations in guttural German.

But the fearsome words that rolled from his lips did not worry the scouts. They did not even understand them. Harry Wharton took a cord from his pocket, and the German's hands were dragged together and tied at the wrists.

Then he was dragged to his feet, his eyes burning with rage, and fiery German utterances still pouring out in a boundless stream.

"Sounds like cracking nuts, don't it?" said Bob Cherry. "Pick out that pistol, somebody, that's a bit of evidence against him. We needn't search him now—they can do that at the camp."

The triumphant juniors marched the captured rascal away. It was a feather in the cap of the Boy Scouts of Greyfriars.

The German tramped away sullenly, with a grip on each of his bound arms. When he lagged, a gentle prod from a scout's staff started him again. They tramped away through the wood, and came out at last into the lane.

Straight to the police-station in Friardale they marched the German, and P.-c. Tozer, who was sunning himself on the steps of the little station, almost fell down at the sight of them.

"My heye!" ejaculated Mr. Tozer. "Oh, jiminy! That's 'im! That's the man what's wanted! Know him in a second! Where did you find 'im?"

"Picked him up in the wood, you know," said Peter Todd. "Thought we'd just rope him in, you know. Always glad to lend the police a hand, you know, like Sherlock Holmes, when they're stumped and can't find their man."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"None of your cheek," said Mr. Tozer ungratefully. "You 'and that Prooshin villain hover to me! Kim on, my man—don't look like a caged tiger. I've got a nice little cell 'ere all ready for you. Kim on!"

"Ach!"

"Grunt away," said Mr. Tozer. "No law agin gruntin'. Kim on!"

The German disappeared into the station with Mr. Tozer. Harry Wharton & Co. turned back towards Greyfriars.

"That's the official thanks we get," said Peter Todd, with a grunt; "and we're an hour late for dinner, and we sha'n't get any!"

"Country first!" said Bob Cherry. "Country comes even before dinner! See daily papers! But hop it, I'm famished! Race you to Greyfriars!"

The juniors arrived at Greyfriars breathless. Billy Bunter met them in the doorway of the School House.

"You've missed dinner, you duffers!" said Bunter. "Quelch is ratty! You'll get licked! Here he comes!"

"Wharton—and all of you!" Mr. Quelch's voice was thunderous. "You are an hour late for dinner; what do you mean by it?"

"Sorry, sir—" began Wharton.

"The sorrowfulness is terrific, honoured sahib. But the patriotic duty comes firstfully!" said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "It was our dutiful bizney to collarfully seize a Prussian Hun!"

"What!"

"We've been scouting, sir," said Wharton. "We've caught that German spy who's been missing for nearly a week!"

"Bless my soul!" Mr. Quelch's voice was not at all thunderous now. "Is it possible, Wharton?"

"Yes, sir. We've handed him over to Mr. Tozer."

"Dear me! This reflects very great credit upon the Boy Scouts of this school," said Mr. Quelch. "Where did you find this man?"

"He was hiding in the old woodman's hut, in Friardale Wood, sir," said Harry. "He made out that he was a Belgian refugee. But Mr. Tozer knew him at once, and he's locked up now."

There was a yell from Billy Bunter.

"You duffers! You've collared my Belgian!"

"Your Belgian turns out to be a German, Billy," grinned Peter Todd. "His name's no more Jacques Flon than mine is Hohenzollern. He's the German spy."

"Rats! You've made a mistake!"

"Tozer knew him, fathead!"

"I don't care! Tozer's a silly ass! You've jolly well collared my Belgian in mistake for a German, you duffers!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What does this mean?" exclaimed Mr. Quelch.

"The man palmed himself off as a Belgian, sir, and got Bunter to give him some grub," said Peter Todd; "but we spotted him."

"Indeed! You should be more careful, Bunter. Still, I cannot but approve of your action," said the Remove master. "If you believed the man was a Belgian, you were quite right to help him. But you should be more careful to inquire into the bona-fides of such a person. My boys, you have done very well indeed. I will ask the cook to provide you with dinner at once!"

The scouts enjoyed that dinner. They had first-class appetites for it. They ate it in the midst of a curious crowd who swarmed into the dining-room, to inquire into the particulars of the arrest of the German. Billy Bunter was there. His eyes were blinking with rage behind his glasses. Evidence was of no use to Bunter. He persisted that the scouts had made a regular "howler," and that his Belgian was a Belgian, and not a Hun at all.

And Bunter declined to be convinced. Even when the Head of Greyfriars received a letter from the Home Office, acknowledging the service that the Boy Scouts of Greyfriars had rendered, Bunter refused to be convinced. That letter was read out in Big Hall, and there were loud cheers. But Bunter only snorted. And even when it was learned that the rascally Hun had been sent to a long term of penal servitude, Billy Bunter persisted in his opinion.

"You silly asses have made a howler!" he told the scouts fifty times at least. "The police are duffers, too! So are the Home Office! So are the Government! I jolly well know that my Belgian was a Belgian!"

To which the scouts replied either with laughter, or with the ancient and classic monosyllable, "Rats!"

THE END.

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THE FIRST INSTALMENT.

Dick Damer, in consequence of an offer received from his uncle, goes out to Australia to live with him. As soon as he arrives he hears of his uncle's death from a man named Wesley Crane, his uncle's former partner.

Wesley Crane, in furtherance of a scheme known best to himself, has Dick drugged and smuggled aboard the Rainbow, a small schooner commanded by Captain Cripps, and bound for an unknown destination.

Dick receives very harsh treatment from the skipper, and has to share the lot of the crew, which is composed entirely of Chinese.

On the fourth day out a derelict is sighted. Captain Cripps, accompanied by Dick and one or two of the Chinamen, go aboard, and they discover that, although they had imagined the ship to have been abandoned, a boy has been left behind, overpowered by gas fumes.

