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TREASURE-TROVE!



BILLY BUNTER'S JOY-RIDE WITH THE TREASURE!

(An Amusing Scene in the Long, Complete School Tale contained in this Number.)

24-5-19



Treasure Trove!

A Magnificent Long, Complete School Story of HARRY WHARTON & CO. AT GREYFRIARS.

BY FRANK RICHARDS.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

In Cellar Cool!

"BEASTS!"

Billy Bunter, of the Greyfriars Remove, made that remark—emphatically.

He was exasperated, and he was alarmed.

It was a half-holiday at Greyfriars, and Harry Wharton & Co., of the Remove, had an appointment in Courtfield. It was a very important appointment—nothing less than meeting some of the Cliff House schoolgirls at the bunshop for tea. Naturally, Billy Bunter had decided to keep that appointment along with the Famous Five. Tea at the bunshop—or anywhere else—had an attraction for Bunter.

Unfortunately, Bunter had no attraction for the Famous Five.

They had started, and Bunter had started after them. But the Co. walked as if for a wager, and Bunter's fat little legs had to go like clockwork to keep pace. Half-way to Courtfield the said legs completely gave out. Billy Bunter slackened, and slowed, and stopped. The Famous Five vanished in the distance at a great rate, and Bunter sat on a grassy bank to rest, and to make remarks. And while he was resting and making remarks Ponsonby and Gadsby, of Highcliffe School, hove in sight—in the offing, so to speak.

Bunter was not glad to see them.

But Pon and Gaddy looked pleased. They were glad to see Bunter. The two nuts of Highcliffe were idle and slacking, as usual; and as the proverb declares, Satan finds work for idle hands. Bunter belonged to Greyfriars, and Pon detested Greyfriars and everything connected with it. And Bunter was a safe subject for a ragging.

"Beasts!" gasped Bunter. "Awful beasts! Rotters! Oh, beasts!"

It was not quite clear whether he was alluding to the departed Removites or to the arriving Highcliffians—perhaps both.

They were all beasts, of varying degrees of beastliness, from Billy Bunter's point of view.

The fat junior scrambled off the grass in a hurry.

He knew what to expect if the Highcliffe nuts collared him. And he blinked round through his big spectacles for a way of escape.

"Beasts!" he gasped. "I'd jolly well lick the pair of them, only—only it's rather too warm for fighting, Rotters!"

I suppose I'd better clear off before they see me! Beasts!"

The fat figure of William George Bunter was visible at a good distance, and the two Highcliffians up the road had already spotted him; but the short-sighted Owl of Greyfriars could not make out their faces, or observe their delighted grins. Under the impression that they had not yet observed him, Bunter plunged across the grass bordering the road to take cover.

Fifty yards or so from the lane were the ruins of a cottage, which had been destroyed by an air raider's bomb during the war. The cottage had never been rebuilt, and only part of the framework of it remained, with masses of wreckage piled amid the tottering walls. Bunter headed for the wrecked building as fast as his fat legs could go.

Ponsonby and Gadsby stopped as they came up to the spot where he had been seated, and looked after him, grinning.

Bunter was pounding across to the cottage, gasping as he went, still under the impression that he was not seen.

"By gad!" Ponsonby burst into a chuckle. "The fat idiot doesn't know we've spotted him. He's goin' to hide till we've passed."

Gadsby chortled.

"None of the other cads in sight, are there?" Ponsonby looked round sharply. He was pleased to see Bunter, but he would have been very sorry to behold Harry Wharton, or Bob Cherry, or Johnny Bull. "The fat bounder seems to be on his own! We'll make an example of him."

"Oh, rather!" agreed Gadsby.

"We'll tie up his leg, and make him hop home, Gaddy."

"You bet!" assented Gaddy.

And the grinning Highcliffians started across the grass after Bunter.

Billy Bunter rolled breathlessly into the ruined cottage, and mopped his fat, perspiring brow when he arrived there.

"Beasts!" he murmured. "I—I wonder whether they've passed yet? If they see me—Beasts!"

The fat junior blinked cautiously through a chink in the tottering wall. Then he jumped.

Ponsonby and Gaddy were heading straight for the cottage, with grinning faces. They were within a dozen yards.

"Oh, crumbs!" gasped Bunter. "The beasts know I'm here!"

He blinked wildly round for a place of concealment.

But the shaky walls and masses of lumber offered no hiding-place. It was

useless to take to his heels; he knew he would be run down in a couple of minutes. Bunter was at his wits' end when, his vision sharpened, perhaps by danger, he observed a trapdoor in the floor, close by the crumbling wreck of a little wooden staircase.

The fat junior made a jump at the trapdoor, and dragged it up.

It evidently gave admission to a cellar, and it was a case of any port in a storm. The cellar did not look inviting, but it was all the safer as a refuge on that account, for the Highcliffe nuts were very particular about their clothes, and they were not likely to pursue their victim among dirt and dust and beetles.

Bunter blinked down into the dark orifice below in search of steps. But there were no steps to be seen. No doubt a ladder had existed once, for descent into the cellar; but if so, it was gone now. But he made out the brick flooring about six or seven feet below.

He hesitated.

But the footsteps of the Highcliffe nuts were close at hand now, and Cecil Ponsonby's voice was heard.

"Hallo, Bunter! Show yourself, you fat frog!"

Bunter hesitated no longer.

He caught the edge of the opening with his fat hands and swung down. As Ponsonby and Gadsby came tramping into the cottage, Bunter dropped. It was a short drop, but the fat junior rolled over as he landed, and crashed on a heap of lumber in a corner of the little, earthy cellar. There was a loud clink as he did so. Clink, clink! came again, as the fat junior rolled off the heap.

The footsteps of the two juniors rang above.

"Where is he?"

"By gad! The fat owl's vanished!"

"Beasts!" murmured Bunter breathlessly.

"Where are you, Bunter?" roared Ponsonby. "We know you're here somewhere, you fat duffer! Show yourself!"

Bunter kept as still as a mouse when the cat is nigh, hoping that the Highcliffians would overlook the open trap. But that was not likely. There was a shout from Gadsby.

"He's down there!"

Two grinning faces looked down at Bunter. The fat junior blinked up at them.

"Run to earth!" grinned Ponsonby.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I—I—I say, you fellows—" stammered Bunter.

"Come up at once!" commanded Ponsonby.

"Oh, really, you know—"

"Do you want us to come down after you?"

"I—I say, you'll make your clothes dirty, you know!" gasped Bunter. "It—it's awfully dirty down here—fairly reeking! Lots of spiders and things! And—and slugs! And—and lots of things!"

Ponsonby sniffed. He certainly had no intention of soiling his elegant "clobber" in the cellar. Bunter was of the earth earthy, as it were, after his roll on the floor, and the elegant Pon did not want to get into the same state.

"Come up, or we'll come down for you!" he said sternly.

"I—I'd come up with pleasure, old chap, to oblige you!" gasped Bunter. "I—I'd do anything for a fellow I really like. But—"

"Well, come up."

"I—I can't!"

"Why can't you, you fat fraud?"

"You see, there ain't any steps," explained Bunter.

"There's a ladder down there," said Gadsby. "There used to be one—it was there when I looked into the place once."

"There isn't any ladder here," said Bunter. "I say, you fellows, there isn't, really, you know!"

"Then how are you going to get out?" demanded Ponsonby.

Bunter started.

That consideration had not occurred to his fat mind.

In his haste to escape the ragers he had been thinking only of getting away from them—not of getting out of the cellar afterwards.

He gave a cry of dismay.

"Oh crumbs! I—I say, you fellows, you—you'll have to help me out!" he stammered.

"Let's help him out, and we'll jolly well wallop him!" said Gadsby.

"Good! Give me your paw, Bunter, and I'll help you up!"

"I—I say, you fellows, make it pax, you know—"

"Ha, ha! No fear!"

Bunter blinked up, and the Highcliffians grinned down. The unfortunate Owl of the Remove was in a fix. If the Highcliffians helped him out, the ragging was inevitable; and if they didn't, he was a helpless prisoner in the cellar under the lonely cottage.

The dismay in his fat face made the Highcliffians yell.

"I—I say, you fellows—"

"Let's leave him there!" chuckled Gadsby. "No bizney of ours if a fat frog falls into a cellar!"

"Ha, ha! Not at all!"

"Good-bye, Bunter!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The two grinning faces disappeared from above. Bunter uttered a yell.

"I—I say, you fellows—come back, you know! Help me out, old chaps! Oh, you beasts! I say, old fellows—Yah! Rotters!"

The footsteps of Ponsonby and Gadsby died away. Those two cheery youths walked on to Highcliffe in a merry mood, leaving the Owl of the Remove to deal with the situation as best he could. Bunter's voice from the cellar followed them.

"Beasts!"

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Treasure-trove!

"Oh crumbs!"
William George Bunter sat down on the lumber in the cellar and almost wept. He had been in the cellar an hour

now, and he was tired of it—quite tired. But his efforts to escape had been fruitless.

There was no possible means of reaching the opening above his head. It was not more than eighteen inches above the tips of his fingers, but it might as well have been eighteen leagues. There was nothing in the cellar to stand upon to raise him to the required level. The lumber piled in the corner was merely wreckage from above—fragments of stairs, and boards, and utensils. If Bunter had been thinking of anything but his own uncomfortable position it might have struck him as curious that anyone had taken the trouble to pile that useless timber in the cellar. But W. G. Bunter was thinking only of himself—and tea-time.

"The awful rotters!" moaned Bunter. He was thinking of Harry Wharton & Co. now. "They've had tea by this time—and I'm hungry! Beasts! Just because they're jealous of a chap's good looks—beasts! Marjorie won't really enjoy her tea without me there—and

It was a thick, strong sack, and it was crammed full of something—something that clinked as it was jolted.

"My only hat!"

Bunter dragged the sack clear and examined it. The neck was looped up with cord, knotted, evidently with care.

Bunter's little round eyes grew larger behind his glasses.

Clink, clink!

His fat fingers were quickly at work on the cord. The sack clinked musically as it jolted. In a few minutes the cord was loose, and Bunter opened the sack. That he had made a curious discovery he knew, and he was intensely curious to know what was in the hidden sack. But as his eyes fell upon the contents he fairly gasped.

There was a glimmer of silver in the dusk of the cellar.

With a trembling hand Bunter drew out of the sack a handsome silver dish. He did not know much about such things, but he knew that the dish must be of considerable value. And it was only one of many. The sack was crammed with such



Peter Todd scrambled out of bed and seized his pillow. Billy Bunter heard him, and quaked. "Wha-a-at are you up to, Peter? Yaroooooh!"
(See Chapter 5.)

Clara will be down in the dumps—sure to be! They won't care, the rotters, so long as they keep me off the grass!"

Clink, clink!

Again came that metallic clinking from under the fat junior as he moved. It struck his attention at last.

He blinked round him in the dusky cellar.

Clink, clink!

"What the dickens is it?" mumbled Bunter peevishly. "I don't see what this rubbish was chucked down here for; it doesn't belong to the place. Bits of old stairs and things, and rags of carpet. Some chap must have been in want of something to do!"

Clink, clink!

"Old saucepans, or kettles, I suppose! What the thump were they brought down here for, I wonder? They're not worth keeping. Besides, nobody lives here!"

Bunter's curiosity was roused at last.

He pulled aside some of the fragments of lumber to see what it was that clinked as he sat on it, and to his astonished eyes a large sack was disclosed.

articles—dishes, stands, boxes—all of gleaming silver.

Billy Bunter gasped for breath.

"Oh dear! What—what—"

He blinked at the sack of silver.

"Hundreds of pounds!" he stuttered.

It was "treasure-trove," and no mistake. How that sack of silver goods had come to be hidden in the lonely cellar was a mystery to Bunter. He simply could not understand it. But it was there, and he had found it. And Bunter's view of such matters was that findings were keepings.

His round eyes gloated over the precious hoard.

"Hundreds of pounds!" he repeated.

"I—I say, it's mine! I found it! I—I wonder whom it belongs to—I—I mean, whom it did belong to? Hundreds of pounds! I—I dare say it belonged to the people who lived here; and I dare say they were all killed in the air-raids—and—and the stuff hasn't any owner now. It belongs to the finder!"

Even Bunter realised that it was im-

probable that such a mass of valuable silver could have belonged to the dwellers in a poor cottage—and he had no reason whatever for supposing that the cottagers had perished in the air-raid of a couple of years ago; but what Bunter wanted was an excuse for annexing the plunder, and any excuse was better than none.

"It's mine!" he repeated. "Hundreds of pounds! Oh, my hat! All mine!"

Bunter's expression grew beatific.

Hundreds of pounds—all his! His fat mind revelled in visions of unlimited tuck! The steepest of war-prices did not matter to a fellow who had that horn of plenty to draw upon. Bunter had often argued with Mrs. Mible, at the school shop, that now the war was over it was time that war-prices were over, too. It had been a very serious matter, in his opinion, though Mrs. Mible had not seemed to see it. But now that was a mere trifle. What did war-prices matter? With hundreds of pounds to draw upon, he could buy up the school shop, if he liked!

Quite forgetful of his position, and that he had not yet solved the question of escape from the cellar, Billy Bunter gloated over his discovery.

Clink, clink!

The silver clinked musically as he handled it, examining article after article.

But it was growing darker and darker in the cellar, and inward pangs brought Bunter back to a realisation of the position at last. He had found the wherewithal to buy up the school shop—but he was a prisoner in the cellar, and he was hungry.

He blinked up at the opening above, which was dusky now, as the sun sank lower in the sky.

"Oh dear! How am I going to get out?" he mumbled.

