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INSIDE



Billy Bunter's Xmas Dinner!



The Ghost of Wharton Lodge

BY FRANK RICHARDS.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Nothing Doing!

MERRY Christmas, Franky!"
"Oh, my hat! Bunter!"
exclaimed Frank Nugent.
"Glad to see you, old

chap!"
"You've got all the gladness on your side!"

"Oh, really, Nugent—"
Frank Nugent had stepped from the train at the little station of Wimford, in Surrey. He was on his way to Wharton Lodge, where the Famous Five of the Greyfriars Remove were to gather for Christmas. He had rather expected Harry Wharton and Hurree Singh to meet him at the station. He had not expected Billy Bunter. But it was the unexpected that happened—in the shape of William George Bunter!

Billy Bunter was on the platform, blinking at the train as it stopped, through his big spectacles. He spotted Nugent at once and rolled up to him. His fat face was irradiated by a friendly grin. Apparently he was glad to see Nugent. Frank Nugent did not seem to share that feeling to any great extent.

"I say, old fellow—"
"Is Wharton here?" asked Nugent.
"Oh, no! He couldn't come. Inky couldn't come, I came instead," said Bunter. "They were coming in the car to pick you up but I fancy something happened to the car. Not that I know anything about it, you know! I haven't been anywhere near the garage. If any body poured cinders into the petrol tank it must have been the chauffeur. I never thought much of that chap."

Frank Nugent stared at the fat Owl of the Remove.

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"Let's take a taxi," went on Bunter briskly. "There's one outside. I'll pay. Leave that to me. You can lend me ten bob. Rather unfortunately, I left my notecase at home with all my banknotes in it when I came over to see Wharton."

"Are you staying at Wharton Lodge?" demanded the puzzled Nugent.

To his surprise, Bunter grinned at that question as if he regarded it as a joke.

"Yes. No, not exactly," said Bunter. "That is to say, sort of, if you know what I mean."

"I haven't the faintest idea what you mean. If the fellows aren't coming to the station I'd better get off."

Frank Nugent picked up his suitcase and started down the platform to the exit. Bunter rolled after him. Outside the station Frank glanced round him. There was no sign of Harry Wharton or Hurree Janset Ram Singh, or of the car from Wharton Lodge; so he started to walk.

Bunter grabbed him by the arm.
"What about the taxi?" he asked.

"Nothing about the taxi!" answered Nugent. "I can walk a mile, I suppose."

"I've said that I'll pay!" said Bunter, with dignity.

"Well, you take the taxi, and I'll walk."

"Beast! I mean, all right, old chap; if you'd rather walk, I'll walk, too. There's a lot of snow on the road, though. A lot more coming down, too, I fancy. Better take the taxi."

"Take it—and be blown!" answered Frank Nugent, and he shook off the fat hand and swung on his way.

Billy Bunter rolled after him. Bunter had already walked from Wharton Lodge that afternoon, and he did not

want to walk back. But, for reasons of his own—good reasons—he did not want to part company with Frank Nugent.

Leaving Wimford behind, they tramped through a carpet of snow down the road that led to Colonel Wharton's house. Nugent walked rather quickly, making little of the weight of his bag, but Billy Bunter puffed and blew as he kept pace with him.

"I say, old chap," gasped Bunter, "not so jolly fast! After I've taken the trouble to walk to the station to meet you—"

"Oh, all right!" Nugent slowed down. "What the dickens did you come to the station for, Bunter?"

"I thought you'd like to see me!" said Bunter, with dignified reproach.

"What on earth put that idea into your head?"

"Beast! I mean, look here, old chap, let me carry your bag. I mean it! I want to save you trouble, old fellow."

Nugent could only stare. It was surprising enough for Billy Bunter to take the trouble to walk to the station. It was simply amazing for him to offer to carry a fellow's bag for him.

"Hand it over," said Bunter. "Let's be pally, old scout! I've been thinking about you ever since we broke up at Greyfriars. We were always pals, weren't we—the best of pals?"

"Not that I know of."

"Oh, really, Nugent! I used to be in Study No. 1 with you before that beast Wharton came—I mean, dear old Harry! Don't you remember how miserable you were when I changed out?"

"No; I remember that I was awfully bucked."

"Beast!"
Nugent grinned and tramped on.

Bunter's little fat legs had to trot to keep pace.

"Don't race, you ass!" gasped Bunter. "I've got something to say to you before we get in. I don't want you to get in first."

"Why not?"

"Well, it would be better for us to arrive together," explained Bunter. "The fact is there's been a bit of a misunderstanding. Rotten sort of thing to happen at Christmas-time, you know! Chance for you to act as peacemaker, and all that."

"What the thump are you driving at?"

"Well, you see, it was frightfully awkward, but when I phoned Harry that I was coming for Christmas his uncle took the call, and, not knowing that it was that stuffy old colonel on the phone, I happened to mention that I thought him an old donkey and an old fossil, and—"

"Oh, my hat!"

"He seems to have been offended," said Bunter.

"You don't say so?" said Nugent, with deep sarcasm.

"I do, old chap. You know what these old codgers are like," said Bunter, shaking his head. "It always gets their backs up to hear what a fellow really thinks of them. Well, Wharton makes out that, his uncle being stuffy about it, he can't have me at the Lodge; and when I came along, you'd hardly believe it, Franky, but those beasts snowballed me, instead of giving me the glad hand—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at! I'd have turned Wharton down at once, only, you see, Bunter Villa—I mean, Bunter Court—is shut up for the holidays, my people being away at Southend—I mean, in the South of France—and there's only Uncle George. And I've had a row with Uncle George, and had to get out. So it leaves a fellow rather stranded, doesn't it, old chap?"

"Then you're not staying with Wharton?" asked the perplexed Nugent.

"Well, I'm going to," said Bunter. "It will be all right with a little tact. I walk in with you—"

"Oh!" ejaculated Nugent. "Do you?"

"You mention to Wharton that you'd like me to be there for Christmas. See?"

"Oh!"

"And he can hardly cut up rusty, you being such a pal of his. As for his uncle, he's bound to be civil, at least, if I come in as your pal. What do you think?"

Nugent gazed at the Owl of the Remove. He did not state what he thought. Bunter seemed to have taken his breath away.

"I fancy it will be all right," said Bunter. "That's why I came to meet your train, old chap. I mean, I came to meet your train because you're my best pal. Lucky I heard those fellows mention the time of your train, wasn't it?"

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Nugent.

"You see how the matter stands," said Bunter. "You're going to act as peacemaker and set it all right. You'll manage it! If you don't you may not have my company this Christmas!"

"What a fearful loss!"

"And Marjorie and Clara will be coming over on Boxing Day, and they'll hardly care for it if I'm not there. Marjorie's rather sweet on me, you know—"

"You fat idiot—"

"Oh, really, Nugent—"

"You blithering bandersnatch!"

"I don't think you ought to be jealous of a fellow, like Wharton and Bob Cherry, Nugent! It's not my fault that I'm a good-looking chap, and that girls run after me! Why, you remember that time I was staying with you, and your sisters were always trying to catch me under the mistletoe— Oh! Ow! Yaroooooop!"

Why Frank Nugent swung round his suitcase and plumped it on Bunter's podgy chest the Owl of the Remove never knew.

But that was what Nugent did.

Bunter went spinning.

He landed on his back in a bank of snow, with a bump and a fearful yell.

Frank Nugent strode on at an accelerated pace—a pace that Billy Bunter could never have equalled if he had been in a state to try.

But Billy Bunter wasn't!

He sat up in the snow, gurgling for breath, and blinking after Frank Nugent's disappearing form over the spectacles that had slipped down his fat little nose.

"Urrrrgh!" gurgled Bunter. "Beast! Urrrrgh!"

By the time the fat Owl crawled out of the snow, Frank Nugent had vanished

THE GHOST THAT WALKED OFF WITH THE CHRISTMAS PUDDING!

in the distance. Billy Bunter was left on his own, in a cold and unfeeling world.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

The Boot for Bunter!

"THERE'S Franky!" exclaimed Harry Wharton.

"As large as life!"

agreed Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

Harry Wharton and the Nabob of Bhanipur were trudging up the snowy road towards Wimford. Wharton was looking worried and perplexed, and his dusky chum sympathetically serious. Having arranged to pick up Frank Nugent at the station, in the car, they had left it much too late to walk the distance. The colonel's car, they discovered, was mysteriously, but totally, out of action. Instead of having it ready for them, Brown, the chauffeur, was in his shirtsleeves in an oily, grubby, and infuriated state, wrestling with the engine.

Brown, usually a well-mannered chauffeur, had been surly, in fact, savage, plainly intimating his belief that somebody had been deliberately playing tricks with the car, and giving him endless work for nothing! So the two juniors started to walk, expecting to meet Nugent somewhere on the road.

They sighted him in the distance coming along with his suitcase in his hand. And they quickened their pace to meet him.

By that time, having carried his suitcase about a mile, Nugent was finding it rather heavy. So he put it down and sat on it, and waited for his friends to come up. They came up at a trot, and Frank rose and shook hands, with a cheery grin.

"Sorry you had to walk it, old man," said Harry. "But at the last minute it turned out that the car was wonky—"

"The wonkifulness was terrific, my esteemed Franky," said the Nabob of Bhanipur, "and the execrable chauffeur was preposterously infuriated."

"I imagine so!" said Nugent, grinning. "Cinders in the petrol must have given him some trouble."

Harry Wharton stared.

"How the thump did you know?" he stuttered. "That's what Brown said, and I thought he was dreaming! Is this magic?"

Hurree Jamset Ram Singh gazed at Nugent in blank astonishment. Really, it seemed like magic! How Nugent, still half a mile from Wharton Lodge, knew what was the trouble with the car there, was a mystery.

"I've met Bunter!" Nugent explained.

"Bunter!" exclaimed Wharton and the nabob together.

"The one and only!" said Frank. "He met me at the station and offered to stand a taxi! But I can't afford to let Bunter stand me taxis."

"Bunter!" repeated Wharton.

"Bunter's not here! I mean, I never knew he was anywhere about! He came along a few days ago and was kicked out. I haven't seen him since. Is he staying in the neighbourhood, then?"

"Must be! He heard you fellows mention the time of my train to-day, so he couldn't have been far off."

"My only hat!"

"The only-hatfulness is terrific."

"But what the thump did he meet you at the station for, even if he had pried out the time of your train?"

Frank Nugent chuckled.

"To walk in with me! I left him a quarter of a mile back, sitting in the snow! His company palled on me slightly."

"But—but has that fat foozler been hanging round the place and playing tricks in the garage?" exclaimed Wharton in amazement. "Did he tell you he'd put cinders in the petrol-tank?"

"No—he told me he hadn't! So I knew he had!"

"Well, I'm dashed!" exclaimed the captain of the Greyfriars Remove. "This beats it! I hadn't the faintest idea he was around. He's done a fearful lot of damage to the car—according to Brown. To keep us away while he met you at the station, I suppose!"

"And to walk in under my wing!" chuckled Nugent. "He seems to have got himself stranded for the hols; and it's a case of any port in a storm. If you want him, I dare say he's still sitting where I left him—he looked as if it would take some time to get his second wind."

Wharton's eyes gleamed.

"The fat villain! Blessed if I know how he could have got into the place without being seen. I've a jolly good mind to go along and kick him all the way to Wimford."

Hurree Jamset Ram Singh gave a chuckle.

"The ridiculous Bunter is in the offing!" he remarked, pointing up the long white road towards Wimford.

Far in the distance, a blot on the white snow, was a fat figure, coming slowly on. A large pair of spectacles flashed back the rays of the wintry sun! Evidently Billy Bunter had got his second wind, and was following Nugent, though at a good distance behind. Perhaps he still hoped to induce Franky to make the attempt to see him

through at Wharton Lodge. Hope springs eternal in the human breast.

"Here he comes!" grinned Nugent. "I can do with a rest, if you'd like to wait for him!" And he sat on his suitcase again.

"We'll wait!" said Harry Wharton grimly. "The blithering fat Owl has got to learn that he can't wreck my uncle's car."

And the juniors waited. It was rather a long wait, for the motions of the fat Owl of the Remove rather resembled those of a fatigued snail. Wharton and the nabob stepped out of sight among the leafless trees by the road, before they were within range of Bunter's spectacles. It was probable that Bunter would have halted if he had sighted the captain of the Remove. As it was, he rolled on and arrived panting and puffing at the spot where Nugent sat on his suitcase.

"Waiting for me, old chap!" gasped Bunter. "I say, what did you bump me over for, you silly ass? But it's all right—I can take a joke—he, he, he! I say, old fellow, you're going to see me through at Wharton Lodge, ain't you? That's why you've waited, isn't it?"

"Not quite!" grinned Nugent, as Wharton and Hurree Singh stepped from the trees behind Bunter.

"Oh really, Nugent! I'm relying on you, you know," urged Bunter. "The fact is, that stuffy old ass, Colonel Wharton, has his back up! You know those fossilised old codgers! Wharton has turned me down, like a rotten, ungrateful cad, after all I've done for him. And that rotten nigger, Inky—Ow! Who's that? What—"

Bunter spun round as Harry Wharton took hold of his collar from behind. His little round eyes almost bulged through his big round spectacles at the unexpected sight of the captain of the Greyfriars Remove.

"Oh!" gasped Bunter. "You!"
"You fat villain!" roared Wharton. "You've been hanging round my uncle's place and playing fool tricks in the garage."

"Oh, really, Wharton! I haven't been near the place! Leggo my collar! Not likely to come near your place after the rotten way you've treated me! As for going to the garage, I don't even know where it is, and the door was open, and I never watched Brown filling up with juice—I wasn't hiding behind the door—Ow! Stop shaking me, you beast—"

Shake! Shake! Shako!
"Oocoooh!" gurgled Bunter. "S-stop shaking me, I tell you—Oocoooh! If you make my specs fall off—oocoooh!—and they get b-b-broken—gurrgh—you'll have to pi-pip-pay for them—wurrgh!"

Shake! Shake! Shake!
"Wurrghgh!" gasped Bunter.
Bump!
"Yurrghgh!"
Billy Bunter sat in the snow and gurgled. Harry Wharton glared down at him.

"Now, you fat rascal—"
"Urrrrgh!"
"I give you one second to get out of reach—"

"Wurrgh!"
"Then I'm going to kick you—"
"Gurrgh! Beast! Urrrrgh!"
"The kickfulness is the proper caper!" agreed Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "Let us all kick togetherfully!"
"Hear, hear!" said Nugent. "Give a fellow room!"

Billy Bunter scrambled up. He made a wild leap to escape. Three boots

landed on his podgy person as he leaped.

"Whoop!" roared Bunter.
He rolled.
The chums of the Remove turned and walked away towards Wharton Lodge, leaving him rolling, roaring. When Harry Wharton glanced back, from a distance, Bunter was sitting up in the snow, shaking a fat fist, his very spectacles glittering with wrath. Then he was lost to sight, and the Removites trudged on, nothing doubting that they had seen the last of Billy Bunter till next term at Greyfriars.

But they hadn't!

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

The Unbidden Guest!

"THOMAS!"
"Yes, Mr. Wells, sir!"
"Place the table before the fire, Thomas."

Wells, the butler of Wharton Lodge, stood in Harry Wharton's sitting-room, otherwise, his "den." Thomas, the page, was laying the table for tea. Colonel Wharton and his sister, Miss Amy, were dining out that evening, and had already left the Lodge. On such occasions Wharton was accustomed to "tea" in his den, and Thomas was making the arrangements under the lofty supervision of the portly Wells. At the present moment Harry Wharton and Nugent and the nabob were downstairs, chatting by the fire in the hall. Outside, the December darkness was falling, and flakes of snow whirled on a keen wind.

Wharton's room looked very cosy and comfortable, with a log fire blazing in the grate and the electric light gleaming on a well-spread tea-table, and on the red berries of the holly that decorated the walls in honour of the season. Wells thought so, and so did a third party, of whose presence neither Wells nor Thomas had the slightest suspicion. There were french windows to the room, opening on an old stone balcony with steps down to the garden—a way by which Harry frequently came and went. In the windy darkness of the balcony a fat figure crouched, blinking at the window through a pair of large spectacles, and shivering in the wind.

"Beasts!" murmured Billy Bunter, for about the twentieth time, wondering whether Wells and Thomas would ever go

That was Bunter's way in!
Wharton had been astonished to learn that the fat Owl of the Remove was still in the neighbourhood. He would have been still more astonished had he known how very near Bunter's quarters were.

Over Wharton's den was an attic, reached by a steep stair in the passage outside. That attic was never used, and was kept locked.

Nobody at Wharton Lodge even dreamed that that disused attic was no longer disused, but that an unknown and uninvited guest had taken up his quarters there!

With Billy Bunter it was, as Frank Nugent had remarked, a case of any port in a storm.

Having had a "row" with the uncle who had taken him in for Christmas, Billy Bunter really could not be very particular.

But this was, perhaps, rather the limit, even for Billy Bunter!

Still, what was a fellow to do? Sooner or later, Bunter counted on a favourable and propitious moment for revealing his presence. That moment had not arrived.

He had hoped that the coming of

Frank Nugent would see him through. It hadn't! If he was staying on, he still had to stay in secret. Somehow or other, his fatuous scheming had made matters worse, instead of better.

A fellow could not, of course, remain imprisoned night and day in an attic! But the secret and unknown guest at Wharton Lodge had to be very, very careful how and when he emerged.

Discovery meant the boot for Bunter, and even the dismal attic was preferable to that.

So far, nobody knew.
The balcony to Wharton's den, and the garden stair, was Bunter's way of ingress and egress; but he had to watch and wait for opportunities.

Now he was on his way back to his lair.

He had cautiously left it till the fall of the winter dusk, when he had been able to creep into the grounds unperceived, and ascend the garden stair to the balcony.

At the usual tea-time at Wharton Lodge he expected to find Wharton's window dark, and his room deserted.

Instead of which, the room was lighted, and Wells and Thomas were there, and the fat Owl had to stay where he was, waiting for them to go.

He only hoped that they would go before the three juniors came up; otherwise, he was booked for a long, long wait on the snowy balcony.

Through the glass he could hear Wells' fruity voice:

"You may go down now, Thomas!"
"Yes, Mr. Wells, sir!" Bunter, blinking in from the darkness outside, saw the lad turn a reproachful eye on the butler. "I 'ope, sir, that that don't mean that you can't trust me, sir."

"I am afraid, Thomas, that I cannot trust you," said Wells, with portly dignity. "I am sorry to say so—but there it is. Being a relation of mine—a distant relation—I got you your present place here, Thomas, speaking for you to the master—"

"And I was thankful to you, Mr. Wells, and I've always done my dooty," said Thomas.

"Up to a few days ago," said Wells coldly, "I had no cause for complaint. But there is some dishonest person in this house, Thomas."

"It ain't me, Mr. Wells!"
"I 'ope, Thomas, that it is not. When Master Hurree Singh's bedclothes were taken away, a few nights ago, it turned out that a vagrant had been about the place, and you were exonerated. When the larder was broken into it was attributed to the same vagrant. Very well! But since then, Thomas, there have been pilferings."

"It wasn't me, Mr. Wells!"
"I hope not. But who was it?" said Wells. "Several times food has been taken from the larder after the whole house was asleep. Candles have been taken—why, I cannot imagine, the value being so small. An electric torch has been missed by Master Harry. A travelling-rug belonging to the master has been missed. Only yesterday the colonel found that there were no biscuits in the box in the dining-room side-board; yet I had filled that box the day before with my own 'ands. Many comestibles laid in by Miss Wharton for the young people on Boxing Day have been purloined—boxes of chocolates, sweets, candied fruits, and so forth! I hope that it was not you, Thomas. But—"

Billy Bunter, with his fat ear to the door, drinking all this in, grinned. The hidden and unbidden guest at Wharton Lodge could have told where the missing eatables had gone!

"So you may go down, Thomas, and



"It's not my fault, Nugent, that the girls run after me," said Bunter. "Why, you remember that time I was staying with you, and your sisters were trying to catch me under the mistletoe—Oh! Ow! Yaroooooop!" The Owl of the Remove broke off suddenly as Nugent's suitcase plumped on his chest and sent him spinning.

tell Master Harry that all is ready," said Wells, with stately dignity.

"Very well, Mr. Wells, but—"

"You may go, Thomas!"

Thomas went.

The butler looked after him and shook his head seriously. He had once had a very good opinion of Thomas. But he was very doubtful now. There was somebody at Wharton Lodge who persistently snaffled trifling things—especially eatable things! Who was it? Suspicion rested on the unlucky Thomas.

Thomas being gone, Wells took a last glance round, to ascertain that all was in order, and then quitted the room himself. He was blissfully unaware that a fat schoolboy on the balcony gasped with relief when the door closed behind him.

Hardly had the door closed when Billy Bunter opened the glass door from the balcony and rolled in. He closed the french window and wiped his feet very carefully on the mat. That was not Bunter's usual custom, but he was very particular now to leave no traces of his entrance and his exits. Then he stood listening.

Any minute the beasts might come up to tea! It behoved the secret guest to get into his hiding-place without the loss of a moment. But Bunter was hungry—his usual state! His latest snafflings had long ago been devoured. The good things on the table were irresistible. Listening with both his fat ears, Billy Bunter stood by the table, cramming cake into his capacious mouth with one hand and various articles into his pockets with the other. Seconds were precious; and Bunter did not waste one!

Tea had been laid for three—an ample tea! In a few moments the supplies

were much less ample. A few minutes would have sufficed for Billy Bunter to clear the festive board from end to end. But he had only moments, not minutes. There was a sound of footsteps and cheery voices in the corridor outside, from the direction of the stairs. Bunter jumped, and nearly choked! Even then he stayed to grab up a cake before he scudded across to the communicating door of Wharton's bed-room and bolted into the latter apartment.

