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**LODER'S LUCK!**



**THE FIFTH-FORM MASTER MAKES AMENDS!**

*(An amusing incident in the splendid long complete school tale in this issue.)*





For Next Monday!

**"THE COUNCIL OF ACTION!"**

By Frank Richards.

Our next story of the chams of Greyfriars is one full of fun and adventure. Owing to Mr. Quelch and three other masters of the Lower School having to be away for the purpose of examination in Classics at Oxford, Dr. Locke is obliged to accept the services of four masters from Highcliffe School, who are able to relieve the shortage on account of an outbreak of measles at Highcliffe.

The masters arrive, and very soon there are ructions in the lower Forms. Fisher T. Fish suggests a Council of Action as a means of retaliation, and

when the Council gets to work, trouble commences.

The fun is fast and furious, and it is only due to Mr. Prout's action that the affair is cleared up and peace once more reigns supreme at Greyfriars.

I must urge my reader-friends to place an early order with their newsagent.

**FROM AUSTRALIA.**

Harold W. Brown, Glencoe, Burt Street, Northcote, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia, would like to hear from readers, 17-25. This correspondent is a particularly brilliant fellow, and though he says he only writes a couple of letters a year, when he does set pen to paper his observations are worth studying.

**EGYPT FOR EVER.**

There is good reason to believe that it was a pleasant duty that fell to the lot of D. Georgiades, who writes me from Alexandria. Certainly it was most cheery to get his letter. He says he felt it his duty to let me know how popular the Companion Papers are in Egypt. They are appreciated everywhere, and the only difficulty is to get a sufficient supply.

**ON TRAMP.**

A correspondent sends me a splendid account of the holiday he has been taking. "I did not bother about luggage," he writes—"just a knapsack and a few necessaries, and I set off. I live in South London, so I made for Surrey, and you will hardly believe the grand time I had. The weather was perfect, so several nights I slept out. I ran against a farmer who found me dosing in his hay. He was a good sort, and asked me in to breakfast. I spent a day with him, and helped in the work, for which he paid me. It is fine to see the country like this. The birds of a morning about four tuned up gloriously. I never saw a main road, but stuck to the byways. When I saw a foot-path I took it, though it did not belong to me. I had a book with me about natural history, and I made notes of some of the birds I saw. It was the cheapest holiday I ever had, and I have come back to my office job feeling ready for anything."

**10 TO 1 IT WON'T!**



P.-c. 11: "Bother it! I've left my watch upstairs, and I'm too tired to go up and fetch it."

P.-c. 22: "Oh, let it alone, and it will run down by itself!"

**THE WICKET BOY!**



Billy: "Yes, it was a splendid match, uncle, but I was the one who won it."

Uncle: "Why, you were not playing!"

Billy: "No; but I was scoring!"

**IT TOOK THE HAT!**



1. "What's this?" hooted Uncle Tom. "Have you boys been using my best hat as an Aunt Sally? Oh, you young rascals, when I get it I'll use the carpet-beater on you!"



2. But when Uncle Tom rolled up to the wall to rescue his topper he had the surprise of his life. Those young rascals had only borrowed it to catch a swarm of bees. Oh, dear us!

**THE ROYAL NAVY.**

A neat, little official handbook called "How to Join the Royal Navy" will shortly be obtainable at any naval recruiting-office, coastguard station, or post-office. I have many inquiries about the grand Service, and perhaps my chums will take note of the new publication, and make a point of asking for it—that is, those of my friends who are eager for the sea. Boys for training as seamen are accepted between the ages of fifteen and a half and seventeen.

**ABOUT THE "GEM!"**

I hope that all my readers are taking advantage of the splendid Football Annual which is being given free with the "Gem Library." Football enthusiasts will, I am sure, be over-joyed with this little gift, for in it they have everything that a follower of football requires in the shape of League fixtures, Laws of the Game, articles by famous players, etc. It is well worth having.

Your Editor





# LODER'S LUCK!

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

By FRANK RICHARDS.

What possessed the fat Renfovite at that moment Bunter was never able to say; but with a roar he leapt forward and flung himself like a rhinoceros upon the nearest man. Bunter and the burglar went down with a crash.  
(See Chapter 4.)

## THE FIRST CHAPTER.

### Bunter Learns Something!

"HALF a mo, young shaver!" Billy Bunter gave a start. Bunter, the fattest junior at Greyfriars School, was strolling along the quaint little High Street of Friardale. He was not paying attention to anything. He was merely thinking how trying it was to be so hard up as to have to walk back to the school without refreshing himself beforehand at the village tuckshop.

Bunter was an extremely short-sighted youth, and the enormous pair of spectacles he wore did not seem to help him much. The Greyfriars Remove, the Form Billy Bunter adorned, had nicknamed him the Owl, because he was always making ludicrous mistakes owing to his impaired vision. And a lot of the fellows referred to him as "the porpoise," because of his insatiable appetite.

"Half a mo, young shaver!"

Billy Bunter looked up in surprise.

Two big, burly men of the racing-tout variety stood across the narrow pathway, and blocked Bunter's further progress. The Owl of the Remove blinked at them through his enormous spectacles.

"Aren't yer going to say good-afternoon, young-gent?" demanded one of the men.

He had a very red face, and wore a check coat, with a cap to match.

"G-good afternoon!" said Billy Bunter nervously, and with a certain show of dignity.

He did not particularly like being addressed as "young shaver," but he was willing to make allowances for the men as they looked rough enough for poachers.

"Well," said the man in the check coat, "we're out for information, young shaver; in fact, we want to know the

lay of the land in these parts. Is there a school named Greyfriars 'ere?"

"I belong to Greyfriars."

"Ho! You do, does you?"

"Y-yes."

"Then perhaps you can answer a few questions, young fellow," said the other man, touching Billy Bunter affectionately on his fat arm.

The Owl of the Remove gave a smirk as he put his hands into his trousers-pockets.

"I don't usually talk to—to strangers in the street," he said.

"You don't know who I am, maybe?" said the burly man.

Billy Bunter shook his head.

"I—I don't think that I have ever met you before," he said. "If I have I've forgotten you."

"I'm Ted Chester."

"Oh!"

"That's me," said Mr. Chester, nodding his head—"that's me."

There was a distinct scent of strong rum as the man came closer to the fat Remove. Billy Bunter backed away a little.

"Here, don't come so close to me!" he expostulated. "I'm not deaf, and I—I've got an appointment, you know."

"I'm Ted Chester—"

"Yes, I know that. You've told me your name before. I am sure I am very pleased to make your acquaintance; but I've got to get back to the school. I've got an appointment, you know."

"I'm Ted Chester, and this 'ere is my pal—Peter Gaff."

"Yes."

Billy Bunter could see that both Mr. Chester and Mr. Gaff had had a little too much rum before they had started out to see the "lay of the land," as they put it. Or perhaps they had refreshed themselves at wayside places en route—not wisely, but too well.

The Owl of the Remove looked up and

down the old village street. It would not do for him to be seen talking to two such disreputable members of society. If one of the masters or even a prefect came along, Bunter would be booked for trouble.

Fortunately, the street was practically deserted. There were two of the villagers standing in the middle of the dusty road, looking on with a certain amount of interest. Just previously Mr. Chester and Mr. Gaff had buttonholed the two worthy natives of the village, and the inebriated condition of the two men had caused them some amusement. It struck them as funny to see one of the boys from Greyfriars School being accosted.

Bunter gave a sigh of relief when he discovered that there were no masters or prefects about.

"Peter Gaff's all right, young shaver," continued the man. "We've been pals since we was babies."

Mr. Gaff gave a thick sort of chuckle.

"Well, we've come to the right place," said Mr. Chester, nodding his head in the direction of Greyfriars School. "He's 'ere! It's good enough! 'E's 'ere!"

"Is he really?" said Billy Bunter, without having the faintest idea what the man was driving at, but thinking it best to humour him.

"You bet! He's at your place."

"Oh!"

"Before we speak to 'im," said Mr. Chester, "we want a little information out of you. From all accounts, he's rather a young rip. You'll allow that?"

"Y-yes."

"But we ain't goin' to show 'im up and 'ave him done in without speaking a word of warning, all the same," said Mr. Chester. "Old Banks might do it, if he could."

Billy Bunter gave a jump.

"Do you mean Joe Banks, the bookie?"

"That's the one. Joe's all right; but 'e's too 'ard on some of 'em. That ain't the way with me—me and Peter Gaff."

"That's jolly considerate of you, Mr. Chester," said Billy Bunter, still  
THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 658.



humouring the stranger. "It would be jolly hard for him to be shown up and done in without a word of warning."

It was all Greek to Bunter. He hadn't the faintest idea what the man was talking about, though the mention of Joe Banks had made the fat junior prick up his ears. The two men were evidently friends of Joe Banks, and the local bookmaker and racing tipster had such a bad name in the locality that Bunter's curiosity was aroused.

He realised that had not the two men imbibed liquid refreshment so liberally that warm September afternoon, they would not have confided all these particulars to the first chance stranger, especially a fellow obviously belonging to Greyfriars School, where Joe Banks would not dream of showing his face because of his fear of Dr. Locke, the headmaster. But the rum had been a little too much for the bookmaker's friends.

"Now this feller Loder," went on Mr. Chester, who was gradually coming closer and closer to Bunter, the fat Removite making every effort to retreat from close contact with him. "Wot is this feller Loder?"

Billy Bunter gave another jump. "Loder?" he gasped. "Loder's a prefect and—and a beastly cad and a bully. What do you want to know about Loder?"

The two men gave a chuckle. "Wot don't we know?" said Mr. Chester. "This bloke Loder seems a pretty warm member."

"Must be if 'e can beat Joe Banks at his own game!" chuckled Mr. Peter Gaff. "Ho, ho, ho!"

Billy Bunter blinked furiously through his big spectacles as the two men gave a hearty guffaw. The fat junior was beginning to see daylight now. He was well aware of Loder of the Sixth's association with Joe Banks.

Loder was the worst prefect in the school. He consistently bullied the juniors in the Lower Forms at Greyfriars, and in consequence he was loathed and despised by everybody, and Billy Bunter was beginning to realise that he was going to gain knowledge which he might be able to put to good account later on.

"Has—has my old friend Loder been up to his tricks with Banks again?" he said.

Mr. Chester and Mr. Gaff stopped laughing suddenly, and stared hard at the fat junior.

"So Loder's a pal of yours, is 'e?" said Mr. Gaff.

"Yes, rather," replied Bunter. "Old Loder and I have known one another for years and years."

"Oh!"

"What's my old pal been up to this time?"

"What ain't 'e?" growled Peter Gaff. "E's been too smart for old Joe for once."

"Oh!"

"Joe Banks 'as got an I O U for wot 'e owes 'im; but this bloke Loder seems to 'ave done it on Joe smarter than that. If them papers your pal Loder 'as took from Joe gets into the 'ands of the police, there's going to be a nice little whitewashed room with bars in the winder for poor old Joe!"

"Oh crumbs!"

"Of course, Joe was being 'ard on your pal Loder, and was fair pressing him for the twenty pound; but Loder lifted them papers of Joe's all right. There's enough evidence in them papers to get Joe five years!"

"Seven!" corrected Mr. Chester despondently.

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 658.

"Are you quite sure Loder's got them?"

"Joe says so."

Billy Bunter's cunning little brain was working hard. There was only one thing in the world that worried the Owl of the Remove. That was the wherewithal with which to purchase unlimited supplies of food. In the secret which was being unfurled now, Bunter foresaw tremendous possibilities. He must get the missing book into his hands, and, somehow or other, the I O U which was in Loder's handwriting. He could not see how he could achieve all this just yet; but the information already imparted by the two inebriated gentlemen was something worth having.

"W-what's in the papers?" continued Bunter. "How can a lot of blessed papers give old Banks seven years' imprisonment?"

"Well, it's like this 'ere. Joe tries to console 'imself that them papers is legitimate means of making people pay up wot's owing. But now Joe can't find 'em. He says he thinks a judge will call it blackmail. It's so upset poor old Joe 'e's fair distracted."

"Oh!"

"Now, young shaver, we've told you wot the game is, now you can 'elp me."

"How?" growled Billy Bunter.

"Well, Joe wants the papers back, and 'e's goin' to give me and Peter Gaff ten pun apiece hif we get them. Now, would you like to earn a quid all to yourself, young shaver?"

"It all depends," replied Bunter cautiously. "What do you want me to do?"

"You get us the papers, and I gives you a whole bloomin' pound for yourself!"

"Not me!" said Billy Bunter emphatically. "I'm jolly well not going to get it for a mouldy pound-note! Why, a pound's not worth ten bob now, what with income tax and all that sort of thing!"

"Oh!"

"If you'll give me the twenty pounds, I might entertain the idea," said Billy Bunter, very condescendingly. "But I'm blessed if I'm going to get it for a pound!"

Mr. Ted Chester and Mr. Peter Gaff stared at the fat Removite a little unsteadily. Bunter's definite refusal annoyed them in their present condition.

"So you ain't going to give two poor men a helping hand, young shaver?"

"Not for a pound!"

For a brief moment a look of ferocity was in the black, glittering eyes of the unsteady Mr. Gaff, and he staggered forward as though he would forcibly detain the Owl of the Remove. But his companion seemed to read his mind. He pulled down the other's extended arm with a muttered oath.

"'Ere, steady, Peter Gaff!" he said. "Don't touch the young shaver. We know 'ow to get the papers easy enough, if it comes to that. It won't be the first crib we've gone for!"

Billy Bunter looked alarmed.

"You wouldn't stand much chance if you broke into Greyfriars!" he exclaimed. "Why, you'd be absolutely mobbed!"

"And who by, young shaver?"

"Why, by the masters and the prefects and—and all the other fellows."

"Let's give the young raskil a good 'iding!" growled Peter Gaff, lurching forward.

Billy Bunter stepped back into the road in alarm. The two villagers had retired into the Red Lion again, and the village street was deserted. He gave a quick glance behind, and then suddenly

turned on his heels and tore away in the direction of Greyfriars.

The two men seemed to suddenly pull themselves together.

Peter Gaff sprang after the fat junior with an oath.

"Seize him!"

But it was too late. Billy Bunter tore down the little street. Fear lent him wings. Puffing and blowing, he soon widened the distance between himself and his pursuers. After five minutes he paused a moment to listen to hear if he were pursued.

There was no sound of footsteps behind him. Billy Bunter wiped his perspiring face, and then rolled off in the direction of Greyfriars, thinking furiously.

## THE SECOND CHAPTER.

### Ragging Loder!

THE Common-room in the Remove Form passage was crowded.