There was nothing for it but to shout for help, in the hope that some passer on the road would hear him and come to the rescue. Bunter had tried that already in vain; but there was nothing for it but to try again. The cottage was a good fifty yards from the road, and it was unlikely that he would be heard by anyone passing, and still more unlikely that anyone would visit the destroyed cottage. With renewed alarm—all the sharper because he was getting ferociously hungry—Bunter realised that he was in a serious scrape, in spite of the treasure he had found.

He re-packed all the silver-ware into the sack carefully before he began to use his fat lungs. If help came, he did not want his treasure to be seen. The rescuer might demand "halves!" He corded up the sack again with great care, and rolled it back into the corner. It was not large enough for him to stand upon to reach the opening overhead. Bunter covered it up carefully with the fragments of lumber. He understood, now, why that rubbish had been piled in the cellar.

Then, standing under the trap, he began to shout.

"Help! Help! Rescue!"

His shouts rang and echoed in the cellar, and through the ruined cottage above, but they did not reach the distant road.

He shouted and shouted till he was breathless and fatigued, as the darkness deepened.

But there was no answering voice, no welcome footstep.

He desisted at last, exhausted and furious.

"Ow! Oh dear!" he mumbled. "It's past calling-over now, and even those beasts won't come home this way—they're sure to take the girls back to Cliff House!"

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Oh dear! I—I shall be out all night—ow!—I shall get a licking from the Head—wow! I'm hungry!"

The last glimmer of light was long gone, and Bunter was in darkness—and doleful dumps. At that awful moment he would have given the sack of silver for one good square meal.

When he recovered his wind he shouted again, dismally. But only the echo of his voice answered him.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Where is Bunter?

"HALLO, hallo, hallo! Just in time!"

Harry Wharton & Co. came up to the gates of Greyfriars as Gosling came out of his lodge. The five juniors hurried in, and Bob Cherry bestowed a genial grin upon the school porter.

"Sorry, old chap!" he remarked.

Gosling blinked at him.

"Wotcher sorry for, Master Cherry?" he asked.

"It's too bad," continued Bob. "Another minute and you could have locked us out, old chap. Sorry!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The sorrowfulness is terrific, my esteemed and grumpy Gosling!" remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

Gosling grunted.

"It's too bad, Gossy!" grinned Frank Nugent. "Another time, old infant!"

Grunt!

The cheery chums of the Remove trotted away across the dusky quad, leaving Gosling to close the gates—which he did with an emphatic bang.

"I wonder where Bunter got to?" remarked Johnny Bull, as they headed for the School House. "He never arrived in Courtfield."

"Crocked up by the wayside!" said Bob. "Poor old Bunter! I dare say he's still lying there, waiting for some Good Samaritan to come by and pick him up."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The sad picture drawn by Bob Cherry did not seem to sadden the cheery five. They chortled.

"He must have turned back," said Harry Wharton. "We shall find him indoors—wrathy! We shall be in Bunter's black books after this."

"Alas!" sighed Bob.

"Just in time, you fellows!" said Vernon-Smith, as the Famous Five came into the School House. "Quelchy's taking call-over. Buck up!"

Harry Wharton & Co. joined the stream of fellows making for Hall, where the master of the Remove was to take the roll-call. They glanced round, as they joined the rest of the Remove, for William George Bunter. But he was not to be seen.

After losing sight of the fat junior on the Courtfield road that afternoon, the chums of the Remove had given him hardly a thought. They had only been thankful that Bunter had not arrived at the bunshop while they were having tea with Marjorie and Clara and Barbara. Billy Bunter was not persona grata with the Cliff House girls. After tea the Co. had escorted their girl chums home to Cliff House, and returned across the fields, just in time for calling-over. They had expected to find William George Bunter there, with wrathful and reproachful looks. But he was not there.

"Hasn't Bunter come in, Toddy?"

Harry Wharton asked, addressing the fat junior's study-mate.

"Blessed-if I know," answered Peter Todd. "Haven't seen him. He wasn't in to tea."

"Have you seen him, Dutton?"

Tom Dutton, the deaf junior, looked round as Wharton tapped him on the elbow.

"Eh?" he said.

"Have you seen Bunter since tea?"

"Eh? Who?"

"Bunter—your study-mate, you know?"

"What rot!" answered Dutton, with a stare. "Quelchy hasn't begun to take the roll yet. I'm not late!"

"Oh, my hat! Have you seen Billy Bunter lately?" howled Wharton.

"Do you mean Quelchy? I've never noticed specially that he's stately," answered Dutton. "But suppose he is—what about it?"

"Oh dear!"

"Bunter!" bawled Bob Cherry, putting his head close to Dutton. "Where's Billy Bunter?"

"Oh, Bunter! I don't know—haven't seen him. And you needn't shout at me, Bob Cherry—I'm not deaf!"

"Phew!"

"Mind your eye!" murmured Redwing. "Quelchy's looking this way."

The Remove-master was about to take the roll. When he came to Bunter's name there was no answer.

"Bunter!" repeated Mr. Quelch sharply. "Bunter!"

Silence.

Mr. Quelch glanced over the Remove, and marked down W. G. Bunter as absent. Sammy Bunter glanced round from among the fags of the Second, wondering what had become of his fat major. William George did not come in, and the fellows were dismissed. In the passage Harry Wharton tapped Sammy of the Second on the shoulder.

"Where's your major, Sammy?" he asked.

The fat fag shook his head.

"Blessed if I know—or care!" he answered, with the brotherly affection that was so marked in the Bunter family.

"Haven't you seen him lately?"

"I saw him rolling after you chaps this afternoon," grinned Sammy. "What have you done with him?"

"We left him on the road."

"Perhaps he's still there!" grinned Sammy.

And Bunter minor rolled away, displaying a plentiful lack of interest in Bunter major's fate.

"The silly ass!" said Bob Cherry. "He's late, and he'll get a wiggling from Quelchy when he comes in. Quelchy doesn't like a chap missing call-over."

Harry Wharton looked thoughtful for a moment. But it seemed impossible that any accident could have happened to Bunter, in the broad daylight; and Bunter had been late for call-over before, many a time.

Harry Wharton and Frank Nugent were at prep in Study No. 1, some time later, when Peter Todd looked in.

"Not finished yet," said Harry, without looking up.

"Bunter's not come in," said Peter.

Wharton looked up then.

"My hat! It's half-past eight!" he said. "Not in yet?"

Peter wrinkled his brows.

"I hope the fat duffer hasn't got walked over by a motor-car, or anything like that," he said. "I suppose he ought to be looked for if he doesn't come in soon."

"We should have heard if there'd been an accident," said Nugent. "Somebody would telephone."

"Yes, I suppose so; but it's queer he doesn't come in, all the same!"

Peter went thoughtfully back to his study. Billy Bunter was rather a trial in No. 7; and Peter did not feel exactly affectionate towards him, but he had rather a sense of responsibility towards his fat study-mate.

After prep. when the juniors came down from their studies, there was a good deal of comment upon the subject of Bunter's absence. The Owl of the Remove had not turned up.

"Run over, most likely!" Skinner suggested, quite cheerfully. "He's jolly short-sighted, you know—just the idiot to walk right into a motor-car. He'll come home on an ambulance."

"Oh, dry up!" grunted Bob Cherry.

"Wharton!" Wingate of the Sixth looked into the Common-room. "Mr. Quelch wishes to speak to you!"

"Yes, Wingate."

Harry Wharton repaired to the Remove-master's study, where he found Mr. Quelch with a frowning brow.

"Bunter has not come in yet?" asked the Form-master.

"No, sir."

"It is very odd. I understand that he went out with you and your friends this afternoon?"

"Ahem! He was coming after us, sir, but we lost sight of him on the Courtfield road—near the old cottage," said Harry.

Buzz-z-z-z-z!

Mr. Quelch's telephone-bell rang as he was about to speak again. He signed to Wharton to wait, and picked up the receiver.

"Hallo!"

"Hallo!" came through the telephone. "Is that Greyfriars?"

"Yes—Mr. Quelch speaking!"

"Have you lost a porpoise?"

"Wha-a-at?"

"Porpoise."

"I do not understand. No such animal as a porpoise is kept at Greyfriars," answered the astonished Form-master. "So far as I am aware, no animal at all belonging to the school has been lost."

"Ha, ha! I mean a porpoise named Bunter."

"Bless my soul! Who is speaking?"

"If you've lost your porpoise, I can give you a tip."

Mr. Quelch frowned over the transmitter.

"If you can tell me where Bunter is, I shall be much obliged," he said coldly. "I will pass over this extremely reprehensible form of address. Can you give me any information regarding Bunter?"

"I saw a porpoise wandering on the Courtfield road this afternoon," replied the voice. "I think it fell into the cellar of the old cottage—the place that was mucked up by the Huns. I shouldn't wonder if it's still there. Ta-ta, old top!"

"Really! Upon my word! Who is speaking?" exclaimed Mr. Quelch.

There was no reply. His unknown interlocutor had rung off. Mr. Quelch put up the receiver with a grim brow, and turned to Wharton.

"Someone has just stated that Bunter fell into the cellar of the old cottage near the Courtfield road, Wharton," he said abruptly. "You say it was near that spot that you saw him last?"

"Yes, sir."

"Doubtless, then, this information is correct, though couched in very disrespectful language. I must send for the foolish boy. Kindly ask Wingate to come here."

"We would go for Bunter, sir, if you choose—"

Mr. Quelch shook his head.

"As the hour is late, Wharton, I think it would be better to ask a prefect to go. Please speak to Wingate."

"Very well, sir."

Harry Wharton retired, rather relieved in his mind about Bunter, and wondering who it was that had given the information regarding the "porpoise." Five

minutes later Wingate and Gwynne of the Sixth Form started for the lonely cottage to the rescue of Billy Bunter.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Rescuing Bunter!

"HELP!"
A glimmer of light in the gloom struck upon Billy Bunter's eyes in the cellar under the old cottage, and he howled at once. Somebody was at hand.

Bunter had had a most unenviable sojourn in the cellar. He had shouted till he was hoarse and husky, but in vain. Nobody had come near enough to the ruined cottage to hear his cries. The fat junior had given it up, and seated himself on the lumber over the sack to wait.

It was a weary wait.

Bunter's nerve was not of the strongest, and the knowledge that the spot was a very lonely one filled him with uneasy terrors. The darkness was peopled with dangerous shadows to his uneasy eyes. And as he waited in the deep gloom another thought troubled him—that of the unknown personage who had hidden the sack of silver there! Suppose that unknown person came along and found Bunter there!

Bunter preferred to believe that the silver had no owner—which, according to his peculiar views, would justify him in keeping it. But deep down in his consciousness, somewhere, he knew that it was most probable that the treasure was loot—hidden there by a thief. There was, indeed, no other way of accounting for it—and though Bunter was determined to believe that the silver was his because he had found it, he could not help dreading the possible arrival of a gentleman of the Bill Sikes variety. And if such a gentleman found Bunter there, sitting on his loot, what was likely to happen to the Owl of the Remove? The thought of being knocked on the head with a jemmy was distinctly uncomfortable.

Bunter waited—and quaked—and waited!

He felt that it was impossible that Ponsonby could intend to leave him there all night—the cad of Highcliffe was hard-hearted enough, but he would not venture to such a limit. He was sure to give information sooner or later, so that Bunter could be found—surely before bed-time. Bunter had to wait till he was searched for, and he could only hope that Bill Sikes would not drop in before the searchers from Greyfriars.

The glimmer of lantern-light above the opening brought hope to his breast. He jumped up and shouted.

But as his shout rang through the cellar his terrors returned upon him. Suppose it wasn't the searchers he expected, after all! Suppose it was Bill Sikes coming back for his hidden loot?

The thought made Bunter shiver.

Footsteps sounded above him in the cottage.

"Oh dear!" groaned Bunter. "I—I say, I'm not here, you know! I haven't seen anything here! I don't know anything about the sack!"

"Bunter!"

"Oh! Wingate!"

The music of the spheres could not have sounded so sweetly in Bunter's fat ears at that moment as the voice of George Wingate of the Sixth Form at Greyfriars—though Wingate's voice, in itself, was not particularly musical.

"Bunter! Are you here?"

"Here I am, Wingate!" yelled the fat junior. "Help!"

The bike-lantern glimmered down into the cellar. The faces of George Wingate and Patrick Gwynne appeared beside it.

"Oh, there you are, are you?" growled Wingate.

"Yes, please, Wingate!" quavered Bunter. "Starving!"

"Are you injured?"

"Oh, yes, fearfully! Bruised all over," said Bunter, with the idea of evoking sympathy. "Covered with awful bruises and bumps, Wingate. I think my neck's broken, too!"

"What?"

"I—I mean, my arm. And I've sprained both my ankles," said Bunter pathetically.

"Sure, it's a fat little loiar ye are!" remarked Gwynne. "Ye're not hurrt at all, at ail!"

"Oh, really, Gwynne—"

"How did you get there?" demanded Wingate.

"That beast Ponsonby of Highcliffe was after me!"

"Oh! Well, put up your paw, and I'll help you out," said Wingate. "Hold the lantern, Gwynne."

"Sure, ye'll niver pull him out, George darling, unless it's a steam-derrick ye are!"

"Hum!" Wingate looked down dubiously at Bunter. He certainly was a good weight to pull up, even for the stalwart captain of Greyfriars. "Perhaps I'd better drop in and bunk up the little beast."

Bunter started.

"Oh no! Don't!" he ejaculated. "D-d-don't come down into the cellar, Wingate! Oh no!"

"Why not?"

"Because—because— You—you see—" stammered Bunter, rather at a loss what reason to give. He certainly did not intend to give the real reason—that he was afraid of Wingate noticing the pile of fragments and what was concealed under it.