That door had hardly closed behind him when the door from the corridor opened, and Harry Wharton and his friends came into the "den."

Bunter gasped for breath.

His escape had been narrow.

Indeed, his extraordinary visit to Wharton Lodge had been a series of narrow escapes.

"Here we are, Franky!" He heard Harry Wharton's cheery voice in the adjoining room. "Just like tea in the study—what?"

"The likefulness is terrific!" remarked Hurree Janset Ram Singh.

"Yes, rather!" said Nugent. "Topping, old bean!"

Bunter did not stay to hear more.

The bed-room had a door on the corridor, and Bunter headed for that door. He opened it a few inches and peered out.

There was a light burning, and the passage was clear. Bunter tiptoed out, and reached the little stair that led up to the disused attic.

Up that stair he went on tiptoe to the little landing, and, taking a key from his pocket, he opened the attic door.

Once inside, he locked the door on the inner side.

Now he was safe!

He lighted a candle—one of the candles that Wells had missed—and sat down on the bedclothes—that had been missed from Hurree Janset Ram Singh's room. There was little furniture in the attic, and Bunter had had to do some furnishing himself.

"Beasts!" murmured Bunter.

By the glimmering candlelight he turned his plunder out of his pockets, and proceeded to park it in his capacious interior. After which Billy Bunter felt better.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Mysterious!

THREE cheery juniors sat down round the tea-table, before the leaping log-fire in Harry Wharton's cosy den.

Frank Nugent was very pleased to be with his friends and his friends were very glad to see him. The next day Bob Cherry and Johnny Bull were coming, when the happy circle of the Famous Five would be complete. Thomas was available to wait on the tea-party, if they had wanted him, but they preferred to wait on themselves, as in the study at Greyfriars School. Harry Wharton took the teapot to make the tea, and sorted out the biscuit-box that was used as a tea-caddy.

"Sosses in the dish, Franky," he said. Nugent lifted the cover.

He gazed at an empty dish.

"Where are the sosses?" he asked.

Wharton, busy tea-making, answered over his shoulder.

"In the dish, fathead! Take off the cover!"

"I've taken it off!"

"Well, then, whack out the sosses!"

Nugent looked across at him.

"Is that a joke, or what?" he asked.

"Are you taking to playing practical jokes in your old age?"

"What the dickens do you mean?"

asked Wharton. He looked round, teapot in hand. "Hallo! Where are the sosses?"

"That's what I want to know."

Wharton stared at the empty dish.

"My hat! Has that young ass Thomas snaffled the sosses?"

"Looks as if somebody has," said Frank. "If there were any. Perhaps they forgot the sosses. Something's been on the dish, though."

Harry Wharton frowned.

"Must have been that kid," he said.

"I don't want to get him into a row with Wells, or with my uncle, but really this is too thick. It isn't the first time, either."

"Oh, never mind the sosses," said Frank good naturedly. "Don't get the young ass a ragging from Wells. Lots of stuff."

"Try the ham."

"Where is it?"

"Oh crumbs! Has he snaffled the ham, too?" exclaimed Wharton. He stared over the tea-table. "And where's the cake?"

"Was there a cake?"

"Of course there was! And where are the muffins?"

"Were there muffins?"

"And the jam! Where's the jam?"

"Was there jam?"

Harry Wharton knitted his brows. Not only was the jam gone, but the dish that contained it was gone also. A busy hand had been at work on that tea-table.

"Dash it all, it's too thick!" exclaimed the captain of the Greyfriars Remove. "Too jolly thick!"

"The thickfulness is terrific!" agreed Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"I hate to get the kid into a row—especially at Christmas-time; but a fellow can't stand this," said Harry. "I'll get him here." And he rang the bell for Thomas.

Thomas appeared in a few moments, with his usual chubby grin on his chubby face.

"You rang, sir!" said Thomas.

"Yes, you young sweep!" exclaimed Wharton. "What have you been up to here?"

"Ain't it all right, sir?" asked Thomas anxiously. "I did everything what Mr. Wells told me, sir."

"Did Wells tell you to snaffle the cake and the jam and the sosses, you young rascal?" exclaimed Wharton.

Thomas stared.

"No, sir! Cert'nly not, sir! I ain't snaffled nothing!"

"Who has, then?" snapped Wharton. "They're gone." He gave the astonished Thomas a grim look. He was deeply annoyed. "Look here—"

"Well, it wasn't me, sir," said Thomas. "Mr. Wells wouldn't trust me to stay in the room, sir, because there's been pilfering, and he fancies I know something about it which I don't, sir. I went down before Mr. Wells did, sir."

"Oh!" exclaimed Wharton.

"And you can ask Mr. Wells, sir!" said Thomas, with dignity. "Mr. Wells was last in the room, sir. He will tell you so, sir, if you ask him."

Wharton stared at him, quite nonplussed. It was impossible, of course, to suppose that the stately Wells had

snaffled cake and jam from a school-boys' tea-table. But really it was very mysterious.

"Well, you can see the things are gone," said Harry, at last.

"P'r'aps it was a burglar, sir?" suggested Thomas.

"Oh, don't be a young ass!"

"Well, sir, it turned out that there was a burglar when Master Hurree Singh's bedclothes was took, which the master thought at first that it was me."

"I know that; but that tramp cleared off, after he escaped from the cellar. And he wouldn't come in in the daytime for a pot of jam, even if he was still about. You're talking rot, Thomas!"

"P'r'aps it was the ghost, sir," said Thomas helpfully.

"What!" roared Wharton.

"Oh, my hat!" said Nugent. "Something new in ghosts! I've never heard of a ghost going for a pot of jam and a cake!"

"Well, sir, there's been sounds 'eard at night," said Thomas. "And Robert, who woke up one night and looked out of his room, saw a shadder, sir—a dark shadder."

"You young ass!"

"Yes, sir," said Thomas.

"Did you sneak back through the bedroom after Wells had gone?" demanded Wharton suspiciously.

Thomas started.

"Oh, sir! No, sir! I s'pose I could 'ave, but I didn't, sir. I wouldn't, sir!"

"Well, get some more food, anyhow," said Harry; and Thomas obediently went for a new supply.

The chums of the Remove were able to sit down to tea at last. And Thomas left them to it, with a worried and troubled look on his chubby face.

"That kid looks as if he was telling the truth, Harry," remarked Nugent, as he helped himself to sausages.

"But who the deuce is it, then?" said Harry. "For two or three days now things have been snaffled right and left—such things as food from the larder, and candles, and a torch, and my uncle's rug. It started with Inky's bedclothes, and the silly ass thought I'd played a trick on him, and got his back up."

"The regretfulness was terrific," murmured the Nabob of Bhanipur.

"It's all right, fathead! But it turned out that there was a tramp hanging about the place, and we put it all down to him," went on Wharton. "He was bagged, and locked in the cellar to wait for a bobby, but he got out and cleared. But it's gone on since then. It can't be anybody from outside the house. The place is locked up safely at night. And it's at night that the things go chiefly."

"What about the ghost?" asked Nugent, laughing. "Is there a ghost?"

"There was a ghost once; but it's not been seen in recent times," said Harry, smiling. "There was a jolly old Wharton in the reign of Henry the Sixth. He took the Lancastrian side in the Wars of the Roses, and some enterprising Yorkists surprised him in this very house while he was feasting at Christmas, and there was a terrific scrap, and he was killed, sword in hand. For reasons not stated in the legend he took to haunting the place. It's been rebuilt more than once since then, and perhaps that has discouraged him. He hasn't been seen for a jolly long time. But even when the ghost walked he was never said to snaffle pots of jam or sosses."

"A Bunter family ghost might!" said Frank, with a chuckle. "But a Wharton ghost would be above it. I'll finish



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with some of those chocs. Shove the box over!"

There was a box of chocolates on the table; a gift from Aunt Amy to her dear nephew, which Wharton had not opened yet. He pushed the box across to Frank.

Nugent opened it.

Then he blinked. The box was stacked full of dry wood-ashes.

"Funny, I suppose!" he remarked rather dryly.

"Eh--what's funny?" asked Wharton. "If you're taking up practical jokes, old bean, I'd advise you to chuck it," said Nugent. "You've had rows with Wibley, at Greyfriars, for his fatheaded practical joking."

"What the dickens do you mean? Who's joking?" demanded Wharton. "Don't you like the chocs?"

"Not that kind!" answered Nugent.

"I haven't looked at them," said Harry. "My aunt gave me the box the other day, but I hadn't opened it. They're all right, I suppose?"

He reached across and took the box, and stared into it in amazement. Every chocolate was gone; but the place had been filled with wood-ashes, apparently to make the box weigh as much as before, and defer detection till it was opened.

"My only hat!" gasped Wharton. "Who's done this?"

"Didn't you?" asked Nugent, in the same dry tone.

"Of course not, fathead! Do you think I'd play an idiotic joke like that?" exclaimed Wharton irritably. "Have a little sense!"

He coloured the next moment. As host to his schoolboy chum, in his home, he had to be a little more particular in manners than in Study No. 1 in the Remove passage at Greyfriars.

"Sorry, old fellow!" he said at once. "Of course, some blithering ass has snooped the chocs, and filled up the box from the grate. Thomas, I suppose—it can't have been anybody else. You wouldn't play such a fatheaded trick, Inky?"

"Certainly not, my esteemed Wharton," said the Nabob of Bhanipur. Wharton's eyes gleamed.

"Look here, you chaps! It's a rotten thing to happen at Christmas-time, with guests in the house; but there's no doubt that there's some rotter in the place who's snaffing things right and left—generally after everybody has gone to bed! I'm jolly well going to sit up to-night and keep an eye open for him!"

"Good egg!" said Nugent. "I'll stay up, too."

"And my esteemed self also!" said Hurree Jamsat Ram Singh. "We will all threefully keep watch with terrific weariness, and if the execrable snaffler takes a walk abroad, the bagfulness will be complete and preposterous."

And so it was arranged. There was likely to be a surprise for the secret guest at Wharton Lodge, if he prowled out of his attic that night!

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

A Narrow Squeak!

BILLY BUNTER hardly breathed. It was pitch dark in the passago.

Downstairs, all was cheery and bright. The strains of a band on the wireless floated up from below. It was getting towards bed-time for the young people; but it was not yet bed-time. It was, in fact, a propitious time

for the hidden Owl to venture out of his lair and take a little trot.

Bunter was not keen on exercise, or on moving at all, as a rule; but even the lazy, fat Owl felt the effect of being "cabined, cribbed, and confined" within the narrow limits of a garret.

Also, it was cold there, unless he kept snuggled in the bedclothes and Colonel Wharton's rug. And he had eaten all he had to eat, and had a faint hope of snaffing something further. So down from his attic crept Bunter—and his first proceeding was to turn off the light in the passage that ran by the doors of Wharton's rooms and the apartments of his schoolboy guests. It was safer in the dark.

Then he tiptoed along to Wharton's den and slipped in. And then—

He listened at the half-open door, with beating heart. Footsteps came down the passage from one end, up from the other! Two persons were approaching.

Bunter shut the door, but did not venture to latch it. The faintest sound might have been heard. Keeping it about half an inch open, he blinked out, through his big spectacles, as the light flashed on in the passage.

From one direction came Wells, the butler. From the other came Thomas, the page. It was Wells who flashed on

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the light. They blinked at one another, and Bunter blinked at both, unseen and unsuspected.

"You, Thomas!" said Wells severely.

"You, Mr. Wells!" said Thomas.

"I think I have caught you this time, Thomas."

"Oh, Mr. Wells!"

"I have been keeping observation," said Wells. "I saw the light turned off, from a distance, Thomas. I came up at once. I find you here. What was your intention, Thomas, in turning off the light?"

"I didn't, Mr. Wells. I thought you had."

"Thomas!" said Wells, in a deep voice.

"I swear, Mr. Wells, that I ain't been anywhere near the switch! Cook being done with me, I thought I'd come up and see if all was right," said Thomas. "Somebody's pinching, I know that."

"Somebody," said Wells, "certainly is! There has been extensive pilfering, Thomas! Almost ever since Master Harry came home for the holidays, it has been going on—night after night! It is my duty, Thomas, to discover the pilferer, and to discharge him—and even if it should be a relation of my own, for whom I obtained a place here—"

"It ain't, Mr. Wells!" said Thomas earnestly. "It ain't!"

"I hope not!" said Wells. "I hope not, Thomas! But it looks suspicious

—very suspicious! To-night, Thomas, I shall call you after everyone has gone to bed, and we shall keep watch together. If the pilfering goes on, while you are under my observation, you will be exonerated, Thomas. If not—"

"I'll 'elp you with pleasure, Mr. Wells," said Thomas eagerly. "I know you don't trust me now, like you did. And the master, he looks at me very odd, sometimes. Even the missus, too! I'll be glad to 'elp!"

"Very well," said Wells. "At eleven o'clock I will tap on your door, and we will remain in the hall, in the dark, on the watch. I hope, for your sake, Thomas, that the pilferer will get on with it again, while you are in my company. Otherwise—"

Wells shook his head portentously, instead of finishing the sentence. Then he went to the staircase.

Bunter grinned.

Many times the hidden Owl, listening with all his fat ears, had picked up information, but never information so useful as this.

That night, most assuredly, he would have walked abroad, like a lion seeking what he might devour but for this timely warning.

Now, it was certain, the fat Owl of the Remove would remain doggo in his attic, so long as Wells and Thomas were on the watch.

Blinking through the narrow aperture of the door, at Thomas, he saw the worried and distressed expression on the chubby countenance of that unfortunate youth.

Bunter was quite sorry for him.

He felt that it was hard lines on Thomas, to be unjustly distrusted like this. Still, as it made things safer for Bunter, it was all to the good!

But the grin faded from Bunter's face as Thomas came towards the door behind which he stood blinking. Thomas was coming into Harry Wharton's den, doubtless to mend the fire.

Bunter scudded across to the bedroom door in time. He shot into the bedroom. But for the fact that the sitting-room and bedroom communicated, he would assuredly have been spotted. That circumstance had saved the artful dodger more than once, when he was rooting through Harry Wharton's rooms. But on this occasion he was barely in time. Thomas, coming in, and switching on the light as he entered, jumped as he saw the communicating door just closing.

He stared at it.

"My eye!" gasped Thomas.

Someone was there! Someone had barely dodged him! It was the secret snaffler or nobody! Thomas' brain was not rapid on the uptake. But he realised that at once.

He tore across to the door and grabbed at the handle! Bunter, on the other side, heard him coming! His fat heart jumped almost into his throat!

A second more, and Thomas would have had that door open! But in the stress of peril Bunter's fat brain worked swiftly. There was a key on the bedroom side of the door. He turned it!

Click!

The key clicked, just as Thomas grabbed the door-handle. Bunter was just in time.

"Oh crikey!" breathed Bunter.

He rushed across the bedroom to the door on the corridor. In Wharton's den, Thomas was doing exactly the same thing!

Bunter stopped.

He knew what Thomas would be doing. He had no time to reach the attic stair. Emerging into the lighted passage was to reveal himself to Thomas.

"Oh lor!" gasped Bunter.

He heard Thomas in the passage. Thomas was coming to the bed-room door on the corridor. Bunter's escape was cut off!

He thought of dodging under the bed, as he had done before in times of danger. But this time, that was a chicken that would not fight; for Thomas knew that there was someone in the room, and would certainly search it.

Bunter had little time to think.

As he stood there, Thomas' hand touched the door-handle outside. The door opened. Bunter was behind it as it opened.

Thomas switched on the light by the doorpost and stepped in past the door. Bunter was behind him as he stood staring across the room.

Thump! Bunter acted promptly.

It was the only way to escape. His fat fist hit Thomas on the back of the head.

Taken utterly by surprise by that sudden attack in the rear, Thomas pitched over headlong, landing on his face, his nose hitting the floor with a heavy hit!

Before he quite knew what had happened, Bunter had switched off the light, darted into the corridor, and shut the door.

"My eye!" gasped Thomas.

He sat up dizzily, feeling his nose with one hand, and the back of his head with the other.

"Oh crikey!" stuttered Thomas.

He staggered to his feet. He groped in the darkness for the door, and got it open. But the corridor, when he looked out, was vacant. Bunter had not lost a split second. He had vanished as if he had been the ghost of Wharton Lodge. He was already palpitating in his attic—and Thomas, still rubbing his nose and the back of his head in a state of dazed astonishment, went to speak to Mr. Wells, to report this startling and amazing occurrence.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Caught!

MIDNIGHT!

Harry Wharton yawned.

Very seldom did the captain of the Greyfriars Remove hear the chimes at midnight.

And on this occasion there was no doubt that he would have preferred his warm and comfortable bed.

But the three juniors had arranged to stay up, and keep watch that night for the secret snaffer; and that was that!

Lights had been turned out at the usual time. Wharton dozed in the arm-chair before a dying fire while he waited for twelve, when the vigil was to begin. Now, at last, midnight was chiming.

He yawned, rose from the chair, and rubbed his sleepy eyes. A dim glow from the fire in the bed-room grate faintly illumined the room. There was the faintest of sounds as the door opened and Hurree Janset Ram Singh and Frank Nugent came in.

"Ready?" asked Nugent, in a whisper.

"Yes! Awfully sleepy," said Harry.

"The sleepfulness is terrific," remarked the Nabob of Bhanipur. "But the wakeful watchfulness is the proper caper."

"Oh, yes, rather!" agreed Wharton. "Got something to swipe him with if we land him? Pillows would show in the

dark. Whoever it is, we'll give him the walloping of his life, if we get hold of him. I've got a cushion!"

"I've stuffed a sock," said Frank.

"And I have a piece of rope with a terrific knot at the end," said Hurree Janset Ram Singh.

"Good!"

The three juniors crept quietly into the passage. All was dark and silent. They made no sound in their soft slippers.

Groping along silently, they reached the stairs. A wide landing joined the double staircase that led down into the hall. The hall was an abyss of darkness over the balustrade.

For more than an hour Wharton Lodge had been buried in silence and slumber. There was not a gleam of light; no sound save the winter wind whining over the roofs and the old chimneys and rustling the snow-mantled ivy against the windows.

On the landing the three juniors waited, leaning on the dim banisters and listening.

From this central position they were well placed to catch sight or sound of the mysterious marauder of Wharton Lodge, whether he stirred upstairs or downstairs.

Quite cheerfully the chums of the Remove had arranged to keep that midnight watch! But now that they came to keep it, they found that it was anything but cheerful.

It was cold, it was dark, it was dismal—and, above all, it was monotonous. When ten minutes had passed, they felt as if they had been there two or three hours.

They reflected—rather late—that the snaffer might not stir that night. Also, that if he did, he might not stir till nearly dawn!

Undoubtedly it was weary work.

The only consolation was that if they caught the marauder, they were going to give him the full benefit of the cushion, the stuffed sock, and the knotted rope's-end.

By the time they felt as if they had been waiting and watching for the best part of the night they heard the half-hour chime out.

It was only half-past twelve!

Wharton, suppressing a yawn, heard a half-suppressed yawn at his elbow. It came from Nugent. Then, suddenly he heard another sound in the well of darkness below. It was the distinct sound of a movement. Someone was stirring.

With a beating heart, he leaned over the banisters and listened. A quick breath on either side of him told that his comrades had also heard it.

Faintly from the darkness came a whisper. The words were not to be distinguished. But the whisper had a warning note. The juniors realised that there were two persons in the hall below—not one, as they had expected. One, it was clear, had clumsily made a sound—the other had whispered to him to be more careful. Obviously there must have been at least two, or there would have been no whisper.

Wharton's eyes glinted.

He groped for his companions in the dark, and drew them back from the banister. He was going to whisper, and having heard that whisper from below, he was taking care that his own whisper should not be heard from above.

"They're there, you fellows!" he breathed. "Must be two of them!"

"I heard!" breathed Nugent.

"The hearfulness was terrific!" murmured the nabob.

"Don't make a sound! If they hear us, there's a dozen doors they can dodge away by, and leave us no wiser! We

know already it's somebody belonging to the house—no need to watch to find that out! We've got to drop on them and catch them."

"What-ho!"

"Come down after me and don't make a sound."

"Go it!"

Slowly and cautiously, and without a sound, Harry Wharton led the way down the stairs, his comrades creeping stealthily after him.

Noiselessly, they reached the hall below.

It was pitchy dark there.

Standing in the darkness, they listened with straining ears, suppressing their breathing. But there was somebody in the dark hall who was not suppressing his breathing. Faintly, but unmistakably in the silence of the night, they heard a sound of breathing in the middle of the hall.

Harry Wharton listened intently, and calculated carefully the exact position of the breather.

Then, on tiptoe, he stepped towards that spot.

His cushion was held high in the air, ready to smite! Dark as it was, he had a glimpse of a face when he was close to it!

Crash!

The cushion came down, hard and heavy. It landed fairly on the head to which that dim glimmer of a face belonged.

Bump!

"Got him!" panted Wharton.

He had got him! There was no doubt about that. The cushion had smitten the shadowy head, fair and square, and the owner thereof had gone down with a bump, and was sprawling on the floor, gasping and spluttering.

Wharton flung himself on the sprawling form.

His knee was planted on a portly chest.

"Got one of them! Get the other, you men!" he panted.

Another figure was already wriggling in the grasp of Frank Nugent.

"Got him! Turn on the light, Inky!" shouted Nugent.

The nabob's dusky hand switched on the electric light. The hall was suddenly flooded with illumination.

Nugent gave a yell as he recognised the fellow he had grasped.

It was Thomas.

Thomas blinked at him, like an owl in the sudden light.

"Oh! Master Nugent!" he stutored. "I thought—"

"It's Thomas after all!" gasped Nugent. "We've snaffed him! Who's the other, Harry?"

But Wharton did not reply.

He could not.

Dumb with amazement, he stared down at the portly plump face of the man on whose portly chest he was kneeling. It was Wells, the butler.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

The Ghost Walks!