There had been an exciting chess contest. Frank Nugent had raised a side to play against a side championed by Hurree Janset Ram Singh. Most of the Removites were good chess-players, and there had been a lot of interest over the evening's game. It had been a close result, but Frank Nugent's team were the victors. They had won three games, and Hurree Singh's side had won two. As the last move was made, and Bulstrode had been successfully check-mated, Harry Wharton, the captain of the Remove Form, pushed back his chair.

"Bed-time!" he said, looking at the clock.

Frank Nugent yawned.

"Well, we've had an exciting evening, and I'm tired," he remarked.

"Half a minute, you fellows!" said Billy Bunter. "I've got some news for you!"

"Keep it till to-morrow, porpoise!" laughed Bob Cherry. "We're tired now."

"But it's important, Cherry! I——"

"Never tell us to-day what you can possibly put off till the morn, Bunter!"

"But I tell you it's important!"

"Bosh!"

"It's about Loder!"

The Removites halted at the door. Loder was a sore point with the Remove. He was always doing his utmost to do the Remove a bad turn, and to report the smallest offence to their Formmaster, Mr. Quelch. Not that Loder had it all his own way. The Sixth-Former often found Harry Wharton & Co. too much for him, and the Remove never missed an opportunity of getting in a sly dig at the unpopular prefect, and at times they ragged him unmercifully.

"What's Loder been up to this time, Bunter?" said Harry Wharton. "Has he been going for you?"

"No, it's not that this time, Wharton. It's something I was told when I was in Friardale this afternoon."

"Oh, have you been eavesdropping again, you fat load?"

"Oh, really, Wharton, I——"

"Come along!" cried Bob Cherry. "Let's go up now. Bunter will keep us all night!"

The Owl of the Remove snorted angrily.

"I tell you it's about Loder, you silly fatheads!" he cried. "Two awful roughs told me that Loder has been up to his tricks again with Banks, the bookie."

"Oh, my hat! What a cad!"

"Simply letting Greyfriars into the mud!"





"Bunter! I am coming!" Mr. Prout came dashing along, his dressing-gown flowing in the air. The Fifth-Form master came panting up, breathless and excited. "My gun, boy!" he gasped. "Where is it?" (See Chapter 4.)

"Rather!"  
 "What did the roughs say, Bunter?" said Harry Wharton.  
 "They told me a lot of things. You see, they were the worse for drink, and they stopped me in the High Street. Of course, it was jolly awkward, because I'm a fearfully particular fellow, really. I don't know what my pater would have said if he had come along and spotted me!"  
 "Oh crumbs! Just hark at the chump!" exclaimed Johnny Bull.  
 "Well, what did the roughs say, Bunter?"  
 "They told me that Loder has been running foul of Joe Banks, the bookie. Banks has got an I O U for twenty pounds, and, in retaliation, Loder sneaked a lot of papers from Banks; and if Loder gave the papers to the police, Banks would be in prison for six or seven years."  
 "Phew!"  
 "My hat!"  
 "The awful cad! He's ruining Greyfriars!"  
 There was a thump at the Common-room door, and the next moment a pale, dissipated-looking face looked in. It was Gerald Loder of the Sixth.  
 "Why in the dickens haven't you young scoundrels gone up to bed yet?" snapped Loder. "Can't you see the time? Mr. Quelch has asked me to see 'lights-out' in the Remove. Up you go, you young rotters! I'm in a hurry!"  
 Not a single member of the Remove stirred.

The Removites strongly resented the Sixth-Former's tone. It was always a bad thing for Harry Wharton & Co. when the reins of authority fell into the hands of Loder. Were it Wingate, the captain of Greyfriars, or Tremaine, or North, authority was always maintained unimpaired.  
 The respect the fellows felt for Wingate helped him in keeping things in order. But Loder was little regarded. He was a bully and a tyrant in the first place, and he had only retained his post as prefect by very carefully keeping his real character from the knowledge of the Head.  
 Now that Mr. Quelch had put Loder in charge for the rest of the evening, the Sixth-Former was likely to regard the duty as an occasion for swanking, and that was not the way to keep order among fellows already inclined to be unruly.  
 There was a bullying expression upon his face, which showed that the knowledge that he was in authority in the Remove Form had "got into his head."  
 A murmur of resentment went up as he finished addressing the juniors in the Common-room.  
 "Now, then," he exclaimed, "I don't want any of that silly noise!"  
 Every eye was turned upon the prefect at once. The Removites stared at him as if he were some curious animal that had wandered into their quarters.  
 "Hallo, hallo, hallo!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "Hark at Loder!"  
 "Not so much noise!"

"Oh crumbs!"  
 "Mind, I don't want any cheek from you rats!" said Loder. "I'll give you a hundred lines each to write out before you go to bed if I have any of your nonsense!"  
 "My word!" murmured Bob Cherry. "I can see myself writing them out, too—I don't think!"  
 "What-ho!" said Bolsover major.  
 "I guess not!" said Fisher T. Fish, the American junior.  
 Loder stamped his foot angrily.  
 "Come in!" said Bob Cherry.  
 There was a laugh, and the prefect turned crimson.  
 "Cherry, take a hundred lines!"  
 "Certainly!" said Bob Cherry.  
 "Where shall I take them to?"  
 "Take two hundred lines!"  
 "With pleasure! Where—"  
 "If you say another word, Cherry, I shall cane you!"  
 "Will you really?"  
 "Ha, ha, ha!"  
 Loder gritted his teeth.  
 "Come here, Cherry!" he shouted.  
 Bob Cherry did not stir.  
 "Thank you, I prefer remaining where I am!" he remarked.  
 "Come here!"  
 "Nother time, Loder, old man!"  
 "Cherry, I order you—"  
 "Dear me," said Bob Cherry, "he orders me, Harry!"  
 "Dear me," said Harry Wharton, "he orders you, Cherry!"  
 THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 658.



"Dear me," said Frank Nugent, "chaps, he orders him!"  
 "I guess the silly galoot orders him!"  
 "My aunt," said Johnny Bull, "he orders him!"  
 "Orders him, you know!" said Peter Todd.

Loder of the Sixth simply snorted. It was the beginning of a "rag," and he knew it. The Removites were openly mocking him, and as he had started the trouble he had no right to complain. He resolved to nip it in the bud, however.

He made a rush across the room towards Bob Cherry. The Removite retreated round the big table, which was too large and solid for Loder to shift it out of the way.

From the opposite side of it he smiled across at the prefect. Bob rather prided himself upon an aristocratic calm of manner, and certainly he did not look nearly as excited as the Sixth-Former.

"Come back here, Cherry!" roared Loder.

"Thanks, I'm all right here!"  
 "I order you—as a prefect!"  
 "And I decline—as a sensible chap!"  
 "Ha, ha, ha!"

Loder glared round at the laughing juniors. But that did not prevent them from laughing. They roared! The red and furious face of Loder seemed to amuse them. The prefect clenched his hands, as if he would rush upon them, hitting out right and left. But he thought better of it. Some of the Removites looked as if they wanted an excuse for handling him; and he had too much sense still to afford them one.

He made a rush round the table after Bob Cherry instead.

Bob Cherry promptly darted round, and was at the opposite side by the time the prefect reached the spot where he had been standing.

Loder halted, panting for breath.

The Removites simply shrieked. The sight of a big Sixth-Former who had utterly lost his self-control chasing a nimble junior round a big table was funny enough. Bob Cherry's coolness added to the comicality of the scene. As soon as he stopped he assumed a languid pose, yawning as if a little bored by the performance, while Loder was spluttering and panting on the other side of the table.

"You—you young hound!" yelled Loder. "I order you to come round!"

The rag started again.

"I say, he orders me!"

"You hear, you chaps—he orders him!"

"The silly, lopsided jay orders him, I guess!"

"Shut up, you cheeky young scoundrels!" roared the prefect.

"Oh crumbs!"

"He orders us!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Loder clenched his hands, and made a sudden run round the table again. Bob Cherry fled again, and round and round the table they went twice, the Removite easily keeping his distance ahead of the Sixth-Former.

Loder paused, partly from breathlessness, and partly because the wild yells of laughter made him realise what a ridiculous figure he was cutting.

He panted at Bob Cherry across the table.

"You young villain—"

"I love him for his nice manners!" murmured Bob Cherry, flicking a speck of dust from his sleeve in a calm, negligent way.

"I—I—I'll—"

"Go hon!"

"I'll—I'll smash you!"

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 658.

"Dear me, he's going to smash me, you chaps!"

"He's going to smash him!"

"The honoured and respected, ludicrous Loder sahib is going for him smashfully!" said Hurree Janset Ram Singh, in his own remarkable English.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Loder laid his hands upon the table and made a sudden sprawl across it. He intended to take Bob Cherry by surprise and catch him before he could escape. But Bob was watching him. He had not time to run round the table; but he dived under it and came up on the other side, just as Loder came sprawling across.

Loder rolled off on the floor and stood where Bob Cherry had been standing, gasping. But the table was still between them!

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Harry Wharton & Co. roared.

"I—I—I—" gasped Loder. "Cherry, I—I shall report this to Mr. Quelch, if not to the Head!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I shall report it to Mr. Quelch first thing in the morning!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

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"I—I shall—shall—"

Words failed Loder. He made another wild rush round the table. Again Bob Cherry eluded him. Then the angry prefect strode from the room, followed by roars of laughter from Harry Wharton & Co.

**THE THIRD CHAPTER.  
A Night-Alarm!**

**B**ILLY BUNTER stirred in his sleep and awoke.

The cool September night was wrapped in silence and sleep; the hour of midnight was long past, and the latest light had been turned out, the last door had closed.

The high windows of the Remove dormitory glimmered with silver light.

The round moon rode in the sky, and the light fell in silver flakes in the wide quadrangle, and glimmered in at the windows.

Across the dormitory it lay in ghostly patches, broken by the shadows of the beds, abnormally long in the clear light.

Billy Bunter turned his head on the pillow, and gave a prodigious yawn.

He had awakened, he did not know

why. There was no sound in the building; not a footstep, not a shutting door, at that hour. Faintly through the dim dormitory came the steady breathing from the other beds.

Yet what was that?

In the deep stillness a faint creak sounded, faint, slight, but sufficient to catch the ear of the awakened Removite by contrast with the heavy silence.

Billy Bunter started.

As he lay in bed his eyes were upon a patch of moonlight that streamed in at the nearest window, and lay in a silver flood beside his bed.

The patch of light had suddenly darkened.

A new shadow lay on the floor.

It was not the shadow of a branch stirred across the window by the wind. It was a shadow, huge, abnormal, eerie, but unmistakable.

The shadow of the head and shoulders of a man.

Billy Bunter lay quiet, breathing hard; fully awake now, with his heart beating like a hammer.

A man at the window!

That was what the shadow meant.

Slowly, cautiously, the fat Removite turned his head so that he would be looking at the window—instead of at the floor. He groped under the pillow for his spectacles, and put them on, and blinked towards the window. The glimmering square was darkened by the outlines of the form outside.

Head and shoulders.  
A black silhouette.

Billy Bunter's fat lips came together hard. He could see nothing but the black mass of the head and shoulders; the features were invisible. Yet it seemed to him that the man was looking straight at him.

But that was only fancy. He could see that form in relief against the moonlight. The man could not see through the glass into the dim dormitory.

Billy Bunter quietly rolled out of bed. His heart was beating hard, and he was trembling all over his fat body. He knew at once that it must be a burglar, and he realised that only a desperate man would have ventured the dangerous task of climbing up a rain-pipe to the dormitory window.

The creak had been caused by an effort to open the window. The window was open at the top, like most of the windows at Greyfriars. The intruder had only to push up the bottom sash from outside. But that was not easy. The lower sash was stiff from disuse, and the man's position was awkward, on a narrow sill more than fifty feet from the ground.

A fall meant death—grim death on the stones of the quadrangle.

Creak!

Some instrument had been forced under the lower sash, and the man was steadily exerting a pressure to raise it. As soon as he could get his fingers under it, it would be easy to do the rest.

Billy Bunter blinked nervously through his big spectacles.

The intruder did not know that the first sound had awakened one of the sleepers, and that his tell-tale shadow in the moonlight had betrayed his presence.

Billy Bunter stepped to the next bed, where Harry Wharton was sleeping, taking care to keep in the shadow and not to step out into the patch of moonlight on the floor.

He shook Harry Wharton by the shoulder, and then placed a fat and trembling hand over his mouth. The caution was necessary.

"Br-r-r-r!" mumbled Harry Wharton, as he awoke.

"Ssssh!" whispered Billy Bunter,



"Wh-wh-wh-what—"  
 "Oh, really, Wharton, do keep quiet!"  
 "I'll jolly well keep you quiet, you fat idiot!" mumbled Harry Wharton.  
 "What the—"  
 "B-b-b-burglars!"  
 "Wh-what?"  
 "B-b-b-burglars!"  
 "Are you dreaming, Bunter?"  
 "No; they're real!"  
 "My hat!"

Harry Wharton rolled out of bed. Billy Bunter pointed to the window, and the captain of the Remove gave a gasp of astonishment.

"Phew!"  
 "D-d-do keep quiet, Wharton!"  
 "All right, Bunter, old man. I say, we'd better tackle him before he gets in. A shove would send him spinning off the window-sill."  
 "Go on, then," said Bunter. "You do it!"

Harry Wharton hesitated, and shook his head.

"No; we won't do that. It would kill him; although, I suppose, a burglar has to take the risks of his business, like a soldier or a policeman."

Nothing ever seemed to upset Harry Wharton's good spirits. He would have joked if he had been bound to the stake.  
 "It's—it's no good joking now, Wharton."

"All right, Bunter. Look here; he won't get that window open in a hurry. It's as stiff as anything. We ought to have some fellows here to collar him when he gets in."

"Better not let him get in. He may have a revolver. I—I believe he's one of those awful rotters who stopped me in Friardale. They looked like burglars."

"Well, look here, we can't knock him off the window-sill. Hang it; a man's life is a man's life, even a burglar's!"

"Yes; but look here, Wharton! He can't get in. He may have a pistol."

Harry Wharton wrinkled his brows in thought.

Creak!  
 The window was creaking, but it was hardly moving.

"I—I say, Wharton," whispered Bunter. "I'll get out and call Wingate and some more of the Sixth, and Mr. Prout. He's got a gun."

"Good! That's the idea! Cut off! Keep in the shadow; he may be able to see you if you get into the light."

Billy Bunter nodded his head, and carefully keeping out of the patches of moonlight, made his way to the door and silently left the dormitory.