"What on earth are you babbling about?" exclaimed Wingate impatiently. "Stand clear while I drop in."

"I—I say, Wingate, it—it's rather dirty down here—"

"Stand clear!"

"And there's a lot of spiders—"

"Do you want me to drop on your silly head?" roared Wingate. "If you don't, stand clear, you young ass!"

"Oh dear!"

Wingate's long legs were swinging into the opening, while Gwynne held the light, and Bunter had to stand clear. He jumped back, and the captain of Greyfriars dropped lightly into the cellar.

Bunter stood between him and the rubbish in the corner; but to his relief Wingate did not even glance towards it.

"Now, then!" said the prefect gruffly.

He grasped Billy Bunter, and "bunked" him up. Gwynne gave a hand from above, and the fat junior was hauled out of the cellar, and landed on the floor above, gasping like a very fat fish.

"Ow!" he gasped. "Yow! You needn't have choked me! Ow! Wharrer you grab me like that for, Gwynne? Yow!"

"It's a thankless little baste ye are!" said Gwynne. "Shut up! Can I lend ye a hand, Wingate?"

"I—I say, come up quick, Wingate!" gasped Bunter. "D-d-don't stay down there, you know. There's spiders, and—and—"

"I can manage, Paddy," said the Greyfriars captain.

He jumped, and caught hold of the edge of the flooring, and pulled himself out of the cellar, much to Bunter's relief.

"Better close the trap, or somebody will be falling in," he remarked.

"Yes, rather!" said Bunter eagerly.

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"And there was a beam on the trap when I opened it. Better put it back."

"That doesn't matter."

"I—I say, it does, you know. It will make the place look just as it was when I found it—"

Wingate stared at him.

"What does it matter what it looks like?" he demanded.

"I—I say, you know, suppose—suppose somebody came along, and—and saw it, you see, then he wouldn't know anybody had been here—see?"

"What does it matter, you fat duffer?"

"Oh! Of—of course it doesn't matter at all!" gasped Bunter. "Not in the slightest, of course. Not a bit!"

"Sure, the fat idiot's brain must have been turned, sitting there in the dark!" said Gwynne, in wonder.

Wingate replaced the trap.

"Come away, Bunter!" he said.

"Just a minute, Wingate!"

Bunter dragged the beam across the trap. He had found it there, and he wanted to restore the place to its original appearance—for reasons of his own. If Bill Sikes came back to visit his loot, Bunter did not want him to know the den had been visited by strangers. Mr. Sikes, in that case, was certain to remove his plunder to another and safer quarter. Bunter's actions, in fact, proved that he was, in his heart of hearts, quite well aware how the silver goods must have come there, though at the same time he was quite determined to believe that the treasure-trove had no owner, and was his for the finding.

The beam fell across the trap with a bump as Wingate's finger and thumb closed on Bunter's fat ear.

"Yooop!" roared Bunter. "Leggo!"

"Come away, you little idiot!"

"Ow! Wow! I'm coming, ain't I?" wailed Bunter.

And he came.

The two Sixth-Formers strode back towards Greyfriars, with the fat junior toddling after them. The great men of the Sixth did not deign to take any further notice of Bunter's existence. It was bed-time for the juniors when they reached the school, and Bunter had just time to report himself to Mr. Quelch, and join the Removites as they went to their dormitory.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Keeping the Secret!

BOB CHERRY greeted the Owl of on the shoulder, which elicited a the Remove with a powerful clap howl from the fat junior.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! So you've turned up?"

"Yow-ow!"

"What's the matter?"

"You silly chump!" howled Bunter.

"You've busted my shoulder!"

"What rot!" said Bob cheerfully. "I only gave you a smack like—"

Bunter dodged in time.

"Where have you been, you owl?" demanded Peter Todd, as the fat junior rolled into the dormitory.

"Nowhere!" answered Bunter promptly.

"What?"

"I—I mean, anywhere!" stammered Bunter.

Billy Bunter had a secret to keep. He had his own ways of keeping secrets. A dozen juniors regarded him curiously as he made that surprising reply to Peter.

"Nowhere and anywhere!" repeated Squiff.

"Ye-es, exactly. I—I mean—"

"Didn't Wingate find you at the old cottage?" asked Harry Wharton.

"Certainly not!"

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"I thought you were there," said Harry, in surprise.

"Blessed if I know why you should think so!" answered Bunter peevishly. "I haven't been anywhere near the old cottage, that I know of. In fact, I don't know where there is such a place."

"Well, my hat!"

"But somebody telephoned to Quelch that you were there!" exclaimed the captain of the Remove.

"Oh, that rotter Ponsonby, of course! I knew he wouldn't dare to leave me there all night!"

"Then you have been there?" exclaimed Peter Todd.

"No, I haven't!"

"But you said that Ponsonby wouldn't dare to leave you there all night!" shrieked Peter.

"Well, he wouldn't, either!" answered Bunter. "There'd have been a jolly row if he had. The Head would have complained at Highcliffe about it."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I see what you fellows are cackling at!"

"How could he leave you there all night if you weren't there, you fathead?" roared Bolsover major.

"He—he—he couldn't, of course," stammered Bunter. "I—I meant to say that—that he couldn't! See? Besides, he didn't."

"Well, my hat! Where did Wingate find you?" asked Hazeldene.

"He didn't find me at all," answered Bunter promptly. "I—I just met Wingate as I was—was strolling home."

"From where?" inquired Ogilvy.

"Nowhere in particular. I was—was just taking a stroll. It—it was such a pleasant evening, you know. Nice spring evening."

"You stayed out hours after calling-over to take an evening stroll?" yelled Ogilvy.

"Ye-es, exactly."

"The whopperfulness is terrific!" remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "But what is the whyfulness of the whoppers?"

"Oh, really, Inky—"

"Blessed if I can see what he is rolling out these thumping lies for!" said Peter Todd, in wonder.

"Look here, Peter—"

"You fat chump, if you'd stayed out without reason, Quelch would have skinned you!" said Peter. "Where have you been?"

"Did Quelch lick you?" asked Bob.

"Certainly not! It wasn't my fault I was bunged up in the cellar, was it?" demanded Bunter warmly.

"Then you were in the cellar?"

"Oh no!" ejaculated Bunter. "Not at all! Did I say cellar?"

"Yes, you did, you fat fraud!"

"I—I wonder what made me say cellar?" gasped Bunter. "I—I didn't mean cellar at all. Don't you fellows run away with the idea that I've been in a cellar. I haven't, you know!"

"Then where have you been?" roared Johnny Bull.

"The—the fact is, I—I dropped in at Cliff House to see Marjorie," stammered Bunter. "I—I thought she'd feel it rather, you know, not seeing me at Courtfield, so I strolled over—"

"You fat fraud, we've been to Cliff House, and you weren't there!" exclaimed Nugent.

"Oh dear! I—I mean, I—I didn't go to Cliff House, Nugent! That's what I really meant to say."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You awful chump!" said Harry Wharton. "You were shut up in the old cottage, and I suppose it was Ponsonby who shut you up there. Why can't you say so?"

"If you doubt my word, Wharton—"

"Your word! Oh, my hat!"

"I decline to discuss the matter with a fellow who doubts my word," said the fat junior, with dignity. "I'm rather surprised at you, Wharton. You're suspicious. That's low!"

"Oh, squash him, somebody!" said the captain of the Remove.

"Why on earth can't you tell us what you've been up to, Bunter?" asked Snoop curiously.

"I don't mind telling you," said Bunter. "I don't want you to fancy I'm keeping any secrets. I'm not, you know. Nothing of that kind. The fact of the matter is this—" Bunter paused a moment, apparently to invent the fact of the matter before he proceeded.

"Now, look out for an extra thumping whopper!" murmured Bob Cherry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, really Cherry! The—the fact of the matter is this. I—I took a stroll on Courtfield Common, and—and lost my way. Walking home, I fell in—"

"Into the cellar?"

"Nunno! I fell in with Wingate."

"What rot!" said Squiff. "Wingate wouldn't fall into a cellar."

"I fell in with Wingate walking, I mean," yelled Bunter. "You know what I mean, you silly ass! I fell in with him, and we walked home together in a friendly way. I'm rather friendly with Wingate, you know."

"Are you?" asked a deep voice in the doorway.

Bunter spun round and blinked at the captain of Greyfriars, who had come to see lights out. There was a chuckle from the Removites. Wingate had arrived just in time to hear that the Owl of the Remove was rather friendly with him, which was probably rather surprising news to the Greyfriars captain.

"Oh!" gasped Bunter. "Is—is—is that you, Wingate?"

"Yes, you cheeky young rascal! So you're rather friendly with me, are you?" grunted Wingate.

"Nunno! Certainly not!" stammered Bunter. "I—I wouldn't be friendly with you for anything, Wingate!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Wingate grinned.

"Turn in, and give your silly jaw a rest, Bunter," he said.

"I say, Wingate," called out Skinner. "Bunter won't tell us where you found him. Is it a secret?"

"Not that I know of. He was in the cellar under the burnt cottage off the Courtfield road. Some Highcliffe chaps shut him up there, I believe."

"Well, my hat!" said Peter Todd.

"Why couldn't he tell us?"

Wingate put out the light and left the dormitory. Then there was a howl of questions addressed to Billy Bunter.

"Bunter, you fraud—"

"Bunter, you Ananias—"

"Why couldn't you tell us, you lying Hun?"

"I—I say, you fellows, Wingate's mistaken!" gasped Bunter. "He—he must have dreamed that, you know. I—I haven't been anywhere near the cottage, and I've never seen any Highcliffe chaps, and I didn't drop into the cellar because Pon and Gaddy were after me, and they didn't walk away and leave me there, for—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Of course, if I'd met Pon and Gaddy I should have mopped them up!" said Bunter. "You fellows know that. I'm not the chap to turn tail, I hope."

"Oh, so that's it!" said Peter. "You've been rolling out all these lies so as to keep it dark that you showed funk!"

"Oh, really, Peter—"

Peter Todd scrambled out of bed and

seized his pillow. Billy Bunter heard him, and quaked.

"I—I say, Peter——"

"I'm coming!"

"Wha-a-at are you up to, Peter? Yaroooooh!"

Whack!

"That's for telling lies!" said Peter.

"Yaroooh!"

Whack!

"That's for showing the white feather——"

"Yooooop!"

Whack!

"And that's for luck!"

"Help!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Peter Todd returned to bed feeling that he had done his duty as Bunter's study-mate and keeper, so to speak. Bunter was feeling as if the dutiful Peter had overdone his duty.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Legal Advice!

WILLIAM GEORGE BUNTER wore a thoughtful expression on his fat brow the next morning in the Remove Form-room.

His thoughtfulness was not caused by any unusual attention to lessons. It was not even caused by the fact that Mr. Quelch rated him sharply for inattention.

Bunter was thinking of the treasure at the lonely cottage, and he was dreaming golden dreams; or perhaps it would be more correct to say silver dreams.

The sack of silver hidden under the rubbish in the cottage cellar haunted his thoughts.

On the principle that findings were keepings, that silver belonged to W. G. Bunter. W. G. B. was quite decided upon that point. He could not help having a lingering doubt whether some gentlemen of the Sikes variety might not have hidden it there; but he determinedly banished that doubt from his mind. For if the silver was stolen property, Bunter clearly had no right to lay his paws upon it. He was resolved to lay his paws upon it. Therefore the silver could not possibly be stolen property. That was the Bunter method of reasoning. Which was good enough for Billy Bunter, but was not, unluckily, likely to be good enough for the police if they became concerned in the matter.

But the obtuse Owl of the Remove did not think so far as that. Whether the silver-ware had been hidden there by an unknown burglar, or whether it had belonged to the former occupants of the cottage, the fact remained that it was there, and that Bunter had found it, and that he wanted it! And Bunter's sense of logic was very accommodating. He could always reason it out that he had a right to an article if he wanted it.

It was settled that the silver was Bunter's—entirely to Bunter's satisfaction. But some difficulties remained. Disposing of it was not likely to be easy. Admitting for a moment the bare possibility that it had been stolen, it would not be safe to take it to a pawnbroker's. Pawnbrokers asked such awkward questions sometimes. And it would look odd—not to say suspicious—for a schoolboy to walk into a shop with a silver tankard or fruit-dish to sell. Bunter felt that he had to walk warily. Unless he was very circumspect, it might even be supposed that he had not come by that silver honestly—an idea which naturally made the fat junior feel indignant.

The silver had to be removed to a place of greater safety. That was evidently the first step to be taken. If it was left where it was some dishonest person might come along and find it, and actually

take it! There were dishonest persons like that in the world, Bunter reflected rather bitterly.

Disposing of it was a more difficult matter. It was a problem the Owl of the Remove had to think out. Thinking it out during morning lessons earned him two or three raps from Mr. Quelch's pointer.

Bunter was sucking his fat knuckles ruefully when the Removites came out after morning classes.

Harry Wharton & Co. turned their steps in the direction of the junior cricket-ground. Peter Todd was following them, when Bunter joined him.

"I say, Peter, old chap——" he began.

"Well, fatty?"

Bunter blinked at him thoughtfully. Peter, as the son of a solicitor, was supposed to have a knowledge of the law equal to Sam Weller's knowledge of London, which was extensive and peculiar. Bunter would have been very glad to learn the exact legal aspect of the matter without revealing the facts to his legal adviser.

worth knowing. I can tell you exactly what sentence you'll get if you're caught. What have you done?"

"You silly ass!" roared Bunter. "I haven't done anything!"

"My mistake. I mean, whom have you done?"

"Oh, really, Peter, I wish you'd be serious! This is a serious matter. Mind, I'm only putting a case," added Bunter hastily.