URRRRRRGGGH!" gurgled Wells.

Harry Wharton jumped up. Wells sat up.

He gurgled breathlessly.

"Oh, my hat!" Wharton found his voice at last. "It's Wells! It's the butler! What the thump—"

"The esteemed and ridiculous Wells!" ejaculated Hurree Janset Ram Singh. "And the fatheaded and absurd Thomas!"

Never had the chums of the Remove been so astonished. The discovery was

utterly unexpected. They had had no doubt that when they jumped on the unseen figures in the dark hall, the secret snaffler of Wharton Lodge would be in their hands. Evidently there was a mistake somewhere.

"Look here, Wells, what's this game?" gasped Wharton. "What the dickens are you and Thomas doing out of bed?"

"Oooooogh!" said Wells, gurgling. "Woooooogh!"

"Oh, Master Harry!" gasped Thomas. "We was a-keeping watch, Mr. Wells and me, sir, for that feller what pinches things at night, sir—"

"Oh crumbs!" murmured Nugent. "So were we!"

Harry Wharton burst into a laugh. Evidently there had been two parties of watchers that night; and one party had dropped on the other in the dark.

"Urrrgh!" gasped Wells. "Ugggh! Perhaps you would kindly give me a hand, sir. I am a little—urrrgh!—winded! Wurrgh!"

Wharton and Nugent helped the portly gentleman up. Wells stood gasping for breath. There was no doubt that he was winded. His breath came and went spasmodically.

"So you were keeping watch, too?" exclaimed Wharton.

"Urrgh! Yes, sir!"

"I wish you'd told me what you were going to do, Wells—then I shouldn't have got you with the cushion. I hope you're not hurt."

"Gurrgh!"

"It is a terrific and lamentable mistake," said the Nabob of Bhanipur, with a grin on his dusky face. "But it is preposterously fortunate that I recognised the esteemed Wells, before beginfully whopping him with this absurd rope's-end."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Urrrgh!" said Wells. "Wurrgh! Young gentlemen, you should not have been up. I do not think the master would be pleased if he knew. Gurrgh!"

"Well, if the jolly old snaffler has heard this row, there's not much chance of catching him to-night," said Frank Nugent. "May as well get to bed, I think."

"The thinkfulness is terrific."

"Urrrgh! Leave it to me, young gentlemen," said Wells. "It is my intention to keep on the watch, that being my duty; but really—urrrgh!—I shall do so with more peace of mind, if you are in bed."

Harry Wharton laughed.

"All serene," he said. "I shall be jolly glad to get to bed, if you're going to keep on the sentry-go, Wells."

"Certainly, sir! Urrgh!"

"We'll ketch him, sir, if he turns out to-night!" said Thomas.

Wells, undoubtedly, was anxious for the juniors to go to bed. A swipe from a cushion and a bump on the floor had considerably disturbed Wells. Harry Wharton & Co were quite willing to leave the night-watch to the butler. They had made a catch, certainly; but a very unexpected one. And at nearly one in the morning they were frightfully sleepy.

"Well, we'll cut," said Harry.

"Good-night, Wells!"

"Good — urrrgh! — night, sir!" gurgled Wells.

The light was turned off again. Wells, still gurgling spasmodically, was left to his vigil, with the faithful Thomas.

The three Greyfriars juniors groped up the staircase, across the landing, and into the passage that led to their rooms.

They passed the little stair in the passage that led up to the disused attic.

Certainly it did not occur to any of them that the attic door above was ajar, and that a fat pair of ears listened there.

Billy Bunter was not asleep that night.

Bunter was too hungry to sleep.

Only his knowledge of the fact that Wells and Thomas were up and watching had kept Bunter in his attic. That was rather fortunate for the hidden Owl, for there was little doubt that he would have run into the juniors had he emerged.

That the juniors also had been keeping watch, Bunter was not aware; but his listening ears had caught a sound from downstairs, and he was wondering what it meant.

"Good-night, you men!" Bunter caught Harry Wharton's voice and gave

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a start. He heard Nugent and the nabob reply, and then there was a faint sound of closing doors.

"Oh lor!" murmured the fat Owl.

He realised that the juniors had been up at that unearthly hour. He could guess why, and what a narrow escape he had had!

But they had gone back to bed now, that was clear, and the problem that worried Bunter was, whether Wells was still keeping it up.

For a long time after the three Removites were in bed, and fast asleep, Bunter stood at the attic door listening.

He heard no sound.

Many times he was tempted to lock the door and turn in. But the inner Bunter kept him awake.

His fat thoughts ran on the Christmas pudding, which was in Wells' pantry, all ready for Christmas.

His mouth watered at the thought of that pudding. He had spent a previous

Christmas at Wharton Lodge, and he knew what the pudding would be like. His fat soul yearned for that pudding.

But if that unspeakable beast, Wells, was on the watch— The fact that he knew that Wells was on the watch had saved him from discovery by the juniors. He was really having a wonderful run of luck. But what was the use, if he had to go to bed hungry? And there was the following day to be thought of. He had to be fearfully careful about venturing out of his hiding-place in the daytime. He might not have a chance of getting out at all, and, anyhow, in the daytime he could not venture near the grub department. Was Wells still on the watch?

Billy Bunter's fat brain was not accustomed to hard work. But his podgy intellect was spurred on by the danger of famine.

He went back to his bed and groped for a sheet. More than once, during his hidden sojourn in Wharton Lodge, he had heard talk among the servants of the "ghost" that was supposed to walk at Christmastide. That ghost was rather a topic now, for there was no doubt that sounds had been heard at night, and one of the servants had actually seen a "shadow" stirring in the hours of darkness.

Bunter draped his fat figure in the sheet, and fastened it on securely. He placed a white pillow-slip over his head, in the form of a hood, and drew it round his fat face, leaving only his eyes—and spectacles—in view.

In that ghostly guise the fat Owl ventured, at last, out of his hiding-place.

Silently, in a soft pair of bed-room slippers—bagged from Wharton's room several nights ago—the fat junior crept down the attic stair to the passage, and tiptoed along to the landing.

All was dark and silent there.

Groping along the wall by the staircase, he made his way down to the hall below. If watch was being kept, he had no doubt that the fact would be revealed, when a ghostly white figure loomed up in the dark.

He was right.

Mr. Wells was still keeping watch; but he was seated in one of the deep armchairs in the hall, and nodding a little. It was Thomas who beheld the white figure glimmering in the dark.

Thomas stared at it with distended eyes for a moment as it glided down the stairs, and then let out a terrific yell.

"The ghost!" yelled Thomas.

Wells started up from a half-doze.

"Wha-a-t?" he gasped.

"Ow! Look! The ghost!" shrieked Thomas wildly. He stayed only for that shriek. Then he bolted. He headed for the service door on the hall, which he tore open and rushed through, in panic terror. A sound of bumping told that Thomas was doing the service stairs in one.

Wells stood rooted to the oak floor of the hall, gazing at the white figure, frozen with astonishment and alarm.

"Oh!" gasped Wells.

The ghostly figure flitted up the staircase before his staring eyes. It flitted up very swiftly! Billy Bunter knew now that watch was still being kept, and he was only anxious to get away.

"The—the—the ghost!" gasped Wells. The ghost vanished!

Wells still stood rooted to the floor, as if petrified. In the servants' hall, Wells was accustomed to pooh-pooh the story of the ghost of Wharton Lodge! Now he had seen it! He stood and gazed, his eyes bulging from his plump face.

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He did not even think of switching on the light. He stood frozen.

But the light was suddenly switched on from above. Colonel Wharton, in his dressing-gown, stared down over the banisters.

He stared blankly at the horrified Wells.

"Wells!" he barked.

"Oh!" gasped Wells. "Yes, sir?" He blinked up at the frowning face over the balustrade above.

"What are you doing up at this time of night? What was that yelling that awakened me?" barked the colonel testily.

"The—the ghost, sir!" stammered Wells.

"What? What? Nonsense! Have you been drinking, Wells?"

"I—I assure you, sir, I—I—I saw——"

"Nonsense!"

"Thomas saw it also, sir——"

"Rubbish! What are you doing out of bed?"

"We were keeping watch for the pilferer, sir, and——"

"And you have been frightened, and awakened me!" snorted the colonel.

"Go to bed! Tell Thomas to go to bed! Absurd!"

"But, sir——"

"Nonsense! Go to bed!" hooted the colonel.

"Very well, sir!"

Colonel Wharton went fuming back to his room. At the colonel's age it was not an easy matter to get to sleep again after being awakened in the night. He was distinctly irritated.

The light was turned out; and Wells disappeared after Thomas. As a matter of fact, he was rather glad to obey the colonel's injunction and go to bed. After what he had seen, he was not keen on staying up any longer in the dark.

Billy Bunter, on the attic stair, heard the colonel's deep voice, and grinned! The coast was going to be clear now! But the fat Owl waited nearly half an hour, to make sure, before he descended.

Then the ghost walked again! But this time there were no eyes to behold it! The ghost's walk took the ghost in the direction of the pantry! When the ghost walked back again, the ghost was breathing rather hard—being heavy-laden! It was not till the following morning that the household learned that the ghost had walked off with the Christmas pudding!

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

A Perplexing Problem!

COLONEL WHARTON wore a grim frown at breakfast the following morning. Miss Amy Wharton looked worried—quite a contrast to her usual placid benignity. Wells, hovering over the dishes, had a very thoughtful and serious expression on his portly face—not to call it solemn! Thomas, who helped wait at table, was in a jumpy state—looking over his shoulder every now and then, as if half expecting to see a spectral figure even in the daylight. Not that there was a lot of daylight; the December morning was misty and dim. Harry Wharton and Frank Nugent and the nabob were more silent than usual. There was rather an electric atmosphere at Wharton Lodge that morning.

The ghost had been seen!

Two pairs of eyes had seen it, so there could be little further doubt. In the servants' hall there was breathless debate on the subject. Thomas had several bumps and bruises, due to his rather hurried descent of the service stairs. But they did not worry him so much as the ghost did.

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The ghost did not worry the old colonel at all! But the fact that the Christmas pudding was missing did! Colonel Wharton, assuredly, was not keen on that delightful comestible; he had reached an age when the less Christmas pudding he disposed of, the better he felt!

But it was an outrageous act of pilfering which exasperated him intensely; it was really the climax!

Several times his stern eye turned grimly on Thomas! He was not the man to be severe without proof; but his suspicions of Thomas were strong.

The ghost story only made him snort! But it annoyed him all the same! He did not doubt that Wells had seen a figure in white! Neither did he doubt for one moment that it had been the figure of some person with a misdirected sense of humour, playing ghost to frighten the servants. Altogether, the old military gentleman was in a rather explosive state that wintry morning.

The three juniors were not sorry when breakfast was over. That morning they were going down to Wimford to meet Bob Cherry and Johnny Bull, who were arriving that day. They were sauntering on the snow-powdered terrace when Colonel Wharton came out. The grim look on his old bronzed face was quite unlike his usual hospitable and kindly expression.

"Which of you was it?" he barked, rather to the surprise of the juniors.

TO READERS IN THE IRISH FREE STATE.

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"To what does the whichfulness refer, esteemed sahib?" inquired Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh.

"Someone played ghost in the house last night!" grunted the colonel. "What you would call a jape, at Greyfriars, I suppose?"

"Oh, my hat!" exclaimed Harry. "Surely, uncle, you don't imagine that it was one of us?"

"I don't imagine anything else!" said Colonel Wharton. "With schoolboys in the house, I think one need not look very far for a young duffer who plays ghosts!"

"Not guilty, sir!" said Frank Nugent, with a smile.

"The not-guiltiness is terrific!" said the Nabob of Bhanipur.

"I certainly know nothing about it!" said Harry.

Colonel Wharton eyed them.

"It was not Thomas!" he barked. "I suspect Thomas of the pilfering. But he was with Wells when the pretended ghost was seen. It was certainly not Thomas that played ghost."

"Couldn't have been," agreed Harry. "But perhaps Wells fancied it, uncle! Might have fancied something in the dark——"

"He saw something!" growled the colonel. "And that something was a young ass playing ghost! I'm bound to take your word, of course! But if it was not one of you, I can't understand it!"

The old soldier stalked away, evidently very much puzzled and annoyed. The mysterious happenings at Wharton Lodge were having a rather deteriorating effect on his temper.

Nugent gave a whistle.

"Uncle's getting his rag out a little!" said Harry. "It's really not surprising. It's pretty thick for a pilfering rogue to bag the Christmas pudding! And if somebody really has played ghost——"

"But who the dickens!" said Nugent. "It's clear that it wasn't Thomas, this time! You haven't been larking with a sheet over your head, I suppose?"

"Of course not, ass!"

"Nor you, Inky?"

"Certainly not! Nor you, my esteemed Franky?"

"Never opened my eyes after I shut them last night," answered Frank. "I was jolly sleepy after keeping watch. I'd have kept it up later, though, if I'd known the ghost was going to walk!"

"I'd like to catch the silly ass!" growled Wharton.

"The catchfulness of the esteemed ghost is the proper caper," assented Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh. "And the whopfulness will be terrific! Now it is time to start for the station if we are to meet our ridiculous friends."

The juniors went in for their coats. Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh went up to his room for a muffler, to fortify himself against the winter cold, which he felt more severely than the natives of the climate. He passed the door of Wharton's den on his way; and beheld Thomas standing there tapping, with a puzzled expression on his face. The nabob stopped.

"My esteemed Thomas!" he remarked. "If you want the absurd Wharton, he is downstairs!"

Thomas blinked at him.

"Then who's in his room, sir?" he asked.

"Is there anybody in his ridiculous room?"

"I came up to mend the fire, sir, and jest as I got to the door, the key was turned," said Thomas. "I s'posed it was Master Harry! So I knocked."

The nabob's eyes gleamed.

If there was someone in Harry Wharton's den who had locked the door on the inside at the sound of approaching footsteps, it certainly was not Wharton, who was downstairs with Nugent, waiting for Hurree Singh.

"Perhapsfully it is the esteemed pilferer!" suggested the nabob, and he stepped quickly to Wharton's bed-room door, passed through the bed-room, and entered the den by the communicating door. Thomas followed at his heels.

They looked round the sitting-room.

It was empty!

"My eye!" said Thomas blankly. "There ain't nobody 'ere, Master Hurree Singh! But I 'eard the door locked!"

Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh stepped to the corridor door. It was locked on the inside!

"My esteemed hat!" he murmured.

Someone had been there! That seemed certain! Whoever it was, he was gone! Hurree Singh stepped back into Wharton's bed-room, and looked round it. No one was there! Then he crossed the den to the french window on the balcony. That window was closed; but it was only latched, not locked. Possibly the mysterious intruder had gone that way. But the industrious Thomas had swept the snow from the balcony and the steps that morning, and there was no trace of footprints.

Leaving Thomas still staring, the nabob went to his room and fetched his muffler, and descended to join his friends in the hall. Someone, it seemed, had used Wharton's room surreptitiously as a means of egress from the house. Who it was, was quite a mystery! Billy Bunter had had another narrow escape!

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

Bunter Again!

"HALLO, hallo, hallo!" roared Bob Cherry.

Bob's ruddy, cheery face looked from a carriage window, at Wimford Station. He waved a woolly gloved hand to three fellows on the platform, and roared. Then the carriage door was hurled open, and Bob jumped out, followed by Johnny Bull, Wharton, Nugent, and Hurree Singh trotted up the platform to meet them.

"Here we are again!" boomed Bob Cherry, the powerful voice that was wont to wake the echoes of the Remove passage at Greyfriars School now rousing those of the little Surrey station. "Hallo, hallo, hallo! Enjoying life, old beans?"

"The enjoyfulness is terrific, now that we once more behold the light of your esteemed and absurd countenance, my idiotic Bob!" declared Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

Bob Cherry chuckled.

"Same old Inky!" he said. "Same jolly old flow of beautiful English! Rip-ping weather, isn't it, you men? Freezing everywhere!"

"The ripfulness is preposterous!" said Hurree Singh. "The freezefulness is perhapsfully a little too terrific! But what is the oddfulness, so long as the happiness is complete and execrable?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Jolly cold in the train," said Johnny Bull. "Here's your bag, Bob! Chuck out my rug!"

"Here you are!" answered Bob, chucking out the rug, as requested. It landed on Johnny's head, and enveloped him, and he sat down suddenly on the platform.

"Ow!" roared Johnny Bull. "You silly ass!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Johnny struggled out of the rug, and folded it again. Bob Cherry chuckled. Bob was evidently in his usual exuberant spirits, only a little more so, under the genial influence of Christmas. Really, it was not quite safe to be too near Bob when he was in high spirits.

"The car's outside," said Harry, laughing. "Got your bags? Come on!"

The Famous Five walked out of the station. The colonel's car was waiting outside, and Brown, the chauffeur, was standing by it, with a rather peculiar expression on his face.

"Is the other young gentleman going in the car, sir?" he inquired.

Wharton stared.

"Which other?" he asked. "There's only us five."

"I mean the stout young gentleman—"

"The which?"

"Well, sir, he got in the car!"

"Who the dickens—" Harry Wharton stepped to the car. He stared in, at a fat face and a big pair of spectacles.

"Bunter!" he gasped.

"Bunter!" exclaimed Nugent blankly. "The esteemed and ridiculous Bunter!"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Jolly old Bunter turned up again like a bad penny!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "I didn't know Bunter was here!"

"Neither did I!" said Harry Wharton grimly. "You fat, frabjous foozler, what the merry old thump are you doing in that car?"

"I say, you fellows—"

"Hop out!"

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"Sharp, fathead!"

Billy Bunter blinked at the Famous Five through his big spectacles. Where he had turned up from nobody knew!

Certainly nobody was likely to guess that he had turned up from Wharton Lodge! Bob Cherry grinned! Johnny Bull grunted! Nugent and Hurree Singh looked blankly surprised! Harry Wharton was frowning! He had had enough of Bunter—in fact, a little too much—though he was far from suspecting how much he had had of Bunter since Greyfriars had broken up for the Christmas holidays.

"I say, old chaps—" said Bunter.

"Get out!" roared Wharton.

"Oh, really, you know!"

"Where on earth did you spring from?" demanded Wharton. "Are you staying in Wimford, you fat foozler?"

"Eh? Oh! Yes! I'm staying at the George Hotel!" explained Bunter.

"There isn't a George Hotel here, you fat ass!"

"Isn't there? Well, I forget its name; but I'm staying there!" said Bunter. "But the fact is, you fellows, I—"

"Jump out!"

"The fact is—"

"Get a move on!"

Billy Bunter did not get a move on. Enconced in the car, he blinked at the chums of the Remove uneasily.

Bunter was "trying it on" again! He had not done so badly in his attic, all things considered—especially since he had snaffled the Christmas pudding! But Bunter, naturally, did not want to spend Christmas in that surreptitious manner, if he could help it. He wanted to spend it as an honoured guest—if he could!

"I say, you fellows, do listen to a chap!" he urged. "Having fixed it up with you for Christmas, Wharton, old fellow, it's rather late to alter arrangements now. You can't let a fellow down!"

"Are you waiting to be slung out on your fat neck?"

"Beast!"

"My uncle's in Wimford this morning," said Harry. "He came in the car with us. If he spots you he's pretty certain to smack your head."

"The smackfulness will probably be terrific!" grinned Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Is the old beast still huffy about that mistake on the telephone?" asked Bunter. "Of course, I shouldn't have called him an old donkey if I'd known he was taking the call. Can't you smooth him over somehow, old chap? Tell him that Christmas will be absolutely rotten if I'm not there! That ought to do the trick!"

"I can't tell whoppers to that extent!"

"Beast! Think of Marjorie, when she comes on Boxing Day!" said Bunter. "What will she feel like if I'm not there?"

"Frightfully bucked, I suppose!"

"The buckfulness will be—"

"Terrific!" chuckled Bob.

"Look here, you fat duffer! Hook it!" exclaimed Wharton impatiently. "I might have managed it for you, but you've put my uncle's back up, and that's that! Now get going!"

"Beast!"

A tall figure approached the group by the car. Colonel Wharton had come to Wimford with the juniors, and left them waiting at the station for the new arrivals. Now, spotting the group from a distance, he was coming over to speak a cheery word of greeting to his nephew's school friends. Brown, the chauffeur, saw him coming. But the Famous Five were all looking at Bunter, in the car, and did not observe him. Neither did Bunter, who was blinking at the Famous Five. Colonel Wharton strode up unnoticed.

"Now, look here, Wharton!" squeaked Bunter. "Do the decent thing! After all I've done for you—"

"You fat idiot!"

"You can pull your silly old uncle's leg somehow! After all, he's a silly old donkey!" said Bunter. "I wouldn't have told him so on the phone, if I'd known he was taking the call—but facts are facts, ain't they? All these old military men are silly old codgers, and your uncle is the silliest old codger I've ever struck! A blithering old fathead, if you ask me! Well, you can stuff him up somehow! An old idiot like that is—"

"Like what?" roared Colonel Wharton.

"Oh, my hat!" exclaimed Bob.

The juniors spun round. They had not been aware of the old colonel's approach till that moment. Now they were aware of it—and aware that he was in a state of towering wrath! His bronzed face was purple, and his eyes gleaming and glinting at the fat face in the car!

"Oh crikey!" gasped Bunter. "Is—is that your uncle, old chap? Oh lor'! I—I say, sir, I—I wasn't saying that you were a blithering old fathead, sir! I—I—I'm much too respectful to say what I think of you, sir! I—I mean—"

A hand that seemed of iron gripped Bunter's collar, and he was hooked out of the car, like a winkle from a shell.

"You disrespectful young rascal!" roared the colonel.

"Ow! Leggo!"

"If I had my cane with me I would thrash you—yes, thrash you, sir, by Jove!" roared the colonel.

"Yaroooooh!"

"As it is, I will box your ears!"