Harry Wharton stepped to Bob Cherry's bed and shook him, awakening him with the same precautions as when he himself was awakened by Bunter.

"What's the row?" whispered Bob.

"Burglars! Look at the window!"

Bob Cherry looked and gave a start.

Creak!

"My hat!" murmured Bob Cherry. "I say, Harry, who do you think he is?"

"Bunter says he thinks he might be one of the men who stopped him in Friardale, and told him all about Loder's affair with Banks, the bookie. I dare say Bunter's right for once."

"What's the fool think he's going to get out of this dorm?"

"Perhaps he thinks Loder lives here, and he's come after the papers Bunter told us about."

"By Jove! I wonder!"

The two Removites watched the silhouette at the window keenly.

Creak!

The silhouette suddenly disappeared to the side of the window, and there was a scratching noise for a few moments.

"I—I wonder whether he's gone?"



"I guess I'll make the silly jay swing thirty feet!" shouted Fisher T. Fish. "Here's the very thing for the guy!" The American junior held a strong stick above his head, and the next moment he leapt up and caught Billy Bunter a resounding thwack across the seat of his trousers. (See Chapter 6.)

gasped Harry Wharton. "That's jolly curious!"

"We had better wake the rest of the dormitory," whispered Bob Cherry.

"We mustn't let the brute get away!"

"Wait a moment! Hark!"

Through the silence of the night, from somewhere downstairs in the school building, rang a piercing cry for help.

"My hat!" cried Harry Wharton.

"That's Bunter's voice! Something's happened. Come on!"

## THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

### At Dead of Night!

**B**ILLY BUNTER crept out of the Remove Form dormitory, and blinked around unsteadily as he gained the landing at the top of the staircase. All was quiet, and the whole place wrapped in Stygian darkness. The Owl of the Remove was glad to be out of the dormitory. He had a doorway now between him and the midnight marauder, and he felt safer in consequence. But he missed the moonlight. He could barely see his hand before his face so black was it at the top of the staircase.

"Oh crumbs!" he grunted to himself.

"How on earth can I be expected to walk about in this? It ain't safe, for one thing."

For a moment Bunter thought of returning to the dormitory and getting a box of matches to help guide him on his mission. But he changed his mind suddenly, and groped his way slowly down the wide staircase.

"I'll get old Prout first!" he muttered. "Prout's got a gun, and it ain't safe to face a beastly burglar without a gun."

Slowly but surely the Removite crawled downstairs.

Creak!

Bunter suddenly started as a sudden creak from the gloom came to his ears. It sounded as though someone else was quite close to him, and the trembling junior clutched the banister hard, and stood waiting, with his heart in his mouth.

Creak, creak! The sounds were faint, would have been imperceptible in the daytime, but in the dead stillness of the night they were perfectly audible to the straining ears of the fat Removite.

Someone was stealing along stealthily at the bottom of the stairs. Billy Bunter, clinging hold of the banister-rail in a grip of desperation, thought he caught a momentary glimpse of a dim form flitting



by in the darkness. But it was too black, and Bunter's nerves were addled by imagination as he stood, waiting anxiously.

Whether the visitor below was Ted Chester or Peter Gaff or not, it was perfectly clear that there was someone about who was not upon an honest errand.

Billy Bunter waited and waited; but after a time he decided that whoever had been below had departed along the passage. The Owl started to move down again, and with his heart in his mouth, he groped his way along the corridor as far as Mr. Prout's bed-room door.

He turned the handle cautiously, and crept in.

Mr. Prout, the Fifth Form master, was in bed. There could be no doubt about that. Snore upon snore awakened the echoes, and Billy Bunter gave a start of surprise at the volume of sound. He switched on the electric light, and Mr. Prout was revealed lying on his back in the centre of the bed, with his mouth wide open and snoring sonorously.

The fat Removite rolled across the carpet and caught the Fifth Form master by the shoulder of his pyjamas and shook.

But Mr. Prout was a sound sleeper. In his young days Mr. Paul Pontifex Prout had been brought up to a life of adventure. He had hunted the bear in the Rockies and shot lions in Central Africa, and spent days and days in tracking down wild animals. In those days Mr. Prout had slept on Nature's bedstead, the hard and unsympathetic earth, and now the comfort of a feather-bed made Mr. Prout a very difficult gentleman to rouse from his slumber. He gave a grunt as Billy Bunter shook him.

"Mr. Prout, sir! Hi! Wake up!"

Billy Bunter shook away at the sleeping master's shoulder, until it looked as though Mr. Prout's pyjama jacket might be rent in two. The heaviest sleeper in the world could not remain unconscious for long under such treatment. Mr. Prout gave a prodigious yawn as he opened his eyes under the buffeting which Bunter was now exerting with both hands.

"Quiet, sir!" muttered the Owl of the Remove anxiously. "Don't make a row, sir. It's burglars!"

The Fifth Form master sat bolt upright in a moment.

"Bunter! What's that?"

"B-burglars, sir! Quick, sir! There's

burglars in the school, and we want your help with a gun."

"Good heavens, boy!"

Mr. Prout flung back the bedclothes in amazement, and sprang out on to the floor.

"Bring a gun, sir—quick! There's a man trying to get into the Remove dormitory!" urged Billy Bunter excitedly.

"Burglars? Boy, you astound me!"

"It's true, sir! Come along, sir!"

"But I must put on some clothes. Bunter," said Mr. Prout breathlessly. "I cannot parade the corridors and dormitories in my pyjamas. Hand me my gun. I will load it first."

Billy Bunter blinked round the little bed-room.

"Where is it, sir?"

"Good heavens!" muttered the Fifth Form master. "It is not here. I left it in the master's room. Bunter, my brave boy, you must fetch it whilst I dress. It is in the corner behind the door. I was showing it to Mr. Capper only last night. I have had a new trigger fixed on, and—"

"Yes, sir. Hurry up!" gasped Billy Bunter. "The burglars will get away."

"Go then, boy!" snapped Mr. Prout. "Bring me the gun!"

"All right, sir!"

Billy Bunter rolled across the bed-room in his wonderful striped pyjamas, as Mr. Prout gathered up his trousers. The next minute the Owl of the Remove was out in the passage again, and making stealthily for the master's room, which was situated at the other end of the passage. Billy Bunter was feeling better now that Mr. Prout had been roused. When the Fifth Form master arrived with the gun the fat Removite realised that the burglars would be faced on equal terms. Almost jauntily Bunter proceeded down the passage. He had practically recovered his nerves completely, and any thoughts of immediate danger had quite gone, when, suddenly, out of the darkness came a muttered oath.

"Crikey! Look out, Peter!"

"Out 'im, Ted!"

Bunter's heart went down to the soles of his feet. Within a yard of him he could see through his enormous spectacles the burly forms of two men.

What possessed the fat Removite at that moment Bunter was never able to

say; but something within him seemed to give him the strength of a rhinoceros. With a roar of fear and exultation, he leapt forward, and flung himself upon the nearest man.

Bunter and the burglar went down heavily, and the passage floor fairly shook as they crashed.

"Help!"

The Owl of the Remove gave a piercing scream of "Help!" as the second man dashed madly away down the corridor, leaving his companion to fight it out as best he could.

"Help! Murder! Thieves!" roared Bunter, gripping the man round the throat, and throwing the whole weight of his fourteen odd stone on to the desperate marauder.

"Let me go! Let me go! I'll bash you!"

"Help!"

Bunter was beginning to feel that the struggle could not last in his favour, as the burglar frantically struggled to regain his position. They rolled over with a crash against a hard bundle lying at the foot of the staircase, and there was a jingling metallic sound as some loose articles fell out on to the floor.

"Help! Murder!" roared Billy Bunter. "Thieves! Rescue!"

"You young fiend!" muttered the burglar, with an oath, as he became undermost again, and Bunter raised his fat fist and brought it down with a crash on the man's face.

"Bunter!"

There was a reassuring cry from along the corridor.

"Bunter, I am coming!"

Mr. Prout came dashing along, his dressing-gown flowing in the air. The Fifth Form master came panting up, breathless and excited.

"My gun, boy!" he gasped. "Where is it?"

"I—I—I haven't got it!" grunted Billy Bunter. "This—this fellow stopped me. Help, sir! Ow!"

"Hold him, Bunter!"

"Quick, sir; he's—he's winning!"

"I will fetch the gun and shoot him!" roared the excited Fifth Form master. He almost fell over the bundle of loot lying in the passage, as he flew along to the end room.

"Help!"

Billy Bunter gave a howl of mingled rage and astonishment as Mr. Prout left him to continue the grim struggle. The fat junior felt his strength leaving him. He lost his grip on the struggling man's throat, and the next moment he rolled over, and his head crashed against the banister post with a loud thump.

"Ow!"

"You young fiend!" gasped the man, struggling to his feet.

He gave the Owl of the Remove a violent kick in the ribs, and Bunter gave a groan as he realised the man had regained his freedom. Mr. Prout could be heard coming along now; but he was too late. The desperate burglar realised what it would mean if he waited. The master had a gun! With a muttered oath, he turned and dashed madly down the passage, and turned the corner just as Mr. Prout gained Billy Bunter's side.

"Bunter!"

"Y-yes!"

"Stand aside now, Bunter! I will shoot the man!"

"He's gone, sir!"

"What?"

"He's gone, sir! He's escaped. You shouldn't have left me!"

"Nonsense, Bunter! Stand aside at once!"

"He's gone!"

"Mind, I will shoot him! I will put a

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shot into his leg. He will then be unable to escape."

"But he has escaped!" howled Bunter. "He's gone along the passage, and whilst you're talking about shooting him, he's getting away!"

"Hark! What's that?"

There was a sound of scurrying footsteps, and a jumble of excited conversation at the head of the stairs, and Billy Bunter realised that the members of the Remove Form dormitory were hurrying down in response to his wild cries for help—help which Mr. Prout, in his excitement, had failed to give at the critical moment. Even now the Fifth Form master was so excited that he would not credit Billy Bunter's statement.

"Steady, Bunter, my lad!" whispered Mr. Prout. "They are returning to the attack!"

"Where?"

"Shoo! Down the stairs! Stand aside to give me a clear range!"

Bunter could clearly distinguish Harry Wharton's voice. The captain of the Remove was leading the rest of the dormitory cautiously down the stairs; but Mr. Prout seemed deaf to the juniors' voices. He raised his repeater to his shoulder, and pointed the muzzle up the staircase.

"Halt, or I fire!"

The Fifth Form master's voice rang out sternly, and Harry Wharton, who could be dimly seen in the gloom, halted suddenly, and there was an excited babel of voices behind him.

"Hands up, you scoundrels!" ordered Mr. Prout. "You would dare to break into this educational establishment with intent to thief! I warn you that non-compliance with my instructions will meet with instant action on my part!"

"It's Wharton and the rest of the fellows!" growled Bunter. "If you fire you'll kill them!"

"Silence, Bunter!"

"Don't fire, sir!" shouted Harry Wharton, in considerable alarm. "It is I—Wharton!"

"I do not believe it! It is a trick to escape! Hands up!"

There was a sudden commotion behind Mr. Prout, and Mr. Quelch and Wingate arrived on the scene. They had hurriedly thrown on their dressing-gowns and shuffled along in bed-room slippers.

"Prout!" cried Mr. Quelch. "What is this? Has anything occurred? Good heavens, Prout! You have a gun! What is this?"

"Burglars!"

"What?"

"Burglars, sir!" said Billy Bunter. "I caught one, but—but Mr. Prout wouldn't help me, and the burglar escaped!"

"Can we come down, Mr. Quelch?" shouted Harry Wharton. "We are here to help. We heard Bunter yelling out for help!"

"Do not move, Wharton!" commanded Mr. Prout. "I believe the scoundrel to be concealed on the stairs. I must have an uninterrupted range. Otherwise, I cannot be held responsible if anyone is hit when I fire."

"Mr. Prout!" gasped the Remove Form master. "You cannot fire! You must not! I insist upon you putting that gun down! You are imperilling the lives of the boys!"

"Nonsense, my dear Quelch!" snapped Mr. Prout. "I have been accustomed to the use of firearms the whole of my life! I have used this weapon for years, and in tighter corners than this."

"Do not point that gun at me!" cried Mr. Quelch, as the Fifth Form master swung round on his heels to expostulate with him. "I order you to put that gun

down at once! It is obvious to me that the burglar is not here now!"

"He would find it difficult to get away even if he were here!" laughed Wingate. "If we could not deal with him, I am willing to eat my dressing-gown."

"It is easy to talk in that way now, Wingate!" snapped Mr. Prout. "It is a pity you could not be here when the man was intercepted by Bunter of the Remove."

George Wingate flushed crimson in the darkness.

"I came the moment I woke up, sir," he said. "I heard cries for help, and you forget that my bed-room is not in this wing of the building. Mr. Quelch will bear me out when I say that for a minute or two we could not locate the spot from whence the cries were being shouted."

"Wingate is quite right, Prout," said Mr. Quelch tersely. "I must now ask you to unload that gun."

As Mr. Prout solemnly opened the breech, Wingate turned to Billy Bunter, who was dragging along the bundle of loot. Lights were turned on, and there was a gasp of astonishment as the contents of the bundle was revealed. Forks and spoons and sporting cups and trophies were there galore.

"The place would have been ransacked!" exclaimed Mr. Quelch. "Wingate, you will at once organise parties to scour the building to see whether the scoundrels are still under this roof. If they have escaped, it would be a waste of time to go in pursuit. It is dark, and escape is easy."

"Right, sir!" said the captain of Greyfriars. "I will do as you suggest at once."

The whole corridor was now crowded with excited boys. Seniors, juniors, and fags had fairly flocked down to the scene of the struggle, and it was an easy matter to find volunteers to set out and search the building. Within five minutes Harry Wharton and Bob Cherry came panting back with the news that they had found an open window, and marks on the sill showed that human beings had recently scrambled through, and had dropped to the ground—a matter of a dozen feet.

Mr. Quelch, Mr. Prout, and Wingate went and inspected the spot, and when the last of the searchers had returned to report no signs of the burglars, Mr. Quelch definitely decided that the marauders had made their escape through the window.

All boys were immediately ordered back to the various dormitories, whilst Mr. Quelch and Mr. Prout visited the Head, and related to the astounded Dr. Locke what had occurred.

## THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

### Mr. Prout Makes Amends!

**B**ILLY BUNTER sat in the big armchair in Study No. 7.

The bell for the first class would be sounded in a few minutes now, and his study-mates, Peter and Alonzo Todd and Tom Dutton had already gone along the passage in the direction of the Remove Form class-room. But William George Bunter was not feeling so anxious about the class-room. He sat in the big armchair and hastily looked through a sheaf of loose papers he was holding in his hand.

The papers were evidently of great interest, because every now and again the fat junior would pause, and his eyes would open wider and wider.

"Oh crumbs!" he muttered now and again. "Fancy the chap being such a rotter!"

Every now and again he would refer

to the individual as a "cad" instead of a "rotter." Bunter was obviously not going through his preparation or anything connected with lessons. He never evinced half the interest in his lessons as he did in the sheaf of papers on his fat knees.

"My hat!" he grunted. "It's jolly lucky I felt into the bundle! Who would have thought those rotten burglars would have shoved the papers in with all that loot?"

And Billy Bunter turned the pages over again, and read the long straggling handwriting which decorated each folio of the wad.

"Fancy getting into the clutches of a cad like Joe Banks!" murmured Bunter, sitting back in the chair. Billy Bunter had made himself quite comfortable. A big cushion was there to rest his head upon, and he crossed his fat little legs as he leaned back and soliloquised.

His adventure with the burglar on the previous night had been the talk of the school. He had been bombarded with questions and inquiries the whole of breakfast, and for once in a way the Owl of the Remove was almost regarded as a hero.

Some of the juniors had wanted to know why he didn't hang on to the midnight visitor when once he had got him. Skinner told him that he ought to have sat on the man if he wanted to lay him out, and Snoop, who was one of Skinner's cronies, had giggled at his leader's humorous remark.

But, taken on the whole, Bunter's behaviour in the affair had been regarded as highly satisfactory, and there were very few juniors who had made fatuous remarks. This was the first opportunity the Owl of the Remove had had of being undisturbed. He had tried to get down to No. 7 Study before breakfast, but the shower of questions he had had to answer whilst he was dressing gave him no chance, and the sheaf of papers which he had extracted from the burglar's bundle of loot had remained under his pillow until he was ready to come down.

"Those rotters who spoke to me yesterday must be awful crooks!" murmured Bunter. "Fancy them finding that cad Loder's study and pinching these! My hat, won't that cad Loder be fuming over it!" And Billy Bunter resumed his attention on the closely-written pages.

Suddenly there was a tap on the door, and Billy Bunter hastily shuffled the papers together, and crammed them under the cushion seat of the armchair. No sooner were they out of sight when the handle of the door was turned, and Mr. Prout, the Fifth-Form master, poked his head into the little study.

"Ah! Here you are, my dear Bunter!" cried Mr. Prout, advancing into the room.

The Owl of the Remove showed signs of confusion in his flushed face, and he gave a nervous cough as he ran his hand along the front of the chair, to satisfy himself that no signs of the incriminating papers were showing. He did not rise from his chair; but Mr. Prout evidently did not notice this little lapse in Bunter's manners.

He drew a chair up to the fat junior's side, and gazed long and earnestly at the Remove.

"Bunter," he said at last, "I feel that I should make you an apology."

"W-what, sir?"

"I should like to assure you, my dear boy, that what I did last night was what I thought was right, and was my proper duty."

"If you had helped instead of going



to fetch the gun we should have nabbed one of them at least."

Mr. Prout pursed his lips and gave a nervous cough, and then adjusted his pince-nez, and then pulled his tie straight. The Fifth-Form master, for once, was at a loss for words. Any boy but Bunter would have appreciated the spirit of the master's words; but Bunter was notoriously thick-skinned and rude. Mr. Prout knew this, but he felt rather floored by the abruptness of the junior's remark.

"Bunter," continued Mr. Prout, "I do not think you quite understand me. Last night you aroused me out of a deep sleep. When I realised that we were face to face with the prospects of a grim hand-to-hand struggle with desperate men I dare say I allowed myself to become unduly excited. Ahem! Er—as I have already said, what I did was what I thought was right, and was my proper duty. I—I should not like you to think that I had failed you by not backing you up at the critical moment."

"I didn't exactly think that, sir. I—"

"Well, well, we will say no more about it, my dear boy," interrupted Mr. Prout. "I have come in to see how you are at the headmaster's expressed wish."

"I think I'm all right, sir," said Bunter. "I thought last night that I had broken my spine and both of my legs. They are very painful, sir."

Mr. Prout rather fancied himself as a professional medico, and he drew his chair a bit nearer, and took Bunter's left hand in his.

"Keep quite still, Bunter, my boy," said Mr. Prout. "I will just take your pulse. Hallo, who is that?"

The door opened, and two juniors dashed in. They gave a start of surprise as they saw Mr. Prout, with Billy Bunter's hand in his.

"Oh! Sorry, sir!" gasped Harry Wharton. "I—I didn't know you were in here."

"Very well, Wharton."

"I—I came in to see Bunter, sir. Mr. Quelch sent Cherry and I to find Bunter. First class has started, and Bunter ought to be there."

Billy Bunter sank back into the armchair and gave a deep groan.

"Bunter is unwell," said Mr. Prout. "After his desperate struggle last night I do not consider that that is very surprising. You may tell Mr. Quelch, with my compliments, that I am in here with Bunter, and as—as a man with a great deal of medical experience I do not consider that Bunter is in a fit and proper condition to attend classes. At any rate not this morning."

"Thank you, sir!" said Harry Wharton. "I will give Mr. Quelch your message."

"Go along, then!"

Harry Wharton and Bob Cherry tiptoed out of the little study, and closed the door to very gently. The captain of the Remove had his suspicions about Bunter. He knew the fat junior was an expert at the art of malingering. In fact, Billy Bunter was the greatest "lead-slinger" at Greyfriars, and as he had shown no signs of sickness when he dressed, and certainly no signs of a bad appetite at breakfast, it made Harry Wharton and Bob Cherry very suspicious as they proceeded along the Remove passage.

As the two juniors left the study Billy Bunter gave another groan. It was deeper than the first, and more prolonged, and Mr. Prout looked alarmed.

"Do you feel any serious pain inside you, Bunter, my dear boy?" he said kindly.

"Oh, yes, sir!" moaned Bunter, putting his handkerchief up to his fat face.

"I feel as though two of my ribs have been fractured."

"But—but just now you said you thought it was your spine."

"Yes, sir; it's the spine as well, you see."

"Oh!"

"I've got shooting pains up my legs."

"Then I fail to understand the case," said Mr. Prout. "Your pulse is normal, and your colour is the same as usual, and I certainly do not think your temperature is above the normal. You are an extraordinary youth, Bunter."

The Owl of the Remove gave another groan.

"I—I think that I shall be all right soon," he grunted. "I think I should like to go for a short stroll in the fresh air."

"But your legs, my boy!"

"They're feeling a bit better now, sir," said Billy Bunter. "It's—it's only now and again that I get the shooting pains."

"But how do you expect to walk with an injured spinal column?" exclaimed Mr. Prout. "It would be highly dangerous to take any exercise if your spine is injured. I certainly could not sanction a stroll, as you suggest, Bunter."

The Owl of the Remove sat up in the armchair and swayed his fat body backwards and forwards two or three times. When he stopped he turned his fat face towards the Fifth-Form master.

"You see, sir, it's ever so much better. I dare say, after a stroll, it will be quite all right. I'm—I'm always better after a stroll, you know, sir."

Mr. Prout rose from his chair.

"I trust you are not deceiving me, Bunter!" he said, after a pause. "I should regard such a proceeding very seriously. In fact, I should take very severe measures in punishing you. After your effort against the burglar last night I should prefer to think that you are not showing deceit now."

"Oh, really, sir, I—"

"That is enough, Bunter," said Mr.

Prout. "I am sorry I even suggested it. If you really think that a quiet stroll will do you good, I will certainly give you permission. I will go along to Mr. Quelch at once and explain your absence to him."

"Thank you, sir!"

"I will go at once, Bunter," repeated Mr. Prout, making for the door.

"Meantime, you are at liberty to rest here, which I strongly recommend; or, if you choose, you may take a stroll in the fresh air. A little freedom either way may help you to forget the terrors of the night."

The Fifth-Form master stamped out of the room, and as his footsteps sounded along the corridor Billy Bunter gave a broad grin on his fat face. In a flash he had extracted the bundle of papers from under the cushion, and for an individual with injured legs and a damaged spine he showed wonderful alacrity as he rolled across the study and rammed the papers amongst the rubbish in the cupboard under the study book-case.

"I'll give old Prout a few minutes to get clear," he muttered aloud, "and then I'll go down to the village and find Joe Banks. He's sure to be in his old haunt. If I can get that rotter Loder's I O U out of him by promising the return of the papers I shall be all right. That'll teach that bullying cad a lesson."

Billy Bunter gazed out of the window. The sun was shining brilliantly, and a stroll down to Friardale would be a very pleasant way of spending the morning. The Owl of the Remove was not a keen scholar, and a morning off pleased him immensely.

He could hear the confused murmur of voices from crowded class-rooms, and he gave a broad grin on his fat face as he listened.

"Well, it's safe enough now," he grunted, snatching up his cap from the little table. "I'll make a move."

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### LIGHTING-UP TIME FOR THIS WEEK.



SEPTEMBER.	
13th Monday	- - - 7.48 p.m.
14th Tuesday	- - - 7.46 "
15th Wednesday	- - - 7.44 "
16th Thursday	- - - 7.41 "
17th Friday	- - - 7.39 "
18th Saturday	- - - 7.37 "
19th Sunday	- - - 7.34 "

Prout. "I am sorry I even suggested it. If you really think that a quiet stroll will do you good, I will certainly give you permission. I will go along to Mr. Quelch at once and explain your absence to him."

"Thank you, sir!"

"I will go at once, Bunter," repeated Mr. Prout, making for the door.

"Meantime, you are at liberty to rest here, which I strongly recommend; or, if you choose, you may take a stroll in the fresh air. A little freedom either way may help you to forget the terrors of the night."

The Fifth-Form master stamped out of the room, and as his footsteps sounded along the corridor Billy Bunter gave a broad grin on his fat face. In a flash he had extracted the bundle of papers from under the cushion, and for an individual with injured legs and a damaged spine he showed wonderful alacrity as he rolled across the study and rammed the papers amongst the rubbish in the cupboard under the study book-case.

"I'll give old Prout a few minutes to get clear," he muttered aloud, "and then I'll go down to the village and find Joe Banks. He's sure to be in his old haunt. If I can get that rotter Loder's I O U out of him by promising the return of the papers I shall be all right. That'll teach that bullying cad a lesson."

Billy Bunter gazed out of the window. The sun was shining brilliantly, and a stroll down to Friardale would be a very pleasant way of spending the morning. The Owl of the Remove was not a keen scholar, and a morning off pleased him immensely.

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### THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

#### Different Theories!

"TWENTY POUNDS!"

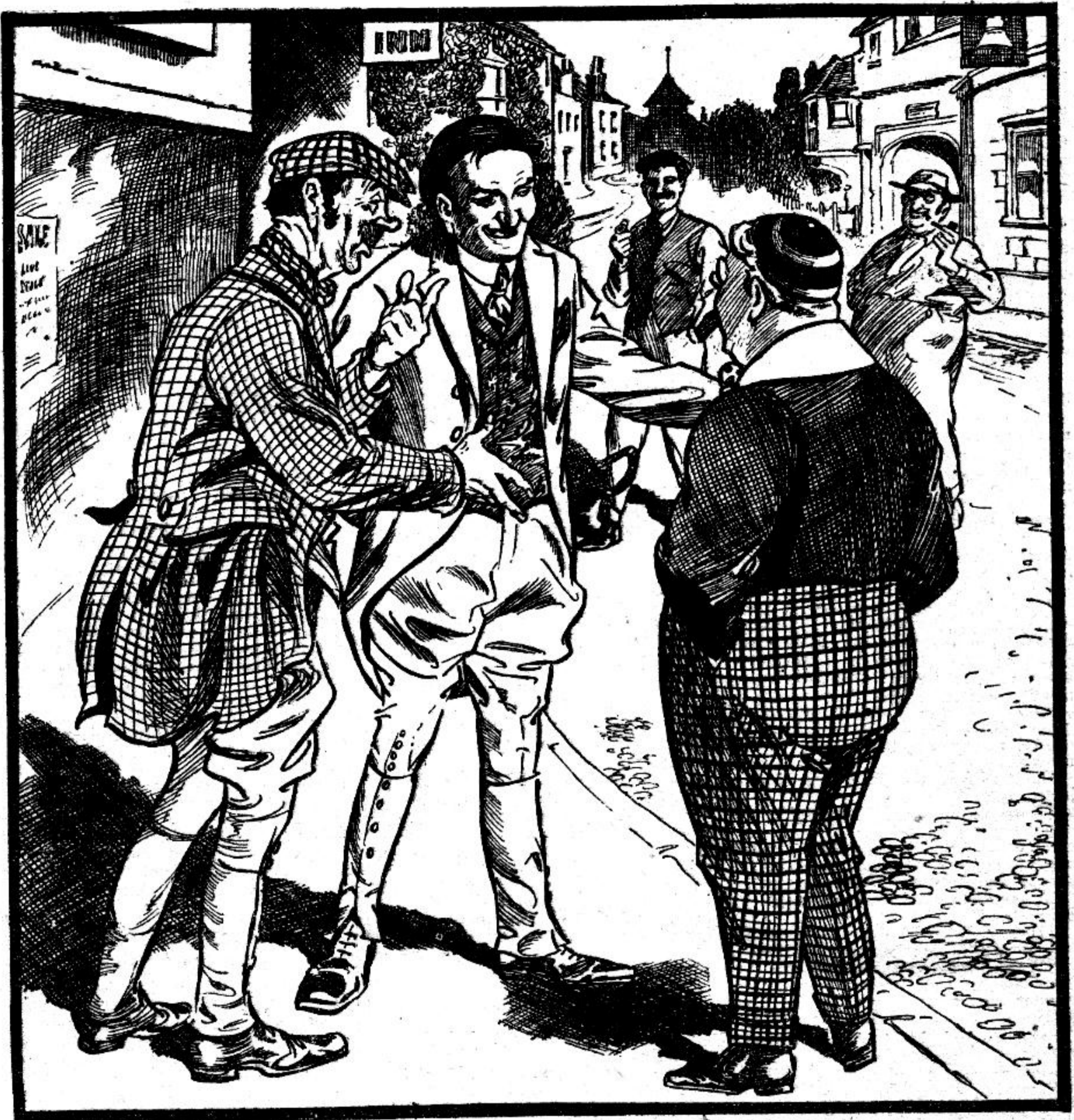
Billy Bunter repeated the remark for the twelfth time, as he ran through the little slips of paper in his fat hands. His visit to Mr. Joe Banks had been an unqualified success. He had found the rascally book-maker in the little parlour of his licensed house, and Bunter had come to business at once.