Peter Todd looked at the fat junior very curiously. He had his bat under his arm, but he gave up considerations of cricket for the moment. Peter was sharp enough to see that there was something unusual "on."

"Well," he said, "let's hear it. Have you committed a murder?"

"No, you fathead!"

"If you have——"

"I haven't!" shrieked Bunter.

"If you have, the first thing to do is to hide the body. Unless the body is found, it's very difficult to convict. If you've been giving some unhappy girl the glad eye with fatal effects——"



"I'm going to give you what you want!" grinned Coker. He spun Bunter to the doorway, spun him round, and brought a heavy boot into play. The Owl of the Remove shot into the passage. (See Chapter 11.)

Or, to be more exact, he would have been glad to hear that he had a legal right to do what he had already determined to do.

"I say, Peter, old chap," repeated Bunter, "you're an awfully clever fellow——"

"Quite so," agreed Peter. "It's the first time you've noticed it; but you can't help being an ass, I suppose. You're getting quite bright, Bunter."

"Oh, really, Peter——"

"Clever is the word," said Todd blandly. "Too clever, in fact, to cash a postal-order for you in advance, my fat tulip. Ask some less clever person."

"I—I say, it's not a postal-order——"

"What! Aren't you expecting a postal-order from one of your titled relations?" exclaimed Peter, in astonishment.

"Nunno!"

"Oh crikey!" said Peter.

"I was going to ask your advice, Peter—legal advice."

"I'm your man!" said Peter at once.

"What I don't know about the law isn't

"You chump!" howled Bunter. "I haven't!"

"I hope it's not bigamy!" said Peter severely. "I hope, Bunter, that even you will draw the line at that."

"You silly idiot——"

"That's not the way to speak to a legal adviser. Buck up with the confession. If it's not murder or bigamy, what is it? Have you stolen a rabbit-pie?"

"I haven't done anything!" howled Bunter. "I'm simply putting a case. Suppose a fellow found something—say, suppose he found a million pounds," said Bunter.

"Pounds of what?"

"Money, you ass!"

"Oh, suppose a fellow found a million pounds sterling!" said Peter. "That wants some supposing. But suppose he did. What then?"

"Well, what would you advise him to do?"

"I'd advise him to get out of the bank before the night-watchman found him there."

"I don't mean in a bank. I mean—anywhere. Suppose he found a million pounds in a—a haystack?" said Bunter.

"Might as well look for a needle in a haystack, I should think. Have you gone off your dot, Bunter?"

"Nunno!"

"Then what are you talking such howling rot for?" demanded Peter.

"Well, suppose—suppose it wasn't a million pounds, but—but a gold watch," said Bunter. "Suppose a fellow found a gold watch in a—a field. Would it belong to him, Peter?"

"Not unless he was the owner."

"But ain't findings keepings, you know?"

"There are a lot of chaps in choky, Bunter, wearing nice suits with broad arrows on them, because they thought that findings were keepings," answered Peter Todd impressively. "If you find a gold watch you have to take it to the police. Keeping it is stealing, the same as if you pinched it out of a chap's pocket. Have you found a watch?"

"Oh, no; nothing of the sort!"

"Then what have you found?"

"I—I—I haven't found anything!" gasped Bunter. "I—I—I was only putting a—a—a case."

Peter regarded him very sharply. He knew Bunter.

"If you've found anything that doesn't belong to you, you'll take it to the police-station, or hand it to Mr. Quelch to send there," he said.

"Is that the law?" asked Bunter.

"That's the law, your fat duffer!"

"But there's such a thing as treasure-trove, isn't there?" asked Bunter.

"Certainly. Treasure-trove is the property of the finder after full inquiry has been made by the authorities, and after the Government has taken a big whack out of it."

"Oh dear! I don't see that. The Government ain't any right to my—"

"Your what?"

"Oh, nothing. I mean, supposing I found a million pounds—that is to say, a gold watch—I don't see that the Government ought to have any. They get quite enough in salaries, I should think, without asking me for any. I jolly well shouldn't give them any, I know that!" said Bunter warmly. "I should keep it. Couldn't I do that, Peter?"

"Certainly, if—"

"If what?" asked Bunter, brightening.

"If you could lick the whole Police Force—"

"Oh!"

"And after them the Army and Navy. But I don't think you could, Bunty," said Peter, shaking his head solemnly. "They'd be rather above your weight."

"Oh, don't be an ass, Peter!" said Bunter. "You don't know anything about the law, I believe. It's all rot, anyway. Smithy says the law was only invented so that lawyers could live without doing any work."

"Smithy knows too much!" grinned Peter. "Come along, Bunter!"

He took the Owl of the Remove by the collar.

"Leggo! Come where?" howled Bunter.

"To Quelchy."

"Wha-a-at for?"

"To give him the watch you've found, of course!"

"I haven't found a watch!" howled Bunter.

"The million quids, then!" grinned Peter.

"I—I—I haven't found anything! Leggo! I—I say, Coker, make him leggo!"

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howled Bunter, as Coker of the Fifth came along.

Coker looked round. Coker was always ready to interfere in any affair, especially if it was not his business.

"Now, then, Todd, let Bunter alone!" rapped out Coker loftily. "I don't allow bullying."

"Fathead!" retorted Peter.

"Do you want me to cuff you?" demanded Coker.

"Certainly, old top, if your silly head is harder than my cricket-bat!" answered Peter. "It won't pay you otherwise."

Horace Coker advanced upon him, frowning. Peter had to release Bunter to bring the cricket-bat into play. Coker jumped back from the swinging bat.

"Put that down, you silly young idiot!" he roared.

"Not at all. I'm just getting busy," answered Peter cheerfully, and he followed up the Fifth-Former with the bat lunging. "I'm going to poke you—like that—"

"Ow! You—"

"And like that!"

"You—you—I'll— Oh, my hat!"

"And like that!"

Horace Coker retreated. Once more he had awakened the wrong passenger—as Coker of the Fifth often did.

Peter Todd looked round for Bunter.

But the Owl of the Remove had lost no time. While Peter was busy with Coker, Bunter had disappeared. He did not want any more legal advice, and assuredly he did not want to go to Mr.

Quelch. He vanished while Peter was attending to the great Horace.

Peter shook his head very seriously, and went on to the cricket-ground. While the schoolboy lawyer was occupied there, Billy Bunter was occupied elsewhere—in a way that would have astonished and alarmed Peter if he had known.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Bunter is Busy!

"SUSPICIOUS beast!"

Billy Bunter snorted out that remark as he trudged away on the road towards Courtfield.

Bunter had a good deal of work to get through before dinner.

Had Peter Todd's legal advice taken the form Bunter desired, he would probably have asked his lanky study-mate for assistance; but that was not quite feasible, as it turned out. Bunter had to depend on himself.

He trudged at an unusual rate, and blinked round him very cautiously when he came up to the deserted cottage. There was no one in sight, and the Owl of the Remove rolled into the ruined building.

All was as he had left it the previous night.

He removed the beam, and opened the trapdoor, and blinked down into the shadows below. All was still and silent.

Bunter did not drop recklessly into the cellar as on the previous occasion. He collected some bulky fragments of lumber from the ruins, and pitched them into the cellar, so that he could swing himself down upon them, and climb out again with ease.

Then he descended.

The sack of silver was still exactly as he had left it. Bunter dragged it out and opened it, and feasted his greedy eyes for a few moments upon the glimmering contents.

But he did not waste time.

For the next quarter of an hour he was very busy, and puffing and blowing with unaccustomed exertion.

One at a time, the silver articles in the sack were conveyed out of the cellar into the room above.

There Bunter stacked them under what remained of the destroyed wooden staircase, and covered them with broken bricks and plaster to conceal them from view.

He was gasping stertorously by the time the sack had been emptied and his task was finished.

Then he replaced the trapdoor and the beam, and piled a few more bricks over the hidden treasure.

The new place of concealment was certainly less safe than the old, but in one sense it was safer, for the unknown person who had placed the silver in the cellar might return at any time and remove it if it remained in its original hiding-place.

And Bunter did not mean to leave it long.

His fat brain had already hatched a masterly scheme for disposing of it.

Having finished his work in the ruined cottage, he rolled out again, and panted home to Greyfriars for dinner.

He was looking rather tired and dusty when he came in, and Peter Todd observed it as he joined his fat study-mate on the way to the dining-room. He dropped his hand on Bunter's shoulder.

"Where have you been, fatty?" he inquired.

"Out for a walk, old chap," answered Bunter.

"Collecting dust?"

"Eh? No."

Read

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The bike lantern glimmered down into the cellar. The faces of Wingate and Gwynne appeared beside it. "Oh, there you are, are you?" growled Wingate. "Yes, please, Wingate!" quavered Bunter. "Starving!" (See Chapter 4.)

"What cellar have you been rummaging in?" demanded Peter.

Bunter jumped.

"I—I haven't been rummaging in a cellar, old chap," he said. "If you think I have you're mistaken, you know. Nothing of the kind. I—I've been helping a man on his allotment."

"Oh, my hat!"

Bunter dodged into the dining-room, and escaped. Peter Todd looked at him several times during dinner oddly. He was curious, and he was not easy in his mind.

He intended to ask Bunter further questions after dinner; but immediately after dinner Bunter vanished.

Squiff's bike vanished, too, from the bike-shed, as the Australian junior discovered when he went there, happening to want it for a spin.

He made the discovery rather too late;

by that time Bunter was pedalling into Courtfield on his bicycle.

Bunter had no time to waste in walking.

He stopped at Mr. Lazarus' shop at the corner of the High Street, and for the moderate expenditure of a couple of shillings secured an empty box and a length of rope and a few nails.

He fastened the box on Squiff's bike with some difficulty, and pedalled away again.

The perspiration was streaming down his fat face when he arrived in the vicinity of the old cottage and stopped at last.

The bike was placed behind a thicket near the road, and the empty box was dragged into the cottage.

Billy Bunter was not much given to work; anything in the nature of hard labour was distasteful to him.

But on this occasion he worked like a Trojan.

Visions of unlimited tuck were floating before his fat mind—to be realised as soon as his plunder was secured.

One by one the silver articles were stacked in the box, jammed in securely with some little damage to surfaces and corners; but that could not be helped.

The box was nearly filled, and Bunter completed it with squeezing in rubbish up to the lid, so that the contents should not rattle.

Then the lid was fastened down, the nails being driven in with a stone, and the cord fastened round several times, and knotted with a very secure conglomeration of knots.

When all was finished, the box had to be removed; and that proved a task requiring terrific exertions.

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But visions of tuck spurred on the Owl of the Remove.

He dragged the box out of the ruined cottage, and through the grass as far as the roadside.

There he sat on it and rested.

There was a good deal of country traffic on the road between Friardale and Courtfield, and Bunter had no doubt about getting a lift with the box.

He did not intend to take it with him to the school, however.

His arrival at Greyfriars on a market-cart with a box of unknown contents would have excited rather too much remark.

Bunter had displayed unusual sharpness in laying his plans.

The box was to arrive at Greyfriars as a box from home, delivered by the Courtfield carrier just as if it had come by railway.

That was Bunter's little scheme.

He was waiting for a lift to Courtfield; and he had not long to wait. A market-cart came lumbering by, and Bunter called to the driver.

That bucolic gentleman willingly agreed to give him a lift with his box as far as Courtfield for the consideration of a shilling.

A quarter of an hour later Bunter and his box were landed at the carrier's office in Courtfield.

There the box was taken in, labelled, and left for delivery at Greyfriars the following day.

Billy Bunter was fatigued, but he was very cheerful as he trotted away from the carrier's office and took his homeward way.

He had left Squiff's bike in the thicket near the cottage—leaving the machine to take care of itself, as it were—sincerely hoping that it would not be "spotted" by some unscrupulous passer-by and "pinched." If it had been, Bunter would have felt quite sorry for Squiff.

The bike, fortunately, was still there when he returned. Bunter blinked round, with the caution that had now become habitual to him, and went into the cottage. Under the broken staircase he had left one of the silver articles—a small but very valuable tankard, which he destined to be the first article realised for cash. He extracted the tankard from its hiding-place, and concealed it under his jacket with a grunt of satisfaction.

"Fishy's the man I want," he murmured. "Fishy will buy anything. I'll sell him this, to begin with—I can afford to let it go cheap, considering."

And Bunter rolled out of the ruined cottage with a perspiring but very satisfied countenance. He pedalled home to Greyfriars on Squiff's bike, and, being late for afternoon classes, avoided a painful interview with Squiff when he arrived. His interview with Mr. Quelch when he arrived in the Form-room was rather painful, however. But Bunter thought of the silver tankard in his study—to be sold before tea-time—and was comforted.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

The Family Plate.

"I SAY, you fellows—"

Study No. 14 were at tea. Johnny Bull and Squiff were talking cricket; and Fisher T. Fish was discussing the price of the articles on the table for tea. Prices were a favourite topic with Fisher T. Fish. He was very eloquent just now on the subject of the sardines.

According to Fishy, Mrs. Mimble had charged three-halfpence too much on the sardines. The sardines were Fishy's contribution to the festive board, so he

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naturally felt it deeply. He expatiated at great length on the subject. His study-mates did not mind. They were not interested in the subject; but they did not listen, so it did not matter. They talked cricket while Fishy bewailed the dead and irreparable loss of his three-halfpence.

Bunter's fat face and glimmering spectacles loomed up in the doorway. Squiff looked round.

"Nothing doing!" he said, before the fat junior could speak. "Cut along to Russell's study. I've heard that he's got a cake."

"I haven't come to tea!" said Bunter, with dignity. "And I don't want to borrow any money of you, Field, so you needn't think so!"

"Are you ill?" asked Sampson Quincy Iffley Field.