"Whooop!"

Smack, smack, smack!

Three smacks were enough for Bunter! He tore himself away, and fled! Colonel Wharton glared after him as he went.

"What is that young rascal doing here, Harry?" he demanded.

"Haven't the foggiest!" answered Harry. "I think he must be staying in Wimford, goodness knows why!"

"The impertinent young jackanapes!" growled the colonel. "By Jove! If I see him again—"

The old colonel did not finish that sentence. But evidently something of a drastic nature was going to happen to Bunter if the colonel saw him again. Billy Bunter vanished round a corner, going strong.

Even Bunter realised that there was nothing doing, so far as the colonel was concerned! Evidently it was still the attic for Bunter!

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

Shut Out!

"O H lor'!" murmured Billy Bunter.

It was dark.

It was frightfully cold!

When Billy Bunter stole out of his attic and got out of Wharton Lodge, he had to take the risk of doing so in the day-time—for the excellent reason that he was too lazy to get up before daylight.

But when he returned to his hidden den he was careful to do so after the fall of the December dusk. A fellow in such very peculiar circumstances couldn't be too careful!

So it was after dark that evening when Bunter, having trudged back from Wimford once more, dodged into the grounds of Wharton Lodge, and

stealthily sneaked round to the old stone garden-stair under Wharton's balcony.

In the dark he crept up to the balcony, and was relieved to find the window dark.

Having timed his return for the period when the family were at dinner, he naturally expected to find the schoolboys' quarters deserted, and hoped to dodge in unseen, as he had done several times before.

But this time there was, so to speak, a lion in the path.

The french windows were locked on the inside!

Generally, the door of Wharton's den on the balcony was left on the latch, as an easy way in and out for Harry and his friends. That had suited Bunter admirably.

Perhaps the incident of the morning had made Thomas take this precaution; or, perhaps, the late mysterious happenings had caused Wells to keep all doors secured; or, perhaps, one of the juniors had locked the french window after going in.

Anyhow, it was locked!

Nobody was in the room—Bunter, with his fat face pressed to the glass, could see that much, by the glimmering, ruddy glow of the log fire.

The coast was clear—if only he could have got in! But he couldn't! Unless he cracked a pane and put a fat paw through to unfasten the door, the Owl of the Remove was shut out.

That, of course, was a very last and desperate resource! It would have furnished rather too palpable a clue to Bunter's surreptitious proceedings. Had suspicion been awakened that there was some extraneous person in the house, a search would soon have unearthed the unbidden guest. That was less desirable than ever since the little scene with Colonel Wharton at the station in Winford.

Bunter shivered in the winter wind, and groaned.

He had to wait and trust to luck!

So far, luck had befriended him in a really wonderful manner! But it seemed to have deserted him now!

Indeed, had Bunter had the railway fare in his pocket he might have been tempted to take his departure, and try his fortune once more with his incensed Uncle George! But he hadn't!

The light came on in the "den" at last! Blinking through the glass, Billy Bunter saw Harry Wharton & Co. come in.

They looked bright and cheerful—a contrast to the fat Owl shivering on the balcony outside.

Wharton stepped across to the french window, and Bunter popped back, huddling under the stone balustrade in deep shadow, in fear of discovery.

But the captain of the Greyfriars Remove did not think of looking out into the darkness. He put his hand to the curtains, and drew them along in front of the french window. Then he turned back to his friends.

Bunter approached the window again.

The curtains did not quite meet in the middle, having been carelessly drawn, and there was a slit between them, through which the fat Owl could still blink into the room within.

Harry Wharton had laid a large cardboard box on the table, and was proceeding now to unpack it.

Bunter watched him, and the members of the Co., gathering round the table, watched also.

From the box, Harry turned out a number of fancy costumes. Bunter, who had heard a good deal of talk in the house, remembered that he had heard that there was to be a fancy dress

function on Boxing Night, when a number of young people were to gather to dance and make merry.

"Pick out what you like, you fellows!" Bunter heard the captain of the Remove say, with his fat ear glued to the keyhole. "Plenty here! Costumes or plain dominoes, and masks all round. Unmask at supper on Boxing Night—"

"Jolly good fun!" said Bob Cherry. "I rather fancy this blue domino. There's a couple of them, I see; but two fellows had better not dress alike. Anybody else want it?"

"Stick to it, old chap!"

Bob Cherry picked out a blue silk domino, and draped it on himself. There was a blue mask to match, which he fastened over his ruddy, cheery countenance. Domino and mask completely hid him from sight from head to foot, and no eye could have detected his identity. He surveyed the result in a tall glass, and gave a nod of satisfaction.

"Good egg!" he said. "Topping fun! Nobody could guess who a fellow was! I wonder if Marjorie will spot me?"

"Sure to, if you dance with her!" said Nugent.

"Eh—why?"

"She will know you by your weight when you tread on her foot."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You silly ass!" roared Bob.

The juniors, chuckling, proceeded to pick out the costumes that they fancied, with the masks belonging to them. Quite a number were left in the box, to be lent to other guests who might want them. Harry Wharton lifted the box from the table, and placed it in a corner of the room.

Then the juniors went out of the den, each carrying the costume he had selected to his own quarters. Harry Wharton passed into the adjoining bedroom with a cavalier costume on his arm.

The light was turned off; the room was deserted and dark again.

Billy Bunter groaned.

Having finished the matter of the costumes, the chums of the Remove had gone downstairs again, little dreaming of the fat Owl on the balcony, like a podgy Peri at the gate of paradise.

"Beasts!" groaned Bunter.

The sight of the costumes had put an idea into Bunter's fat brain. At a function where all the people were costumed and masked there was a chance for a "gate-crasher."

Bunter had already resolved to get hold of one of those costumes, and join the party on Boxing Night. He would make sure of a supper, at least! The guests were to unmask at the supper, but that was all right—Bunter would be early at supper!

But for the present the fat Owl was shut out! How was he going to get in? He had grumbled at his quarters in the attic, but he would have been very glad of the attic now! At least, it was a shelter from the December wind!

What awful beast had locked that french window? Several times, since his extraordinary visit to Wharton Lodge, Bunter's weird ventriloquism had stood him in good stead. But it could not help him now! It looked as if he was booked for a night out!

He groped over the window. But it was fast—there was no chance! Almost he made up his fat mind to break a pane and get at the key inside! But it was altogether too risky.

But what was a fellow to do?

Apparently, he could only wait and hope! Bunter waited—but he felt less and less hopeful as the long, cold minutes passed!

At last, there was a light again in the room! Bunter blinked through the gap in the curtains. It was the portly Wells who entered.

Judging by the way the butler looked round the room, Bunter guessed that he had slipped up for a few minutes to see whether all was right. Wells was fed-up with keeping watch at night for the mysterious pilferer, but at other times he was very watchful and wary. Now that everybody was downstairs, no doubt it occurred to him that this was a chance for that mysterious snaffler, and he was taking a cautious look round.

Bunter blinked at him.

At the sight of the watchful Wells, his first thought was to seek the darkest and shadiest corner of the balcony, in case the butler looked out.

But second thoughts were best!

This, he realised, was a chance! Bunter was getting desperate at the prospect of a night out; and he had to take chances. Under the stress of his painful position his fat brain worked at an unusual rate.

He tapped at the window!

Wells gave a start, and looked round at the french window, evidently surprised by the tap.

And the Greyfriars ventriloquist, in a voice that anyone at Wharton Lodge would have sworn was that of Hurree Janset Ram Singh, the dusky Nabob of Bhanipur, called out:

"Please let me in fully, my esteemed Wells! The door is lockfully fastened on the inside!"

"Dear me!" ejaculated Wells.

He came towards the window, nothing doubting that Hurree Janset Ram Singh had gone out of the house and returned by way of Wharton's den, expecting to find the french window on the latch. He pulled the curtains aside.

Bunter popped back into cover of a thick mass of ivy beside the window.

The next moment it opened, and Wells looked out.

"Master Hurree Singh—" Wells stared into the darkness, surprised not to see the nabob standing there.

"Dear me! Where are you, sir?"

From the steps of the balcony, at a little distance from the window, came the voice of the Greyfriars ventriloquist!

"Please come and helpfully assist me! I have slipfully fallen on the idiotic snow."

"Good gracious!" exclaimed Wells, and he stepped quickly from the french window and crossed the balcony to the steps.

He stood on the top step, peering down into the darkness.

His portly back was towards Bunter and the window.

With his fat heart beating fast, Bunter moved from the ivy and stepped silently in at the french window.

In a twinkling he shot the window, turned the key, and dragged the curtains across. He closed them more carefully than Harry Wharton had done. He had his reasons! Not a fraction of a gap was left by which Wells could have looked in.

Bunter grinned.

"Bless me!" he heard Wells ejaculate. "Where are you, sir? Please call out! Why—what—who—upon my word!"

Wells tramped back across the balcony to the french window. His portly face wore a frown. He tried the handle and found the door locked, and his frown intensified. He could only conclude that Hurree Janset Ram Singh had played a practical joke on him, tricking him out on the balcony and shutting him out in the cold. He tapped sharply on the window.

"Please let me in at once, Master



Thomas, the page, stared at the white figure with distended eyes as it glided down the stairs. Then he let out a terrific yell. "The ghost!" Wells, the butler, started up from a half-doze. "Wha-a-at!" he gasped. "Ow! Look! The ghost!" shrieked Thomas.

Hurree Singh!" he called out sharply. "I am bound to say, sir, that I do not like this kind of joke! I beg you to let me in at once."

Billy Bunter gave no heed. Wells could not get in, and could not look in! If he wanted to get back he had to go down the steps, round the house, and in by the door downstairs. That gave the fat Owl of the Remove plenty of time.

Tap, tap, tap! came unheeded at the window! Wells was not anxious to go round the house in the December wind, without even a coat on!

"Master Hurree Singh!" he shouted. "Let me in at once!"

Bunter turned a deaf ear.

He whisked across to the box of costumes and opened it. He picked out the blue domino and mask, exactly like those selected by Bob Cherry! He jammed the mask into his pocket and crammed the domino under his arm, and then whisked to the door. The passage outside was clear; and Bunter lost no time in getting back to his attic!

There he chuckled a fat chuckle!

Wells, on the cold and windy balcony, did not feel like chuckling! He tapped again and again! But as there was no response, he realised that the practical joker did not intend to let him in, and he made up his mind, at last, to descend the steps and go round the house to the door. And when, at last, Wells got in, cold and shivering and deeply exasperated, only his well-trained respect for his master and his master's guests prevented Wells from telling the Nabob of Bhanipur what he thought of him!

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

The Christmas Ghost!

CHRISTMAS DAY was rather a quiet day at Wharton Lodge. The festivities followed.

Quietest of all that Christmas Day was the unbidden and unsuspected guest who had the disused attic all to himself! Several times during the day, certainly, Bunter ventured out when the coast was clear. But he did not venture far; and a footstep or a voice sent him scuttling back to his attic, like a fat rabbit to its burrow.

Bunter had had an idea that on Christmas Day he would show up and take his chance! On that day, of all others, a fellow was least likely to get the "boot."

But for the unfortunate row with the colonel at Wimford, doubtless Bunter would have taken his chance.

But that, so to speak, had put the lid on!

All Bunter's proceedings, in fact, since he had been an unsuspected guest at Wharton Lodge had made matters worse instead of better.

He had, as it were, run up a long account, which had to be paid off if he was discovered there.

All his various snaffings, which had been attributed to some unknown pilferer from below stairs, would be traced to their genuine author as soon as it was known that Bunter had been hidden there all the time.

The identity of the "ghost" would be known at once. Nobody would doubt where the Christmas pudding had gone!

Still, Bunter would have risked it, but for that row with the old colonel! Colonel Wharton had not finished

smacking his head on that occasion when Bunter got away. Bunter did not want him to finish.

He pondered over it dismally in the seclusion of the attic, but he felt that it would not do!

Fortunately, he was not short of provender.

The pudding was still lasting him!

It was, luckily, an enormous pudding! Even Bunter was a long time getting through it! Christmas pudding, delightful as it is, might have palled on any other fellow in the long run. But it did not pall on Bunter! He enjoyed every crumb and every plum.

The pudding, of course, had been replaced downstairs. There was another pudding for the family. Probably they did not enjoy the second pudding so much as the fat Owl of the Remove enjoyed the first one.

But everything comes to an end! The last fragment of that big pudding was gone on Christmas Day.

In the dusk of the evening the fat Owl ventured out of his hiding place again and as far as the landing. The hall below was brightly lighted and gleaming with holly and mistletoe.

Peering through the banisters, Bunter blinked at bright and cheery faces. Miss Amy Wharton with her kind and gentle smile, was pulling a Christmas cracker with Hurree Janset Ram Singh. Bob Cherry's ruddy face grinned under a tall paper cap. Harry Wharton was trying the wireless, to see what was coming through—ready to turn it on if there was something cheerful and to



(Continued from page 13.)

turn it off if there was one of those interesting and improving talks! Everybody looked happy, and Bunter, blinking down at them unseen, considered once more whether it would be judicious to "show up." Colonel Wharton, standing before the fire with his hands under his coat-tails, looked unusually amiable. Frank Nugent's voice floated up!

"Heard from Mauly, Wharton?"

"Yes; he's coming over to-morrow," answered Harry.

"Good egg! Is Bunter staying with him?"

"Not that I know of."

"I wonder whom Bunter's staying with?"

There was a laugh.

"Bunter!" It was the colonel's deep voice. "That impertinent young jackanapes! Huh!"

"My dear James!" murmured Aunt Amy.

"Oh, quite so, my dear Amy!" said the colonel. "At Christmas-time one must feel kindly towards everybody. Still, I think I should box that cheeky young rascal's ears if I saw him, all the same. What is there on the wireless, Harry?" he added, evidently to get rid of the disagreeable subject of that impertinent young jackanapes, Bunter!

Billy Bunter glared through the banisters.

He gave up the idea of "showing up" and trusting to luck and the spirit of Yuletide. The colonel evidently had not got over it. It was still the attic for Bunter!

Squeals and Morse came from the wireless. Wharton shut it off.

"What about a ghost story?" asked Bob Cherry. "Harry tells us that the jolly old ghost has been seen this Christmas. Lucky bargee to have a family ghost; they forgot to tell the builder to put one in at Cherry Place."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Tell us about the ghost, sir," said Johnny Bull.

Colonel Wharton smiled.

"If you would care to hear it——" he said.

"Oh, yes, rather!"

"The ratherfulness is terrific."

There was general attention while the colonel told the story of the ghostly figure that haunted—or did not haunt—Wharton Lodge. At Christmastide, it seemed, when the snow was white on the roofs, and the wild wind wailed round the chimneys, the ghost walked on the scene where he had been slain so many hundred years ago, and announced his presence with deep and dismal groans.

"Of late," the colonel wound up, "the ghost has not been seen or heard——"

Groan!

Colonel Wharton broke off sharply.

Groan!

"What—what—what was that?" ejaculated Miss Amy. Her face became quite pale in the firelight.

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"Good gad! What——" The colonel stared round.

Groan!

All the juniors were on their feet.

Every groan seemed to come from a different direction. They were, naturally, unaware that a ventriloquist was at work.

It was startling—ecric—unnerving.

"What the thump——" exclaimed Bob Cherry blankly. "Did you fellows hear that?"

"The hearfulness was terrific."

"Hark! There it is again!"

Groan!

It was a long, horrible, hair-raising groan. This time it seemed to Colonel Wharton that he detected the sound from the oak-balustraded landing over the old hall. He glared up.

"Someone is playing a trick!" he snapped. "Run up the stairs, some of you, and search!"

Billy Bunter was generally like the tortoise in his movements. But as he heard those words he outstripped the hare. He was back in his attic almost in the twinkling of an eye.

Harry Wharton & Co. ran up the stairs.

"Nobody here!" called out Harry.

The groans were heard no more. Billy Bunter, locked in his attic, was groaning dismally over the absence of supper. But in the attic his groans were unheard.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

Beastly for Bob!

CHIMING bells gounded in the frosty night, mingling with the wail of the wind.

In the old oak-walled hall of Wharton Lodge there was still a dim glow from the red embers on the ancient hearth. Every now and then came a faint crackle from a log. At long intervals there was a little leaping flame, that died down again and left all black.

The household slept—with some exceptions. Five fellows were very wide awake. It was a lark, Bob Cherry had declared, to celebrate Christmas with a ghost-hunt. Johnny Bull agreed that a ghost gave the festive season the finishing touch. Harry Wharton was very keen to lay hold of the mysterious practical joker who was playing ghost—who had scared Wells and Thomas with a sheet over his head, and startled the whole party by groaning on Christmas evening from some unsuspected nook. The whole Co., in fact, were keen on bagging the ghost, and at the chimes of midnight they turned out for that purpose.

There was no danger this time of bagging Wells by mistake. Colonel Wharton had frowned so severely on the butler's exploit that Wells was not going to repeat it. The Famous Five had the field to themselves. And if the ghost walked they were going to "lay" it.

They were going, in fact, to lay it hard. Each of them had provided himself with a weapon of offence for laying the ghost. If that ghost was caught he was likely to be the soundest thrashed ghost in the whole world of spectres and phantoms.

The chums of the Remove had laid their plans carefully. They posted themselves at various points to watch for the ghost.

Harry Wharton and Frank Nugent tiptoed down into the hall. Johnny Bull posted himself on one wing of the double staircase, Hurree Janset Ram Singh on the other. Bob Cherry took possession of the long, wide landing that connected the two above.

Thus posted, the five juniors were well placed to bag the ghost if he showed up that Christmas night. They hoped that he would. It was, perhaps, a "lark" to go ghost-hunting; but it was cold, and the fellows grew rather sleepy, and they were not fearfully keen to repeat the performance. So they hoped that they would have good luck this time.

Certainly there was a good chance of it—for the ghost of Wharton Lodge was frightfully hungry.

Another raid on the larder was indicated, and Billy Bunter could only hope that everybody was sleeping soundly on Christmas night.

Anyhow, he had to risk it.

If anybody was up, and he was seen, a ghostly aspect would save him from detection if he got clear. Carefully, by a dim candle-light in his attic, the Owl of the Remove draped himself in a sheet, and put the pillowslip over his bullet-head. It was well after midnight when he made the venture. He blew out the candle, opened the attic door silently, and crept out. For several long minutes he listened.

All was silent and still.

He hesitated, but he made up his fat mind. The thought of cold turkey lured him on.

On tiptoe he crept down the attic stair and crept stealthily along the passage to the stairs.

Faintly from below came a dim red gleam from the dying fire in the hall; otherwise, all was black.

At the end of the passage Bunter listened again.

There was no sound.

He stepped forward to grope his way to the stairs. And as he did so there came a sudden, startled gasp from the darkness on the landing.

"My hat! Hallo, hallo, hallo!"

Bunter stopped dead. He knew Bob Cherry's voice. The beasts, as he had half suspected, were on the watch for the ghost.

"Oh lor'!" breathed Bunter.

"Come on, you men!" shouted Bob.

He was running along the landing in the dark towards Bunter. Bunter popped back into the passage from which he had emerged.

There were calling voices and footsteps on the stairs. The Co. were running up in the dark to join Bob.

Bob did not wait for them.

He rushed after the disappearing ghost.

Bunter turned the corner of the passage. With really wonderful presence of mind, he tore off the sheet and the pillowslip. Bob was only a few yards away; there was no escape by running. In sheer desperation Bunter stopped just round the corner of the passage, backing close to the wall.

Two seconds later Bob Cherry came barging round.

Something white fluttered in the air and descended like a cloud over his head. It was the sheet.

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Bob.

He struggled in the enveloping folds of the sheet on his head. That was Bunter's chance.

He darted up the passage, leaped up the attic stair, and vanished—as swiftly and completely as a real ghost.

Bob grabbed wildly at the sheet that had so suddenly descended on his head and enveloped him. He had been taken quite by surprise by that peculiar manoeuvre on the part of the ghost.

There was a rush of footsteps across the landing. Johnny Bull's voice shouted:

"Here he is!" He glimpsed a white, ghostly figure just round the corner

in the passage and leaped at it. "Got him!"

Crash!
Bob Cherry, enveloped in the sheet, went with a crash to the floor, with Johnny Bull sprawling over him. "Back up!" panted Johnny. "Got him!"

"Hurrah!"
"Pile in!" panted Wharton.
"Urrrrgh!" came from Bob Cherry, choked and blinded by the sheet and unable to get rid of it in Johnny Bull's hefty clutches. "Yuuurrrgh!"

Wharton was on him the next moment. A second later, Nugent and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh added their grasp. "Got the rotter!" gasped Nugent. "The gotfulness is terrific!"

"Where's Bob? Lend a hand here, Bob!"

"Urrrrgh!"
"My hat! He's pretty hefty! Hold him! Don't let him get away!" panted

Wharton. "Never mind if you damage him."

"What-ho!"
"Urrrrgh! Grooogh! Oooooogh!" came in muffled splutterings from the interior of the tangled sheet. "Whurrrgh!"

"Keep hold of him!"
"Get a light, somebody! Switch it on, one of you!" exclaimed Wharton. "I've got the rotter all right!"

Wharton's arm was round the prisoner's neck, half suffocating him. Nugent and Hurree Singh held his arms, tangled in the sheet. Johnny Bull let go, ran along to the switch, and turned on the light. Then he ran back and grasped the prisoner again.

"Where's Bob!" he exclaimed. Only four members of the Co. were holding the capture. "Bob! Back up, Bob!"

"Yurrrgh! Leggo! I'm chook-chook-choking! Yurrrgh!" came in

suffocated tones from under the tangled sheet.

"Serve you jolly well right, whoever you are!" grinned Johnny Bull. "You're going to have a jolly good hiding, too! Are you Thomas?"

"Grooogh! Gooogh! Leggo!"
"I seem to know that voice," said Harry. "Hold him tight, while I get the sheet off him. Don't let him get away."