Joe Banks was worried.

He showed traces of it in every line of his wicked face. The loss of the papers had been a constant nightmare to him. It was worse because of the uncertainty of their whereabouts. He had missed them immediately after an angry interview he had had with Gerald Loder, the black-sheep prefect of Greyfriars School.

Joe Banks had been pressing Loder for the twenty pounds he owed him. Debts spread over many weeks of gambling, and which had been temporarily fixed up by I O U promissory notes, and the climax had been reached at that interview when Banks had threatened to expose the Sixth-Former to his headmaster. Un-





"Perhaps you can answer a few questions, young fellow," said the man. The Owl of the Remove gave a smirk as he placed his hands into his trousers-pockets. "I don't usually talk to—to strangers in the street," he said. (See Chapter 1.)

fortunately for Joe Banks, he had been called away for a minute or two, and in that time, brief as it was, Loder had disappeared, and so had a precious sheaf of papers belonging to the rascally book-maker.

It was a coincidence that Loder and the papers had disappeared at the same time; but in spite of that Joe Banks could not swear that the Greyfriars prefect had taken them. The matter had worried Joe almost to his wits' end; and in desperation he had called in two old-time acquaintances of his, who had spent the last five years in his Majesty's prison. Ted Chester and Peter Gaff had been commissioned to search Loder's study in the middle of the night, with what result the reader knows.

Then finally Joe Banks' anxiety had been allayed at last. Bunter had arrived and made the bargain. In exchange for Loder's I O U's and five pounds the book-

maker could have his precious papers back. Joe Banks leapt at the offer. The fiver would be paid over on receipt of the papers. As a proof of good faith, the I O U's were surrendered there and then.

And thus it was that the Owl of the Remove rolled into Study No. 7 at the end of the morning with Loder's incriminating I O U's in his fat little hands.

"Twenty pounds!" repeated Bunter again. "Fancy spending twenty pounds on a lot of rotten racehorses! I—Hallo! There's the bell for dismissal. Those rotters will be along here now. I'll shove all the papers together, and fix 'em up later."

Billy Bunter rolled across to the cupboard under the book-case, and pushed the neat little bundle of I O U's on top of Joe Banks' papers. He slammed the door to, and pushed up the catch. There was no key to the cupboard. It had been lost ever since Bunter could remember.

But that did not matter very much, because neither Peter nor Alonzo Todd ever used the cupboard, and Bunter had never seen Tom Dutton, the deaf junior, take a single article out of it. In fact, the cupboard was so full of rubbish that nobody touched it. The dust on the rubbish was thick and ancient, and it looked as though at least another dozen years would roll by before anyone ventured on spring-cleaning it out.

The Owl of the Remove looked hastily round the study, and then hurried away downstairs. As a rule, all the juniors—especially the Removites—rallied in the quad when classes were dismissed. Books were flung into the various studies, and the owners would scamper down to the quadrangle without any waste of time.

It was a gorgeous September day, and Bunter knew that he would find most of his Form-fellows outside now.

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As he gained the passage leading to the door through which all had to pass, the Owl of the Remove was swept along in a flood of excited 'Friars. It was Wednesday, and lessons were over for the day, so there was every reason for an exuberance of spirits.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" cried Bob Cherry, as he found himself wedged up against Billy Bunter. "Here's the porpoise!"

"Oh, really, Cherry, I—"

"Come along, Bunter!" laughed Bob. "You're just the fellow we want. We're going to reconstruct the crime."

"What crime?"

"Why, last night's crime, of course!" snorted Bob Cherry. "We had an argument in class this morning. Old Quelchy said he thinks we imagined a man at the dormitory window."

"That's awful rot! I saw him!"

"I know that! So did Harry, and so did Franky!"

"He tried to push the window up," said Bunter, as the stream of juniors gained the open air. Harry Wharton & Co. and most of the Remove fellows strolled across to the dormitory building, and stared up at the window where the previous night's visitor had appeared.

"Waal," said Fisher T. Fish, the American junior, "I guess that guy must have had wings to get up there!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Johnny Bull went down on his hands and knees, and inspected the hard ground for traces of ladder-marks. There was a slight depression under the window, and the investigator pointed it out to the group standing around.

"There you are, Linley!" he said. "I suggested that he had used a ladder. Of course I'm right! Just look at the mark!"

Mark Linley, the Lancashire junior, bent down.

"Where's the mark?" he said. "I don't see one."

"What!" cried Johnny Bull. "You mean to say you can't see a mark here?" And Bull pressed his finger on the spot.

"I can see a mark on your finger—an ink-mark!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Johnny Bull gave a snort of disgust.

"Well, I bet you any money you like it's a ladder-mark. It's the only way the burglar could have got up to that height!"

"But we looked out of the window a minute after his shadow disappeared, and we didn't see a ladder," said Harry Wharton. "Personally, I think he got on to the roof somehow, and hung on by the gutter. Then when he found he couldn't open the blessed window he drew himself on to the roof again, and hurried downstairs. He would just run into Bunter then. If you asked me to reconstruct the crime that is how I should put it."

"How could he get downstairs if he was on the roof, ass?" said Bolsover major.

"Climb through the trapdoor, of course, you idiot! Haven't we done it time upon time?"

Bolsover major put on a thoughtful frown, and nodded his head in agreement.

"Perhaps you're right," he said.

"Well, what do you think he did, Inky?" laughed Harry Wharton, turning to the dusky Nabob of Bhanipur. "You're generally full of nobby ideas."

Hurree Jamset Ram Singh showed his white teeth in a pleasant smile.

"If my worthy and ludicrous chum asks me," he said, in his weird and wonderful English, "I would say suggestfully that

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a man stood on the esteemed ground here standfully, and pushed a scarecrow up stickfully."

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

"What on earth would be the good of that, Inky, you duffer?" exclaimed Bob Cherry.

"Well, my esteemed and idiotic chumps, it would be a very good idea wheezefully, because it kept our worthy and ludicrous captain in the dormitory with the wind upfully whilst the man's pals downstairs lifted the idiotic silver."

"Well, I'm hanged!" gasped Frank Nugent. "That's a jolly ingenious idea, Inky, if you like!"

"I don't think much of your detective notions!" grunted Billy Bunter. "If you ask me, you're all off the map!"

"Just hark at the fat chump!" said Bob Cherry. "Out of the mouths of hogs and porpoises shall we have words of wisdom!"

"Oh, really, Cherry, you know I'm jolly good at detective work. It's only your beastly jealousy if you say I ain't any good!"

"Well, what's your idea of it, Bunter?" said Harry Wharton.

"It's not an idea at all. I can show you exactly how the burglars got up to the dormitory window."

"Can you tell us how he got down again?"

"Of course I can!" growled the fat junior. "Here, Nugent, old man, you and Mauly and Wharton and Linley and Johnny just give be a bunk up!"

"What!"

"You see this tree," said Bunter, rolling across to a tree standing about ten yards away from the wall of the building. "Just give me a bunk up to this branch!"

Harry Wharton & Co. exchanged glances. And if Billy Bunter had not been so short-sighted he might have observed the famous chums winking at one another in a very knowing manner. Bob Cherry and Frank Nugent leaned down and caught hold of Bunter's fat legs. Lord Mauleverer and Harry Wharton stood with their hands under Bunter's fat arms, and half a dozen others of the Removites stood by, ready to give an extra heave when the time came.

"Steady, you fellows!" cried the Owl.

"That's all right, Bunter! Say when you're ready!"

"Well, raise me gently. I don't want to fall, you know!"

"We sha'n't let you go. Now, then, all together! One—two—three!"

On the word "Three!" the Removites worked. Billy Bunter was hoisted up into the air, and his fat body swayed dangerously for a moment whilst he raised his fat arms and groped about for the overhanging branch of the tree.

"Ow! Where is it. Oh crumbs! I'm—"

Oh! That's got it!"

Bunter's hands closed on the bark, and the Removites scattered from beneath him.

"Hi! Don't let go!" howled the swinging Bunter. "I ain't safe yet. Ow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Owl of the Remove swayed to and fro, and it looked as though he might fall to the ground any moment. It was a long way to drop. At least, it was for Bunter, because of his fourteen-odd stone in avoirdupois. Billy Bunter didn't fancy dropping all that distance.

"Go it, porpoise!" laughed Bob Cherry. "Show us how the burglar got up to the dormy window!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ow! You cads! I'm falling! I—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Billy Bunter's face was a ruddy hue from the exertion of his suspension, and his fat legs swung to and fro through the air as the Removites stood around laughing merrily.

"What did he do when he got that far, porpoise?" asked Bob Cherry. "You've only got a thirty-foot swing to do and you'll land bang in the centre of the window-sill."

"Groooh!"

"I guess I'll make the silly galoot swing thirty feet!" shouted Fisher T. Fish. "Here's the very thing for the guy!"

The American junior held a strong stick above his head, and the next moment he leapt up and caught Billy Bunter a resounding thwack across the seat of his trousers. There was a yelp of rage and pain as the dust arose in a cloud.

"Ow! Gerooh! Stoppit!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Thwack, thwack, thwack! Fisher T. Fish wielded the stick unmercifully, and a howl went up from the swinging Removite.

"Oh! Stoppit! Gerooh! Geraway, you beastly cad!" roared Bunter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Thwack, thwack, thwack!

"Oooooer! Wow! Yahooh!"

Thwack, thwack, thwack!

"Brrrrrrh! Ooooooph! Wow! Look out! Hi! I'm c-c-c-coming!"

With a last shriek—a long, piercing shriek—Billy Bunter let go, and he rushed through the air and met the hard, unsympathetic ground with a bump.

Crash!

"Ow!" went Bunter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Removites fairly shrieked with laughter as Bunter landed on his back. The Owl gave a roar; but Bunter seldom received any sympathy from the juniors, and as his roars increased so the Removites decreased. By one's and two's they left the Owl to his fate, and in less than two minutes Bunter was alone in his misery, with no one to commiserate with him.

## THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

### A Surprise for Loder!

**L**ODER, the prefect, was looking out of his study doorway. There was a frown of ill-temper on Loder's face as he glanced up and down the passage. Loder wanted a fag, but he did not want to bawl "Fag!" at the top of his voice along the passage, as was customary with the great men of the Sixth when they required service.

Loder, prefect as he was, was the black sheep of the Sixth. He frequently required services of his fags that would have got him into serious trouble with the powers-to-be if the matter had become known.

Some of the Sixth knew the kind of fellow he was, and shrugged their shoulders at it. But it was only in the Upper Fourth and the Remove Form that his character was really known in its true light, for from the Lower School Loder picked his fags, and in return for their services frequently initiated them into his own iniquities.

Loder gave a grunt of annoyance; but the next moment his face lighted up, as there was a step in the passage, and a junior came along with a book under his arm.

It was not very light in the corridor, and the prefect shaded his eyes to see who it was. He gave a start of surprise as he recognised the junior.

"Bunter!" he cried. "Come here, please! You are just the one I want! I was going to send for you."



"Oh, really, Loder!" grunted Bunter, as he came rolling up. "I was just coming along to see you."

"Eh?"

"I—I want to talk a little matter over with you, Loder."

"Come into my study!" snapped Loder. "Or, rather, come into what's left of it after those fiends have paid their visit."

Loder led the way in, and Bunter followed on his heels. The fat Removite gave a gasp of surprise as he blinked around the disorderly study. The burglars had done their work well and truly. The whole place was upside down, and papers and books and ornaments littered the whole place.

"G-good gracious!" gasped Bunter. "Haven't they made a blessed mess of the place?"

"The mad fiends!" muttered Loder angrily.

"Aren't you going to get the room tidied up, Loder?"

"Of course I am, you fat idiot! But all the rooms in this passage are alike, and the fags are keeping clear because they don't fancy the job of clearing up."

"Oh, I see, Loder!"

"Now, Bunter, I want you to do a little job for me. I want you to run down to Friardale. It won't take you long, and I'll give you a bob to spend upon yourself."

The Owl of the Remove blinked through his enormous spectacles, and could not help but see the tense and anxious look on the prefect's face. It was plain even to Bunter that Loder was worried. He showed it in his eyes, and in the nervous manner in which he fidgeted with his hands.

"I'm very sorry, Loder, old man," said Billy Bunter. "but I can't go down to Friardale. Where do you want me to go?"

"To take a message to Banks—Joe Banks."

"The bookie, Loder?"

"Y-yes; I believe he does interest himself in horse-racing. But—but this is a sort of joke I've got up against him. I only want you to give him about half a dozen words, and you needn't stay to argue with him!"

"Oh!"

"You see, these confounded burglars cleared out all my papers, and they—they took some belonging to Banks. I was minding them. I'm sure you won't mind just running down to see him. It won't take long, and I know a bob's a bob to you kids in these hard times."

"But I've hurt my leg," said the fat Removite. "About an hour ago those rotters—Harry Wharton and the rest—pushed me up a tree in the quad, and I fell almost from the top."

Loder frowned.

"Look here, you lazy young scoundrel, that sort of yarn won't wash with me! I jolly well intend getting somebody to go down to Friardale, and if you don't go I'll make you stay here and clean up my room instead!"

"Oh, really, Loder, I'm jolly well not going to do your beastly work for you, and you had better be careful what you say to me, too!"

"What?"

The indignant Sixth-Former glared furiously at the fat Removite.

"I say you had better be careful what you say to me. I'm not here to stand any nonsense from you, Loder!"

"I—I—"

"Everyone knows what a rotten cad you are. In fact, you're the worst bounder in Greyfriars. But you can take it from me that I'm not going to stand any of your rot now!"

Loder could hardly believe his ears. He stood and glared at Bunter as though he could have slain him with his look. But Billy Bunter was not in the mood to be very strongly impressed by the Sixth-Former's glare. He just stood calmly in front of him, and blinked through his enormous spectacles.

"Look here, Bunter, you beastly, crawling, fat idiot!" exclaimed Loder hoarsely. "I'm not in the mood after this burgling affair to stand this sort of thing from you! Unless you decide at once to take this message down to Joe Banks I shall give you the hiding of your life! Now, then, what is it to be?"

"Neither!" replied the Owl of the Remove thickly. "If you dare to touch me I shall take those I O U's of yours to the Head!"

Gerald Loder staggered back against the littered table.

"What's that?" he gasped.