"Eh? No!"

"Or mad?"

"No, you ass!"

"Or wandering in your mind?"

"You silly chump—"

"If you're not, what do you mean by saying that you don't want to borrow any money?" demanded Squiff.

"Oh, really, Field! I just looked in to speak to Fishy—"

"Then you can vamoose the ranch!" said Fisher T. Fish decidedly. "I guess I was raised where they know how to look after their dollars, Bunter. N.G."

"Look here, Fishy—"

"Not a cent!" said Fisher T. Fish emphatically. "Not a Continental red cent! I lent you a shilling once. I had to track you down for a whole term to get that quarter back. Nothing doing!"

"I want to sell you something!" howled Bunter.

Fisher T. Fish's manner altered at once.

"Oh, I guess that's a mule of quite another colour!" he said cordially. "I reckon I can do with the goods, if they're any value! Good price, too—"

"About one per cent. of the value—what?" grunted Johnny Bull. "You're an idiot if you sell Fishy anything, Bunter!"

"I'll sell it you if you like," said Bunter at once. "It's a really handsome tankard—"

"A what?" ejaculated Johnny Bull.

"Tankard—silver tankard—heirloom in our family," explained Bunter. "It's got our crest on it—the famous Bunter crest, you know."

"That detracts from the value," said Fisher T. Fish. "Buyer will want that crest taken off and his own stuff put on. That costs money. Silver's a drug in the market, too. I guess I can't give you much for a silver tankard, Bunter."

"Where on earth have you got a silver tankard from, Bunter?" exclaimed Squiff in astonishment, staring at the fat junior.

"It's an heirloom!" explained Bunter airily.

"More likely pinched from the school museum!" grunted Johnny Bull. "You'd better put it back where you found it, Bunter. It'll be missed."

"If you think I'd steal a tankard, Bull—"

"I don't see how else you could have got one."

"Oh, really, you know—"

"Well, where did you get it?" asked Squiff.

"My father—ahem!—the fact is, it's some of our family silver," said Bunter. "The pater's getting a new lot, and—and he doesn't want it. It—it's been given to me, you know."

That statement was so extraordinary that the three juniors stared at Bunter blankly. Fisher T. Fish put his tongue in his cheek.

"Tell us another!" he suggested.

"If you doubt my word, Fishy—"

"I guess your word cuts no ice with me, my pippin," grinned Fishy. "I reckon I'll believe in that family silver when I see it. Not before, I calculate!"

"I can show you the tankard!" said Bunter, with dignity.

Fisher T. Fish closed one eye.

"Show up, then!" he said.

Bunter hesitated a moment or two. Obtuse as he was, the fat junior felt a slight uneasiness at the idea of showing the silver-ware, and actually selling it. But it was evident that if he was to raise cash upon his new property he had both to show it and to sell it. There was no going back now.

"You can come to my study and see it," he said at last.

"I guess I'm not moseying along the passage to be made a fool of," answered Fisher T. Fish. "Bring it here."

"Oh, all right!"

Billy Bunter quitted the study.

"Now, I wonder," said Fisher T. Fish reflectively, "what that blessed jay has come here and told that silly whopper for? He must have a motive, I calculate. But what's the motive?"

And Fisher T. Fish shook his head. Even his sharp brain could not fathom Bunter's motive for what looked like a purposeless untruth. But there was a surprise in store for Fisher T. Fish.

Bunter came back into the study with something wrapped in paper. He laid it on the tea-table, and turned back the wrapping-paper. A small but very solid and handsomely chased tankard was revealed. Johnny Bull and Squiff and Fishy blinked at it as if mesmerised.

"Waal, I swow!" ejaculated Fishy.

"What do you think of that?" asked Bunter loftily. "What's that worth, Fishy?"

"More than you'll get in this study, I reckon. Is it yours?"

"Of course it's mine, you ass!"

"Do you mean to say that your father's given you that tankard?" exclaimed Squiff blankly.

"It's some of our old family silver, you see. We're simply crowded with it at home. Silver all over the place—gold, too," said Bunter airily. "The pater's decided to have only gold plate in the future."

"Oh, my hat!"

"You see, my father's wealthy," explained Bunter. "He's thinking of going in for a title. He can afford it now—they're not such high prices as they used to be—I mean, he can afford it, whatever it costs. Well, when he's a viscount he won't want any silver plate about—all gold plate, you know. That's how it is."

Billy Bunter apparently thought that that amazing explanation would satisfy Study No. 14. But it didn't! Johnny Bull and Squiff gazed at him aghast, and Fisher T. Fish chuckled.

"How much will you give me for it, any of you?" asked Bunter. "It will make a splendid ornament for the study, you know. Or you could use it for a cricket challenge cup if you liked. It would do splendidly for that. You could offer it as a silver cup to be played for, say, by the Remove and the Upper Fourth. How much?"

"I guess I wouldn't give you ten cents for it," said Fisher T. Fish drily. "I calculate I should be afraid of the owner coming along and claiming it."

"You silly ass!" roared Bunter. "I'm the owner!"

"Tell us an easier one!" suggested Fishy.

"Look here, Bunter," said Johnny Bull quietly, "that tankard isn't yours! It can't be! Don't tell us silly lies about

your father giving you the family silver. I don't believe he has any; but if he had he wouldn't be idiot enough to give it to you. Where did you steal that tankard?"

"Oh, really, Bull— It's mine, you know—"

"Where did you get it?" demanded Squiff.

"My pater—"

"Ring off the whoppers!" The Australian junior jumped up and closed the door. He was very serious now. "Bunter, you crass idiot, you're landing yourself into bad trouble! That tankard isn't yours, and it's got an owner somewhere. It's got to be taken back to the owner at once. Do you hear?"

"I'm the owner!" yelled Bunter angrily.

"Fathead! Where did you get it?"

Bunter blinked angrily at the unbelieving juniors. It was pretty clear that the family silver story would not do. But the Owl of the Remove was blessed with an imagination that would have done credit to a war correspondent. If one whopper would not do, he was always ready with another.

"The—the fact is, my pater wants to sell off his family plate," he said, after a pause. "He's had rather bad luck on the Stock Exchange. The idea is to sell it off a little at a time. See?"

"That isn't such a big one," remarked Squiff.

"Such a big what, you ass?"

"Whopper."

"It isn't a whopper at all!" hooted Bunter. "My pater is sending me a lot of the family silver in a—a—a box—"

"Draw it mild!"

"Perhaps you'll believe me when the box arrives!" snorted Bunter.

"When the box arrives, certainly!" assented Squiff. "Not before."

Bunter's eyes glimmered for a moment behind his big glasses.

"That's a go, then!" he said. "You'll jolly well see it before long! This mug is only an article in advance; the rest is coming."

"Gammon!"

"You see, the idea is that I may be able to sell some of these things here among the fellows," explained Bunter. "Why shouldn't I?"

"No reason why you shouldn't, if the things are yours," remarked Johnny Bull. "I'll believe that when the family silver arrives. Just now you'd better take that tankard back to the owner."

"You silly ass—"

Squiff regarded the fat junior with a very searching gaze. He knew Bunter's extremely easy-going views on the subject of property; and that handsome silver tankard was certainly a very valuable article to be in the possession of a junior schoolboy. It was barely possible that Bunter's latest explanation was founded on fact—though it sounded very steep.

"You mean to say that a box of silver goods is coming to Greyfriars for you, Bunter?" the Australian junior asked at last.

"Yes, certainly!"

"Well, seeing is believing. You're not going to sell that tankard to anybody till we know. We'll give you a chance. If the box of merchandise comes along, we'll take that as proof. Until then you can put that tankard away. If you try to sell it, I'll take you to Mr. Queleh, and you can explain to him."

"Oh, really, Field—"

"I mean that!" said Squiff.

And he stepped away from the door; and Billy Bunter, after an angry blink round the study, quitted that apartment with his silver tankard—still unsold.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

The Box for Bunter!

HARRY WHARTON & CO., like the rest of the Remove, heard the story of the Bunter family plate, and were perplexed by it.

It was easy enough to believe that Bunter senior was hard up and wanted to sell his silver—if he had any. But certainly it was an extraordinary step for him to take to send some of the goods to his son at school to be sold among schoolboys. There was no reason why he shouldn't do so if he chose, but it sounded very steep—in fact, incredible.

But Bunter persisted that the box of silver goods was to arrive the following day, and that the tankard he had shown was only a sample in advance; and the chums of the Remove hardly knew what to think.

Their first impression, naturally, was that the Owl had "annexed" the tankard somewhere; but if the box of silver goods did arrive, that impression would have to be revised. They could not suppose that the fat junior had annexed a whole silver collection—unless he had taken up burglary on a large scale, which really was improbable.

The question was, would the box arrive? If it did, Bunter's story had to be taken as true, marvellous as it was.

So on the following day there was great curiosity among the juniors on the subject, and when the carrier was due in the afternoon a good many of the Remove waited to see him come along.

Cripps, the carrier, came along after lessons were over, and Harry Wharton & Co. saw him deliver a box into Gosling's charge—a rather heavy box, corded and labelled.

As soon as the carrier was gone the Famous Five interviewed Gosling.

"Box for Bunter?" Wharton asked.

"Yes," was the porter's answer. "Eavy, too!"

"What's in it?" asked Bob Cherry.

"Which that ain't wrote on the hout-side!" answered Gosling, with stolid sarcasm.

The juniors looked at the box. It was addressed in Bunter's own hand on the label, which was rather surprising.

"I say, you fellows—"

Billy Bunter rolled into the lodge.

"Your box has come, Bunter," said Wharton, looking at the fat junior very curiously.

"Yes, I was expecting it by the carrier," answered Bunter calmly. "I want that taken up to the box-room, Gosling."

"How did you come to write the label, if that box is from home?" asked Johnny Bull.

"Eh? I didn't!"

"Look at it. It's in your fist."

Bunter blinked at the label.

"Oh, I—I forgot! I did some labels when I was home last—left 'em for the pater to use, you know, to save him trouble. I say, Gosling, I want you to be careful with that box. I'll give you a shilling to take it up to the Remove box-room very carefully."

"I'm taking it to the 'ousekeeper first," answered Gosling stolidly. "Ow do I know there ain't things agin orders in that there box?"

Bunter started, and Gosling grinned. The worthy Gosling guessed that there was tuck in the box, and tuck-boxes had to be looked over, as a rule, by the housekeeper, though the rule was not always rigidly enforced. In fact, the enforcement of the rule sometimes depended on the size of the tip that was bestowed upon Gosling.

"I—I say— I meant to say two shillings, Gosling!" stammered Bunter.

"Very kind of you, Master Bunter, to

gimme two shillings for carrying that there box to the 'ousekeeper's room."

"I say, you fellows—"

The Famous Five strolled away.

"Wharton!" howled Bunter. "Lend me half-a-crown—"

The captain of the Remove appeared to be deaf.

Harry Wharton & Co., in fact, did not see why the box should not pass through the hands of Mrs. Kebble if it contained property that was Bunter's own—not in the shape of tuck. They were not prepared to whack out their pocket-money in tips to Gosling to keep the box dark for no reason that they could see.

But Bunter seemed anxious on the point, Gosling, who attributed his anxiety to the fact that forbidden tuck was in the box, waited cheerfully for the price to rise. He was in no hurry to remove the box.

Billy Bunter would willingly have handed out five shillings to get the precious box carried safely into a secluded corner; but he was in his usual impecunious state. Five shillings were as far off as five thousand pounds. And the thought of the housekeeper going through the box was quite alarming.

It was no use explaining to Mrs. Kebble that he had "found" hundreds of pounds' worth of silver, and that findings were keepings.

In fact, by having packed the plunder in a box, and sent it on by carrier under pretence that it came from home, Bunter had admitted that he was well aware that he had no right to it. If all had been above-board there would have been no need of disguise.

Fortunately for the Owl, Fisher T. Fish arrived at Gosling's lodge, his sharp nose having scented out the arrival of the already celebrated box.

"I guess I'll lend you a hand with that box, Bunter," he remarked generously. "We can carry it between us, I calculate."

"Right-ho!" said Bunter eagerly. "Sha'n't want you, Gosling!"

"That there box has to go to the 'ousekeeper's room first, sir!" answered Gosling stolidly. "Them's my instructions, generally speaking."

"Look here—" began Bunter hotly.

"Them's my orders, Master Bunter."

"Lend me five bob, Fishy," said Bunter.

Fisher T. Fish hesitated.

The arrival of the box certainly seemed to bear out Bunter's statements, but Fishy had not yet seen the interior of the box. Five shillings was five shillings, especially to Fisher Tarleton Fish; and he was not the fellow to cast his bread upon the waters, as it were.

"I'll settle this evening, you ass!" grunted Bunter. "You know I've got plenty of tin now, Fishy. Look here, you can take the tankard as security, if you like. It's in my study."

Fisher T. Fish's thoughtful brow cleared.

"Now you're talking," he said heartily. "If you don't settle up, Bunter, I keep the mug."

"Done!"

Five shillings passed over, and Fisher T. Fish departed in haste to take possession of the pledged article. He did not believe in taking chances.

The sight of five shillings in Bunter's fat hand brought a genial smile to Gosling's crusty face. His manners, which had been Hunnish hitherto, became polished and Chesterfieldian. It transpired that Gosling was not only willing, but eager, to oblige Master Bunter.

Gosling, having arrived at that accommodating frame of mind, the difficulty

vanished. The box for Bunter was conveyed into the house, and landed in the box-room at the upper end of the Remove passage, and Gosling returned to his lodge richer by five shillings.

Billy Bunter stood and blinked at the box in great satisfaction. His plunder had been safely landed at last.