Dick and the Chinamen are ordered to get him aboard the Rainbow, while the captain remains on the Kauri, as the derelict is named. As soon as they reach their own ship and have attended the boy's wants, they are startled by a deep booming sound. A storm is rising!

(Now go on with the story.)

THE SECOND INSTALMENT.

The Castaway Takes Command.

Dick, who had been leaning over the castaway, straightened himself with a sharp exclamation.

"What—" he began. Then his eyes fell on Chang's face, and the expression upon it cut his question short. For the first time since he had known the man he saw stark terror writ large on the yellow man's countenance.

Dropping everything, Chang darted for the ladder and went up it like a flash. Dick, hard at his heels, reached the deck, and for a moment stood stock still, unable to believe his eyes.

Fifteen minutes earlier, when he had left the deck, the sun had been blazing down from a cloudless sky. Now the sun was gone, swallowed by a monstrous volume of inky vapour which was sweeping up with tremendous speed. The blazing heat had changed to a bitter chill.

But this was not the worst. To the southward, darkness had shut down across the ocean like a cover sliding over a hatch, and beneath it the sea was boiling under a squall of appalling fury. Dick could see the white line of foam rushing towards the schooner at the rate of an express train, while the roar of the oncoming tempest set the whole air a-tremble.

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NEXT
MONDAY—**"THE OLD BOYS' CHALLENGE!"**

He had heard of the suddenness of these Pacific storms, but this—this was incredible, appalling.

As he stood there, helpless, not knowing what to do, the first gust caught the schooner and set her sails and spars swinging and flapping wildly.

"What can we do, Chang? What can we do?" he cried despairingly, and for the first time in his life a hideous sense of his own helplessness and ignorance overwhelmed him.

"Me not know. Me tink gettum sail down," answered Chang.

"Then call to the men. Tell them what to do!" cried Dick.

Chang shouted to the men, but they did not move. They stood where they were, clinging to cleats or stays, paralysed with fear.

Just then Dick saw Cripps come springing up on to the deck of the Kauri. He saw him rush to the side waving his arms, evidently shouting orders. But the roar of the storm swamped his voice, and the next instant a veil of darkness swept over him, hiding him and the ship in a single second.

Before Dick could draw one more breath it was on the schooner, and catching her full on the beam, pressed her over until her lee gunwale was buried, and it seemed that she would instantly capsize.

"You set o' swabs! Call yourselves sailormen? Are you going to let yourselves drown like rats in a tub?"

The voice came ringing through the din and thunder of the storm like the clear call of a bugle, and Dick, clinging to the starboard ratlines, turned his head and saw the boy from the Kauri spring up from the hatch and dash across the reeling deck towards the wheel.

"Stand by, men—stand by!"

The Chinese crew, who had paid no attention whatever to the orders of Chang, seemed galvanised into sudden activity by the trumpet-call of the stranger's voice. They sprang to obey.

"Look alive, there! Get hold of the cutter's warp! Sharp now, for your lives! Make the warp fast to the stays! l halliards! Pass the end forrard; outside the rigging, you idiots! Now, make fast to the bitts! Let out some o' the line, there! That'll do! She's coming up!"

The boat, in which Dick had just returned from the derelict, had been towing astern, and the first rush of the storm had swamped her.

The stranger whom Dick had rescued had seen that the one chance of saving the Rainbow was to use the swamped boat as a sea-anchor. This he achieved by fastening her to the schooner's bow instead of to the stern. The result was that the Rainbow, answering to the drag, veered round, and now lay head to the seas, pitching violently, but riding out the squall in perfect safety.

It was a masterly manœuvre, and even Dick, utterly ignorant as he was of any form of seamanship, realised this much.

Dick had helped all he could—not that that was much. Now he stood, breathing hard, close to the wheel, and staring out in the direction of the derelict. But the rain was coming down in spouts. Nothing was visible beyond a hundred-yard radius. As for the derelict, there was not a sign of her.

"Hi, there, you—you white boy! What are you loafing there for? Get on and help get in that fore-s'l!"

Dick realised that the order was addressed to him, and for a moment resented it savagely. But only for a moment. He was aware that the new-comer had, of course, no idea to whom he owed his rescue. He knew, too, that every hand was needed, and he staggered forrard to obey.

A Grand, Long, Complete Story of Harry
Wharton & Co. By FRANK RICHARDS.

The red-haired boy followed him. He had lashed the helm. He passed Dick, and sprang into the rigging. Clearly, he was a fine seaman. He knew exactly what to do, and how to do it; and the Chinamen, encouraged by his example, worked magnificently.

Dick, pulling here and hauling there as he was bid, was conscious the whole time of the tremendous personality of the youngster, of his enormous physical strength and driving power. So, like the Chinamen, Dick obeyed the orders that rang full and clear above the shriek of the storm.

It was quick come, quick go. They had barely finished snugging down, when the sky began to grow lighter. The rain ceased, the wind dropped, and then, like the rolling up of a drop scene in a theatre, the ragged mass of cloud swept away, leaving the sky a burning blue, with the sun flaring down upon the still heaving waters.

The cub from the Kauri went running up the weather rigging to the cross-trees. Dick saw him standing there, holding by one hand, shading his eyes with the other from the hot glare of the sun. For perhaps two minutes he stood, sweeping the whole horizon. Then he shook his head, and came swiftly down again.

"No sign of the Kauri?" said Dick, as the other reached the deck.

The red-haired youngster stared him up and down in a contemptuous way, which brought the blood to Dick's cheeks.

"No," he said shortly. "Where's your skipper?" he added.

"He was aboard the Kauri when the storm came on."