"No fear!"
"Where's that ass, Bob, all this time?" grunted Johnny Bull.

"Gurrrgh!"
"Keep him safe!"

Wharton grasped the sheet to pull it away, while the other three fellows held the prisoner as if in a vice. The captain of the Remove tore away the sheet.

(Continued on next page.)



"Linesman," who is an expert on Soccer, will be pleased to hear from MAGNET chums who have problems to solve. Write to him, c/o The MAGNET, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

AT certain big football grounds, where the space between the goal-lines and touch-lines is some distance from the nearest spectators, it is the custom to employ boys to kick the ball back when it goes out of play. Haven't you sometimes felt a bit jealous when watching the boys who have been given this job? I confess that I have. They have a splendid view of the match.

In this connection, one of my readers sends me an out-of-the-way query this week. He wants to know how those boys get the job at a ground like that of Chelsea, at Stamford Bridge, for instance. This reader friend of mine says he would like such a job. I dare say he would. There are no end of applications from boys for this task.

I am afraid, however, that a merely ordinary application to the Chelsea club—or to any other club which uses these boys—would not be of much use. These nice jobs—like so many other jobs—are mostly obtained by "influence."

At Hampden Park, Glasgow, which is the biggest football arena in the British Isles—bigger than Wembley even—they employ eight lads for all the big matches to kick the ball back to the field of play when it has run over the line. These boys at Hampden Park, where the Scotland v. England matches are usually played, are booked for two years, after which they are then given what might, in a sense, be called an international cap. And they retire with that honour to make way for other boys who have grown big enough.

SURPRISE RESULTS!

EACH season, when the Cup-ties come along, we get a certain number of shocks. Teams which scarcely seem to have a chance, somehow manage to beat their much more fancied competitors. Last season, for instance, Arsenal, then leaders of the

First Division, were drawn against Walsall, a club which had done very little out of the ordinary even in the Third Division. But on their own ground, Walsall beat Arsenal by two goals to nil.

How is it that this sort of thing happens in the Cup competition? That is a question which has been put to me. There are different ways in which we can account for these surprise results. For instance, it may well be that a mistake is made in supposing that the clubs in the Third Division, by way of example, are so much inferior to the clubs of the First Division. We have seen teams like Portsmouth climb upwards, fairly rapidly, from the Third Division, through the Second Division, and up to the very top class.

Again, it may happen that occasionally the players connected with a club in the very top class, meeting a team from a lower League, are inclined to treat their opponents with a certain amount of contempt; to say to themselves: "We need not worry much about this game, which we can win as we like." Often the players who adopt that attitude towards a match don't wake up to their mistake until it is too late.

It seems to me, however, that the biggest reason for these surprise Cup-tie results is that the lowly club is in the happy position of having everything to gain and nothing to lose.

They know that everybody expects them to be beaten, and that nobody will be disappointed if that is their fate. Therefore, they settle down to the game in a care-free spirit, and if, by their enthusiasm and energy, they manage to get the lead, they hang on to it with grim determination.

On the other hand, if the players of the highly-placed First Division club do happen to fall behind they begin to worry. They know that the whole football world will laugh at them if they are defeated, and knowing this, they get anxious, and don't play their natural game.

Anyway, whatever the explanation, these surprise results are part and parcel of the Cup competition. This knock-out affair gives all the clubs a second chance. By the time the Cup-tie part of the season comes along it is obvious that some clubs haven't the faintest hope of winning the championship of their League, or even getting near it. So they concentrate on the Cup competition, and thus try to make up for their failure in the League. It is a striking fact that success in League and Cup very seldom go hand in hand. It is thirty-six years since the same team won the First Division championship and the F.A. Cup in the same season.

HALF-TIME!

WHEN watching a match the other day," writes one of my readers, "I noticed what seemed like an argument going on immediately after the referee had blown the whistle for half-time. It was a dull day, and the referee seemed to be ordering the players to change ends without going off the field so that the match could be finished while the light lasted. Has the referee the right to order the players to change ends at half-time without going off?"

In reply, I have to say that the referee has no such right.

He can, with a view to getting the match finished while the light lasts, ask the players if they would mind changing ends immediately, without going off the field. But according to rule the players, if they feel so disposed, can demand that they have an interval of five minutes' duration.

So when you read—as you often do in the newspapers—that the referee ordered the players not to leave the field at half-time, the statement is wrong.

There is endless romance in the finding of football players who rise to the top of the tree. This season, Tom Mills, the inside-left of Clapton Orient, has played for Wales. Do you know how he was discovered? I'll tell you. When he was growing up he was a waiter at a restaurant. The firm which employed him had a football team, and that team got to the final of a trade Cup competition. At that final tie, Arthur Grimsdell, who was then manager of the Orient, happened to be present, and being struck with the promise of Mills, he gave him a trial. Mills was duly signed on. You never know, my football friends, when somebody of importance may be watching!

"LINESMAN."

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"Now, who— Oh, my hat!"

In utter stupefaction the juniors gazed at the red, wrathful, and infuriated face of Bob Cherry!

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

Wrathy!

"**B**OB!"

"Bob Cherry!"

"Oh crikey!"

"Oh, my esteemed hat!"

Bob Cherry gurgled. The other fellows gasped. They gazed at their prisoner as if they could hardly believe their eyes.

"Bob! You silly ass!" gasped Wharton. "You—playing ghost—"

"You unspeakable idiot!" exclaimed Johnny Bull. "Calling out to us to come on—and playing ghost yourself all the time! Call that sense!"

"The senselessness is terrific!"

"Urrrrggh!" gurgled Bob. "Wurrrggh! Oh crikey! I'm nearly suffocated! Urrrrrrggh!"

"You silly ass!" exclaimed Nugent indignantly. "Serve you jolly well right! What the thump are you playing this game for?"

"You blithering idiot!" gasped Bob.

"There's a blithering idiot here, that's a cert!" said Johnny Bull. "And his name's Cherry!"

"You howling ass!"

"Look here, Bob, it's really too thick!" exclaimed Harry Wharton. "You've spoiled the whole thing! What on earth put it into your silly head to play ghost?"

"You burbling chump!"

"Oh, chuck it!" growled Johnny Bull. "Of all the unspeakable, howling asses to start playing ghost yourself—"

"I didn't!" shrieked Bob Cherry.

"Oh, don't be an ass! Here you were, with a sheet over your head—"

"That tricky rotter chucked it there, you blithering idiot!" hissed Bob. "I nearly had him when he chucked the sheet over my head and bolted."

"Who did?"

"How should I know, ass? The fellow who was playing the ghost! I ran round this corner after him, and he

chucked the sheet over my head!" hooted Bob. "Then you silly idiots rushed me over—"

"Oh, my hat!"

"And while you've been playing the fool he's got away!" snorted Bob. "You silly owls, I've got about a dozen bumps and bruises—"

"Mean to say you weren't playing ghost?" gasped Johnny Bull. "Well, you silly ass, what was a fellow to think, coming up in the dark and finding a blithering idiot with a sheet over his head?"

"I tell you he chucked it over me and scooted!" shrieked Bob.

"Why did you let him do it?"

"You—you—you burbling bandersnatch, how could I help it? Do you think I let him do it for fun?" hissed Bob.

"Well, you shouldn't have let him!" said Johnny Bull, shaking his head. "You've spoiled the whole thing. He's got away now, whoever he is. You ought to have had a bit more gumption, old chap!"

"I tell you—" roared Bob.

"Don't wake the house, old bean," said Johnny. "If Wharton's uncle comes out he won't be in the best of tempers. And he mayn't believe that you weren't playing the ghost when he hears that we found you with a sheet over your head in the dark."

"If you want your nose pulled, Johnny Bull—"

Bob Cherry's usually amicable temper seemed to be failing him.

"Order, old beans!" said Harry Wharton. "No rags! Anyhow, we nearly had the fellow. Better luck next time!"

"Perhaps the betterfulness of the esteemed luck next time will be terrific!" said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh soothingly.

"We've got the sheet, anyhow," said Harry. "The housekeeper may be able to tell which bed it came from, when she sees it to-morrow. That may be a clue to the blighter."

"No sheet missing from your bed, Bob?" asked Johnny Bull.

Johnny still seemed to have his doubts.

Bob Cherry's answer was not in words. He was punched and pommelled, breathless and winded. He was wrathy. It was due, from his point of view, to the headlong haste of his comrades. To be suspected of playing ghostly tricks himself was altogether too much! Instead of answering Johnny's question verbally he jumped at him and got his head into chancery!

Thump! Thump!

"Oh, my hat! Stop that!" gasped Harry Wharton.

"Bob, you ass!" exclaimed Nugent.

"My esteemed and idiotic Bob—"

They grasped Bob Cherry and dragged him back. Johnny Bull, gasping for breath, glared at him.

"You silly ass!" he spluttered. "What the thump— I've a jolly good mind— I'll—I'll—"

"Let me go, you fatheads!" howled Bob. "If that howling ass thinks I was playing ghost, I'll jolly well punch a little more sense into his silly head."

"Quiet, fathead! You'll wake the house!"

"I tell you if that blithering ass thinks—"

"I know what it looks like!" said Johnny Bull. "I don't mind your practical jokes, as a rule. But this—"

"Let me get at him!" howled Bob.

"Rats! Shut up, Johnny, we can all take Bob's word," said Harry. "Look here, the game's up for to-night. Let's get back to bed. We've lost enough sleep over that rotten trickster."

Wharton and Nugent walked with Bob to his room.

The unfortunate outcome of the ghost-hunt seemed likely to end in fisticuffs, in Bob's present excited and wrathy state—which, of course, would never have done.

Johnny Bull shrugged his shoulders as he went to his room. He did not exactly doubt Bob's word on the subject, but, as he had said, he knew what it looked like! Nobody had seen the "ghost" except Bob; and Bob had been caught with the ghostly sheet over his head. Perhaps the other fellows had a lingering doubt, too. Bob was well known to have a rather exuberant sense of fun, which might have led him over the limit, for once.

"Good-night, old chap!" said Wharton and Nugent amicably at Bob's door.

"Good-night, you silly fatheads!" grunted Bob.

And they smiled, and went to their own quarters.

Lights were turned out; all was dark. One o'clock chimed. Two! Three! At that unearthly hour there was no eye open, no ear alert, to see or to hear a figure that glided and crept by dark passages and staircases.

It was a very late hour when the unsuspected guest at Wharton Lodge ate his supper of cold turkey by candlelight in the attic.

But the turkey was good! And it was better late than never!

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.

The Blue Domino!

STRAINS of merry music floated through Wharton Lodge.

The gramophone was grinding out dance music.

Outside, snowflakes were falling and dashing against the windows on the winter wind.

Within, all was merry and bright.

The old oak-walled hall was glistening with evergreens and red berries. Everything had been cleared out of the way to make room for the dancing. Already some couples were gliding over the polished floor.



AIRMEN ACRO- BATS!

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Colonel Wharton was telling the story of the ghost that haunted Wharton Lodge when there came the sound of a long, horrible, hair-raising groan. "What—what—what was that?" ejaculated Miss Wharton, her face turning quite pale. The party, naturally, was unaware that Bunter, the ventriloquist, was at work on the landing above!

Guests had been arriving during Boxing Day.

Lord Mauleverer had turned up in the biggest car ever. Hazeldene of the Remove had come, with his sister Marjorie, and with Marjorie came Miss Clara and several other Cliff House girls. Fisher T. Fish, the American junior of Greyfriars, was there. Fishy, whose home was in New York, stayed at Greyfriars over the holidays. Nobody was keen on Fishy's company; the fellows would almost have preferred Bunter of the two. But Harry Wharton had a kind thought for the fellow who was left at school on his lonely own, and he had rung up Greyfriars and asked him for Boxing Day.

Fishy had a mental struggle before he accepted the invitation, welcome as it was to a fellow who was passing his holidays in the far from enlivening company of Gosling, the porter, and Mrs. Kebble, the House dame.

But, after a rapid mental calculation, he decided that what he would get to eat at Wharton Lodge would be nearly worth the railway fare.

So Fishy came, still a little worried by the unavoidable expenditure of cash, but prepared to make the best of it.

Other Greyfriars fellows turned up, too, among them the Bounder and Tom Redwing, the two of them coming over in Smithy's pater's car—or, rather, in one of Mr. Vernon-Smith's many cars. Some fellows brought sisters or cousins. So there was quite a numerous company; on all of whom Miss Amy Wharton smiled her kind and hospitable smile, and the colonel grinned his most amiable grin. Wharton was happy in an uncle and an aunt who did not mind if the house was turned upside-down on occasion, so long as their dear nephew enjoyed himself. And there was no

doubt that the house was considerably turned upside-down.

There was dancing in the wide old hall to the merry strains of the gramophone, in charge of which stood Thomas, with his widest grin on his chubby face. The dining-room was the supper-room, arranged in a way that would have made Billy Bunter's mouth water had he seen it—as he was going to, if all went well. The colonel's study, opening off the hall, was turned into a cosy corner, with chintzes and holly decorations.

Fisher T. Fish ascertained that supper started whenever a fellow liked, and that a fellow could have all the suppers he liked, one after another. Fishy was early in beginning. He only wished that he had had an appetite like Billy Bunter's. In that case, he could have been absolutely certain of indemnifying himself for the cost of his railway fare. Anyhow, he was going to do his best, and he calculated and reckoned and guessed that, on the whole, he would not be much of a loser.

Wharton's den swarmed with fellows, selecting costumes from the ample box, and most of them talking at once. Some of them had brought their fancy dress, some hadn't; but there was an ample supply in the box.

Cheery voices floated up the attic stair and reached the fat ears of a fat junior who was lying doggo there. Fellows swarmed in the rooms and in the passage of the quarter of the house assigned to Wharton and his friends. Some of them even sat on the attic stair while they talked, little dreaming whose fat ears heard them from farther up.

"Seen anything of Bunter these hols?"

Vernon-Smith's voice floated up to Bunter, as he sat on the attic stair

putting on his dancing shoes. Apparently, he was addressing Lord Mauleverer, for it was Mauly's lazy voice that answered.

"No. Splendid luck—what?"

"Beast!" breathed Billy Bunter, in the darkness above.

"Better luck than ours, Mauly!" said Bob Cherry, with a chuckle. "We've seen the fat fozzler! He was in Wimford a day or two before Christmas."

"What was he doin' there?"

"You mean, whom was he doin'?" chuckled the Bounder.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I rather like this jolly old blue domino," remarked Bob Cherry, who was in costume. "The blessed hood makes a fellow's napper rather warm!"

"Better put on the mask, too!" said the Bounder.

"I'm going to. But why?"

"You'll be better-lookin' in it!"

"Fathead!"

"Your sister's asking for you, Hazel," said Redwing, from the stairs.

"Is she?" said Hazeldene. "I'm not ready yet. Here, don't shove a fellow over, Bob Cherry, you ass! What's the hurry?"

The junior in the blue domino did not answer that question. Hazel stared after him as he raced for the stairs. Hazel was not in a particular hurry to join Marjorie in the hall—he saw no occasion for haste. Apparently, Bob Cherry did.

Billy Bunter, in his attic, waited for the coast to clear.

By candlelight he had fitted himself up in the blue domino and hood and mask that he had borrowed from the box in Wharton's room.

The hood made him look rather taller than was natural to the fat junior, and

the loose folds of the domino, which reached to his fat ankles, completely concealed the rotundity of his ample figure.

Bunter had no doubt of passing undetected in the crowd.

Except that he was shorter, he looked exactly like Bob Cherry, whose costume was similar, and the hood over his bullet head lessened the difference.

Bunter grinned under the mask.

A fellow in domino, hood, and mask might be anybody in the merry company, and, unless they were seen together, anyone would take him for Bob. That added to his sense of security. But he had to wait till the coast was clear before he descended from the attic.

Bunter peered cautiously out through his big spectacles and the eye-holes of his mask.

All the other fellows had gone down, so far as he could see.

The fat Owl rolled down the attic stair to the passage.

"Oh gad!" came a startled exclamation.

Bunter jumped and stared round.

Lord Mauleverer, in evening clothes—his lordship was too lazy to change into fancy dress—was leaning on the wall, just making up his lazy mind to negotiate the staircase.

He stared at the apparition in the blue domino. He had seen Bob Cherry put on a blue domino exactly like this one, but he had also seen Bob rush down the stairs early.

"Where did you spring from, old bean?" asked Mauleverer. "I thought you were down in the jolly old hall, trippin' the light fantastic toe and treadin' on Marjorie's feet."

The fat Owl grinned under his mask.

Instead of answering, he stepped towards Lord Mauleverer. This was the fellow who had left him behind when Greyfriars broke up for Christmas, instead of carrying him off to Mauleverer Towers! It was due to this beast that Bunter was passing his Christmas in such a very remarkable manner. Stepping quickly towards his unsuspecting lordship, Bunter disentangled a fat paw from his domino, and delivered a sudden and unexpected punch, which landed on Mauly's noble nose, taking him quite by surprise.

Bump!

Lord Mauleverer sat down suddenly.

"Oh gad!" he gasped, in bewilderment. "Oh, great gad! Mad, or what? By Jove! Ow!"

Bunter fled.

He had vanished before the astounded Mauleverer clambered to his feet again. Mauly dabbed his nose with his handkerchief. There was a trickle of red.

"Oh gad! Is the fellow mad, or what?" gasped Mauly. "Punchin' a fellow's nose like that! Oh crumbs! I'll jolly well have somethin' to say to Bob when I see him again, by Jove!"

Not till he had abolished the last speck of crimson from his nose did Lord Mauleverer descend the staircase into the hall. The gramophone was roaring, and a dance was going on.

Lord Mauleverer spotted a blue domino—the only one to be seen. Bob Cherry had had one dance with Marjorie, and now he was standing by a window, watching her as she glided round with the Bouncer.

As there were rather more boys than girls, Bob was not in demand; and, indeed, it was only kind friendship that could have induced Marjorie to dance with Bob, who was a great man on the football field, but rather like a rhinoceros in the dancing line. If he

did not tear a yard off a dress, or tread on a foot, Bob considered that he got through pretty well; keeping time to the music was an art he had not yet acquired. He was looking on contentedly and cheerfully, when Lord Mauleverer touched him on the arm, and he glanced round.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Why aren't you dancing, Mauly?" he asked. "You're the man they want, you know."

"Have you gone off your rocker?" asked Mauly.

"Eh?"

"Look at my nose!"

"Knocked it hard against something?" asked Bob in wonder. "It looks as if you have, old chap. Hard luck!"

"I can't very well punch you here—"

"Wh-a-at?"

"But remind me next term at Greyfriars, if I forget—"

"What the jolly old thump do you want to punch me for, Mauly, you howling ass?" demanded Bob.

"Because you punched me, you obstreperous idiot! If you're not off your rocker, what did you do it for?"

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"I did?" gasped Bob.

"Yaas!"

"You're dreaming!"

"Oh rats!" grunted Mauleverer, and he moved away, leaving Bob Cherry staring after him in blank amazement.

In the supper-room, out of sight, there was another fellow in a blue domino. Mauly did not see him. Neither was he likely to see him for some time. Bunter was going to distinguish himself in the dancing, which he did as elegantly and gracefully as an elephant. But supper came first! Bunter had several lost suppers to make up for! Now he was making up for them. Also, he would not be able to join the supper-table when the unmasking came on. So he had to fill up in advance! Which he was proceeding to do—with a steady determination that left Fisher T. Fish far in the rear.

THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER.

Extraordinary!

"MY esteemed Bob—" "Hallo, hallo, hallo, Inky!"

"Do you knowfully recognise me?"

Bob Cherry grinned. "You've changed your domino," he said. "But I sort of fancy I know your jolly old variety of my native language, Inky."

Bob was standing by a big tub of palms, waiting for the moment when he could claim Marjorie Hazeldene for another dance. A blue domino joined him there. He had seen Hurree Jamset Ram Singh putting on a pink domino, so he concluded that the nabob had changed. For there was no mistaking the variety of English that was spoken from behind the mask. As Bob did not know that Billy Bunter was anywhere within a dozen miles, and had, in fact, quite forgotten his fat existence, he was not likely to suspect that the speaker was that fat and fatuous youth, skilfully imitating the nabob's beautiful flow of English.

"Been at supper already, Inky?"

"Eh?"

"There's some jam on your domino," grinned Bob, "and your mask looks a bit sticky! Hallo, hallo, hallo! I've got to cut off—"

"Hold on an absurd moment—"

"Can't! Let go my arm, Inky, you ass—can't keep Marjorie waiting, you fathead!"

"You are desirefully wanted on the esteemed telephone. The absurd colonel asked me to find you and tell you."

"Oh, what rot!"

"It is a call from Cherry Place, and I fearfully think that something is wrongful—"

"Oh, my hat!" A telephone call from home, on Boxing Night, could hardly mean anything, except that something was amiss. "I say, thanks, Inky, old man— I say, this is my dance—Marjorie, you know— I say, will you explain to her, old chap? She's yonder. Smithy's just taken her to that seat by the holly."

"The explainfulness will be terrific."

Bob Cherry hurried away. Even a dance with Marjorie counted for nothing if something untoward had happened at home. And what else could a trunk call from Dorsetshire mean?

Billy Bunter grinned under his mask.

Bob had not the faintest suspicion. He passed a pink domino as he hurried away, but never suspected that Hurree Jamset Ram Singh was inside it. He fancied that he had just been speaking to Hurree Jamset Ram Singh in a blue domino like his own.

Bunter rolled over to Marjorie.

Smithy, who was the man in possession, so to speak, was rather reluctant to quit; but Bob's name was down on Marjorie's programme and that was that! Neither the Bouncer nor Miss Hazeldene had any suspicion that the fellow in the blue domino was not Bob. Certainly, he was not to be recognised; but the Bouncer had seen him putting on a blue domino, and Marjorie had danced and talked with him. It was as easy as pie for Bunter, now that he had got the genuine article out of the way.