The fat junior was inclined to pat himself on the back for his extreme cleverness. It was cleverness of a kind that was likely to land him into serious trouble; but he was not yet aware of that.

Findings being keepings, according to Bunter's peculiar point of view, the silver goods were his, and he had a right to take care of them, and to dispose of them. And now they had arrived in a "box from home" even a suspicious beast like Peter Todd could not cavil. Bunter almost purred with satisfaction over the remarkable cleverness he had displayed.

He came down from the box-room almost walking on air. Peter Todd's voice fell upon his ears as he rolled into the Remove passage.

"So you've got that blessed box, Bunter?" asked Peter, eyeing him very curiously.

"Yes, it's come," said Bunter airily.

"Where has it come from?"

"Home, of course!"

Peter wrinkled his brows.

"Well, I don't see where else it could have come from," he admitted, "but it's jolly odd, Bunter."

"I don't see it. My pater's hard up, and—"

"I believe that much."

"I've offered to do my best selling off some of his silver stuff. I regarded that as my duty!" said Bunter loftily.

Bunter spoke with great seriousness. In his obtuse mind, the difference between truth and falsehood was not very clearly marked, and he certainly did not realise the full import of his words and deeds. He had a very fertile imagination, and he was wont to take its fertile images for facts.

"Well, it's jolly queer," said Peter.

"I suppose you haven't been burgling a manor house, or anything like that?"

"Oh, really, Peter—"

"You were speaking yesterday about something you'd found," said Peter, still eyeing him.

"A—a gold watch, you know—not silver pots," stammered Bunter.

"You didn't find these silver pots?"

"Nunno!"

"What did you find, then—you've found something?" persisted Peter, still uneasy and suspicious.

Bunter drew a deep breath. His unlucky request for legal advice from the schoolboy lawyer had roused suspicion which had to be allayed. The Owl of the Remove was always prepared to back up one terrific whopper with another still more terrific.

"The—the fact is, Peter, I—I've taken it to the police-station," he stammered.

"You've taken what?"

"The—the gold watch!"

"The one you found?"

"Ye-es. I—I took your advice, you know," explained Bunter.

Peter Todd looked at him fixedly. So long as Bunter denied having "found" anything Peter suspected him; but as soon as he admitted it Peter somehow suspected him still more of departing from the truth. He shook his head and turned away. He was puzzled, and he had to give it up. Bunter breathed more freely when his suspicious study-mate left him.

"Beast!" he murmured.

And he went to look for Fisher T. Fish.

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THE TENTH CHAPTER.

The Business Man on the Job.

HARRY WHARTON & CO. were in the end study at tea when Billy Bunter arrived there. Johnny Bull and Squiff were "standing" the feast, and all the Famous Five had turned up. Fisher T. Fish, as a member of the study, joined the festive board in a very cheerful mood. The spread was an unusually good one, and Fishy hadn't anything to pay towards it. He calculated that his whack was worth anything from a quarter to half-a-dollar, and so he had reason to be pleased.

He grinned genially at Billy Bunter as the fat junior blinked in at the doorway. Fisher T. Fish had revised his estimate of Bunter. The arrival of the box from home had settled the matter. Even Peter Todd had nothing further to say, and Fishy, with all his sharpness, was not so keen as Peter.

"Mosey in, Bunter, old jay," he said hospitably. "I guess I'm jolly glad to see you; I reckon, sonny, that you're a sight for sore eyes. Make room for Bunter, you galoots!"

"Blow Bunter!" growled Johnny Bull.

"Well, I don't mind having tea, as you're so pressing," said Billy Bunter. "That looks a rather nice cake. You needn't trouble about giving me your chair, Bull—"

"I wasn't going to."

"Thanks all the same, but this box will do. I say, Wharton, are you in want of a silver cake-stand for your study?"

Harry Wharton laughed.

"Are you giving one away?" he asked.

"Nunno! I'm selling one cheap. A really handsome silver stand, engraved with the Bunter crest, only twenty pounds."

"Oh, my hat!"

"If that's more than you can afford I'll—"

"Just a trifle!" chuckled the captain of the Remove.

"I'll take five."

"Not from me," smiled Wharton.

"As an old pal, I want to let you down lightly," said Bunter, with his mouth full of cake. "Say ten bob."

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

"From twenty quid to ten bob is rather a fall, isn't it, Bunter?"

"The fact is, I want to deal generously with you chaps," said Billy Bunter, blinking round the table. "I never was mean in money matters. Nobody can say that about me."

"Oh crumbs!"

"The crumbliness is terrific!" grinned Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "The esteemed Bunter is wandering from the estimable facts."

"Oh, really, Inky! Look here, you've got plenty of tin," said Bunter persuasively. "You buy a set of things for the study. I've got a set of silver fish-knives going cheap."

"You're selling all this stuff for your pater?" asked Frank Nugent abruptly.

"Ye-es."

"What will he say to getting bobs instead of quids for them?"

"Oh, that's all right! The pater's given me carty blank—"

"Wha-at?"

"Carty blank!" explained Bunter.

"What the merry thunder is carty blank?" ejaculated Squiff.

"You don't know French," said Bunter disdainfully.

"Oh, my hat! Do you mean carte blanche?"

"Carty blank," answered Bunter obstinately. "That's what I mean—carty blank. It means a blank sheet."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You see, my pater having given me

carty blank, I can sell the stuff at what prices I like. The fact is, it's really my own to deal with as I choose. That's why I'm offering it cheap to my best pals—you, for instance, Wharton."

"Thanks awfully—and I didn't even know I was your pal!"

"Oh, really, Harry, if that's your gratitude for my generosity—"

"That's it, old infant," assented Wharton.

"I refuse to sell you any of my family silver, Wharton. Would you care for a set of silver photo-frames, Bull?"

"No."

"Hem! What about fish-knives for you, Squiff?"

"Bow-wow!"

Billy Bunter snorted. Considering how cheap he was willing to sell the family silver, it was really hard lines that he could not find a customer. But even if Harry Wharton & Co. had felt inclined to purchase silver adornments for their studies, they would have hesitated to purchase it of Bunter, at whatever price. The story of the family silver seemed to be substantiated by the arrival of the "box from home," but—There was a very large "but." The whole thing was too queer.

Tea finished in Study No. 14, and Harry Wharton & Co. went, Squiff going with them. Fisher T. Fish was left alone with Bunter. The Owl of the Remove blinked at his companion rather morosely.

"It's rotten," he said. "Look here, Fishy, why can't you take some of the stuff off my hands? You're always buying things from one fellow or another."

Fisher T. Fish nodded.

"I've bought a tankard off you already," he answered.

"Eh? You're not having that tankard for five bob—"

"It's mine unless you square up the five bob this evening," answered Fisher T. Fish coolly. "That was the arrangement."

"It's worth pounds!" howled Bunter.

"I guess it may be. All the better for me."

"Look here, Fisher—"

"Can you square up?"

"Nunno. I spent my last bobs yesterday with old Lazarus, and in Courtfield," grunted Bunter. "The box—I—I mean, the—"

"What box?"

"N-n-nothing! I—I mean the man who gave me a lift—"

"Eh? Somebody gave you a lift?"

"Nunno! I—I was going to say—that is—ahem!—um—" stammered Bunter, in confusion.

"Blessed if I savvy!" answered Fisher T. Fish. "Look hyer, Bunter, I'm the antelope you want to meet! You've got goods to sell. I'm the galoot to sell them for you. I guess I can do it for a commish."

"A—a what?"

"A commish."

"What's that?"

Fisher T. Fish gave him a pitying look.

"It's what you call a commission, if you've got the time to waste," he explained.

"Oh, I see! Well, I'll give you a commission if you sell the goods," said Bunter. "Say one per cent."

"Never mind the per cent. till I've seen the goods. Show them to me, and I'll give you my advice—practical advice of a business galoot what was raised in Noo Yark!" said Fish impressively.

Billy Bunter blinked round the tea-table; and as the last crumb had vanished he rose.

"Come on, then!" he said.

He led Fisher T. Fish to the upper

box-room, where the box was duly unrecorded, and its precious contents exposed to Fishy's rapt gaze. Fisher T. Fish feasted his eyes upon that mass of silver as if he would never finish feasting them. The sight of that treasure almost took his breath away.

"Waal, I swow!" he ejaculated at last.

Bunter grinned with satisfaction. The business man of the Remove was evidently impressed.

Fisher T. Fish looked at Bunter at last.

"I guess you'd better give me the straight goods," he remarked.

"Eh?"

"Where did you get this stuff?"

"My pater—"
"It's a bit too steep, you see," explained Fisher T. Fish. "A few things—I guess I could swallow that! But this stack of goods! Oh, come off! You don't see any green in my eye, I calculate. Is your father a pawnbroker?"

"No!" yelled Bunter.

"Well, this might be a pawnbroker's stock. Don't spin me yarns about the family plate. Before we can bring off a sale you've got to think of a better tale than that. Think again."

"Look here, Fishy—"

"Talk sense!" said Fisher T. Fish impatiently. "There'll be no sale if the fellows don't believe the stuff is yours. Do you think they'd swallow a yarn of your popper sending you the family plate to sell? Don't be a jay. They don't know what to make of it, so far. It seems that the box came from your home. Let the fellows know the facts, and we shall sell this stuff like hot cakes if we let it go fairly cheap. I can work the raffle; I've got an idea in my cabeza. But I want to know the facts first. Have you got a pawnbroker relation, and has your popper bought up his stock?"

Bunter hesitated.

"You needn't mind owning up, you fat jay!" said Fishy disdainfully. "Nobody believes your yarns about your titled relations, anyhow; so you won't be giving anything away. I suppose you've got an uncle in the pawnbroking line—is that it?"

Bunter nodded at last.

"Ye-e-es!" he gasped.

It was one more on the list of the numerous "whoppers" Bunter had told; but one more did not seem to matter much. Bunter had already lost count of them. And it had the effect of reassuring Fisher T. Fish. He thought he saw clearly now.

"Unredeemed pledges, I guess!" he remarked.

"Ye-e-es."

"Why couldn't you say so at first?"

"I—I—I—"

"Waal, I guess it doesn't matter now

you've owned up. Nothing to grin at, that I can see. Now, you can't sell this stuff, Bunter. You haven't the salesman gift. I guess I have. I'm willing to go in with you, for a fair commish. Say twenty per cent."

"Oh, I say—"

"Twenty per cent. on all sales, and I'll get it all off your hands—at good prices, too. Is it a go?"

"Ye-e-es."

"Good! Then I'll tell you my stunt. An auction!" said Fisher T. Fish impressively.

Bunter jumped.

"An—an—an auction!" he ejaculated.

"Yep!"

"I—I never thought of that—"

"You wouldn't. You're not a business man! I am, I reckon. I'll get up a list. 'Lot 1, Lot 2,' and so on, and we'll hold an auction in the Rag on Saturday afternoon, as it's a half-holiday," said Fisher T. Fish, his sharp eyes glistening. "With me wielding the hammer, I guess the prices will run up. And I'll fix it with one or two galoots to make dud bids, you know, to encourage the others. I guess I know the game. You can leave me to make up the list, and draw up the announcement—"

"I—I say, Fishy—"

"Leave it to me!" said Fishy, with a wave of his bony hand.

"Yes, but—"

"Bunter, you're the kind of galoot to jaw the hind leg off a mule! Leave it to me, I tell you!"

"Yes, but I'm stony!" howled Bunter.

"Look here, you lend me—"

"Nix! You'll be rolling in durocks on Saturday—after the auction—"

"You lend me—"

"Vamoose the ranch, and let me get to work on the list!"

Billy Bunter sniffed. Evidently there was no loan to be raised from Fishy, even with all that wealth in store. Fisher T. Fish, with glistening eyes, was soon at work with pencil and paper, already beginning preparations for the auction sale; and Bunter slipped a small silver goblet into his pocket and rolled out of the box-room. He had to admit that Fisher T. Fish was the man for the job, and the auction was a stunning idea. But he was chiefly concerned about raising the wind in time for supper.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

Startling News!

"OH, rotten!" growled Bunter. The Owl of the Remove was disappointed and wrathful.

His silver goblet was certainly worth a good many pounds; but he had not been able to find a fellow in the Remove to give him even one solitary "quid" for it.

Harry Wharton & Co. declined even

to look at it. Vernon-Smith advised him to take it back to its owner. Newland mooted the idea of telephoning to the police. Skinner, certainly, offered him sixpence; but that offer was not good enough.

The Owl of the Remove neglected his prep in his anxiety to raise the wind on that advance sample of his new "line" in silver goods; but he did not succeed. Fisher T. Fish, as a born business man, might make a success of the auction—or he might not—but certainly William George Bunter himself had no luck as a salesman.

"I'll jolly well try the seniors," he murmured, after debating the matter for some time in his fat mind. "Coker's got plenty of money; he offered a football cup once, and he might like this to offer as a cricket cup. I'll try Coker."

And the fat junior rolled away to the Fifth Form passage to look for Horace Coker. He found Coker's study empty, and went in, to wait for the great Horace to turn up.

Horace Coker came in in a few minutes, and he misunderstood Bunter's presence in his study. That was not surprising, considering William George's reputation as a study raider. He promptly took the Owl of the Remove by the collar.

"I—I say, Coker—" stammered Bunter. "Leggo! I say—"

"After my cake—what!" roared Coker, in great wrath.

"Nunno! I—I came here—"

Yaroooh! Leggo! I—I want—"

"I'm going to give you what you want!" grinned Coker.

He spun Bunter to the doorway, spun him round, and brought a heavy boot into play. The Owl of the Remove shot into the passage.

There was a roar from Bunter, and a chuckle from Coker.

"Yaroooh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yow-ow! You rotter! Ow!" gasped Bunter, scrambling up dizzily.