"Then the chances are he's there!" said the other, jerking his thumb downwards with an unpleasantly significant gesture.

"Got a mate?" he continued.

"No. The rest of the crew are Chinamen."

"Great snakes, what an outfit! And who are you?"

"Damer, my name is—Dick Damer."

"And you're the chap who was going to let the schooner capsize without lifting a finger to save her?"

The contempt in his voice stung Dick.

"What else could I do?" he retorted. "I've only been aboard four days."

"Never been to sea before? No; I needn't ask. You don't look it. What's your job?"

"Anything and everything," answered Dick. "I was drugged in Sydney, and put aboard without knowing anything about it."

The other burst into a great laugh.

"Shanghaied—eh? Christmas, but I'll bet your skipper was pleased when he saw what they'd palmed off on him!"

The colour rose hotly in Dick's cheeks.

"It was no fault of mine. I didn't ask to come."

"You wouldn't. But, as you're here, you'd better be useful. What is this craft, and where's she bound?"

"She's the Rainbow of Sydney. That's all I know. Captain Cripps didn't tell me what her business was, or where she was going."

At the name of Cripps, a scowl crossed the other's face.

"Abner Cripps! Was that the chap?"

Dick nodded.

"The old pirate. I've heard of him. I'll lay it was some low-down game he was after. Wonder if the Chink head-man has got any notions? Which is he?"

"Chang. That tall man."

"Hi, you, Chang!" shouted the Kauri boy.

Chang stepped briskly across. From the smart way in which he obeyed the new-comer, it was clear that he regarded him with considerable respect. In fact, as Dick discovered later, the wonderful piece of seamanship which had saved the Rainbow had given its author a very high place in the estimation of the Chinese crew. Indeed, they regarded him with a respect that was almost superstitious.

"See here, Chang," said the tall youngster briskly, "your skipper's gone. Chances are he's dead and drowned. Have you any notion where this craft's bound?"

"Chang not know nothing. Captain Clippis, he onlee man what know."

"Thought as much. Well, I suppose the best thing we can do is to 'bout ship, and get back to Sydney. And lucky for you folk I know my navigation. If I didn't, we might float around this old Pacific Ocean till Doomsday!"

He paused, and seemed to consider a moment.

"Stay! I'll have a look at the old shark's papers first. Like as not, there might be something worth getting one's teeth into. Here you, Damer, and you, Chang, come along down to the old man's cabin! May as well see I do the thing all ship-shape and proper."

He gave a quick glance round at the sea and the sky, then led the way briskly down the companion. Dick, following, could hardly repress a shudder as the other burst unceremoniously into Cripps' cabin. He half fancied that the

squat, herculean form of the skipper must rise in savage protest at the intrusion.

"Now then," said their leader, "here's his desk! Suppose the key's gone down with him? Well, we'll soon have it open!"

He looked round, and, seeing a heavy sheath-knife hanging on the wall, whipped it out of its scabbard, and set to work on the desk. There was a rending crash, and, amid a shower of white splinters, the heavy lid flew open.

Inside, besides the log-book and writing material, were several bundles of letters and papers. The red-haired boy pulled out the whole lot, flung them on the bunk, and, sitting down on the edge of it, deliberately began to examine them.

Once or twice he frowned, and once he laughed.

"Gosh, but the old man was a peach!" he muttered.

At last he came to a long blue envelope, from which he drew a letter and a chart, the latter folded across and across. As he read the letter, Dick saw his expression change. There came an eager gleam in his eyes. Then he unfolded the map, and spread it out carefully on top of the desk. Dick noticed a course pricked out across it and a circular mark in red ink.

For a minute or two the red-haired boy studied it carefully. Then suddenly he brought his fist down on the desk-top with a bang that made Dick jump.

"Thought as much. Cripps was on a good thing, and no error. Here you, Damer, you can read if you can't do anything else. Take this, and squint through it. Chang, you clear out. I'll have a chin-chin with you afterwards."

Chang vanished in the curiously silent way peculiar to his race. Dick took the letter, and noted with a start that the heading was Warlindi.

"Dear Cripps," he read,—"The old man snuffed it last night. About time, too, for I've been sitting up here with him every night for a week, and a deuced tedious job I found it. However, I was there at the finish, and that's the main thing. As soon as ever I was sure that he'd really passed in his checks I got to work, and herewith I enclose the result. It's Kempster's chart all right, and the island marked all hunky with the course and all pricked out. I needn't tell you what to do. You ought to be able to get the Rainbow ready inside a week. And don't you take any white men along. They might ask questions. Chinks are good enough if you pick them careful. As for the business end of this job, no need to go into that any further. You know what your share will be, and I reckon it's a darned sight more than you'd ever make if you stuck to the black-birding job till the end of your days. All I will say is, to give you a word of warning against playing me false, or keeping any of the stuff unbeknown to yours truly."

"WESLEY CRANE."

Dick looked up quickly.

"Why, this is written by the man who had me shanghaied!" he exclaimed.

The other eyed him sharply.

"Where do you come in? Do you know anything about this man Kempster or the chart?"

"Nothing," answered Dick. "I never heard of one or the other. I was sent out from home to my uncle, Nicholas Damer, who lived at Warlindi. When I got there I met this man Crane, who told me my uncle was dead. He said that he had been his partner, and that my uncle had not said anything about my coming out. He told me he would give me work, and sent me back to Sydney, to stay at an inn kept by a man called Bale."

"Bale!" broke in the other. "Great ghost! The worst blackguard on the waterside! Tell you what, kid. You were deuced lucky to escape with a whole skin. Well, go on."

"Bale drugged me," said Dick simply; "and the next thing I knew I was aboard this schooner."

The boy from the Kauri laughed loudly. Then he turned suddenly serious again.