Marjorie gave him a sweet smile; all the sweeter because she rather dreaded dancing with Bob. She liked Bob immensely; but she feared his feet.

The gramophone was roaring again. Many couples were tripping the light fantastic toe, and Bunter and Marjorie glided into action. At all events, Marjorie glided and Bunter rolled.

"Here, look out!" gasped a handsome cavalier, in the voice of Harry Wharton, as the blue domino barged into him.

"Clumsy ass!" said Bunter.

"Dash it all, don't knock a fellow over!" came Nugent's voice, as the fat Owl hurtled into a Spanish matador.

"If you can't dance, why not get off the floor!" said the blue domino.

He barged on.

"Bob!" murmured Marjorie softly.

She was surprised to hear Bob talk to his friends in that style. She was also surprised by the clumsiness of his movements. Bob was a bad dancer, there was no mistake about that; but he had never seemed quite so clumsy as this before.

"Silly lot of asses, what?" said the blue domino. "They can't dance, old thing! Barging into a fellow!"

"Oh!" murmured Marjorie.

"Rotten floor, what?" said Bunter.

"I thought it quite good."

"Not what I'm used to! Pokey little place for a dance; but, after all, these people ain't well off," said Bunter, "what?"

Marjorie did not answer that. She was too utterly astonished at hearing such remarks from a fellow whom she believed to be Bob Cherry.

"Keep off my feet!" came a hissing voice recognisable as Hazeldene's. "You barge! Keep off a fellow's feet!"

"Don't spread your silly feet all over the floor, you ass!" answered the blue domino as he barged on.

"I—I think I should like to sit this one out, Bob!" gasped Marjorie.

"Oh, rot!"

"Wha-a-at?"

"Let's show them some real dancing! Tired?" asked Bunter. "I dare say that clumsy ass Bob—I mean, Smithy—tired you out. But you've got a good partner now I say, did you see that old ass of a colonel at it? Bit of a goat, at his age, what?"

Marjorie was dumb.

"Crummy lot!" went on Bunter agreeably. "Hardly my style, a show of this sort! Beastly floor—I jolly nearly tripped then! Rotten dancing—see how they barge into a fellow! Oh crikey!"

Blue domino shouldered a pink domino and slipped! Billy Bunter clutched wildly at Marjorie to save himself; but the girl, fortunately, escaped his wild clutch. The fat junior went skating.

"Oh, my hat!"

"Look out! Who's that?"

"That's Cherry—Ha, ha!"

Crash! Bump!

Billy Bunter, staggering and skidding wildly, clutched a cavalier with one hand, and a Spanish matador with the other. He dragged them both down in his fall. It was quite a mix-up. The Bounder slipped in, bagged Marjorie, and steered her away from the disaster. Really, she was not sorry to get to a safe distance from the blue domino.

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Harry Wharton. "Let go, Bob, you ass!"

"Leggo, you fathead!" spluttered Nugent.

"Ow! Oh! Oh crikey!" gurgled Bunter.

Wharton and Nugent wrested themselves loose, and jumped up. The blue domino lay gasping, amid a ripple of merry laughter.

"Bob, you ass—" gasped Wharton. He grabbed the blue domino by the arm and helped him up.

Thump!

"Oh crumbs!" howled Wharton, as the blue domino rewarded him with a thump on the chest, and he sat down suddenly.

"Bob!" howled Nugent.

"My esteemed Bob!" gasped the pink domino.

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"Well, that's the jolly old limit!" chuckled the Bounder. "Punching a fellow at a dance. What's the matter with Bob to-night?"

"I can't understand him!" said Marjorie blankly. "I—I suppose that is Bob! He seems very different from usual."

The blue domino—the cynosure of all eyes now—rolled away. Wharton got on his feet, too astounded even to be angry. Almost everyone had seen that amazing incident. Unless Bob Cherry had gone out of his senses, it was not to be accounted for.

"Is Bob mad?" gasped Nugent.

"The madfulness must be terrific," murmured the Nabob of Bhanipur. "But the leastfulness said, the sooner—fully mended."

The dance went on. Blue domino disappeared into the supper-room. Even Billy Bunter could not consider that he had scored a howling success as a dancer. But there was comfort in supper. That, after all, was the chief thing. It was an hour since Bunter had had his first supper, so he was ready for another! He tucked in again and was comforted.

THE SIXTEENTH CHAPTER.

Two of Them!

BOB CHERRY, his blue eyes glinting through the eyeholes of his mask, came back into the hall.

He was looking for a blue domino. There was none to be seen, save his own; but he spotted a pink domino, strode over to it, and tapped it on the shoulder. Hurree Janset Ram Singh, who was standing by a tub of palms, speaking to Miss Clara, who was sitting there, turned his head.

"My esteemed Bob—" he murmured.

"So it's you!" said Bob, in a tone of concentrated anger. "You've changed your domino again."

"Eh?"

"You silly, burbling idiot, what do you mean by it?"

"By what, my esteemed and idiotic Bob?" asked the astonished nabob.

"Your silly fool trick, you dummy, making me believe that there was something wrong at home!" hissed Bob. "Are you mad, or what?"

Hurree Janset Ram Singh gazed at THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,350.

him. Miss Clara gazed at both of them; but just then Harry Wharton came up to take her away, and the two juniors were left to themselves.

"If we weren't here, I'd punch your silly head!" said Bob, in a low, savage voice. "I wasn't wanted on the phone! I've got through to home, and they tell me they never rang up. What do you mean by it?"

"The understandfulness is not terrific!" murmured the astounded Nabob of Bhanipur.

"You pulled my leg, telling me I was wanted on the phone from home—"

"You are dreaming, my esteemed Bob!" said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "I certainly did nothing of the kind."

"What's the good of telling lies, you ass?" snapped Bob. "Did you do it to bag my dance with Marjorie, you rotter?"

"Y-your dance with Marjorie!" stut-tered the nabob.

"Yes—I've missed it, all through you. By gum, if we were in a quiet place, I'd jolly well punch you!"

Hurree Jamset Ram Singh looked at him in real concern. The weird proceedings of the blue domino that evening had made some of the fellows wonder whether Bob had gone off his "rocker." Hurree Singh could hardly doubt it, as he listened to this—having, as he supposed, seen Bob in that dance with Marjorie, and the disaster that had occurred.

"Did you dance with Marjorie?" demanded Bob.

"Certainly not! You did!" gasped the nabob.

"What do you mean, you idiot?"

"The meanfulness is the same as the sayfulness, my esteemed Bob! Keep calmful, my absurd chum!" murmured the nabob. "This is not a place for esteemed excitement and execrable ragfulness."

He slipped his arm through Bob's, and gently drew him away towards the supper-room. In this extraordinary state of affairs, his one idea was to get Bob out of the general view. A fellow in a state of high excitement, who fancied that he had been telephoning, when the nabob had actually seen him dancing and tumbling over, evidently required to be led to a quiet spot and reasoned with.

Bob jerked savagely at his arm. But the nabob held on to it, gently but firmly.

"Come onfully," he whispered. "The explainfulness is better in private, far from the madding crowd, as the poet remarkably observes."

"Oh, all right!" granted Bob. And he went. He was more anxious, at that moment, to punch his chum's dusky head, than anything else; and if a sufficiently quiet and secluded spot could be reached, there was no doubt that he was going to do so. So he went.

There was only one fellow in the supper-room at the moment; in a blue domino, with his mask pushed up to give free play to his active jaws. The two juniors did not observe him; he was partly screened by floral decorations on the table. But, as he saw them come in, that fellow ceased operations on the wing of a chicken, and hastily pulled down his mask to cover his fat countenance entirely.

"Now, Inky, you silly, cheeky ass!" breathed Bob.

"The calmfulness is the proper caper, my esteemed Bob!" murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "The excitement is too terrific. Perhapsfully you had better go up to your room—"

"What do you mean, you cheeky ass?"

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I'm not going up to my room, unless you like to come up there to have your cheeky nose punched."

"The punchfulness has already been too preposterous, my absurd Bob. You have already created ludicrous amazement—"

"Eh? What have I done, I'd like to know?" demanded Bob. "I've been bothering over the telephone the last half-hour—"

"You have punched the esteemed Wharton—"

"Are you mad?"

"I think you must be, my absurd and ridiculous Bob! Pleasefully keep calm!" urged the nabob. "If you are ill—"

"Who's ill, you idiot?"

"Then what is the matterfulness?"

"I've told you what's the matter! You pulled my leg with a rotten trick, and made me miss my dance with Marjorie—"

"But you did not miss the esteemed dance," said the bewildered nabob. "Do you not rememberfully recollect that you tumbled over, and when the esteemed Wharton helped you up, you thumped him—"

"You're mad! I've been on the telephone! If anybody did it, it was somebody else—"

"You are the only fellow, I think, in a blue domino—"

"What do you mean? You had on a blue domino yourself, when you pulled my leg about the telephone call?" snorted Bob. "I see you've changed back into your pink one now."

"Oh, my esteemed hat! I have not changed at all, my absurd Bob!" Light suddenly dawned on the nabob. "Great pipfulness! Is there another fellow here in a blue domino? I remember that there was a second one in the esteemed Wharton's box—"

"Oh!" gasped Bob. "But—but I knew your voice when you spoke to me—at least, I knew your fatheaded lingo! Look here, do you mean to say that a fellow in a blue domino has been dancing with Marjorie, while I was away at the phone?"

"Certainly! You have been taken infully! Some terrific blighter pulled your esteemed leg, to bag your dance. The seefulness is preposterous now! It was not you who punched the absurd Wharton—"

"Did you think it was, you blithering idiot? I suppose that's it—some japing ass has bagged that other blue domino— By gum! I'll smash him! I'll—I'll— But where is he? I didn't see him in the hall."

"He must be about somewherefully— why— what— Look!" exclaimed Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, as, glancing round, he spotted a half-hidden blue domino on the other side of a table.

Bob Cherry jumped.

So did the blue domino!

Bunter leaped to his feet.

"That's the rotter!" hissed Bob, and he started round the table, followed by the Nabob of Bhanipur.

"Oh lor'!" gasped Billy Bunter.

He blinked through his big spectacles, from the eyeholes of his mask, in deep alarm. Discovery was imminent. Bob, evidently, meant to know who it was who had played that extraordinary trick on him—though certainly he had not the remotest suspicion that it was Billy Bunter. But if the mask was jerked off the fat face, Billy Bunter would be revealed—and the game would be up!

In that awful emergency the fat Owl's podgy brain worked swiftly. Bob had almost reached him, when Billy Bunter grabbed a soda siphon from the table.

Squizzzzz! Squish! Fizzzzz! "Urrrrggh!" spluttered Bob, staggering back from the sudden torrent that splashed on his mask.

Squizzz! Whizzz! Fizzz!

"Urrrrggh!" gurgled the Nabob of Bhanipur, as Bunter's defensive weapon was turned on him.

Smothered and blinded for the moment, the two juniors staggered back helplessly. That moment was enough for Bunter.

He dropped the siphon and fled.

Wells, who presided over the supper-room, beheld that amazing scene in astonishment and consternation. He made a step into Bunter's path as he fled for the door on the hall.

Crash!

Bump!

"Wurrrrggh!" gurgled Wells.

He went over as if a cannon-shot had struck him. A charge from Billy Bunter was not unlike that of a battering-ram.

Bunter, desperate, leaped over him and bounded on.

He bounded out into the hall where the gramophone was grinding out a merry melody, and nearly everybody was dancing. Bunter did not heed the dancers. He had no time to think of them. He was thinking only of escape. He barged wildly through, and there were startled cries and exclamations on all sides.

"Bob, you potty ass!" yelled Wharton, as he reeled to the right.

"Bob, you dummy!" roared Johnny Bull, as he staggered to the left.

"Oh gad!" gasped Lord Mauleverer, going over with a crash.

"That man Cherry's mad!" panted the Bounder.

"What on earth—"

"What the thump—"

The blue domino vanished up the staircase. Nobody could have guessed that it was Billy Bunter, from the speed he put on. He fairly flashed. The blue domino vanished above, leaving amazement and consternation below.

Fortunately for the fat Owl the upper part of the house was deserted. He whipped into the passage, tore off the blue domino and mask, hurled them into the open doorway of Wharton's room, and dashed up the attic stair. A moment more and he was palpitating breathlessly behind a locked door.

THE SEVENTEENTH CHAPTER.

The Ghost's Last Walk!

"WHAT the thump—"

"Good lord!"

"Bob's mad!"

"Mad as a hatter!"

"Why, what— Look! Who—what is—"

Another blue domino hurtled out of the supper-room into the hall. There was a buzz of amazement at the sight of it.

"Who's that?"

"Two of them—"

"What—"

"Where is he?" roared Bob Cherry.

Colonel Wharton strode up to him, and grasped him by the arm in a grip of iron. His eyes glinted under his grey brows.

"What does this mean, boy? What are—" hooted the colonel.

"That rotter!" panted Bob. "Who was it? Where is he gone? He's been making out that he's me—I mean, I'm Bob Cherry, and he—"

Bob pushed up his drenched mask. He, at all events, could be recognised now. The identity of the other fellow in a blue domino was still a mystery.



Billy Bunter, staggering and skidding wildly, clutched a cavalier with one hand and a Spanish matador with the other, and dragged them both down in his fall. Vernon-Smith slipped in, bagged Marjorie Hazeldene, and steered her away from the disaster!

"Where is he gone?" gasped Bob.
 "H-he ran upstairs!" stuttered Nugent. "Who was it? What's the row?"
 "Explain yourself, Cherry!" snapped the colonel.
 "Bob, you ass——"
 "But who the dickens was it?" exclaimed Wharton blankly. "I thought it was you, Bob——"
 "It's some japing ass!" gasped Bob. "He's been making out that he's me in a domino like mine, and he bagged my dance with Marjorie, and——"
 "Oh!" exclaimed Marjorie.
 "Oh, my hat!" ejaculated the Bounder. "What a game!"
 "Ha, ha, ha!"
 "But who was it?"
 "Well, well," said the colonel testily. "It was a foolish joke; but this excitement is out of place, Cherry."
 Bob Cherry crimsoned. He realised that himself.
 "Sorry!" he stammered. "Only—only the brute pulled my leg, making out that I was wanted on the phone. And—and well, never mind. Sorry! He's drenched me with soda water, too. I shall have to go and change."
 "Poor old Bob!"
 "But who the dickens was it?"
 "Ha, ha, ha!"
 Bob Cherry scudded up the stairs. It was true that he wanted to change; but still more he wanted to ascertain whether there was a chance of getting hold of that blue domino.
 The domino itself met his eyes, lying inside the doorway of Wharton's room. But it was unoccupied now, and the identity of the wearer still remained a mystery.
 Evidently the wearer had discarded it in haste, left it lying there, and cleared. Bob looked along the passage, but there

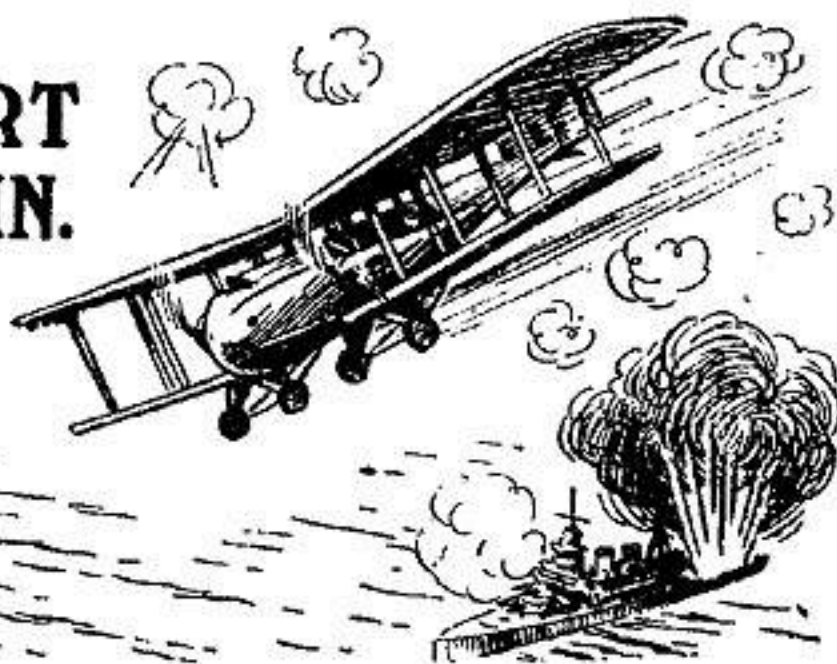
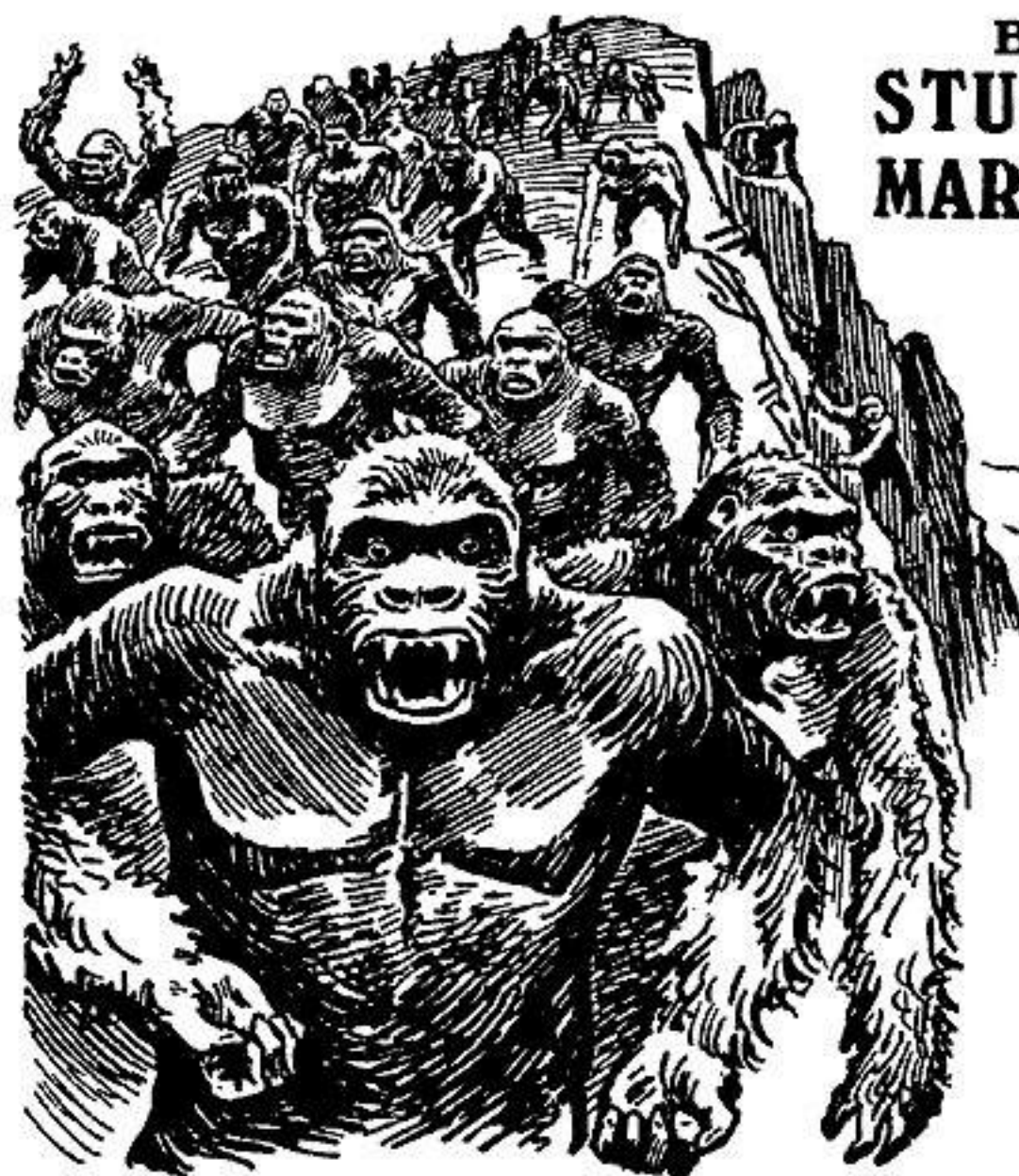
was nobody to be seen. Either the fellow had got away by another staircase, or he was lying doggo in some room; and Bob had to give it up.
 Certainly, he would not have given it up had he been aware that there was an unknown and unsuspected person in Wharton Lodge, palpitating at that moment in the locked attic!
 But that, of course, never crossed his mind. He could only conclude that one of the fellows had been japing him; but which one it was, among the many fellows there, he could not guess. He could only make up his mind that, if he discovered that fellow later, he would find a quiet spot and a quiet moment for altering his features for him.
 When Bob came down at last, Lord Mauleverer tapped him on the arm, with a cheery grin.
 "Sorry, old bean," said Mauly. "I know now that it wasn't you who tapped my boko—it was the other idiot—I mean the other chap! He seems to have made it a point to make himself jolly unpleasant all round. Who was it?"
 "Goodness knows!" said Bob. "I'd like to find out. Must have been one of the fellows—goodness knows which!"
 Bob was still considerably wrathful; till he secured another dance with Marjorie. Then oil was poured on the troubled waters.
 "I ought really to have guessed that it wasn't you, Bob," said Miss Hazeldene.
 "Well, he was got up just like me—you couldn't really——" said Bob.
 "I mean, because he danced so badly!" said Marjorie sweetly.
 And all was calm and bright!
 It had been a rather exciting and somewhat perturbing episode! But it was forgotten; and all went merrily—for everyone except the fat junior in the attic.
 Billy Bunter listened to merry music

and merry voices from below, but he did not think of venturing again to mingle in the throng of the happy and the gay! Fortunately, he had parked an ample supper; and that, after all, was what really mattered! And later, he was going to make that beast Cherry sit up—Bunter knew how!
 Bob Cherry awoke suddenly.
 Groan!
 It was late.
 Long ago the last door had closed, the last light had been turned out. Harry Wharton & Co. were sleeping the sleep of healthy youth—Bob as soundly as any. But he awoke and stared into the deep darkness, a cold shiver running down his back.
 Groan!
 It was a hair-raising groan in the darkness and silence of his room. Bob sat up in bed.
 Groan!
 From the darkness near the door came a glimmer of white. Bob felt his heart thumping.
 Just within the doorway a dim, white, ghostly figure stood. Bob's startled eyes fixed on it.
 The ghost of Wharton Lodge was walking again.
 Groan!
 Eerily the ghostly sound came through the gloom.
 For a moment or two, Bob, sitting up in bed, gazed at the phantom figure as if spellbound.
 Then, silently, he groped for a missile. His hand encountered a heavy book—the Greyfriars Holiday Annual—which was lying on the little table within arm's reach.
 Bob did not move from the bed. He suspected that if he did, the ghost would
 (Continued on page 28.)
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NON-STOP THRILLS IN THIS GRAND ADVENTURE STORY!