"I—I say, Coker, I—I want—"

"You want some more?"

"Nunno! I—I want—"

"Lots more on tap, if you want it!" grinned Coker, and he strode out into the passage.

But Billy Bunter did not wait for Coker's boot; that was not what he wanted at all. He fled.

"Beast!" he gasped, as he escaped from the Fifth Form passage.

Then he stopped to consider. Coker was rather too hasty to be dealt with. After due consideration, Billy Bunter started for the august quarters of the Sixth Form.

Wingate of the Sixth was to have the next chance. Indeed, Bunter was quite sorry he hadn't started with the Sixth, and not wasted his time over a blessed



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lot of fags, as he disrespectfully termed his Form-fellows. A Sixth-Former, evidently, was more likely to purchase a valuable silver goblet than a fag in the Lower Fourth.

The fat junior arrived at Wingate's door. The door was half-open, and George Wingate was in his study, in conversation with Gwynne of the Sixth.

Billy Bunter was about to raise his fat hand to tap, when he paused suddenly. George Wingate's voice came to his ears from within.

"A clean sweep, it seems—all the silver in old Popper's place. And they haven't found the man."

Bunter almost ceased to breathe.

He stood rooted to the floor of the Sixth Form passage as if turned suddenly to stone. His fat hand was on the silver goblet in his pocket, all ready to pull it out to display it to the purchaser; but he let go now as if the goblet had become red-hot.

Gwynne's voice came from within. The two Sixth-Formers were talking, quite unconscious of the horrified junior rooted to the passage without.

"I saw Sir Hilton Popper in Friar-dale to-day; I thought he was looking like thunder, bedad—he was coming out of the police-station."

"Well, I suppose he's rather upset," said Wingate. "I don't know how much the stuff was worth, but it must have been a good many hundreds of pounds. It was all the silver-plate at Popper Court, anyway. It happened four days ago, I think, and the man, whoever he was, got clear off with his plunder.

Tankards, and goblets, and things, you know. I don't like old Popper, personally, but I certainly hope he'll get his property back."

"Oh!" gasped Bunter.

Wingate looked round towards the door as he heard that gasping ejaculation.

"Hallo! Who's there?" he called out.

"I—I'm not here, Wingate—"

"What?"

Wingate strode to the door. Billy Bunter blinked at him through his big spectacles in utter dismay. He had come there to show that silver goblet to the captain of Greyfriars; and now he would not have shown it for a fifty-pound note. It seemed to be burning a hole in his pocket now.

"What do you want, Bunter?" asked Wingate, staring at the fat junior's troubled, dismayed face.

"N-n-nothing!"

"Well, why have you come to my study, then?"

"I—I haven't! I—I mean— I—I haven't come to sell you anything, Wingate!" gasped Bunter.

"I suppose you haven't, you fat, little idiot!" said Wingate, in wonder.

"I—I haven't got a silver goblet, or— or anything, in my—my pocket at this minute," stammered Bunter. "D-d-don't you think I have, Wingate! I—I—I haven't, you know. Nothing of the kind!"

"Are you off your silly rocker, Bunter?" asked the Greyfriars captain in astonishment.

"Nunno! I—I—"

"Then what are you burbling about?"

"N-n-nothing! I—I—"

"Oh, cut off!" said the Sixth-Former.

He slammed the study door, and Billy Bunter limped away down the passage. That sudden, startling news he had heard had quite unnerved him. As by a sudden flash of light he had learned, beyond doubt, the source of the treasure-trove in the ruined cottage. He limped away, gasping, and ran into Bob Cherry at the foot of the staircase.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" exclaimed Bob, catching him by the shoulder. "What's the matter?"

"N-n-nothing! I—I haven't stolen anything—"

"What?" howled Bob.

"I—I mean, lemme alone!"

And Bunter scuttled up the stairs, leaving Bob Cherry staring after him in bewilderment. Bunter was not seen again that evening till bed-time. He was thinking it out—and trying to persuade himself that, in spite of what he had heard in Wingate's study, "findings were keepings," all the same. But he found it difficult. And when, in the dormitory, Fisher T. Fish told him cheerily that he had made all the arrangements for the auction, Bunter only grunted dismally. He had his doubts about that auction now.

(DON'T MISS "BUNTER'S AUCTION!"—next Monday's grand complete story of Harry Wharton & Co., by FRANK RICHARDS.)



Goggs, Grammarian

By Richard Randolph

SYNOPSIS.

Johnny Goggs—ventriloquist, ju-jitsu expert, and all-round sportsman—comes to Rylcombe Grammar School from Frankingham, which has been burnt down.

At a cricket-match with the St. Jim's fellows, Goggs goes in disguise as Phelim O'Hoggarty, an Irish boy.

Larking, Carpenter, and Snipe, who are anxious to get their own back on Goggs, seek to expose him at St. Jim's, and Goggs decides to tell some of the juniors that Larking & Co. are about to work off a jape on them.

(Now read on.)

The Wiles of Goggs.

GORE? Yes, Gore would do. For the rest—two or three more, at least—Goggs must trust to luck.

He would not mind enlisting Arthur Augustus and Herries; but that would probably mean Blake and Digby also, and those two were more acute. As for Tom Merry & Co., Kangaroo & Co., Talbot, and Levison & Co., Goggs had not the slightest notion of dragging them into it. A word or two might well be enough to raise their suspicions.

Luck was with him again.

He found Grundy, Wilkins, and Gunn in their study.

"Hallo! Who're you?" said Grundy, as he looked in.

"Sure, an' me name's O'Hoggarty, an' it was only this evenin' I was ather comin' here at all, at all."

"Oh, you're the boulder who's left the Grammar School to come to us?" said Wilkins.

"Faith, an' that's me!"

"Well, what d'ye want?" asked Grundy.

The red-wigged Phelim came close to him, and spoke in a confidential tone.

"There was a spalpeen who was ather insultin' you the other day," he said. "An', by the same token, he's no friend of mine at all, at all!"

"Oh, Larking!" snorted Grundy. "What about him? Not that I'm the least interested in the fellow."

"Sure, but he's interested in you no end, an' at this very identical moment he an' Carpenter an' Snipe are inside the walls of this school, the schamers!"

"What?"

Grundy's face was red with anger.

Phelim nodded twice or thrice, looking very solemn.

"They've got in to play some beastly trick on me!" fumed Grundy.

"Faith, an' I'm not sayin' that, for I wouldn't be ather sayin' more than I know. But it looks—"

"Looks! Oh, rot! I'm sure of it! What else would they come here for? Oh, I'll let them have a taste of—"

"How did you twig them, O'Hoggarty?" asked Gunn.

"I was walkin' meself in the quad, mediatin', when I heard voices. I was down by the old tree—"

"He'll take all night to tell it!" said Wilkins impatiently. "I'm not dead sure that he doesn't think he's having us on a string. But we'll warn him up if he's spoofing, the red-headed rascal!"

"What's to be done?" inquired Gunn.

"Nab them!" snorted Grundy.

"And chuck the sweeps over the wall!" added Wilkins. "Jolly cheek of them coming here, I call it!"

"Sure isn't there a place we could lock them up in?" asked Phelim.

"Are you in this?" Gunn asked, staring at him.

"Faith, I am, for it's not likin' those three I am at all, at all!"

"There's the woodshed," said Wilkins.

"Good notion! We'll seize them—"

"An' gag them!" put in O'Hoggarty.

"Good notion!" said Grundy again.

The great George Alfred seldom considered any notions but his own good. But within five minutes, if everything went well, he could find it easy to persuade himself that the wood-

shed and the gagging were both emanations of his fertile brain.

"Four of us aren't enough for that," said Wilkins doubtfully.

"Rats!" snorted Grundy. "I can handle two of the bounders!"

"Bedad, I'll fetch some more!" said Phelim. And he vanished before Grundy could protest.

Again luck favoured him. He found Mulvaney minor and Tompkins at once. Then he ran against Herries and D'Arcy, luckily without Blake and Digby.

He did not trouble to look for Gore. But, as it happened, Gore came along as they were stealing out, and added himself to the party after an inquiry as to what was up.

Gore did not matter. He had no suspicions of O'Hoggarty.

But here luck turned the other way. For at the last moment Ralph Reckness Cardew joined up.

Goggs would have preferred anyone else—Levison, Tom Merry, Noble, Dane, Talbot—anyone!

But it was no use worrying. He must act if need be. Cardew had only himself to thank if that action did not please him.

"We've got the gags!" whispered Wilkins.

Goggs felt in his pocket, and found a clean handkerchief there. It might be necessary to gag Cardew!

They stole across the quad in the shadow of the buildings. Under the old tree they could discern dimly the figures of Carpenter and Snipe.

The gagging was absolutely necessary to a capture, and it would have to be done quickly. For the juniors had no right at all in the quad at that hour, and an outcry meant heavy punishment for them all. Some of them felt a trifle nervous. They had been rather rushed into this.

The Grundy-led contingent drew nearer, wondering why their quarry should await them so meekly. Goggs gave a low whistle.

"On them!" snorted Grundy.

Then things happened—happened quickly. Bags and Tricks rushed forward and seized Larking's left leg as he sat straddling the wall.

"Yoooop!" howled Larking as he tumbled over.

Herries, entrusted with one gag, whipped it between his jaws in a trice, while Arthur Augustus and Clarence York Tompkins held his legs and arms.

Grundy, who would fain have dealt with Larking, had Carpenter instead. Gunn and Mulvaney minor aided him. Wilkins gagged Snipe, and bore the mark of Snipe's teeth on his knuckles for days afterwards. Gore and Goggs aided Wilkins.

Cardew stood by, appreciative but inactive.

"Now heave them up!" ordered Grundy.

The three traitorous trespassers were got upon their feet.

"Move!" commanded the great George Alfred Grundy.

Strange noises came from behind the gags. But the three moved. They had to move. They were pushed along towards the woodshed, and whenever one of them tried to stop, a foot behind, applied gently, gave him a hint to get on or expect worse.

So they were got to the door of the woodshed.

"Oh, what gorgeous luck!" cried Wilkins exultantly. "Old Taggles has left the key in the lock!"

"Open the door!" commanded Grundy.

Clarence York Tompkins obeyed.

"In with that cad Snipe!"

Herries and Gussy thrust Snipe forward. A hefty push sent him floundering amongst the wood.

"Now Carpenter!"

Gore and Mulvaney deposited Carpenter on top of Snipe.

Goggs had kept close to Cardew, who had marched behind Larking. Goggs had the handkerchief ready, in case anything untoward should chance. He had begun to think that it would not be needed, however.

"Larking!" snorted Grundy.

Larking was the real danger. Carpenter and Snipe now had their hands free, and might have removed their gags. But, rolling over and over one another on the wood, they did not think of that.

Larking was shoved forward by Goggs and Cardew. Directly the hands that had pinned his arms behind were removed he snatched at his gag, and tore it from his mouth.

"Oh, you fools!" he hissed. "You're being taken in! That red-headed cad is Goggs!"

Only Cardew and Goggs heard that. They were just inside the woodshed, the others just

(Continued on page 16.)

The Editor's Chat.

The Companion Papers are:

THE MAGNET. THE GEM. THE BOYS' FRIEND. CHUCKLES. THE PENNY POPULAR.
Every Monday. Every Wed. Every Monday. Every Friday. Every Friday.

YOUR EDITOR IS ALWAYS GLAD TO HEAR FROM HIS READERS.

For Next Monday :

"BUNTER'S AUCTION!"

By Frank Richards.

Our next grand long complete story of the chums of Greyfriars describes how Billy Bunter disposes—or tries to dispose—of his hoard of treasure. With the ready aid of Fisher T. Fish, who acts as auctioneer, an auction sale is arranged in the Rag—with results which, needless to say, prove far from satisfactory to the two principals! Finally, Billy Bunter is persuaded to take his ill-gotten gains to the Head, and to make a clean breast of how he came by them. Had Bunter not been induced to take this step, very serious consequences might have followed as a result of

"BUNTER'S AUCTION!"

FRIDAY'S TREMENDOUS ATTRACTION!

Everyone is Looking Out for the "Penny Popular"!

What silly ass said Friday was an unlucky day? Whoever he was, he couldn't have known that on Friday of this week the "Penny Popular" will appear in its new form, to delight the hearts of thousands of boys and girls.

This Friday's issue of our bright little companion paper will contain, as promised by your Editor,

THREE SUPERB NEW STORIES OF SCHOOL LIFE!

Every story is a gem, but the palm must be given to

"THE LADS OF LANCASHIRE!"

By Frank Richards,

which describes how Harry Wharton & Co., the world-famous heroes of the Greyfriars Remove, travel up to Blackpool to meet a team of Lancashire boys in a series of sporting contests.

Lancashire is Mark Linley's county, and the scholarship boy plays a big part in the story, which is one of the very best which famous Frank Richards has ever penned.

OTHER COUNTIES TO FOLLOW!

Harry Wharton & Co.'s visit to Lancashire is only the kick-off, so to speak. Another party of Greyfriars juniors, under the leadership of Vernon-Smith, will pay a visit to Surrey the following week; and every county in England will be visited in turn.

No series of school stories, on so colossal a scale, has ever been planned before. Look out for the time when the Greyfriars chums visit your county!

I have been writing of "The Lads of Lancashire!" as if it were the only feature in this week's issue of the "Penny Pop." But it isn't! There are two other fine yarns—a Tom Merry story by Martin Clifford, and a Rookwood story by Owen Conquest.

These three stories will go to make up an issue of the "Penny Popular" which has

NEVER BEEN SURPASSED!

and as there is bound to be a big rush for copies, my chums should place an order NOW—without an instant's delay—for this Friday's issue of the "Penny Popular"!