"I don't know what this peach Crane had against you, but it's mighty clear he wanted to get shut of you as smart as he could. Well, see here; it's plain as pie that this chart was stolen from your late uncle. And if you're his nearest kin—why, seems to me you've got the best right to whatever there is in this island."

"What do you think it is?" broke in Dick.

"Pearls, most like. Anyway, it's worth having, or you may lay your last bob that this chap Crane wouldn't have shelled out to send the Rainbow after it. Now, I'm square. No one has the right to say that Barry Freeland don't play the game. But this chance is a bit too good to lose. We've got a ship, we've got a crew, we've got a navigator—yours truly. If you're game for this trip, and willing to go halves, I'm the chap to get the stuff, whatever it may be."

Dick hesitated a moment. The very vastness and vagueness of the venture daunted him. So, too, did Freeland himself.



As the storm overtook them, Dick saw Captain Cripps come springing on to the deck of the Kauri, waving his arms, evidently shouting orders, but the next instant the darkness hid him and the ship.

This cub from the Kauri was so big, so strong, so rough and reckless that the idea of voyaging for weeks or months in his company filled Dick with a sort of terror.

Barry Freeland seemed to read his thoughts.

"Scared, are ye?" he said, with a sneer. "Here's a chance offered ye of a fortune and, more than that, of getting square with the man that done ye down, and ye goes white and red like a baby. Gosh, how old are ye—six?"

Dick went not red, but crimson. Tears of mortification started to his eyes. He sprang to his feet.

"I'll go anywhere that you will. And—and if you talk to me like that again I'll fight you."

With the memory of Captain Cripps green in his mind, Dick fully expected a blow or a thrashing. To his immense surprise, Freeland threw his head back, and burst into a great roar of laughter.

"Flicked ye on the raw, did I? Darned if there isn't a bit of spirit in the kid, after all! All right, Damer, I'll take you at your word, and I'll draw up a bit of an agreement for you to sign. Now, cut along, and send Chang here. I've got to get him into this swim, for if he's willing, the rest of the Chinks won't make no trouble."

Dick heard nothing of the interview with Chang, but apparently it was satisfactory, for about half an hour later Freeland came on deck, and, at once taking command, gave orders for sail to be set. A course was shaped north-east, and all hands were kept busy until everything was shipshape and to Freeland's satisfaction.

By this time supper was due. Freeland called up Dick.

"Damer," he said, "you'll bunk with me, aft. Not that you'll be much use to me, but it isn't right for white men to live with Chinks. And, see here, you've got to learn—and learn mighty quick, too. I don't reckon to have to navigate this craft all the way to this here island single-handed. You'll have to stand watch and watch. See?"

"I'll do my best," said Dick humbly. And then they went down to supper.

It seemed odd to Dick to be sitting there in the cabin, THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 384.

with the food served on a table covered with a cloth, and with Chang bringing in the dishes. Freeland seemed to have changed everything, and changed it, too, without an effort. Dick was filled with envy at the easy way in which he gave his orders, and the promptness with which he was obeyed.

And yet there were things about Freeland which filled the other with discomfort. His table manners were not nearly so good as those of the Chinamen in the fo'c's'le. He ate with his knife, he champed his food noisily, and it was plain to Dick's fastidious eyes that he had not washed his hands before sitting down.

The new skipper of the Rainbow was utterly unlike anyone whom Dick had ever met before, and that night, after turning in, he lay awake a long time, wondering at the extraordinary turn of Fortune's wheel which had flung him into such queer company and such an amazing adventure.

The Man With the Gun.

"It's pearls all right. There's diving-dresses below."

So spoke Barry Freeland, emerging next morning from the depths of the hold.

"Ever seen a diving-dress, kid?" he added.

"I never have," answered Dick truthfully. "I've read about them, though."

"Bah! You've wasted all your life reading about things!" retorted the other. "I never struck a chap like you before."

"I—I know I'm very ignorant," said Dick humbly. "You see, I never went to school."

"No more did I. At least, not since I was twelve. I've been at sea ever since. Come and take the wheel. It's time you learnt to steer, anyway."

The schooner, with the wind a couple of points aft of the beam, was snoring pleasantly through the long blue swells. Barry, getting rid of the Chinaman, who was steering, took the wheel himself, and showed Dick how to read the compass and how to watch the sails.

"Now, take hold," he ordered.

Dick, with secret misgivings, did as he was bid, and was surprised to find how easy his task was. Barry watched him for a few minutes, then deliberately left him to his own devices, and for the next hour the schooner was entirely under Dick's control.

When his first nervousness had worn off, Dick actually enjoyed the experience. It was the first time in his life that he had ever had anything under his own control, and he took a keen pride in keeping the Rainbow exactly on her course.

"Not so bad," remarked Barry, when at last he came back to Dick. "But don't you go and think it's always going to be as easy as this. Wait till you've got to buck her into a head-wind and a head-sea. That'll teach ye something."

It was in this way that Dick's nautical education began, and Barry took precious good care that none of his pupil's time was wasted. Almost every hour of the day he was at him. He showed him how to take the sun, how to read the chronometer; he instructed him in the mysteries of dead reckoning, and taught him the names and uses of every spar and sail and sheet.

Dick, naturally intelligent, threw all his heart into the work, and learnt with such quickness that Barry was secretly pleased. At the same time he did not say so. On the other hand, he was often cuttingly sarcastic; and Dick, much as he admired him, was never quite happy in his company.

The weather remained fair, and the Rainbow, driving always north-east, ate up the miles. Each day Barry measured up her course on the chart, and Dick's excitement grew as he saw the distance lessen between her and her mysterious destination.