WHEN the GREAT APES CAME!

By
**STUART
MARTIN.**



HOW THE STORY STARTED.

GERRY LAMBERT and BILLY MURCHIE, two young airmen, are flying over the African jungle when their plane, the Golden Clipper, is forced down by an army of apes reared to crush civilisation by a renegade called Stein. By the orders of Big Ling, a giant ape-man, the pilots are imprisoned—together with a white girl named Lola—in an underground cave. Gerry escapes, but Billy and Lola are taken aboard Big Ling's flying armada, which captures Gibraltar. Then the ape army makes for London in a stolen Zeppelin. Meanwhile, Gerry puts the Golden Clipper to rights, and flies back to London. Assisted by Lieut. Huskin, he succeeds in bringing down the Zep, a flaming wreck, in Hyde Park.

(Now read on.)

A Counter-attack!

AS Gerry and Huskin stood there watching the blaze, two mounted policemen came towards them.

"What are you two doing here, and where did you come from?" asked one of them.

"Take us somewhere we can have a bath, officer," said Huskin dizzily, giving his name and rank. "This boy has saved London from destruction. Big Ling's army has lost this trick, anyhow."

Gerry was not listening. He was looking at a great form that bounded into the darkness among the tall trees and disappeared from sight! It was the form of Big Ling!

The crowds gathered in Park Lane from Hyde Park Corner to Marble Arch knew that something mysterious, something terrible, had happened. There was a smouldering airship in the Park, its dying fire lighting up the sward with a baleful glare. Dozens of policemen were arriving in vans, and armed soldiers were marching out of Wellington Barracks.

All sorts of rumours were being whispered, some even saying that another European war had broken out. Then something suddenly emerged from the shadow of the trees near Park Lane that sent the crowds scurrying pell-mell in all directions. It was the monster ape-man, Big Ling.

Blood was dripping from a wound in his breast, and for a moment he stood there, dwarfing everything around him. The traffic was blocking the road, but Big Ling, in one stride, cleared the thoroughfare.

A taxicab coming out of a side street struck his leg before the driver could pull up. Ling stooped, lifted the cab bodily, and then hurled it among the

traffic, where it crashed into a bus, throwing passengers into paroxysms of terror.

The crowd lost its nerve at the sight of the monster and ran hither and thither, filled with panic and impeding the movements of the bands of police, who still strove to handle the situation. Then, from the direction of Hyde Park Corner, came the sound of marching men. The soldiers had arrived, and the first battalion entered the Park at the double, an officer at their head. The latter was somewhat hazy as to the actual situation; his orders had been that an enemy airship had been brought down in the Park by Lieut. Huskin, of the R.A.F. and a flying ace. He halted his troops, and ran forward to a group of officials.

"Is Lieutenant Huskin here?" he inquired.

"That's my name, sir," said Huskin, stepping forward. "And this is Gerry—"

"The airship is burning itself out, sir!" interrupted a police-inspector. "But look over there!"

Out of the tangle of traffic in Park Lane the monstrous figure of the ape-man towered beside the flood-lit entrance to one of the newest hotels. Seizing the hotel doorkeeper, he hurled him high into the air, to fall and lay still almost at the officer's feet.

Wheeling round sharply, the officer ordered his men to charge. As the troops raised their rifles, Big Ling's great hands tore at the glass canopy, lifting the frame entirely from its socket in the wall. Another heave, and he raised it above his head and threw it as the soldiers took aim.

The missile broke in fragments as the rifles crashed out, and bullets whizzed perilously near the giant ape-man. Clutching at one window-sill after another, Big Ling hauled himself up

the front of the hotel. Hand-over-hand he went, turning a corner of the building for cover, and was within reach of the roof before a second volley could be discharged. Then, lying there on the tiles of the immense hotel, he tore at the roof and flung broken rafters and chimney-pots at the soldiers below.

This fusillade did not last for long, however, for the troops scattered at an order, and, pushing their way through the disorganised traffic and the mob, endeavoured to surround the hotel, and thus cut off Big Ling's retreat. Some were ordered to enter the hotel, while others were sent to position themselves on the top floors of neighbouring houses.

Gerry and Lieut. Huskin were among those who entered the hotel. Guests were panic-stricken, crouching in every corner, and the staff was helpless to preserve order. Up the stairs ran Gerry and Huskin with the officer, followed by a company of soldiers.

They reached the top floor, where, by means of an emergency ladder, they were able to climb up on to the flat roof. There was no sign of Ling, save the holes he had torn in the roof and the broken chimneys he had smashed in his rage.

"There he goes!" cried Gerry suddenly, pointing northward; and all eyes were turned in that direction.

Several buildings away, the figure of Ling could be seen as he leaped across the roofs, some of which gave way under his weight and impeded his progress. He fell more than once, and now the troops on the roof of the hotel had a good sight of him as he was outlined against the glare of the lights of Oxford Street.

The soldiers fired, but whether the ape-man was hit it was impossible to say; for, big though the target was, Ling was dodging and twisting with all the agility of a gorilla.

The ape-man succeeded in reaching Oxford Street at last, dropped to the ground, and then sped away up one of the side streets.

People who were in the vicinity saw the monster striding ahead, heedless of the terror his appearance occasioned. As Big Ling passed on his way, he snatched at the food which was exposed in small shops that were still open.

A fruiterer's window was raided, and its contents strewn across the road as Ling grabbed at the trays that were displayed. A butcher near Marylebone Road, who was closing for the night, was lifted by an immense paw and thrown into the street, while Ling thrust his other hand into the shop and tore the carcass of an ox from a hook. He flung the carcass over his shoulder and marched off, eating his stolen food as he did so.

His passage was swift and terrible, like the passing of a frightful dream. In two strides he was across Marylebone Road. Before those who saw him could believe their eyes, he was in the gloom of Regent's Park, where all trace of him disappeared.

The alarm had been telephoned to every district police station. Armoured cars had been summoned, and more troops had been rushed to Park Lane; but it was impossible to trail the monster with accuracy. By the time the news of his appearance in Marylebone had been sent to the authorities, he had vanished again.

Inquiries, however, showed that if he had entered Regent's Park, there were a dozen ways by which he could emerge.

Quickly a cordon of troops were thrown round the place. Machine-guns were hurriedly brought up. Searchlights were trained, and poured their beams into every likely corner, along every yard of the ground, and into the branches of every tree. All this took time, and while it was being carried out, scouts were scouring the outlying districts on swift motor-cycles and in cars in the hope of picking up a clue.

Little did the pursuers know that Big Ling was actually sitting within reach of their guns and within earshot of their massing.

For Ling had made for the Zoo within the park, and was at that very moment preparing for a counter-attack such as his pursuers did not dream.

While the searchlights were throwing their floods of light across the green-sward and into the clumps of trees, Big Ling sat on the ground near the Zoo pavilion. Around him roamed the lions he had let loose by tearing the bars of their cages asunder. Elephants which had borne children on their backs were standing behind him. Wolves were sneaking here and there, while bears crouched on the grass. Every animal was present at that strange meeting.

The peculiar sense which animals have when they meet their master had penetrated the blood of the inmates of the Zoo.

There were two among these dwellers of the jungle, however, who were rebels.

Alone of all that multitude of beasts, the tigers were unknown to the taming hand of Ling; and, although the massive brutes had, like the others, crawled from their cages at his command, the two natives of the Indian forests had not yet developed the slave-like attitude of the other creatures.

Ling had massed the animals where he might imbue them with his savage desire for revenge. He had spoken to them in the jungle growling, the forest method of communication that is the language of the beasts; but all the time

he knew that the tigers were suspicious. They were natives of a land he had never visited, and the sight of this ape-man had aroused in them the ferocity exhibited to their own keepers.

One of them, a great striped beast, kept up a continuous low growl, first raising its head and glaring at Ling, then snarling and clawing the ground menacingly. The carcass of the ox which Ling had stolen from the butcher's shop during his travels had been devoured by the lions and the beasts that fed on flesh. The bones lay around, and this tiger, having scented blood and having eaten flesh, kept eyeing Ling.

The huge ape-man rose to his feet and sent out a loud cry, the howl that had brought the beasts to him in the forests of Africa. It was the war-cry of the jungle. Then he made for the direction of the main gateway with the beasts at his heels.

As he did so, however, the tiger made a bound and landed on Ling's broad shoulders, slashing at him with claws and teeth.

Down went Ling, rolling over and over, his great hands seeking the hold he knew in such a fight. In a matter of moments his great fingers spread like a steel band round the tiger's throat.

Spend a Few Minutes
of the
LONG WINTER EVENINGS
writing

GREYFRIARS LIMERICKS!

D. Bradshaw, of 71, Coldcotes Avenue, Harehills, Leeds, will be pleased with the TOPPING POCKET WALLET awarded him for sending in the following prize-winning effort:

Said Ocker to Potter: "What-ho!
A run on my mo'-bike I'll go."
But the run ended quickly
In a hawthorn bush prickly,
Bringing cries full of anguish and woe.

Set to work on a limerick now,
chum, and win one of these
handy - for - the - pocket wallets
YOURSELF.

Then, heaving himself to his knees, Big Ling raised the tiger in his powerful arms, heedless of its wild clawing, and sent it crashing to the ground, to take no further part in the fight.

Sending forth another howl, the huge ape-man moved towards the gate. One heave, and the sidepost was drawn from its socket, and the gate crashed to the ground, and away across the park streamed the freed pack of savage creatures, let loose on London!

For a moment Ling listened to the riot of sound. The machine-guns broke out in a rattle of death. The searchlights flashed up and down, then steadied. Ling leaned on the broken gate and watched.

He saw the troops pouring a hail of bullets into the maddened animals. Some of them broke the cordon and escaped. For long time the ape-man watched the battle; then, with a savage grin on his face, he turned and tottered towards the Mappin terrace. Into one of the caves in that terrace he dragged his limbs, and lay down to rest, listening eagerly.

He had killed in plenty that night. Two night-watchmen of the Zoo had been slain by him, besides the people

he had ~~slain~~ when he escaped from Hyde Park. The lust for killing was strong within him. His Mongolian face had assumed the aspect of a gorilla. His wounds gave him no thought. They would heal as other wounds had healed. He lay, listening and watching.

After a long time his quick ears heard a stealthy footstep on the gravel outside. Someone was moving by the terrace.

A moment later a voice whispered his name:

"Ling, are you there?"

The ape-man crawled out of the cave in which he had stowed his bulk.

"Is that you, Stein?"

"Yes. Come!"

Big Ling stood up, and saw the other on the steps beside the polar bears' pool. Together they slipped through the deserted grounds.

"I arrived just in time, Ling," said Stein. "They'll be searching soon. Everything is ready."

He piloted Ling under the bridge towards the canal. They entered the water and waded under the bridge, climbing the bank some distance down. Then they clambered over the railings, close to where a large pantechicon was drawn up. The doors of the pantechicon were open, and Big Ling slipped inside.

Stein closed the doors, mounted the driver's seat, and drove off, passing through the police cordon and the crowds that were gathered in the street.

Billy to the Rescue!

THE telephone-bell in the brightly lit room in the War Office rang furiously, and the Chief lifted the receiver, with a sigh.

It was after one o'clock in the morning, and he had been receiving and answering calls incessantly for some hours. Mostly they were calls giving him details of the chase of Big Ling and the outbreak at the Zoo.

So far as the latter was concerned, the late calls had been reassuring. Most of the wild animals had already been accounted for, while many of them had been slain by the machine-guns. But of Big Ling there had been no sign. It was expected that he would be discovered when daylight came, however.

But this call made the Chief sit up rigid in his chair.

"This is Billy Murchie speaking!" came a voice over the wires, tense and anxious.

"Billy Murchie?" cried the Chief. "You mean you are the person who has been sending us the mysterious messages of warning?"

"Yes, that's me. I'm in London—in a house somewhere; I don't know the district. I was brought here to-night with Stein, the madman who is behind Big Ling!"

"What is your number?"

"I don't know. Listen to what I have to say. I've only got a moment to speak. There are bargeloads of apes in the Thames now! They are going to attack London—"

The voice died away, as if the speaker had been forced from the instrument. The Chief listened eagerly.

"Hallo, hallo!" he shouted several times.

But there was no response.

A knock sounded on the Chief's door. "Come in!"

Into the room marched Gerry and Lieutenant Huskin. Both were weary and tired after the night's events, and the Chief turned to them swiftly.

"You are Gerry, the boy I have heard so much about? Tell me your story right away. I have just had a telephone call from your friend, Billy Murchie."

"From Billy?" cried Gerry quickly. "Is he in London?"

"Evidently. He tells me that there are bargeloads of apes in the Thames. I want you to tell me in a few words how you came into touch with these apes. Hurry!"

"We were made prisoners by them when we were on a flying record-breaking trip to the Cape. I escaped, and Billy was taken prisoner with a girl named Lola. They are led by Big Ling, who has been taught by a renegade called Stein."

"That's all right. I have reports here that tell me something of this. I sent for you two to be brought here after this Big Ling was chased across the roofs in Park Lane. Lieutenant Huskin, you will write out a report of how you came into this affair, but in the meantime tell me a few details."

"I was sent up in the plane with this boy, sir, to pursue the airship. We brought it down in Hyde Park—"

"And we have other planes up now searching for any further raiders," interrupted the chief, as if speaking to himself.

Then he turned towards Gerry.

"Now I want to hear the whole story, boy, so far as you know it, of the organisation behind this fantastic affair. Do you know any of the plans of these apes? What is their object?"

Details, details, details were what the chief wanted, for the events of the evening had crowded so closely that everything seemed a jumble. The official mind wanted to meet an attack in the usual leisurely manner of officialdom, and Gerry was on his feet, about to give what information he could, when a noise outside broke in on the room.

The Chief rushed to the window that overlooked Whitehall. From the wide thoroughfare came the strangest rumbling, then howls broke out. The telephone bell rang again and again.

Gerry grabbed the receiver.

"Is that you, Billy?" he yelled.

But it was not Billy. It was a voice asking for the Chief, who snatched the receiver quickly.

In a moment he dropped it like a stone, and began to press buttons summoning assistants from different parts of the building.

"It is true," he said, his face white and set. "Apes have been brought up the Thames in barges. They are disembarking at Westminster. That was Scotland Yard—What's the matter?"

His query ended in a gasp of terror, for the door of the room had been flung open, and a gigantic figure, that filled them with terror, entered the room. It was Big Ling!

He stood viewing them, gleating over the impression his appearance had created, his shoulders bowed and touching the ceiling, his gigantic head thrust forward.

His eyes, filled with malice and grim hate, were on Gerry.

"I've come in time!" he said growlingly. "Your friend tried to speak our plans over what you call a telephone. We got him in time. You must not be allowed to tell what you know."

He stepped forward, brushing the table and the chairs aside with his leg,

and laid a hand on Gerry's shoulder. With the other hand he tore the telephone-receiver from its position, ripped the cord from the wall, and flung it into a corner.

"I am Big Ling, King of the World!" he cried, in a voice that thundered through the room. "My troops are in your streets!"

He waved his arm in a magnificent gesture, and gave vent to a howl that was answered from the street. In vain Gerry fought against that clutch. He might as well have tried to escape from the claws of a steel trap. Ling held him by the collar and dragged him towards the door.

As he did so, Gerry saw Ling's mighty arm raised towards the chandelier that hung from the ceiling.

One tug, and the lights were extinguished, and half the ceiling came down in a smother of plaster and mortar.

Along the corridor and down the wide stairs strode the giant. Reaching the door, he raised his hand in salute to his apes, who were massed in front of the War Office.

An ape-man stepped forward, seized Gerry in his arms, and ran round the corner. A large saloon car stood there, its engine throbbing.

Into the car Gerry was bundled, and the ape-man followed, still clutching the boy in a grip that almost strangled him.

Next moment the car gathered pace, swept out into Whitehall, through into Trafalgar Square and then up Charing Cross Road, to disappear into the night.

Half an hour or so passed before the car drew up in front of a tall building in a terrace of large houses. Here Gerry was dragged out and carried up a flight of stone steps. The door was opened, and he was bundled into the hall, and then pushed into a room, the door of which was afterwards closed on him.

It was a perfectly bare room in which Gerry found himself. Over the window a massive sheet of heavy material had been hung, and the only light in the place was a tall candle that was stuck on the mantelpiece. The faint glimmer of the light added a weird condition to the atmosphere of the place. There was a curious smell, too, everywhere; it was the odour of gorilla.

But Gerry's eyes had been busy as he was dragged up the stone steps. He had observed that the house was one of several which had "To Let" boards in front of them. He heard mutterings beyond the door of the huge apartment.

The door opened after a while, and in stepped Stein, followed by a squad of the young giants who were the lieutenants of the ape armies.

They squatted on the floor, forming a semicircle on both sides of Stein, muscular half-men, all of them, gorillas from the waist downwards, Mongolian from the waist upward.

"Stand over there!" commanded Stein sternly; and Gerry took up a position facing his captors.

"You are going to be tried for your life," went on Stein. "This is the court and these are your judges. The charge against you is that you are an enemy of Ling's army, that you were instrumental in destroying the Zeppelin and its crew. Have you anything to say in your defence?"

"Yes," said Gerry, between his teeth. "And I'd do it again if I had the chance!"

Stein turned to the ape-men surrounding him.

"You hear that?" he cried fiercely. "The prisoner has admitted his guilt and defies us."

A murmur of anger arose from the ape-men as they glared at Gerry.

"Listen to me," said Stein venomously, turning to Gerry. "The verdict of this company is that you have merited death. Is that not so, men of the forest?"

Without exception, the ape-men raised their hands to their heads and bowed.

"Death!" they cried in deep tones that sent a shudder through the boy.

"Death it will be," said Stein, "but the manner of it will be left for the final decision of Ling. He will be here before long. For the present he is busy disorganising London."

Stein then gave orders for Gerry to be tied up, and a dozen hands were laid on the boy, and he was roped securely and thrown in a corner.

Meanwhile, Stein took from his pocket a large map, which he laid on the floor. Then, taking the candle from the mantelpiece, he placed it beside the map. Next he bent down and carefully marked off several points on the map.

"Our work must be done in the darkness," he said, addressing his ape-men, "for it can then be done with the best results. I have here marked the various points which we shall attack before dawn to-morrow. The racing car is at the door. I will do the driving. Each one of you will come when I call for you. The first is you—"

He pointed to a young ape-man who stood up and squared his shoulders.

"We shall carry bombs. It will be your duty to throw them where and when I say. First, we shall wreck the force that drives this city—we are going to the electrical works. We shall break into them by swiftness. One bomb will wreck the machines that make electricity. Are you ready?"

"I am ready."

"And you others remain here. I shall be back soon."

Stein was in the act of rising to his feet, when a voice rang out:

"Sit still, all of you! One move of a finger, and I'll blow you all to pieces!"

Gerry twisted his head round and uttered a cry of surprised delight, for Billie Murchie was standing on the threshold, holding a Mills bomb threateningly above his head.

Billy's face was white and drawn, but his set expression told the group of ape-men that he was in deadly earnest.

"Crawl this way, Gerry!" he said. "Can you make it?"

"You watch me, old son!"

Across the floor Gerry managed to wriggle until he lay beside the door.

"Now out into the corridor, Gerry," said Billy anxiously. "I'll fix this bunch."

Gerry obeyed, while his chum held the bomb menacingly.

The ape-men had not stirred a muscle. Stein was about to leap to his feet, but Billy raised his arm to throw, and Stein slid back to the floor.

"Lola!"

A girl's form came out of the darkness at the end of the passage. She knew the cue, and in a trice had cut Gerry's bonds, pushed a revolver into his hand, and urged him towards the door.

"I won't go without Billy!" said Gerry.

"I'm coming, Gerry!"

Out of the room Billy leaped, slamming the door behind him and locking it. He withdrew the pin from the bomb, laid it on the floor, and then raced away with Gerry and Lola.

Stein's car was by the pavement. Into it the three scrambled, Billy taking the wheel. A moment later they were speeding down the street.

They had gone some distance, when

the girl, who was in the back seat of the car, uttered a scream.

"What is it, Lola?"

"Someone—something is climbing up the back of the car!"

As Gerry turned, the windows of the car suddenly darkened, and there came the sound of scratching above their heads.

The girl screamed again.

"It is one of them!" she cried. "He is climbing on the roof!"

At that moment a hairy arm appeared at the window beside Gerry. A bright brass bracelet was on the wrist, and the fingers were fumbling for the door-handle.

"It is Manbe—the one who was our gaoler!" cried the girl.