"I shall take the I O U's that you gave that rotter Banks and show them to Dr. Locke!" growled Billy Bunter firmly. "I can tell you plainly, Loder, old man, I'm not going to stand any tommy-rot from you in future!"

"Those I O U's!" gasped Loder. "What in the blazes do you know about my I O U's to Banks? Answer me, you fat rascal!"

"I know a jolly lot," replied Bunter. "And not only that, but Banks has given them to me. I particularly wanted to have them, Loder, old man. I—I thought you would like to buy them back from me. If you don't, I know the Head collects stamps and things, and I dare say he would buy them from me."

Loder bit his lips hard.

"Look here, Bunter!" he said anxiously. "As far as I'm concerned you're talking in riddles. What do you know about any of my I O U's? I—I don't mind admitting to a fellow like you, Bunter, that I—I have written a few I O U's from time to time. It's rather convenient on occasions, you know."

"Especially if it's for a sum of twenty pounds, Loder!"

"You—you know that I have given that scoundrel Banks I O U's for twenty pounds?"

Billy Bunter gave a fat grin.

"Of course I do, Loder," he replied. "Didn't I tell you that Joe Banks has handed them over to me?"

"Good heavens! Is that true?"

"Oh, really, Loder, you don't think I should tell fibs to you? That's just like you rotters in the Sixth, you never want to believe a chap."

Loder pushed himself away from the table, and he drew himself up to his full height, and towered over the fat Removite.

"Look here, Bunter!" he said thickly. "It seems to me that you are under the impression that you have got some sort of a stranglehold over me. I don't mind admitting to you, in spite of the fact that I'm a prefect and you're a—fag in the Lower School, that I'm more anxious than you can think of. When those confounded burglars broke into the school last night they got away with some papers I had. Those papers were saving me from being ruined here, and now that they've gone everything is up as far as I'm concerned!"

"Oh, really, Loder, I—"

"Shut up, you fat toad! I owe Banks twenty pounds, and the scoundrel is pressing me for all he's worth. But so long as I held those papers I had Banks checkmated for ever and anon."

"But don't I keep on telling you that I've got the I O U's?" shouted Bunter. "Banks gave 'em to me this morning."

"You mean that?"

"Of course he did!" replied Bunter. "And I know all about your rotten papers, Loder. I've got those as well."

"What?"

Loder's voice rose almost to a scream as he stood trembling in every limb before the fat form of Billy Bunter. The Owl of the Remove could hardly believe his eyes as he saw how down and out was the usually bullying prefect.

"I've got them," repeated Bunter, "and I've got the I O U's, too. I can tell you I properly put the wind up that rotter Banks this morning. He is going to give me five pounds when I take him back his rotten old papers. Jolly lucky for me that the burglars didn't get away with their lot. I found the papers in the bag, all ready to be taken."

"Five pounds!" gasped Loder. "Do you mean to say that he's only going to offer you five pounds for the papers? Why, they're worth every sou the scoundrel's got! If you'll give 'em to me I'll bleed the scoundrel white before he has 'em back! Where are they? Bring them here! I'll give you the five pounds. It's every halfpenny I've got in the world, and I was going to give it to Banks to keep him quiet for a-time. I'm hanged if he shall have it now, though! Ha, ha, ha! I should say not!"

And Loder of the Sixth gave a hoarse chuckle at the idea of it.

"Will—will you really give me the money, Loder?" said Bunter, "Honest Injun!"

"Give it to you, you fat idiot!" gasped Loder. "I should think I will, you beastly little bloodsucker!"

"Oh, really, Loder—"

"Fetch them here, Bunter!" interrupted the Sixth-Former. "If you've got the papers and the—the slips of paper that I signed I'll give you the money. Go on, Bunter; get them and the money is yours!"

"There won't be any hanky-panky, Loder!"

"Fetch them, Bunter."

"Well, give me the money in advance in good faith, and all that sort of thing. Come along, Loder. That's only fair, you know."

"Bring them here, you fat young rotter!"

"But will you play the game, Loder? You know what a cad and a bully you are as a rule. After all, you might go for me as soon as I bring the papers up."

"I—I won't, Bunter. Go along! I want them."

"You'll pay me the five pounds for the I O U's?"

"No! I'll pay you the fiver for the papers and the I O U's."

"Oh, but you said first of all you'd give me five pounds for the I O U's alone. That rotter Banks has promised to give me five pounds for the papers. Surely your rotten I O U's are worth something? If they aren't, I suppose I may as well hand them to the Head. Perhaps he'll like to have them."

"Shssh!" hissed Loder. "Not so loud, you blackmailing young rotter! Somebody might hear!"

"Oh, really, Loder, I—"

"Shut up!" roared the angry prefect. "Go and fetch them. I'll give you five pounds for the I O U's."

Billy Bunter gave a satisfied sort of grin as he rolled across to the door.

"That's a bet, Loder!" he said, blinking round at the prefect through his big spectacles. "Five pounds for the I O U's."



"That's right."

"There's five of them, value twenty pounds."

"Well, hurry, Bunter!" pleaded the Sixth-Former. "I am anxious about them. It will be a tremendous weight off my mind."

"Right-ho, Loder, old man!" said Billy Bunter. "I'll be back in a jiffy!"

## THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

### Peter Todd Sets Things Alight!

"TODD! Dutton!"

Thump!

"Peter, old chap!"

Bang!

"Toddy, old man! Todd, old fellow!"

Bang, bang!

Billy Bunter was standing outside the door of Study No. 7 in the Remove-Form passage, knocking and calling. He had been knocking and calling for five minutes, but no reply had been vouchsafed from within. Yet he knew perfectly well that Peter Todd was there, for when he had first tried the door the Owl of the Remove had heard Peter Todd talking to his cousin Alonzo Todd and Tom Dutton, the deaf junior. And now he could hear an occasional movement on the part of the occupants of the study. Billy Bunter's study-mates were there, but they seemed to be afflicted with an unaccountable deafness.

"Toddy!"

Bang!

"Toddy, you rotter!"

Crash!

"Alonzo! Peter! Dutton, you ass!"

Thump, thump, thump!

"The rotters can hear me!" exclaimed Billy Bunter wrathfully. "They must know that I'm here."

Johnny Bull of the Remove came along at that moment, and he stood by, with a grin on his face, as he watched Billy Bunter thumping on the door.

"My hat!" grinned Bull. "If Toddy doesn't hear that he must be shockingly deaf! Never mind, Bunter! Knock a little louder!"

"I'll kick the blessed door down if he doesn't open it!"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" cried Bob Cherry, coming on the scene with Harry Wharton and Hurree Singh. "What's the trouble now, porpoise? More burglars, or just a little exercise? You'll bring old Quelchy or one of the prefects on the scene if you make too much of that row!"

"Hang old Quelchy!" growled Billy Bunter. "I'm going into my own study. I can tell you! I want to fetch something for Loder. Do you think I'm going to stay out here whilst those three rotters are inside?"

Thump, thump, thump!

Billy Bunter resumed his attack on the panels again. Several other fellows heard the row, and they came along to see what was up.

"I say, dear boy, can't you get in, begad?" asked Lord Mauleverer, as he arrived. "What's the matter, begad?"

"The door's locked."

"Well, knock, my dear fellow," said the schoolboy earl.

"I've been knocking, you idiot, Mauly!" growled Billy Bunter. "They won't let me in!"

Bang—bang—bang!

Thump—thump—thump!

Billy Bunter was getting thoroughly exasperated. He was beginning to have fears for the safety of his precious documents, and his state of feeling at

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being denied admittance was making him furious. But the door was locked, and no notice was taken from within of the clamour.

The interest in the scene by the juniors in the passage was growing.

Thump! Bang! Crash! Billy Bunter brought his boot into play, and, though he could not kick through the solid oak panels of the door, he made them creak and groan.

"Here, I say, draw it mild, Bunter!" said Bob Cherry. "You'll have a master or else a beastly prefect on the scene in a minute!"

"I don't care! I'm going in!"

"It's a bit thick of 'Toddy,'" said Harry Wharton. "After all, he shares the study with Bunter, and he ought not to lock himself in like that without answering a knock."

"Besides, there's Alonzo and Dutton in there as well!" laughed Johnny Bull.

"Oh, they're evidently in the game," said Harry Wharton. "I don't quite see why Bunter should be kept out in the passage."

"I'm jolly well not going to be, either!" cried Bunter, with emphasis.

Bang, bang, bang!

Crash—crash!

"You'll have Quelchy here, as sure as a gun!" said Bob Cherry. "Hallo! What a beastly smell of burning!"

A whiff of smoke curled upwards from the crack under the door of Study No. 7, and a strong smell of burning pervaded the passage.

The Removites sniffed through their nostrils, and looked puzzled.

"What on earth are they up to?" said Harry Wharton, trying the handle of the door.

"It's locked!" grunted Billy Bunter. "Look out! I'm going to kick the beastly panel in!"

"Don't be a howling dummy!" said Harry Wharton. "What's the use of doing that? You'll only have to brass up the cash for the damage."

"Well, the cads shouldn't lock me out! I ain't done any harm to them!"

"Stand aside for a second," said Harry Wharton. "I'll try them."

The captain of the Remove Form tapped at the door.

"Open the door, Toddy! It is I—Wharton."

"It's me, too!" shouted Billy Bunter.

There was a sound of the key turning in the lock. The door of Study No. 7 was opened, and Peter Todd's cheerful countenance came into view.

Peter Todd was looking very business-like. He was in his shirt-sleeves, and his face was running with perspiration. A cloud of smoke curled out into the passage as the Removites gazed in surprise at the sight.

Harry Wharton stared at Todd.

"Hallo! What's the game, Toddy? Are you decorating the study?"

"Not quite that!" laughed Peter Todd pleasantly. "The place has been in such an awful mess for ages we've decided to clean it up a bit to give us more room. We're making a bonfire of the stuff we don't want."

"Oh, is that all it is?" exclaimed Harry Wharton. "Then why in the dickens didn't you let Bunter in? It's his study as well, isn't it?"

"I know!" cried Peter Todd. "And a great pity it is, too! He makes the place into a regular pig-sty with his idiotic litter. Half the stuff we've cremated has been Bunter's rubbish."

Billy Bunter gave a growl as he pushed open the door and rolled in. Alonzo Todd was tearing up papers by the ream, and as he tore it up he cast the rubbish on to the blazing fire which

was burning with a roar up the small chimney. Tom Dutton, the deaf junior, was just-staggering away from the bookcase with the last load of dusty documents waiting for destruction.

"Why in the dickens didn't you answer my call, Todd?" growled Bunter. "I've been out there for ages."

"Never mind that, you fat toad!"

"But I do mind!"

"Well, we didn't want your fat carcass in the way while we were spring-cleaning. Now the place is a bit clean we can see where we are. Any way, what's the hurry? Hungry?"

Billy Bunter's eyes brightened up, and he blinked round the little room greedily.

"Well, considering I haven't had anything to eat for over two hours, I should think I am hungry. I could just do with a snack. Here, look out, Dutton, you ass!"

Tom Dutton, the deaf junior, knocked into the Owl of the Remove with the loaded basket he was carrying, and Billy Bunter staggered back.

"Sorry, Bunter!" cried Dutton. "I wish you would look where you are going, though!"

The Owl of the Remove gave a grunt of annoyance as the deaf junior threw the contents of the basket on to the blazing fire in the grate, and Alonzo Todd stirred the pile up with the poker, and there was a roar as the flames licked their way up the chimney.

"Mind you don't set the giddy school on fire!" laughed Peter Todd. "Those old papers and things don't half blaze."

"It is quite all right, my dear Peter," replied Alonzo Todd, who appeared to be in charge of the cremation department. "I think that's the lot out of the cupboard, isn't it, Dutton?"

Tom Dutton turned his head.

"What's that?" he said.

"That's the lot, isn't it?" repeated Alonzo.

Dutton was very deaf, and it was a difficult matter to make the junior understand at times. He looked surprised just now.

"Why is it rot?" he said.

"I didn't say anything about rot!" shouted Alonzo Todd. "I asked you whether that was the lot."

There was a chuckle from the juniors standing at the doorway as the deaf Removite gave a snort.

"If you say I'm talking rot, there will be trouble!" he shouted.

"Have you emptied the cupboard?" roared Alonzo.

"So I'm a regular old Mother Hubbard, am I, you rotter?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You idiots can laugh!" said Peter Todd. "But how would you like to have a deaf chump like that in your study? He's so blessed deaf there's about six fights a day here just because he imagines something's been said that hasn't."

"Look here, Todd!" shouted Bunter suddenly. "What have you been up to? Have you been clearing that cupboard under the bookcase?"

"Of course we have, fathead!"

"B-but—" Billy Bunter looked frantically round the study, and then from the cupboard to the fire. "But have you—have you been burning it?"

"That's the idea," said Peter pleasantly. "Now you're here, you can help us to finish the good work. We'll slaughter Dutton and put him on the fire."

The deaf junior and Alonzo Todd were still shouting hard at one another, when Bunter sprang across the room and flung

(Continued on page 20.)



# THE FIRST CHAPTERS OF OUR GREAT NEW SERIAL!



## “BY NERO’S COMMAND!”

The Finest Story of a  
Gladiator’s Life Ever Produced.

By  
**FAMOUS**  
**VICTOR NELSON.**

### INTRODUCTION.

Marcus, an upright, honest gladiator, is chosen to wrestle with Nabis, a famous Greek champion of Nero’s court.

The contest takes place at a huge feast in Nero’s palace.

Among the slaves waiting at table is one Eunice, a young and beautiful Briton, who is loved by Marcus. Eunice incurs Nero’s displeasure, and he turns angrily to the soldiers about him.

“Take this careless chit and give her three hundred lashes!” he thunders. “Not one less—you understand!”

“Have mercy, sire!” the girl pleads.

Marcus hears the dreadful command, and rushes to the room where the punishment is being carried out. He flings himself upon the brutal soldiers, and fights a grim hand-to-hand contest. The odds against him look like telling when there comes a startled interruption.

“Hold!” a terrible voice cries.

Nero stands before them, and for a moment the young gladiator’s life hangs by a thread.

Then the great despot tells Marcus that he will forgive him and allow him to marry Eunice if he is successful in catching a pirate called Strongbow, the Rover—a man who has waylaid a large number of Nero’s ships at sea. Marcus sets off with a company of splendid men, and is instrumental in ambushing Strongbow’s fleet, and capturing the outlaw. At the conclusion of the fight, Strongbow declares that Marcus is his long-lost son; but although the boy does not quite believe him he allows him his parole. A party is formed to search the island for Strongbow’s treasure. Marcus and his men are in a large cave when they discover an old man bound to the rocks. To the consternation of Marcus, he finds that he has at last discovered his father, and that Strongbow has deceived him. Meantime, whilst the landing-party are away, Strongbow contrives to escape ashore, and, finding Marcus and his men in the cave, he rolls a gigantic rock against the mouth.