More than once they passed islands which hove up dream-like out of the blue sea, with the swells pounding and spouting on their coral reefs. Once Barry ran in through a wide channel into a still lagoon, and took a boat ashore for fresh water.

On the twenty-third day after the storm, when Barry took Dick below to prick off their course and write up the log, the distance between the Rainbow's position and the red circle on the chart which indicated the nameless island had dwindled to the length of a thumb-nail.

"If the island's there, I reckon we'll raise her to-morrow," said Barry.

"If she's there?" repeated Dick. "B-but you don't think that she isn't?"

Barry laughed jeeringly.

"How d'ye know the whole thing isn't a fake?"

"I—I don't know, of course. But I hope not."

"Well, you'll know pretty soon if this wind holds," answered Barry, as he put the chart away.

The wind did hold, and all the rest of that day, and all night, too, the Rainbow was reeling off ten or eleven knots an hour.

At earliest dawn next morning Dick was on deck, staring out towards the north-east. He was so excited that he could hardly eat his breakfast, and brought down upon himself fresh jeers from Barry.

As soon as the meal was over he resumed his watch, climbing high into the cross-trees and sweeping the horizon with a pair of binoculars, which had belonged to Cripps.

It was about ten o'clock when, in the focus of the glasses, he caught what seemed a tiny cloud hanging between sea and sky. So like a cloud that for quite two minutes he hesitated, not really believing that it could be land.

Gradually the outline sharpened until the powerful glasses picked out the graceful feathers of lofty palms, and Dick, drawing a long breath, shouted at the top of his voice:

"Land-ho!"

Then he came sliding down to the deck with such haste that the ropes burnt his palms, and rushed up to Barry, who was standing by the binnacle.

"It's not a fake!" he cried triumphantly. "That's the island all right!"

"Let's hope there's something on it, then!" returned Barry drily.

Slowly the island lifted into sight, and in another hour they were near enough to see the huge swells breaking in white foam over the coral-reef surrounding it.

Now Barry took the wheel; and Dick noticed that he changed course slightly, running up to windward of the island.

"Wonder where the opening is?" Dick heard him mutter. "Must be one somewhere, I suppose."

"It's very small—the island, I mean," said Dick.

"What's that matter? If it's pearls, they're in the lagoon, not on the island," Barry retorted.

The schooner drew on until she was parallel with the reef and about a mile to the north.

Dick gave a sudden shout:

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"There's the opening, Freeland. Do you see it?"

"I've been looking at it the last two minutes," answered Barry drily; and, instead of turning in towards it, threw the schooner up into the wind, and shouted an order to heave the lead.

This was done, but the line ran out to its full length.

"No gettee bottom!" cried the leadsman.

"Likely as not it's a mile deep!" growled Barry. "Means we can't anchor."

"But why not run in?" asked Dick.

"Because we've only got one ship, you duffer; and if we pile her up there's an end of it. Think I'm going to chance running into an uncharted channel? Pretty sort of seaman I'd be!"

"A nice hole I'm in!" he added, with a frown. "I can't leave the ship, for there's no one else to navigate her. And I've no one I can trust to sound the channel."

"I'll try if you like," said Dick. "Let me take Chang and Ah Lung. We'll manage, if you'll tell us what to do."

"H'm! Suppose that's the only thing," growled Barry. "Very well! Get the boat out as sharp as you can. And keep clear of the reef. If you capsize her, the sharks'll have you before you can say 'knife!'"

So the boat was launched, and Dick, full of excitement, but desperately keen to do his job to Barry's satisfaction, sat in the stern sheets and steered, while the two stolid Chinamen pulled at the oars.

As they neared the opening the roar was deafening. Although a fine day, with no more than a sailing breeze, the great Pacific swells burst on the ragged teeth of the reef with a sound like thunder.

"Steady her!" said Dick. It was the first order he had ever given, and the way in which he snapped it out surprised no one more than himself. "Ah Lung, you hold her where she is! Chang, you can heave the lead!"

The lead hissed through the air and struck the water with a heavy splash. The line whizzed out.

"Folteen fathom!" announced Chang, and prepared for another cast.

Bit by bit they worked in; and risky work it was, for the current raced through the narrow opening, and the coral fangs stuck out black and jagged on either side through a smother of white foam.

"Plenty deep!" said Chang, as he took a last cast in the very centre of the channel. "Schooner! she no' lun aglound!"

"Carry on a bit," said Dick. "See what it's like inside."

Ah Lung took a couple more strokes, and the boat shot through into the lagoon. The change was startling. Inside, the water was calm as a lake, and of an incredible clearness. The boat seemed floating on air. Below, gay-coloured fish swarmed like birds, and in the depths corals and weeds of rainbow hues lay like a fairy garden plain to view.

Dick gasped with delight and wonder. He found it difficult to take his eyes off the beauties below and survey the island itself.

The lagoon was perhaps six or seven miles across, the island in the centre was not more than two miles in diameter. Its beach of coral-sand shone white as snow in the tropical sunshine; the centre was a mass of thick bush, with groups of tufted coconut and pandanus rising here and there from the undergrowth.

Dick scanned it carefully, but could see no sign of life. No smoke rose anywhere; the island looked as though man had never set foot upon it.

There came a sound like the distant crack of a whip.

Zip, zip, zip!

Something came skipping across the calm lagoon, cutting little white dots on its placid surface. It passed the boat with a long-drawn, whining sound.

Dick stared.

"What was that?" he asked wonderingly.

Crack! Zip! Nearer this time.

Chang and his fellow Chinaman had sprung to the oars and were pulling like mad for the channel.

"What was it?" asked Dick again.

"Someone shootee! No likee—no likee!" responded Chang, with something very like terror on his usually impassive face.

"Shooting at us! But what for?" exclaimed Dick; and as he spoke he felt as if someone had hit the boat with a hammer, and white splinters leaped from the gunwale.