Gerry drew his revolver and fired. A grunt of pain was heard, and the arm was withdrawn.

(Continued on next page.)

COME INTO THE OFFICE, BOYS!

Always glad to hear from you, chums, so drop me a line to the following address: The Editor, The "Magnet" Library, The Amalgamated Press, Ltd., The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. A stamped, addressed envelope will ensure a reply.

WELL, chums, for many years now—twenty-six years to be precise—I have picked up my pen at this festive season of the year to wish you all the old, old wish of **A VERY MERRY CHRISTMAS AND A HAPPY AND PROSPEROUS NEW YEAR!**

And, I need hardly tell you, that I hope I'll go on wishing you this same wish for many, many years to come! Every day now Christmas cards are coming in by the hundreds from readers who are scattered all over the earth, and I can tell you I appreciate them! Many of those readers are "old boys," and there is a bond of affection between them and their old paper which seems to be strengthened as the years roll on. I feel that all of us, new readers, old readers, and, of course, my staff, form a happy family bound together by the traditions of the **MAGNET**, and you may take it from me that those traditions are going to be worthily carried on.

And now, here is a greeting to you all from the man who has won a place in your estimation for his wonderful school stories. As toastmasters say at big banquets: "Pray silence, gentlemen, for Mr. Frank Richards!"

Here is his Christmas greeting to you all: "All you wish yourselves, chums, is the heartfelt wish of one who likes to think that he can number you all amongst his sincerest friends. May you all live long and be happy, and may our friendship be ever strengthened in the years to come.

"FRANK RICHARDS."

By the way, how do you like this week's set of free coloured pictures? Aren't they really top-notchers? How glad you must feel that you're a reader of the **MAGNET** and able to come into possession of so wonderful a collection of pictures, the like of which has never before been presented free by any other boy's paper. Don't forget that next Saturday's bumper number of the **MAGNET** will contain another set of coloured pictures to stick in your album. Don't miss them, whatever you do!

THE much-discussed Indian rope trick has bobbed up again, and I've had a letter from a Halifax reader who claims that

HE KNOWS HOW TO DO IT!

You all know the trick, of course. An Indian magician suddenly takes a rope and throws it into the air. The rope stiffens and stays upright in the air, while

a small boy actually climbs up it. There have been so many arguments about how it is done—and even about whether it ever has been done—that perhaps this latest solution of the mystery may interest you.

According to this reader, the rope has a rubber tube inside it. When it is thrown into the air a hidden pump forces a tremendous pressure of water into the tube. There are also three invisible silver wires attached to the rope like the guys of a tent, and these are held by unseen helpers in the crowd. They hold the rope steady enough for a very light, small, and agile boy to climb.

That reminds me of a yarn I heard of a conjurer who was travelling in China. He gave a performance before a mighty mandarin out there, and the mandarin was greatly impressed. When the conjurer left, after a stay of several days, he told the mandarin he would do

AN EVEN MORE MARVELLOUS PIECE OF MAGIC!

He said that if the mandarin climbed to the topmost tower of his palace on a certain day, several months later, he would find his name written on the opposite hillside in letters of blood-red.

The conjurer confesses that he never went back to see if this actually happened, but it should have done! For, during his stay, he had been on that hillside every day and he had sown the seeds of a quick-growing and blood-red flower, forming them into the characters of the mandarin's name. The day he had told the mandarin to look from the tower was the day the conjurer reckoned the flowers would be in bloom!

I HAVE been looking up a few more THINGS YOU'D HARDLY BELIEVE

in response to many requests from readers. Here they are:

Feathered Huntsmen.—Golden eagles have been trained by a tribe in Central Asia to hunt for game. In China cormorants are used to catch fish. A collar round the bird's neck prevents it from swallowing the fish, which it takes back to its master.

The Steeplejack Cow.—A man found a cow on the roof of his house in North Calcutta. He had been in the habit of giving it food, but, as he was away from home, the cow entered the house. Not finding him on the ground floor, it climbed up the stairs from floor to floor until it reached the roof! The local fire brigade rescued it!

Crows Like Golf Balls.—Golfers in Australia are perturbed by the number of crows which prey on the golf courses and steal the balls. Rewards have been offered for dead crows, but the crows are too wily. Local boys are earning extra pocket-money by acting as crow-scarers.

Is He the Oldest Swimmer?—A man in Colorado swims regularly, although he is a hundred and one years old. He claims to be able to beat most local swimmers for speed.

SOME of you fellows are certainly adventurous—and ambitious. Here is a letter from Tom Gibbons, of Helensburg, who wants to go

PROSPECTING FOR GOLD!

Is there much to be done nowadays, he asks? Certainly there is, so long as the would-be gold-finder confines himself to "placer" mining, which does not require much knowledge of geology and minerals. "Placer" mining means washing deposits of sand, gravel, and debris to discover whether it contains gold. The beginner must learn to "pan"—that is, to wash out lighter material from a pan while retaining the heavier substance. If Tom wants to practise he can mix some iron and lead filings with sand and light gravel in a pan, then let water drip in the pan, and wash it round until he separates the filings from the other matter.

Prospectors in certain parts of the United States and Canada are finding "pay dirt" along streams where former placer deposits have been worked out, because even when a deposit has been worked out, a certain amount of gold has been left behind, and in time this has become concentrated in new deposits.

Needless to say there is not a fortune to be made in placer mining nowadays, or the big commercial gold-mining companies would set to work. But there is still enough gold to be found to make things pay for a solitary prospector who does not mind the loneliness and monotony of washing tons of dirt in order to obtain ounces of gold.

There's a first-rate "New Year" yarn for you next week, entitled:

"BUNTER, THE CRASHER!"

By Frank Richards,

in which all your favourite characters play a prominent part. Mr. Richards has put his very best into the yarn, which for excitement and enjoyment has all other school stories "licked to a frazzle."

Stuart Martin is going very strong, too, with "When the Great Apes Came." I have received letters galore congratulating me on selecting this magnificent yarn, which will add to the long list of **MAGNET** successes. Don't miss next week's full-of-thrills chapters.

You'll find chuckles galore in the "Greyfriars Herald," while "Linesman" will be answering more Soccer queries.

Most important of all—don't forget that there will be another set of superb coloured pictures FREE with this issue.

YOUR EDITOR.

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,350.

"The roof, Gerry—fire through the roof!" called Billy, at the same time pressing his foot on the accelerator and manipulating the steering-wheel in an effort to throw the unwanted passenger off.

Crack, crack! went Gerry's revolver, as he aimed directly above his head.

Crack, crack!

Something slid past the window at the back, and the car seemed to leap forward.

Lola looked back, and peered cautiously through the rear window.

"He is gone!" she cried excitedly. "It is Manbe! He lies still!"

The car's headlights picked out a figure standing in the middle of the road. It was a policeman, and the man in blue was flashing his lamp as a signal for them to stop.

Billy put his foot on the brakes.

"Now, then, what's all this?"

The policeman blew his whistle for assistance, and then flashed his lamp into the car, revealing the girl in her jungle attire, and the two boys.

"What are you doing with that gun?" was the policeman's next question.

In a few words Gerry explained the situation. Other policemen arrived, followed by an inspector.

The latter scrutinised the trio closely, listening to the jerky explanations.

Suddenly he became alert.

"All right," he said. "I've heard of you two at the Yard. So you're Billy Murchie, then? All right, we'll have the house you describe surrounded right away, and get hold of this Stein and his ape-men. This has been a night. What with the animals at the Zoo breaking loose, a monster in Park Lane, and trouble in Whitehall—"

He turned and issued some orders to the policemen, who ran off, blowing their whistles as they ran.

"Where are you going in this car?" asked the inspector.

"I was thinking of making for the War Office," replied Billy. "I can give them information about the gorilla attack—"

"There's a police-box down the road. Drive there, and I'll come with you. I want reinforcements to surround that house—and machine-guns, too!"

"Be careful with the ammunition, inspector," said Billy quickly. "The cellars of that house are stored with bombs and stuff. Here's the police-box!"

They drew up, and the inspector and Billy dashed to the box, its bright light burning above, twinkling like a star to attract attention.

The inspector lifted the receiver and made his call.

Impatiently he waited, urging the operator to hasten. While he waited he was questioning Billy, who outlined the position swiftly.

"Stein came over with me, having arranged to meet Ling at the Zoo at a

certain hour. The Zoo business was only a kick-off, so to speak. One of their armies commandeered some barges in the Thames. Their only hope is to make sudden raids until they have consolidated their positions—"

"How many armies have they got?"

"I don't know, but they have several, all under the leadership of ape-men like the one Gerry shot dead a minute ago on top of the car—"

The inspector broke off suddenly, and darted from the box into the street.

A terrible explosion had rent the air, and some distance off a fierce glare lit up the sky. Flames and smoke rose in a pillar into the heavens.

"It's the house you've escaped from!" he cried. "They have blown it up!"

He dashed back to the police-box, lifted up the receiver, and began shouting into the mouthpiece. Presently a puzzled expression came over his face.

"They can't get any connection with the Yard or with the War Office!" he said, in a strange voice. "I wonder if—"

He lifted the receiver again and tried other connections—local police stations, reserve corps.

He put the receiver down at last, and wiped his brow.

"The Chief is taking command," he said. "I'm to take you to Whitehall at—"

"But if the gorillas are there—"

"There are no gorillas in Whitehall now," replied the inspector. "I'm told that all is quiet there. The Chief, however, can't get in touch with the Yard. I'm to go down direct and make my report. Come on!"

The car sped along, and it was a good thing that the inspector was with the party, for they were held up time and again by officers hurrying to the scene of the explosion.

"There are short cuts we can take," the inspector told Billy. "Don't worry about speed limits."

They whirled through the main thoroughfares, reached Oxford Street, and then sped down Regent Street into Piccadilly Circus. Here a cordon of soldiers barred the way, and they had to cut through a side street, only to be confronted by more cordons of police and soldiers.

"Seen any gorillas, inspector?" asked an officer, as the car drew up before an inquiring official.

"I was about to ask you that. What's happened to the mob that got into Whitehall?"

"Don't know. We are only just on the scene. But the gorillas have gone. They raided Covent Garden—cleared the stalls and the shops of everything eatable, I hear. As for Whitehall—I don't know."

(Billy & Co. are booked for the biggest surprise ever when they reach the War Office! Don't miss next week's full-of-thrills chapters, whatever you do!)

THE GHOST OF WHARTON LODGE!

(Continued from page 23.)

hear him, and vanish before he could get to close quarters.

He gripped the Holiday Annual silently and took careful and accurate aim.

Whiz!

Crash!

"Yooooooooop!" roared the ghost.

The Annual flew—and so did the ghost! The bulky volume landed on a fat nose, and the ghost flew backwards into the passage, and sat down with a heavy bump!

"Urrrrggh!" came a wild and breathless splutter. "Wurrgh! Urrrrgh! Ow! Wow! Urrrrggh!"

"Got him!" gasped Bob.

He leaped from the bed, and rushed to the door. At the sound of his movements, the ghostly figure leaped up. There was a pattering of rapid footsteps! Bob rushed down the passage in pursuit. Something white tangled in his feet and he stumbled. It was the sheet thrown down by the ghost as he fled.

"Oh!" gasped Bob as he stumbled over.

Bump!

The pattering footsteps died away. Bob Cherry scrambled up, groped along the passage for the switch, and turned on the light.

But the passage was empty, except for himself! The ghost had vanished!

Bob Cherry looked up and down the passage. He even glanced up the attic stair. But there was nothing to be seen—and he turned off the light at last, picked up his Holiday Annual, and went back to bed. For some little time he stayed awake, rather hoping that the ghost would put in another appearance. But he fell asleep at last!

He had, in fact, laid the ghost!

In the attic, Billy Bunter was tenderly caressing his fat little nose, which felt considerably damaged from the impact of the Holiday Annual. Bunter had not expected that whizzing book. As so often occurs, it was the unexpected that had happened. Billy Bunter was fed-up with playing ghost. It was getting too exciting!

How his extraordinary visit to Wharton Lodge was going to end, Billy Bunter did not yet know! But the ghost of Wharton Lodge had walked for the last time.

THE END.

(Now look out for next week's grand New Year and Free Gift Number of the MAGNET, which will contain another rollicking fine yarn of Harry Wharton & Co., entitled: "BUNTER, THE CRASHER!" It's full of fun and exciting situations, chums. Be sure to order your copy EARLY!)

INCREASED my own height to 6ft. 3ins.!! T. H., age 16, to 6ft. 1 T. F., age 21, from 5ft. 5 to 5ft. 10! Ross System is Genuine. Enrol and Watch Yourself Grow! Fee £2 2s Particulars 1/6 stamp.—P. ROSS, Height Specialist, Scarborough

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All applications for Advertisement Space in this publication should be addressed to the Advertisement Manager, The MAGNET, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

CAN ANY GENT OBLIGE?

Begging your pardon, young gents, but can any of you lend me a powerful microscope?

I want to have a look for the Christmas Box Master Skinner promised me last term!—Wm. GOSLING, Porter's Lodge, Greyfriars.



THE NEW Greyfriars Herald



NON-SWIMMER WANTED

To skate over thin ice and fall in, so that I can rescue him from drowning. This is the only way I can imagine of overcoming the pater's hostility since reading my rotten School Report!—G. BULSTRODE, c/o "GREYFRIARS HERALD."

No. 65 (New Series).

EDITED BY MARY WHARTON.

December 30th, 1933.

"MANNERS MAKYTH MAN"

Bunter Laments Lost Chivalry

Having failed to discover Bunter Court, our reporter had a look round the suburbs and found Billy Bunter in front of an enormous fire in the dining-room of a modest villa, munching chocolates. He nodded thoughtfully, when asked for a New Year message to the world. "That's easy," he said. "My New Year message to the world is: 'Be Better Mannered!'"

MY WORST AND BEST EXPERIENCE

By Bolsover Major

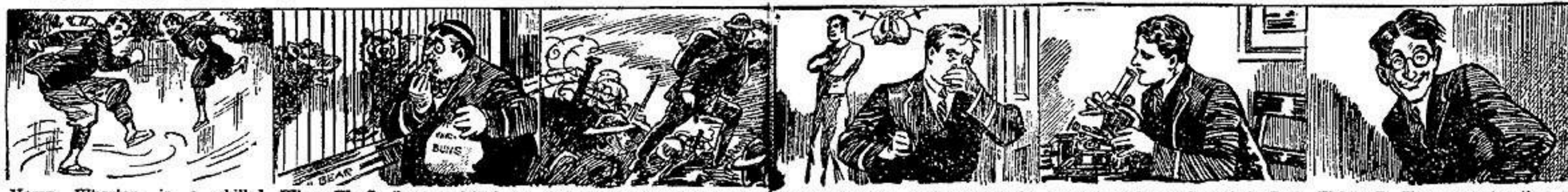
It was in the last week of last Christmas term that I struck my worst experience, and I don't mind broadcasting it as a warning to others. When I went into Courtfield to buy a few Christmas presents, there was nothing but peace and goodwill in my heart. It's true that on the way I tweaked one fag's nose and twisted another fag's ear, and knocked the heads of two other fags together, but it was done in a purely jovial spirit. When I got to Courtfield, however, peace and goodwill took a back seat. The shopping crowds were enough to try any man's patience. They jostled me off the pavement, trod on my toes in the shops, and jabbed me in the eyes with their elbows when I sat down to have a cup of tea. By the time I got back to Courtfield Station, well laden with purchases, I don't mind telling you I was not in a very good mood. The train for Friarsdale was pretty full. I made a rush for the only vacant seat I could see; but a grinning youth, who wasn't hampered with parcels, calmly stepped in front of me and claimed it. It was the last straw! Having dumped my parcels on the rack

My best experience was at a Christmas party last year, for reasons I couldn't name, everybody seemed to have a violent fancy to me. The fellows plied me with presents and hung on every word I spoke, while the girls circled round me, and almost begged for the privilege of dancing with me. Even the duns seemed to follow my movements with fascinated eyes, and fall over themselves with delight when I spoke to them. Could it, I wondered, that I had at last got into a circle where my true merits were appreciated? What was the explanation, it was jolly satisfying to me to be the life of the evening, and I enjoyed as I've enjoyed no other party before or since. Afterwards, I learned the reason for all the fuss they had been expecting a star named Alfonso Darker to turn up, and I happened to look rather like him! But I didn't learn till late in the evening, and the



It turned out that the grinning youth was Young Slasher, the featherweight champion of Wapshot! Moral: Before you tackle any grinning youth who weighs a stone less than you weigh yourself, see that his hands are tied behind his back! We feel sure it would have been a complete "frost" any case.

WOULD YOU BELIEVE IT?



Harry Wharton is a skilled "figure" skater, and has given some remarkable exhibitions on the Sark. Marjorie Hazeldene is the best of the Cliff House girls. When W. G. Bunter visited the London Zoo, he took a huge bag of buns—but not for the bears! Bunter cruelly "scooped" the buns, while the bears looked on helplessly! Captain "Larry" Lascelles, a young subaltern, won the D.M. in the Great War, 1914-18. Very few people know about it, however—"Larry" being a modest and retiring hero! Percy Bolsover gives lessons in the art of self-defence. His clients frequently leave his study after the first lesson with black eyes and swollen noses—and they don't come back! Besides boxing and football, Dick Russell goes in for Natural History, and enjoys studying minute organisms under a powerful microscope. He has some weird specimens in stock! Fisher T. Fish estimates that if all his money-making schemes this term had "come off," he would now be worth roughly £50,000. Unfortunately, however, his schemes have left him 'broke'!

COKER ORDERS MORNING DIP

But Guests Laugh Last

On waking up the first morning after their arrival at Coker's house, Potter and Greene were surprised to find their clothes missing and bathing-costumes and bath-wraps lying in their place. Ere they had recovered from the first shock of this discovery, Coker himself came along the landing, whistling cheerfully. "Show a leg, you wasters!" he greeted boisterously, as Potter and Greene looked out from their respective bed-rooms. "Ready for your morning dip?" "Our morning WHAT?" howled Potter and Greene in chorus, with a horrified look at the icicles hanging outside the landing window. "Your morning dip!" repeated Coker, with a hearty laugh at their evident surprise. "I believe in starting the day well with a dip in the river before brekker. No rooting about in a stuffy bed-room for me!" "But the river's frozen!" shrieked Potter. "Only to a depth of about two inches; we can soon break through that," smiled Coker. "Somehow, I thought you slackers would jib, so I got the gardener to take your clobber to the other side of the river. Unless you want a mile walk to the nearest bridge, you'll simply have to go across—see? Well, let's go!" And Coker, who was also attired in bathing-costume and bath-wrap, led the way down the stairs. To say that Potter and Greene objected would be putting it mildly. Their eyes goggled, and they foamed at the mouth as they followed their leader. But, knowing Coker, they knew that all the objections in the world would make no difference to him; so willy-nilly they tramped with him across the ice-bound fields to the river. As Coker had anticipated, they

LANGUID LORD'S LUXURIOUS TOBOGGAN

Winter Sports a la Mauly

If you imagine that tobogganing at Mauleverer Towers is just a matter of getting out an old soap-box and sliding down the hill, you've made a big mistake. Mauly does things in style, believe us. First he tells the Butler that he is going tobogganing. The Butler tells the Head Footman, and the Head Footman tells the team of Garage Hands to the front of the Towers. We need hardly say that the toboggan is a handsome, plush-upholstered affair, designed by one of London's most exclusive firms of body-builders, with seats for a driver and three footmen, in addition, of course, to Mauly himself. As soon as Mauly has donned his fur coat, top-hat, and mittens, and been carried to the cushioned passenger-seat, and the electric foot-warmers have been adjusted to the required heat, the toboggan is hauled to the top of a hill and released. The run having been accomplished in safety, Mauly is hauled back to the Towers, and carried up to bed for a well-earned rest. And that is tobogganing at Mauleverer Towers! If we've slightly exaggerated the facts, we apologise. The fact is, this is the first time our Winter Sports Representative has visited Mauleverer Towers, and he's so overwhelmed by it that his impressions are apt to get a little distorted!



Second Footman. The Second Footman passes the word to the Third Footman, and the Third Footman passes it on to the next three—who pass it on to the Page.

Our New Year Resolved—

THAT we're going to make the "Greyfriars Herald" even better and brighter than before. THAT we'll worthily uphold the fine old traditions of Greyfriars. THAT those who add to the laurels of the old school in field or Form-room shall receive our unstinted praise. THAT rogues, bullies, bad sports, and boasters shall be fearlessly exposed in our columns. THAT we'll anoint the first spring poet who calls on us with a bottle of best blue-black ink. THAT we'll strew Billy Bunter in little pieces all over the Remove passage every time he burlesques the Editor's tea. THAT we'll buy Dicky Nugent a book on Spelling—if he'll promise not to burn it in the Form-room grate during the next Second Form herring-rying jamboree! THAT any request from Mr. Quelch to publish the first 1,000,000 words of his "History of Greyfriars" in serial form, shall be gently, but firmly, declined. THAT we're going to bump Coker every time he offers to become Editor. THAT even if he stops offering to become Editor, we're going to bump him just the same!

'LONZY'S LITTLE LETTERS

Dear Editor,—Peradventure your perceptive powers have recently intimated to your intelligence the circumstantial phenomenon of the superimposition on my physiognomy of a discoloration particularly related to one of my visual organs. May I, in justice to my known views on the pacification of juvenile social animate existence and my preference for pusillanimity over pugnacity, asseverate with the utmost vehemence that the ophthalmic irregularity revealed is not the consequence of a fistical encounter, but the sequel to an inordinately violent causation of contiguity between the anterior portion of my anatomy and the study door? Earnestly yours, ALONZO TODD.

(If all this means; "I didn't get my black-eye from a scrap, but from a bash from the study door," then, 'Lonzy, we believe you!—Ed.)