Marcus and Leo escape from the cave, and whilst returning to the Conqueror for help are again captured by Strongbow. The two gladiators are taken aboard the rover ship, and are sentenced to walk the plank. Marcus, bound and blind-folded, is first, and he disappears into the sea.

(Now read on.)

### The Tables Turned.

**A**S the blue-green waters closed over Marcus, there happened on the ship a surprising thing.

Leo had continued to strain and wrench at the cords binding his wrists, and, even as the plank had overbalanced, carrying Marcus with it over the vessel’s side, Leo felt the bonds slacken.

He was a strong youngster. His training as a gladiator had made his muscles as hard as steel and given him an ox-like strength. He put forth all the effort that was in him, strained again at the cords, and burst them with a snap.

His arms flew out, and the two pirates, who had been standing on either side of him, suddenly and unexpectedly sat on the deck, hurled there by each receiving a stinging and simultaneous back-handed blow in the face.

Like an arrow released from a bow, Leo leapt towards the bulwarks, and, as Strongbow tried to stop him, Leo gripped him about the waist, swung him high above his head, and hurled him bodily over the vessel’s side.

With a mighty splash, the rover chief struck the water and disappeared; and on the deck of the ship Leo was fighting like a demon to go after and rescue his friend.

To give the pirate sailors their due, none of them were lacking in pluck, and man after man flung himself at the gladiator as he got his back against the bulwarks and laid about him with a heavy club he had snatched from the hand of the first man he had felled.

Whilst it lasted it was a terrible combat. Leo, thinking of the fate that had been assigned to his chum, was “seeing red,” and not a man received a blow from him without being stretched, stunned and bleeding, on the deck.

Thud!

Leo abruptly hurled the club into the face of the nearest pirate, and, ere the man could fall, had him in his arms.

By the scruff of his neck and his leg, Leo whirled him aloft, much as he had done with Strongbow, and now he threw him lengthwise at the others, bringing down at least half a dozen of them in a confused and huddled heap, and momentarily leaving himself unmenaced.

In a flash he had turned, had leapt to the bulwarks of the vessel, and taken a swift, clean dive into the sea.

Just before he struck the water he glimpsed Strongbow striking out to re-

gain the vessel, and, as he came up after his header, he saw Marcus rise to the surface and sink again.

With a speedy overarm stroke for which he had been noted in swimming contests in Rome, Leo propelled himself towards the spot where his chum had vanished.

He reached it and dived, searching blindly at first with his hands, then with his eyes as well, as they became accustomed to his greenish surroundings.

He saw the bound and helpless form of his chum before him, struck out, and seized it in his arms. Kicking out vigorously with his legs, he shot to the surface, his strong arm supporting Marcus so that his head was above the water. But, as he whipped away the bandage from Marcus’ eyes, Leo found that they were closed, and his comrade unconscious.

Already some dozen men had leapt from the pirate vessel, and were now swimming towards Leo and his helpless burden, their knives gripped between their teeth.

Leo’s jaw set harshly, and he struck out away from them. He knew, however, that they must surely overtake him. He could not hope to swim as fast as they, hampered as he was with the absolute dead weight of his friend.

Yet he meant to give them a run for it; and he succeeded, using his one free arm and legs with all his strength, and fairly shooting through the water. But surely, if slowly, they gained upon him, until he could hear the sharp breathing of the foremost man—a villainous-looking half-caste.

Leo slowed down suddenly, and with all his strength kicked out at the man. The suddenness of the move took the pirate completely off his guard, and he had no time to avoid the gladiator’s lunging foot.

It caught him fairly and squarely in the face, driving his knife between his teeth and badly cutting his lips. For a moment he sank, and by the time he had recovered himself sufficiently to rise again Leo was away once more, and had gained many yards. Others had passed the half-caste, however, and were threatening to overhaul and surround the plucky lad.

He felt that the position was hopeless. Strongbow, doubtless mad with rage at his ducking, had probably ordered his men to kill them both without further





Nearer, ever nearer, the Conqueror sailed. A perfect fusillade of missiles descended upon her now. Strongbow knew that he had reached the end of his tether, and meant to fight to the last man! (See page 18.)

delay, judging by the weapons they carried. Once let them come up with him, and the doom of both him and his senseless chum would be sealed.

He put forth every ounce of strength to keep them at a distance; but the odds in their favour told, and four of the murderous swimmers had soon drawn within a few feet of him.

Again he kicked out at the nearest man, and again his foot got home in the fellow's snarling face. Then, as Leo struck out again, feeling that the end was at hand, he heard loud hails from the ship, and wondered what they could mean.

Swiftly he turned his head and shot a glance over his shoulder as he swam, and he could have cried out in surprise at what he saw.

The pirates no longer pursued him. One and all had swung about and were swimming like madmen back towards their ship.

For a moment Leo trod water and stared after them, hardly able to believe his eyes. Then, as he looked the other way, the sudden abandoning of their chase was explained.

To his joy, he saw the gigantic Conqueror sailing round the island and making towards him at her topmost speed, her sails bellied and every pair of her oars swiftly at work. He uttered a hoarse cheer, though only the retreating pirates heard; and, anxious to get Marcus out of the water at the earliest possible moment, he turned and struck out to meet the great ship.

The Conqueror was fast, as vessels went in those times, considering her

bulk, and it was not long ere she was nearing the swimming gladiator and his burden. As she swept abreast of him a small boat splashed into the water, her rowers stilled their oars, and her speed was slackened.

Four burly sailors tumbled into the smaller craft and rowed swiftly to meet the swimmer. In another few seconds strong, friendly hands were lifting the unconscious Marcus aboard, whilst Leo rested for a moment, clinging to the boat's side.

A moment later he was given a hand in, and the boat was rowed back to the Conqueror.

"We sighted you from the hills on the island," one of the officers of the vessel explained, when Marcus had been lifted aboard and Leo had followed. "We had come ashore to seek to recapture the caitiff, Strongbow, who broke his parole and suddenly leapt overboard and swam to the island. We saw the other pirate ship, and you and Marcus being forced into the boat to be rowed to it. We made all haste to return to the Conqueror and rescue you, though, by Castor, it would seem that we were only just in time!"

Leo gripped his hand. "The main thing is that you were in time, Tacon," he said. "But stand aside. How fares Marcus?"

The vessel was again on her way, making with all speed after the pirate ship. After a swift glance towards it, Leo moved to where Marcus lay on the deck, tended by sailors, who were administering the equivalent of artificial respiration.

The young gladiator, whose hands, of course, had been freed, looked very

white, and showed no signs yet of recovering consciousness. Inquiries Leo made, however, swept away his anxiety.

Marcus, the sailors declared, was not in danger now, though a few more seconds beneath the water would have made all the difference, and cost him his life. It was only a matter of time.

He would regain his senses presently, and soon shake off the effects of his submersion.

As Leo turned away, and beckoned to the officer, Tacon, his thoughts had gone to vengeance.

"We've got to capture that vessel!" he said through his teeth, pointing across the sea to the flying pirate craft. "Strongbow is aboard it, and unless we take him back to Rome our mission has failed."

The officer shaded his eyes, and stared for a moment at the fugitive.

"We are gaining on her slowly," he said, with conviction; "and they cannot keep up that pace for long, O Leo. Remember that they cannot change their oarsmen as often as can we, and tired men do not row fast. What hast become of the men who went with you to the island? Are they, perchance, aboard, and the prisoners of Strongbow?"

"Nay, nay! They are on the island, imprisoned, as were Marcus and I, in a cave there," Leo answered.

And quickly he told the officer everything—how Marcus had found his father upon the island, how Strongbow had sent the boulder crashing into the mouth of the cavern, and how he and Marcus had escaped, only to fall in with the further batch of pirates and be captured by them.



"As soon as we have laid yonder tub by the heels—if ships have heels—we must return to the island and rescue them, Tacon," he concluded. "Already they will think our non-appearance strange."

The officer nodded, turned away, and issued a sharp, crisp order. The men at the oars responded to it with a will, for it had commanded the utmost speed. They bent their backs to their task, and pulled with all the power of their arms.

In twenty minutes a fresh order brought every available man, who was not either rowing or guarding the captured pirates, to the centre of the deck. Another command sent them to relieve the oarsmen, and, in turn, they rested.

Leo stood in the bows, and his eyes were riveted upon the retreating vessel across the sun-caressed sea. Presently the gladiator turned away with a smile of grim satisfaction. Yes, the Conqueror was gaining right enough, if only slowly.

"The master is coming back to life," a sailor announced, stepping forward and addressing him; and, with a nod, Leo hastened to where his friend lay on the deck.

He found Marcus' eyes wide open, and as he knelt beside him the young gladiator stretched forth his hand weakly and clasped that of his chum.

"I have heard how you saved me," he said simply. "I owe you my life, Leo. I canst scarce find words to thank you properly, but—"

"But nothing, Marcus!" Leo scoffed. "I did only what you wouldst do for me in similar circumstances. By Bacchus! But I thought it was all over with us both; and if I needed thanks, I should find them—and reward, too—in seeing you alive, and in being alive my unworthy self! What wouldst you do?"

"I want to get to the bows to watch the chase after Strongbow, my friend," Marcus answered, making a plucky effort to get upon his feet, and succeeding, with the aid of two of the sailors who had been restoring him. "It means much to me to see him captured."

"You would be better in your sleeping quarters," Leo protested doubtfully.

"Nay, I could not lay there and know not what was happening on deck, and how the chase was faring," Marcus returned. "I shall come not to harm. The sun is so hot that already my clothes are dry—or almost so; and if you will bring me a draught of wine, I shall be my old self again. As I do not indulge in it as a general thing, it will have good effect, and put new life into my veins."

Leo saw that he was not to be turned from his purpose, and, signing to the sailors to assist his friend to a place in the bows of the vessel, he himself went off in search of the wine Marcus had requested.

When he returned with a gourd of it, he found that the sailors had fashioned a seat for Marcus out of a coil of rope and some rugs. He was seated upon it, his arms on the ship's side, and his gaze upon the rover boat.

"We are beginning to gain upon her fast, Leo!" he said, his voice unsteady with excitement; and he was right.

The freshness of the men who had relieved the others at the Conqueror's oars had told, and the gap between the two vessels had been sensibly lessened.

Marcus drank the wine, and a touch of colour began to steal into his cheeks. Leo regarded him a trifle anxiously, not liking the unnatural brightness of his eyes. He again urged him to rest, but Marcus only shook his head. He meant

to see the chase and recapture of Strongbow through before he sought his sleeping quarters.

### Face to Face With Strongbow!

**T**HE pursuit went on through the blazing afternoon. About every twenty minutes the oarsmen were changed, one lot of sailors sitting by and resting, whilst the others pulled for all they were worth.

Nearer and nearer crept the Conqueror to the pirate craft, until at last they were within hailing distance.

Leo made a trumpet of his hands. "Hold!" he shouted. "Stop, or we will sink you!"

No notice was taken by the fugitive, and Marcus turned towards Tacon, his face stern and determined.

"Ram her!" he ordered tersely. The officer gave a gesture of assent, and, swinging round on his heels, addressed the men at the oars, urging them to make a last strenuous effort.

He issued other commands that caused the sailors who had been standing by to gather up swords, javelins, bows and arrows and slings, and the vessel to be put full at the fleeing rover.

A formidable shower of stones and arrows rattled upon the Conqueror's deck as she forged her way ever nearer. Three of the sailors were struck, but not injured seriously; and, like a grim messenger of vengeance, the mighty vessel sailed on in pursuit.

From a matter of twenty yards the distance between the two ships was decreased to a dozen. Marcus and Leo, peering over the bows, could see that the rowers on the pirate craft were straining every muscle to make sufficient speed to elude them, but it was all to no purpose. They might just as well have attempted to race the wind.

Nearer, ever nearer, the Conqueror sailed. A perfect fusillade of missiles descended upon her now, and one of her men fell, never to rise again, and two more were sent, groaning, to the deck, arrows quivering in their bodies. Strongbow knew that he had reached the end of his tether, and meant to fight to the last man, the last drop of blood.

Six yards, now only a few feet, separated pursuer and pursued, and Marcus gave an order for the pirate to be given a taste of her own medicine. The men responded with a will, and arrow after arrow, stone after stone, was rained upon her, felling her nondescript crew left and right. But worse was to come.

Cries of alarm came from the smaller vessel, as the Conqueror came inexorably on, running full tilt at her.

Strongbow, who was in the centre of the deck, a sword in his hand, frantically screamed orders, and, too late, the ship was swung round to attempt to rush away at a tangent and avoid the impending collision.

Crash!

For a moment the gigantic bows of the Conqueror had towered over her, then had caught her a rending, broadside blow that smashed in her timbers like the shell of an egg.

Panic reigned upon her. Completely losing their heads, men rushed insanely this way and that; others fought to lower the boats she carried; still more fought with each other to reach the side, and take the slender chance of escape held out by swimming.

Already her bows were dipping under water, and the part of her deck that remained above it was practically flush with the sea. It was a scene of terror, chaos, pandemonium!

"Keep your eyes on Strongbow,"

Marcus said coolly, his hand resting upon Leo's arm. "The others can go, if they can escape drowning. We will pick those up who prefer to be taken prisoner, but it's Strongbow who is important. He must be taken at all costs. Ah, see! He is going to dive!"

"Leave him to me!" Leo rapped, making to climb the vessel's side.

"Have a care! He's a knife between his teeth!" Marcus shouted, as his friend raised his arms above his head preparatory to diving.

But if Leo heard he paid no heed.

But, then, he was as near to fearless as a man can hope to be, and the fact that an adversary was armed was not likely to trouble him much.

He had seen Strongbow leap into the water, and strike away from his doomed ship. Whether the pirate contemplated attempting the long swim back to the island, or knew of other land that he intended making for, it was hard to say. Certainly he was desperate. He could expect no mercy or consideration from Marcus or Leo now, after his two attempts upon their lives, and to be taken to Rome meant death.

As Leo came up after his dive, and shook the water from his eyes, he saw Strongbow swimming swiftly some yards ahead of him and away to the right. The gladiator started after him, and as he looked over his shoulder and saw him, the rover chieftain redoubled his efforts, and swam with the speed of a lively seal.