The Chinamen pulled like fury, and before another bullet could reach them the boat was swinging in the rollers that poured through the opening in the reef, and Dick had his work cut out to keep her head to the foaming crests. If there was more shooting he did not hear it, and no other bullet touched them.

Ten minutes later they were alongside the schooner, which had been beating up and down outside, and Dick tumbled hastily over the counter.



Above the wall of ferns a face rose slowly into sight. It was hardly bigger than a chimpanzee's, and was fringed by whiskers that were as thick and white as snow. Barry Freeland seemed to be paralysed for the moment, resourceful as he was. But the next instant his rifle went to his shoulder. "Hands up!" he shouted.

"There's someone on the island!" he told Freeland breathlessly. "Someone shot at us!"

"The deuce he did! Did you see him?"

"We didn't see a sign of anybody—not a boat, or smoke, or anything. But one shot hit the cutter."

Barry frowned.

"What about the channel?" he asked.

"Plenty of room, and plenty of water. B-but are you going in? You may get shot."

Barry laughed harshly.

"Rifle-bullets can't sink the schooner," he said. "And if it comes to trouble—why, we can do our share of the shooting."

As he spoke he brought the schooner round, and ran her straight down towards the channel.

The Glade of Death.

"Where's your noble sportsman? Where's your chap with the gun?"

The schooner lay at anchor, every spar and rope mirrored in the placid surface of the lagoon. Barry stood with Dick by the rail, and, with his glasses to his eyes, searched the greenery, that danced and shimmered in the blaze of the afternoon sun.

"I don't know any more than you," Dick answered. "What are you going to do?"

"Go ashore and have a look round. Hi, Chang, over with that cutter!"

Chang and his fellows launched the boat, but when Barry ordered two of them into it they flatly refused to obey.

"No likee shootum," said Chang stolidly.

Barry's face flamed.

"You yellow-livered cur!" he thundered; and, making a

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spring like a tiger, he seized Chang by the collar of his blue blouse.

Into Dick's mind flashed the memory of Chang's former kindness, and on the spur of the moment he rushed after Barry, and grasped his arm.

"No!" he cried. "No, don't hit him. You can't wonder he's scared."

Barry swung round on Dick, and there was a very ugly look in his eyes. For the moment Dick fully believed that the other would drive his fist into his face.

But Dick did not flinch, and the expected blow did not come.

"Perhaps you'll come instead?" said Barry sarcastically.

"Yes, I will," answered Dick simply. "But," he added, "I can't row very well."

"You'll have to try!" returned Barry harshly. "Come on, then!"

Dick jumped down into the boat. When Barry followed, Dick saw that he was carrying a rifle. It was a .38-bore Winchester repeater.

"Pull on," said Barry shortly; and Dick, whose only rowing had been a pleasure-boat on a pond, dropped his blades in and began a jerky, unskilful progress towards the beach.

He was so busy endeavouring not to catch a crab that he had not much time to think of the danger. Yet now and then, in spite of the heat, his skin crawled at the thought that, somewhere up in that thick bush behind him, lay a man with a gun, waiting to put a bullet through his back.

But the shot never came, and presently the bow grated on the beach. Barry sprang quickly ashore and made the boat fast. Then, with his finger on the trigger, he walked quickly towards the brush.

The heat was terrific, the sand was like fire beneath their feet. The brush and palms seemed to swim in the scorching air.

NEXT
MONDAY—

"THE OLD BOYS' CHALLENGE!"

A Grand, Long, Complete Story of Harry
Wharton & Co. By FRANK RICHARDS.

"Quiet enough," muttered Barry, as he stepped into the shade of a group of palms. "If it hadn't been for that hole in the boat I'd have betted that you'd dreamed the whole thing. Gosh! I wonder where the gun-man's gone? We'll have to try and track him."

He began prowling slowly along the edge of the scrub, his eyes on the ground. Dick, feeling anything but happy, followed close behind.

A quarter of a mile they went, and suddenly Barry stopped short.

"Gee!" he muttered. "It was no dream, after all. 'Here's the tracks, right enough!'"

Dick, looking down, saw footmarks plain upon a patch of sandy ground. He was about to speak, but Barry, holding up a hand, checked him, and set off on the trail like a questing hound.

The steps took them into a path—a path clearly much used, for the grass was worn flat. Yet it was so narrow that two could not walk abreast. And the path, curving through the steamy heat of the jungle-like brush, led them presently into an opening—a space of clear ground shadowed by a group of lofty palms.

Barry was leading, and he stopped so suddenly that Dick almost fell over him.

"Great ghost!" gasped Barry, and for the first time since he had met the cub from the Kauri, Dick heard real fright in his voice.

"Look at that!" muttered Barry; and as he stepped aside, Dick found himself confronted by a sight so strange and hideous that it was all he could do to choke down the scream that rose in his throat.

Flat upon the ground, under the dappled shade of the cocoa-palms, lay five skeletons. Neatly arranged, they were side by side, and about a yard apart.

They were dry bones, without one fragment of flesh, and their grinning skulls were all in line. Flat on their backs they lay, their legs stretched straight out, and their eyeless sockets staring straight upwards towards the sky.

But what was perhaps the most terrible part of this ghastly spectacle was that each skeleton head was crowned with a garland of scarlet hibiscus blooms, which glowed like blood against the paper whiteness of the bare bones.

A spasm of sickness seized Dick. He staggered and grasped at the nearest tree. For once Barry refrained from jeering at him.

"Ugh! I never saw anything so beastly!" he growled; and under his saddle-like tan his cheeks had whitened.

"Do—do natives leave their dead like this?" asked Dick hoarsely.