MARK LINLEY'S BOXING STORY!

I have received a large number of inquiries lately from readers who wish to know whether Mark Linley's famous "Greyfriars Herald" serial, "The Pride of the Ring," has appeared in book form.

The answer is "Yes!" "The Pride of the Ring" has been published in "Boys' Friend" Library form, and is still on sale.

I may add that the story has been revised since it first appeared in the pages of "The Greyfriars Herald," and in its complete form it is indeed a yarn which should not be missed. The story deals with the adventures of Neddy Welsh & Co. at Earlingham School; but Harry Wharton & Co. play a part in it, and, of course, there is plenty of boxing. I have no hesitation in saying that this is the finest issue of the "Boys' Friend" Library which has appeared since Frank Richards gave us "Rivals and Chums." The price is fourpence, and there are sixty-four pages of closely-packed reading matter.

THE SORROWS OF SEYTON!

Master Cyril Seyton, of Blackburn, administers a gentle reproof to me this week.

Cyril tells me that, instead of using these Chat columns for the purpose for which they were originally intended—namely, personal chats with my chums—I am devoting a great deal of space to "shouting the odds," as Cyril puts it, about the Companion Papers, particularly the "Penny Popular."

I do not deny my chum's accusation; but I submit, in defence, that I am quite justified in putting my chums on to any good things that are going.

What ever would my readers think of me if, for instance, I kept mum about the grand new stories which are appearing in the "Penny Popular"? I should be constantly getting letters of this sort: "Harry Wharton & Co. have visited our county during a sports tour, and you never told us a word about it! And now I find that the story is out of print!"

Whenever anything extra special is appearing in "The Boys' Friend," "Chuckles," or any other of our Companion Papers, I do not hesitate to "boom" it through the medium of this Chat. Many thousands of my chums would not have ordered this week's "Penny Popular" had I not advised them of the grand new innovations taking place in that paper. The stories would have appeared; Popular had I not advised them of the most vital adventures of Harry Wharton & Co., and there would have been weeping and gnashing of teeth!

No, Cyril; I cannot agree with you that I am misusing this Chat Page. Whenever there is anything to shout about, I do so—not merely for my own selfish sake, as you seem to suppose, but for the benefit of thousands of my chums who, but for this Chat, would be quite in the dark as to the latest developments in the world of boys' literature.

NOTICES.

Cricket.

LADS' FELLOWSHIP want matches—16-17.—R. W. Brown, 32, Bishopsgate, E.C. 2.

A. V. West, 114, Wellfield Road, Streatham, S.W. 16, desires place in South London team. First-class batsman and fieldsman.

Back Numbers Wanted.

Donald Don, 127, Mallinson Road, Clapham Common, S.W.—"Gem," 518, "Manners' Vendetta," 3d. offered if clean. Write first.

Eric H. Turner, 61, Chesterford Road, Manor Park, E. 12—"Gem" 153; "Magnet" 204; also "Magnet" 200.

Hugh Page, 18, Chester Street, Newcastle-on-Tyne.—Any Christmas Numbers "Magnet," and "Gem" before 1916. 6d. offered—9d. if clean. Write first.

Ben Cole, St. Joseph's Ward, Jewis Street Hospital, Dublin.—"Boys' Friend" Library, "Shunned by the School," and "The Pride of the School."

H. A. H. (YOUR EDITOR).

outside, and there was a hum of excitement among the rest that helped to make Larking inaudible to them.

"Look out, you fellows! We're being——" Then the handkerchief was thrust over Cardew's open mouth, and he found himself shot on top of Carpenter and Snipe.

Goggs dodged out of the door. "Sure, we've trapped him!" he cried. "Lock up, me darlins!"

The woodshed was shadowed by the wall near. No one had noticed Cardew's passing inside; no one missed him now.

The door slammed to. The key grated in the lock.

"You silly idiots!" came a roar from inside. And Goggs recognised the voice of Cardew. But no one else did.

In the Fourth Dormitory.

"WHERE have you young asses been?" asked Kildare, meeting the Grundy contingent in the corridors below stairs, where they certainly should not have been at that hour. "Is it bed-time, Kildare?" inquired Gunn innocently.

Kildare looked at him hard. "Don't you know it?" he snapped.

But he did not repeat his query as to where they had been. It must have been fairly obvious to him that they had come from out-of-doors, but there was no evidence of the fact in their appearance, for none of them wore caps, and the skipper of St. Jim's was not the fellow to make a fuss about trifles.

"Weally, I am surprised to find how late it is!" said Arthur Augustus, taking his handsome watch out and glancing at it. "You must excuse us, Kildare, deah boy!"

"Don't gas-get!" replied Kildare curtly. "Hallo! Who's that?"

He was looking at Phelim O'Hoggarty as he spoke, and he nodded towards that arch-impostor.

"New chap; wild Irishman, nam of O'Hoggarty," answered Wilkins.

"Sure, he's no wilder than I am," remarked Mulvaney minor, who had quite taken Phelim to his heart.

"I hope not!" Kildare returned drily. "Cut now!"

They cut then.

Goggs had not wanted Kildare to see him; but the incident had passed off without any apparent suspicion on the part of the skipper.

"That fellow Kildare has a way of talking that I can't say I approve of at all," growled Grundy. "It's all very well for him to call you chaps 'young asses.' That's right enough. But it's a bit thick when he includes me—me!"

"Sure, now, an' it looked to me as though he was ather lookin' straight at you when he spoke," said Phelim.

Grundy glared at him.

"Look here, O'Taggarty, or whatever your silly Irish name is," said the great man loftily, "you and I will fall out if I have any of your blessed check, so don't you forget it!"

"Oh, he doesn't know any better, old top!" Wilkins said, with a wink at Phelim. "What can you expect from a chap brought up in an Irish bog and then sent to the Grammar School? We'll teach him what's what and who's who, and when he knows all about it he won't think of coming near you except on his bended knees!"

"Good-night, you fellows!" said Gore, as the Fourth-Formers turned in at the door of their dormitory, and the Shell fellows went on to theirs.

Phelim grinned. Grundy and Wilkins had both helped him without knowing what they did.

Thus far no one had noticed the absence of Cardew. The four from the Shell were not likely to think about it now. But there was still danger to be dreaded in the dormitory, into which Phelim now followed the Fourth Form section of the party.

Everybody else—except Cardew—was already there and undressing.

"That's your bed, I suppose," said Tompkins to Phelim. "Anyway, it's the only one empty, so it will have to be."

"Hallo, O'Hoggarty!" cried Levison.

"You've turned up here, then?"

"Sure, and didn't I say——"

"We thought you were gassing, you know."

"Faith, and I niver gas!"

"Tom Merry won't let you bowl those beastly grubs if you play for us," remarked Blake.

"And you'll get into a thumping row if you knock your own wicket down!" added Digby.

"Bai Jove! Nobody would do that except by accident," said Arthur Augustus. "I have had that misfortune myself, but——"

"Sheer clumsiness, Gustavus!" put in Digby.

"Weally, Dig! I weject the imputation with omplete despisewy. I defy anyone whatevah to say that I am evah clumsy."

Phelim grinned cheerily. All this suited him very well indeed. His appearance, and the chaff which had arisen through it, had caused even Clive and Levison to forget about Cardew for the time being.

And the longer they went on forgetting the better it would suit him.

Kildare came along to put out the lights. He walked part of the way down the room, for Gussy had not finished undressing, and the captain was not in as big a hurry as he sometimes was.

In another moment he must have spotted Cardew's empty bed. But the red-wigged spoofer was equal to the occasion.

He sat up.

"Sure," he said, "somewan ought to be ather inthrojuicin' me to this young gintleman!"

Kildare looked at him and smiled.

"I don't really see the need of an introduction," he said. "I know who you are, and if you don't know who I am you'll be finding out pretty soon. But I'm pleased to shake hands with a brother Irishman."

"Oirish, are yez? Bedad, I'd niver be ather thinkin' it at all, at all, for yez have no more of the brogue than myself. But it's plased and proud I am to shake hands wid yez!"

Kildare's attention was kept from the open empty bed thus; and, as he turned again, Arthur Augustus said:

"I'm ready now, Kildare, deah boy."

"And time, too!" came the skipper's genial growl.

He put out the lights and departed.

Hardly had the door closed behind him when Durrance asked:

"Anybody here know where Cardew is?"

"I was just wondering about that," said Clive. "I thought every minute Kildare would be spotting the fact that he wasn't here."

"O'Hoggarty saved that by wanting to be 'inthrojuiced' to Kildare," said Roylance.

"No credit to O'Hog! We'd better call him O'Hog, I think," Blake said. "He didn't know Cardew was away. It was quite an accident he held up Kildare like that."

"Not so sure!" grunted Herries. "O'Hog was with us, and I shouldn't wonder if he did twig about Cardew, though I'll own I didn't. O'Hog isn't such an ass as he looks, Blake."

"Hadn't need be!" Blake replied.

"But where is Cardew?" persisted Durrance.

"Cousin George wants to know where cousin Ralph is, and won't be happy till he's told!" giped Levison.

"Do you know, Levison?" asked Durrance, ignoring the gibe.

"I don't usually tell all I know," answered Levison.

"If it's any good to you to know it, I haven't the ghost of an idea where the bouncer is, Durrance!" said Clive frankly.

"Oh, Levison does!" said Digby. "You fellows needn't worry."

"Cardew's a pretty good hand at taking care of himself, anyway!" remarked Kerruish.

Levison said no more.

He did not know at all where Cardew was. But he knew Cardew.

This sort of thing was not matter for amazement when it was done by Ralph Reckness Cardew.

Indeed, nothing which that self-willed youth did ever greatly amazed Levison, though Clive was still liable to be surprised by some of his wilder flights.

"Shall we toss O'Hog in a blanket?" asked Blake.

"Sure, an' I'd rather yez didn't!" said Phelim.

"It's not your views on the matter that count, you know, O'Hog!" said Roylance.

"Not likely!" agreed Smith minor.

"Leave him alone!" spoke Lumley-Lumley.

"I don't see ragging a chap the first night. Doesn't give him a fair chance."

"But O'Hog's been at the Grammar School!" argued Digby. "Tisn't as if the bouncer was fresh from home and mother."

"Did they toss you in a blanket at the Grammar School, O'Hog?" asked Blake.

"Faith, thin, an' they did that same!"

"Bai Jove! We have forgotten to tell you

fellows about the Gwammah School wot-tahs in the woodshed!" said Arthur Augustus.

"Grammar School rotters in the woodshed? What on earth are you burbling about, you fathead?" demanded Blake politely.

"Hewwies knows."

"Sure, an' so do I!" piped up Mulvaney minor.

"I was in it, too!" said Clarence York Tompkins.

"What, the woodshed?" Digby asked. "Seems to me either you or the Grammar School bounders aren't very particular about the company they keep."

"There seems to have been a pretty scratch lot in it," remarked Kerruish, with engaging candour.

"Gussy, Herries, Mulvaney, Tompkins." Blake said thoughtfully. "Yes, bar old Herries, it's rather a one-legged crowd."

"Weally, Blake, I considah your gwoos wudeness——"

"Don't forget O'Hog!" growled Herries.

"He was in it, too—first in it, I rather fancy."

"Faith, but that's hardly worth talkin' about, me jewel!" said Phelim.

He preferred that they should go on talking, since that took their minds off the absence of Cardew.

But he would rather have had the conversation kept free of any reference to the affair of the woodshed.

"We want to know all about it," said Blake.

"I will welahe the facts, deah boys," volunteered Arthur Augustus.

"Shall we get any sleep to-night?" yawned Levison.

"Wats to you, Levison! If you mean to infer that I have a long-winded mannah of telling stowies, all I have to say is——"

"Here beginneth the first lesson!" chirped Digby.

"Which will last the 'ole blessed night!" added Harry Hammond.

"You are weally vewy iwwevewent, Dig! An' I am surprised at your wudeness, Hammond! I decline to tell the stowy at all!"

"Well, there are others who can tell it," said Blake. "Go on, Herries!"

"Weally, Blake, I——"

"But you say you decline to tell it, Gustavus."

"I did not mean my words to be taken pwecisely in that mannah, Blake. But if I am to be intewwupted fifty times before I begin——"

"And five hundred and fifty after you've finished," chipped in Kerruish.

"It still won't matter much as long as you're not interrupted while your noble jaw is wag-wag-wagging," said Dick-Julian.

"Bai Jove, what uttah wot you fellahs talk! It was this way, Hewwies an' I were goin' along the passage——"

"Was that last year, or only last term?" inquired Digby anxiously.

"You weally are a sillay ass, Dig! It was neithah last term nor——"

"Well, start it a bit farther back. Begin with Noah, or one of the other giddy old patriarchs. No use making half a job of it, you know."

"It was just before this bizney began," said Gussy firmly.

"Then it doesn't matter," Roylance said. "We don't want to hear a thing that happened before it began. Much better begin in the middle, old gun!"

"I call that absolutely widic! To begin in the middle is absurd, positively. The pwopah place to begin a stowy is at the commencement."

"Let's see—which end is that?" inquired Levison.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Will you let me tell my stowy, Blake?"

"I thought you never, never did, Gussy!"

"Did what, Woylance?"

"Told 'stowies.' Mustn't call 'em lies—it might wound your tender feelings."

"Weally, of all the sillay asses, you fellows——"

"Oh, dry up, all of you!" hooted Herries.

"I'll tell the yarn. It won't take me a giddy fortnight. There really isn't much in it. Some of those Grammar School bounders tried on one of their little games to-night, and we jolly well scored over them!"

(Another grand long instalment of this magnificent school serial will appear in next Monday's issue. Order early.)