What followed was really a pretty contest, though it did not last long. Leo turned upon his side, and swam with the great, sweeping overarm stroke that was so essentially his, and in the matter of half a minute he was so near to Strongbow that a few more strokes would enable him to throw his arms about him.

The pirate suddenly turned, snatched his knife from between his teeth, and waited for the gladiator, treading water. There was murder in the rover's eyes, and Leo watched him keenly and warily as, pausing, he, too, tread water.

Strongbow abruptly made as if to turn and swim off once more. Then, as Leo followed, Strongbow stopped and made a savage lunge at his breast with his weapon. But Leo could also be cunning and show strategy, and as the knife swept down towards him he dived with the speed of lightning.

Strongbow felt his ankle seized in the gladiator's powerful hand, and he was dragged beneath the surface. Then, before he quite knew what was happening, Leo had whirled him beneath him, and was gripping him about the body.

Locked together, the two men rose through the waters, but only the head of Leo was clear of the surface. Strongbow was held under water, and as his knife-arm was pinned tightly to his side by Leo's grip, he was as helpless as a child.

Probably the pirate thought that the gladiator intended to drown him, but it was only sufficiently long for him to become dazed and enfeebled that Leo kept him under the waves. As soon as his struggles weakened the gladiator allowed him to rise, and whilst he held the pirate's head clear of the sea with one hand, he snatched the knife from his well-nigh nerveless fingers with the other.

Choking and gasping to regain his breath, Strongbow attempted to fling him off. Before he knew where he was Leo had him over on his back and his neck held firmly in the crook of his arm. The gladiator himself had turned on his back, and now, kicking out with his legs and using his one free arm, he propelled himself and his captive in triumph to the Conqueror.



He had scarcely reached it, seen Strongbow hauled aboard and made secure with both handcuffs and leg-irons, and followed himself, than the wrecked pirate ship foundered.

Her stern rose high in the air, and, with a terrible suddenness, she went plunging down into the fathomless depths, leaving innumerable bubbles to mark the spot where she had been, and those of her rabble crew, who had not already left her or been dragged down with her, struggling in the water.

Men from the Conqueror had already put off in boats in anticipation of the vessel sinking. They began to pick up those of the pirates who did not elect to throw themselves upon the mercy of the sea and swim away.

And on the huge vessel from Rome Strongbow was being bound securely to one of the masts. He was not to be allowed a chance to escape for the second time.

The time had passed quickly for Marcus, and the long voyage back to Rome was almost at its end. Antium would be in sight within an hour, and his mission almost ended.

He was smiling happily as he listened to the merry chaff and chatter of Leo, who stood with him in the Conqueror's bows, for it seemed that the best of good fortune was his, and to him the future looked bright and smiling.

Strongbow and the majority of his men had been captured, as well as six of his ships, which, each with a number of prisoners on board, sailed now in the Conqueror's wake.

It was a triumphal return, and his reward was to be Eunice. He could picture the joy and love in her eyes as she learned he had succeeded, and he held her in his arms.

Just for a moment a frown hovered upon his brow.

He was thinking of his father who, together with the six sailors, had, of course, been hauled out of the cavern on the island as soon as a body of men from the Conqueror could reach the hill with ropes.

Marcus had left the old man in Alexandria. There had been just time to return there and arrange for him to be cared for in the city before setting out on the long voyage back to Rome.

It had hurt Marcus deeply to have to part from him so soon after finding him and knowing him for his father; but it would have been madness to take him to Rome until some assurance was received from Nero that he would be left unmolested.

True, it had been before Nero's reign as emperor that Anthony of Antium's league for the suppression of slavery had been broken up, Marcus' mother murdered, and the lad himself, then a baby, kidnapped and left on a poor man's doorstep. But Anthony's name would still be remembered as a political offender, and so great a despot was Nero that he could not be relied upon to pardon him, in spite of the great service Marcus and his men had rendered the community.

Yet surely, thought Marcus, he could prevail upon Nero to look mercifully upon his father's case; whilst, after all, if he could not, as Eunice would be freed and his wife and he himself released from the school of gladiators, they might join his father in Africa.

Poor lad! If only he had been given the power to look into the future, to realise to the full the black treachery

and cruelty of which Nero could be capable, there would have been no happy smile on his lips as now.

It was just after the fall of darkness that the lights of Antium appeared ahead of them. The sailors raised a cheer that must have carried to the shore.

"Our voyage is ended, Leo!" Marcus cried, clapping him upon the shoulder. "In a day or two you shall dance at my wedding!"

"I wish you all happiness, you and your bride, old friend!" Leo said quietly, suddenly serious. "I wonder if, perchance, Nero is still here in Antium? It was hinted that his stay would be a long one."

"Suppose we go ashore and make inquiries?" Marcus suggested, as the vessels neared the harbour and cast their anchors. "I shall be expected to report to him at the earliest possible moment."

Leo nodded his agreement, and accordingly they gave orders for a boat to be lowered and rowed themselves ashore. They had scarce set foot on land, however, when they became aware that the town was in the grip of some wild excitement. People stood about in little knots, whispering together, others stared at the sky in the direction of Rome, and more

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than once Leo and Marcus caught the words "the fire."

Marcus stepped up to an old fisherman and touched his arm.

"Tell me, what is wrong?" he asked.

For a moment the old man stared at him in apparent amazement; then, as he studied his clothes, he gave an exclamation of understanding.

"Ah, you have just come off the sea, master," he said, "or you would know that Rome is blazing, and that the city runs red with blood and is in the throes of revolution!"

Marcus reeled back as if he had received a heavy blow between the eyes.

"What part of the city is burning? Knowest you that?" he asked hoarsely, his face deathly white beneath its tan.

"'Tis said that the outbreak is so serious that all of Rome must become charred ashes, master," the fisherman replied.

Marcus gripped his shoulders, and in his anxiety and excitement gently shook him to and fro as he rapped:

"The Palatine, and Nero's palace? What of that?"

"News has just reached here that the fire spreads in that direction, master. Perchance, you have friends there?" the old fellow asked sympathetically.

Marcus staggered away from him, his hand gripping upon his friend's arm in a manner that bruised even his tough flesh.

Marcus' brain was reeling. He felt sick and faint with anxiety and dread.

Rome on fire—so badly ablaze that the entire city was threatened with annihilation! Why, it meant something too terrible to imagine! If the news were really not exaggerated, it was a blaze of a magnitude the like of which had never been dreamed of before!

Marcus could picture it only as an inferno out of which no living thing could escape. And Eunice was virtually a prisoner in Cæsar's palace in the Palatine, which might even now have been drawn into the all-consuming maw of the flames.

"You heard, Leo—you heard?" he almost moaned. "I must go to her—go to try and save her, though I fear she may be already dead!"

"Yes, go—go now—at once!" Leo urged, his hand upon his shoulder. "I will return to the ship and see that all remains well there until you come back."

Marcus was choking. He dared not trust himself to speak as he sought his friend's hand and gave it a quick, warm clasp—perhaps the last he would ever give it, Leo thought gravely. He felt that Marcus would scorn risks when he reached the blazing city, and probably sacrifice his own life in an attempt to reach the spot where the girl he loved was last known to be. But it was useless to try to turn him from his purpose—quite useless.

Marcus went rushing away through the gloom. Nero had supplied him with ample funds when he commenced his voyage, and he had an abundance of money left in his possession. He shouted for a horse, and when a man who hired them out understood that he was bound for Rome and hesitated about letting him have one of his animals, Marcus literally threw money at him until he brought out the fastest horse he had and gave him a leg-up on to its back.

Then, it was away through the town, past the ghostly-looking cypresses and the white villas, on into Laurentum, and thence into Ardea. At Aricium, half-way to Rome, he found his horse so tired that he purchased outright another, and pressed on, at last reaching the steep hill beyond Aricium's white walls.

He plied his whip and urged his horse up the incline at its greatest speed, knowing that when he reached the summit he would be able to see Rome itself.

At the top of the hill the wind flung the odour of smoke into his face, and as he reined in his steed and gazed ahead and downwards, a terrifying sight greeted him—so terrifying that he caught in his breath and stifled a groan of despair.

For miles around the lower ground was enveloped in a pall of black, choking smoke, which blotted out towns, aqueducts, trees, and villas. Beyond lay one huge, lurid glare, a veritable sea of fire, that lit up the sky with a blinding radiance.

It was a scene at once grand, awe-inspiring, terrible, and marked the position of doomed Rome—Rome, where the girl he loved better than life itself had been held in bondage by Nero.

Marcus spurred on his horse, though his brain was numbed with dread and he reeled in the saddle.

"Had she escaped from the palace and reached a place of safety?" he asked himself. "Or had she fallen a victim to the blood-red horror that had fallen upon the once-magnificent city?"

(This magnificent story will be continued in next week's issue of the MAGNET. Order now.)



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# LODER'S LUCK!

(Continued from Page 14.)

open the cupboard door. He gave a roar of anger as he noted the empty shelves.

"Todd, you rotter! Todd, you raving idiot!" he shouted. "Have you burnt all the stuff that was in here?"

"Yes, ass!"

"Everything?" howled Bunter. "All the papers?"

"That's the idea!"

"You've saved nothing?"

"I hope not, you fat chump! When I spring-clean I do it properly. What was the good of keeping the rotten stuff? It's been there for years, and there was about an inch of dust on it. It was only old papers and impots and magazines."

"It wasn't! It wasn't!" shrieked Bunter. "I shoved some important papers in there this morning!"

"Oh, my giddy aunt!" exclaimed Peter Todd. "You were an ass! Have we burnt the lot, Alonzo?"

"Yes, we've finished now," replied Alonzo. "I wish you would take Dutton away. He won't let the subject drop when once he misunderstands one."

There was a roar of anguish from Bunter as he heard the fatal reply.

"Oh, you idiots! Oh, you chumps! Oh, you mad rotters!" he roared.

"Bunter sounds upset!" laughed Bob Cherry. "What a lively home to live in!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You've burnt my papers! Oh, you beastly cads!"

"Well, you shouldn't shove important papers away in a dirty old cupboard," said Peter Todd. "How in the dickens did you expect us to go through everything? There ain't time when you're spring-cleaning for that sort of thing!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Hallo, hallo! Cave, you fellows!" cried Bob Cherry. "Here comes that cad Loder! Looks as though he's on the war-path, too!"

The Removites in the passage made way as Loder the prefect came striding up. There was an angry frown on his face as he pushed his way into Study No. 7.

"Bunter here?" he cried, looking round. "Ah, here you are, Bunter! How much longer are you going to keep me waiting? I told you to come back at once. Where are those papers?"

"Burnt!" roared Bunter. "Burnt to a blessed cinder!"

"What?"

"These idiots have had a clear out,

and they shoved everything on to the fire."

An enormous sigh of relief went up from the Sixth-Former.

"Is—is it true?" he gasped.

"Yes, it's quite true, Loder," said Peter Todd. "I'm very sorry; but how was I to know that Bunter shoved some important papers into the blessed cupboard?"

There was a groan from Bunter.

"Of course, it wasn't your fault," said Loder. "Are you quite sure they're burnt?"

Peter Todd pointed to the blazing mass of charred paper in the grate.

"Look at it!" he said.

Loder felt almost like dancing round the table as he realised what it all meant. Somewhere in that blazing heap were his wretched I O U's. Joe Banks' incriminating papers didn't affect the matter now. The one had counterbalanced the other. He was safe.

"Well, perhaps—perhaps it doesn't matter," he said. "Bunter was looking after the papers for me, and—and I don't mind so long as they are burnt."

"But I do!" roared Bunter. "What about my fiver from—from—from—"

The fat Removite suddenly stopped, and Harry Wharton & Co. looked at him in surprise.

"Hallo! It looks as though the porpoise has been up to some tricks," said Harry Wharton. "Surely the papers couldn't have been worth five pounds!"

"You'd better keep that mouth of yours closed, Bunter!" snapped Loder, turning on his heels. "When you've cooled down a bit you can come and see me."

"Here," cried Bunter, "where are you off to, Loder, you cad? Don't you forget I want a fiver from you as well. You promised it to me, you know."

Loder's face was a study.

He turned round and faced Bunter as though he could kill the fat Removite on the spot.

"Give me my five pounds, Loder!" howled Bunter. "I got your blessed I O U's, and you'll jolly well give me the five pounds! It doesn't make any difference even if they have been burnt!"

"You young hound!" shouted Loder. "Do you dare to suggest that I have been writing out I O U's?"

"Well, have you ever—"

"You'll bring a false accusation against me, will you?" cried the angry prefect, seizing Bunter by the hair and shaking

him furiously. "I'll teach you to talk like that to a prefect!"

And he boxed Bunter's ears right and left.

The fat junior squirmed and struggled and yelled.

"Stoppit! Ow! Don't be a cad! I don't accuse you!"

"Then what are you talking about?" demanded Loder, still thumping.

"I—I don't know! I—I—"

Thump, thump, thump!

"Here, hold on!" exclaimed Harry Wharton, coming forward. "That's enough of that, Loder!"

Loder stared at him.

"Do you dare to interfere with a prefect, you young hound?"

"Yes, I do, when he's acting like a hooligan!" retorted Wharton. "I tell you you sha'n't handle a member of the Remove like that! Hands off!"

"Hands off!" shouted Nugent and Bob Cherry.

Loder hesitated. The Removites were ready to spring at him, and his grasp upon the Owl released. Billy Bunter took advantage of it, and tore himself away, and promptly dodged round the table.

"I—I think he's had enough!" panted Loder. "He won't bring accusations against me again in a hurry!"

And the prefect strode from the study.

Loder made his way up to his untidy study, and threw himself into an arm-chair. Now that his anxiety was over, the reaction set in. He felt the strain of the last few days. Bunter's cruel threats had distracted the Sixth-Former almost to desperation; and even when the crooked youth had held the upper hand by the possession of the stolen papers he felt bowed down by worry and anxiety.

Now that it was all over he felt ready to drop.

For some minutes he sat there, with his hands pressed up to his throbbing temples, and then he got up and scrawled a hasty note to Banks. In a few words he told him of the destruction of his papers and of the slips he had surrendered to Bunter, and when it was written Loder felt better. Whether the lesson he had learned would benefit him it was hard to say; but he brightened up, and Harry Wharton & Co. of the Remove were left alone in peace for several days, which was something to be thankful for.

It was a queer thing that the Remove should be allowed to share a boon from "Loder's Luck!"

THE END.

(Another grand story of Harry Wharton & Co. will appear in next week's MAGNET. Order now.)

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