"Never heard of it, if they do," answered Barry. "Besides, they weren't bare feet that made those tracks we've followed. They were boots."

He paused a moment, and visibly pulled himself together.

"Come on! We've got to get to the bottom of this. The tracks are all around these bones. And, see, they lead off beyond!"

Again he took up the trail, and Dick, giddy and breathing hard, followed. The tracks led them out of the gruesome glade, and once more they found themselves in a narrow bush-trail.

Barry picked his way with care. Dick noticed that he held his rifle with his finger on the trigger. Once more the bush opened a little, and they saw another glade. It was empty, but in the centre was a pool of clear water, with a little rill running away from it, and trickling through a miniature forest of ferns towards the sea.

The spring was so strong that the surface of the little pool bubbled like a boiling kettle.

By this they paused.

"C-can I have a drink?" panted Dick.

"Go ahead. I'll watch out."

Dick dropped on his knees and put his face down to the exquisitely clear water. Never in his life had he tasted anything so delicious as that fresh, cool draught. He drank, and drank, and sprang to his feet refreshed.

"Take the gun," said Barry, thrusting the rifle into his hands. Then he dropped down and buried his face in the sparkling pool.

It was at that moment that Dick heard the laugh, and if the sight of the skeletons had shocked him, that laugh struck terror into his heart.

It was a low, mocking chuckle, yet full of such malice that it sounded like nothing human.

He glared around, but could see nothing. The next thing he knew, Barry was on his feet, and had swiftly taken the rifle from his hands.

"You heard it?" whispered Dick.

Barry nodded. His eyes had a queer look in them.

For a minute or more they listened, and all was so still that the snapping of the tiny bubbles flung up by the spring came plainly to their ears.

"Suppose I didn't dream it?" muttered Barry. And as he spoke, Dick seized his arm and pointed.

Above the wall of ferns which marked the course of the tiny brook a face had risen slowly into sight—a face that was no more human than the laugh.

It was hardly bigger than that of a chimpanzee, and the wrinkled skin was almost the colour of a well-baked coffee-berry. In startling contrast to the brown of the skin was the fringe of beard and whiskers, thick and white as snow. The top of the head was likewise covered with a mat of snowy hair.

One ear stuck out like a bat's wing, the other was missing altogether; and this gave the head a most curiously lopsided appearance.

But this mutilation Dick hardly noticed. It was the eyes that held him with a horrible fascination. Small, black, and deep-set under shaggy brows, they were filled with a sort of unholy glee that exactly matched the terrible laugh which their owner had uttered.

Barry Freeland drew a sharp, whistling breath. Ready and resourceful as he was, the hideously uncanny sight seemed for the moment to have paralysed his nerve.

It was only for a moment. Then he flung his rifle to his shoulder.

"Hands up!" he shouted.

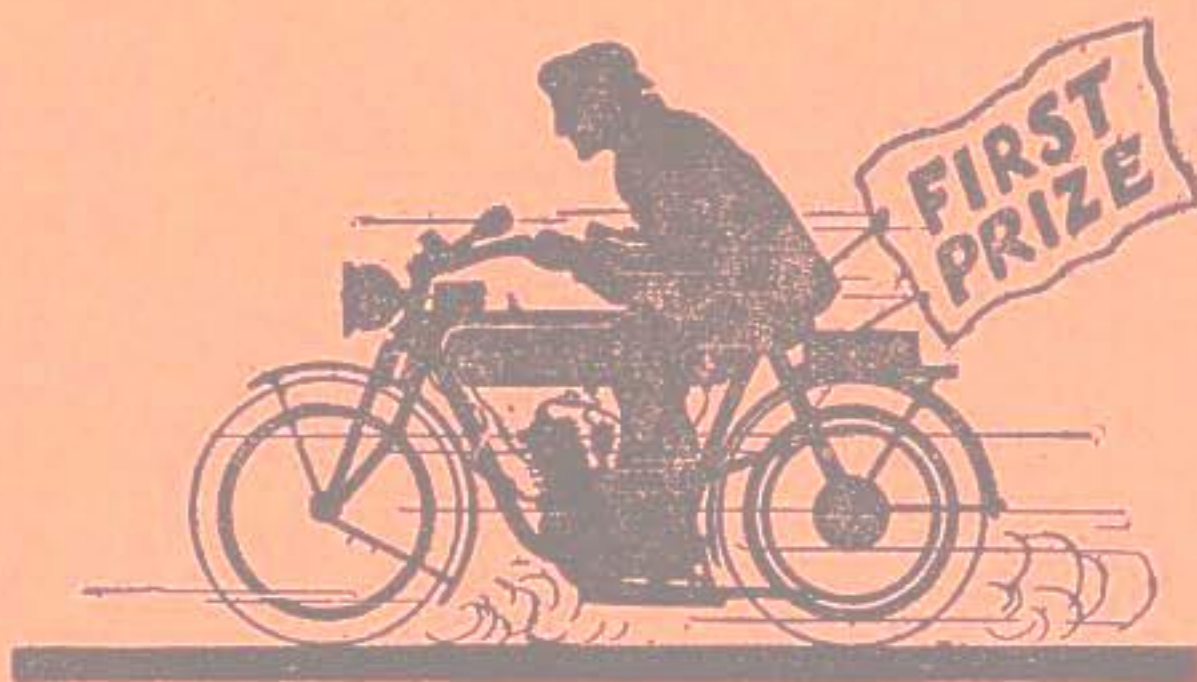
His delay, though but momentary, had been too long. Unseen behind the close screen of fern, the other, too, had been holding a rifle.

The two shots rang out simultaneously, or so nearly so that, to Dick's ears, the two reports seemed one. But the one-eared man had evidently been a fraction of a second the quicker of the two, for it was Barry who stumbled backwards and fell heavily to the ground.

(Next Monday's "MAGNET" will contain a further thrilling instalment of this fine yarn, in which exciting developments will occur. Make quite sure of your copy by asking your newsagent to reserve a copy specially for you every week. IT IS THE ONLY WAY!)



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The Editor is always pleased to hear from his chums, at home or abroad, and is only too willing to give his best advice to them if they are in difficulty or in trouble. . . . Whom to write to: Editor, The "Magnet" Library, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.

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YOUR EDITOR AND THE ARMY.

Since the personal explanation as to why I was not fighting at the front appeared in the "Magnet," an apology has come to hand from one of the correspondents whose letter I quoted at the time.

I hope to reproduce this apology on my Chat page next Monday.



FOR NEXT MONDAY:

"THE OLD BOYS' CHALLENGE!"

By FRANK RICHARDS.

The above title is sufficient to ensure that next week's splendid, long, complete tale of Greyfriars lacks nothing of excitement. Colonel Wharton, home on leave from the front, brings a cricket team composed of Old Boys down to the school, and challenges the First Eleven to a match. In the ranks of the old "Friars" is an ex-county player, and the side is a most redoubtable one. Wingate and his merry men are faced with a stiff proposition; and with Gerald Loder causing discord in the team, there are many thrilling and dramatic scenes as a result of

"THE OLD BOYS' CHALLENGE!"

A CORNISH CHUM'S CLEVER VERSES.

Jack Trelawney, a "Magnet" reader, hailing from pleasant Cornwall, sends me the following ingenious poem, in which he includes the names of several schoolboy characters appearing in the "Magnet," "Gem," and "Boys' Friend."

I am pleased to tell my friend Jack that he possesses a distinct talent for versifying—an opinion which I feel sure most Magnetites, after reading his effusion, will heartily endorse.

A CRICKETING TRAGEDY.

A boy named *Brown*, who had *Wun Lung*,
Went forth to guard his wicket;
With smile so *Blund*, he loved to stand
The *Cutts* and *Knox* of cricket.
He had the stature of a *Bull*,
His face flushed like a *Cherry*.
He roared "*Hoo-Ray!*" We'll *Wynn* to-day!
I feel like making *Merry*."

Young *Brown* could play in that grand way
That every boy ad-*Myers*;
The *Field* spread out, to *Singh* and shout,
And *Crane* their necks for "*skiers*."
The long-stop paused, a *Bun-ter* chew,
He *Wootton* see his danger;
Of *Courcy* lay, no longer *Gay*,
Struck down, the hapless stranger!

The *Gore* upon his *Temple* stood,
The matron saw; it shocked her.
"Great *Scott!*" said she. "Oh, *Trotter*-long,
And fetch the local doctor!"
One *Noble* fellow dashed away,
O'er *Hill* and *Leigh* he sped;
But, sad to say, that long-stop lay
Upon the *Greene*-sward—dead!

My Cornish chum goes on to say that he is in the employ of a blacksmith, and found time to scribble his verses in the forge. It is very remiss of you to write poems in work hours, Jack, but I suppose that black-Smith Major do it?

REPLIES IN BRIEF.

R. M. B. (Somerset).—There are several good cricket yarns in store, so tell your chums to look out for them. I don't think your suggestion is practicable; many thanks for it, all the same.

"Two Young Clerks."—There are so many boys at Greyfriars that they cannot all take a prominent part in the story each week. In this matter I try to be as impartial as possible, and most of my readers are perfectly satisfied.

Violet S. (Cork).—I sincerely sympathise with you in the sad bereavement you have sustained by the loss of your father in a recent Naval engagement. You may console yourself by the fact that there is no higher honour than to fight and fall for England. Very pleased to hear you are emulating the celebrated Sister Susie. If you will send me your full name and address, I will forward you the book you are so anxious to obtain.

R. Farlow (Herne Bay).—You are quite correct in pointing out error.

L. E. C. (Southampton).—The highest individual score in school cricket is that made by A. E. J. Collins, for Clifton, in 1899. Collins made 628, and was not out at the close of the match. In later years he took a commission in the Army, and was recently killed in Flanders.

Murdoch K. Mackenzie, "Jeanville," Lenzie Road, Stepps, Scotland, will be glad to hear from readers in his district with a view to forming a "Magnet" League there.

F. L. (Leicester).—Many thanks for your letter and loyal support.

"A Would-be Helper" (Toronto).—I note all your criticisms, most of which, however, relate to very trivial matters. To class some of the stories as "poor yarns, indifferently written," is absurd. If such a statement were true, I wonder you lower yourself to the extent of purchasing the companion papers.

B. Cannon (Abingdon).—A good book on ventriloquism may be obtained from Messrs. Glaisher & Co., Charing-Cross Road, W.C.

W. Kyle and J. Young (Belfast).—I will see what can be done in the matter you mention.

"Six School Girls" (Newcastle).—I will bear in mind what you say. Best wishes.

"Gemite" (Birmingham).—I shall be glad to hear from you at all times.

Norman A. Fletcher (Huddersfield).—Good for you, Norman! I hope you will always be on hand to render good service to the jolly companion papers.

A. P. Robins (Northampton).—I have had no intimation that there are any "Magnet" or "Gem" Leagues flourishing in your town. Your own club strikes me as being quite a creditable affair.

J. Benge (Westminster).—Your letter interested me very much. I agree with you that "The Boy Without a Name," by Frank Richards, contained an excellent moral in teaching a boy to be true to his chums.

F. Byrd (Bridgwater).—A boy of fourteen years of age would probably be placed in the Remove; if an indifferent scholar, the Third. Bunter's parents do not keep a public-house. He is merely taunted to this effect by his humorously-inclined schoolfellows.

The Editor