

**SPECIAL CHRISTMAS NUMBER
NEXT FRIDAY!**

The
**Penny
Popular**

No.
268.

Three Complete Stories of—
HARRY WHARTON & Co.—JIMMY SILVER & Co.—TOM MERRY & Co.



“IT’S FREEZING!” GASPED BUNTER.

*(An Amusing Incident from the Long Complete Story of Harry Wharton & Co.,
contained in this Issue.)*

THE GREYFRIARS CARNIVAL!

A Magnificent Long Complete Story, dealing with the
Early Adventures of Harry Wharton & Co. at Greyfriars.

By FRANK RICHARDS.

THE FIRST CHAPTER. Not Freezing.

OH-H-H! It's freezing!" Billy Bunter made that statement, in a lugubrious tone, as he sat up in bed in the Remove dormitory at Greyfriars, in the cold winter morning.

If there was anything Billy Bunter disliked more than missing a meal, it was getting up in the morning. And in the winter he disliked it more than ever. The clang of the rising bell always had a doleful sound, like a knell of doom, to the ears of the Owl of the Remove. And now it was ringing through the frosty air, with an energy that showed that Gosling, who was pulling the rope, wasn't pleased either at getting up early.

Clang, clang, clang!
"Oh! Br-r-r! Gr-r-r! It's freezing!"

Bob Cherry jumped out of bed with a single bound.

"Freezing! Jolly good!"
"Oh, really, Cherry—"

Bob, regardless of the cold, ran to the nearest window and looked out into the Close. He could see only a dim vision of leafless trees, for the frost was wet on the panes, and he turned a wrathful eye upon Billy Bunter.

"You young ass!" he exclaimed. "What do you mean? It's not freezing—it's thawing."

"I—I—m-m-meant it was jolly cold, Cherry."

Bob Cherry snorted.

"Ass! Fathead! You made me think we were going to get some skating at last, and now—Br-r-r-r!"

"It's j-j-j-jolly c-c-c-cold—"

"Oh, get out!"

"I—I say, you fellows, do you th-think Mr. Quelch would let me have my breakfast in bed this morning if you t-t-told him I was ill?"

"Yes—I don't think!" said Bob Cherry. "Shall I help you out?"

"Ow! Keep off! Keep that beast away, Wharton!"

Harry Wharton laughed as he turned out.

"By Jove! It's jolly cold, whether it's thawing or not, Bob. Make an effort and jump out, Billy. No good shivering there. That's the way to catch cold."

"I—I feel ill this morning—"

"I'll give you some medicine," said Bob Cherry, unhooking his braces, and coming towards Bunter's bed. "I'll teach you to tell yarns about it's freezing, when I've been waiting for it to freeze for a week or more. I—"

"Ow!"

"Thwack!"

The braces fell forcibly across the bed-clothes, and the fat form beneath. Bunter wriggled, but he could not face the cold air, and he yelled instead of getting up.

"Ow! Yow! Leave off! Yah! Yaroo!"

"Up you get!"

"I—I—I'm ill, you know. Yaroo!"

"Well, your lungs aren't affected, anyway," grinned Nugent, as Bunter's yells rang through the dormitory; and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh remarked that the lungfulness of the honourable Bunter was terrific.

The fat junior skipped out of bed, and clothing himself from head to foot, left only his face exposed. He went to the washstand, and proceeded gingerly to rub his face with a sponge. Then he towelled it quickly.

"Going to wash this morning?" asked Bulstrode.

"Oh, really, Bulstrode, I have washed! It's jolly cold!"

Billy Bunter was never much given to washing. And as the weather grew colder and colder, so his amount of washing in the morning was observed to grow smaller by degrees and beautifully less.

Bob Cherry shook his head seriously.

"We shall have to take this matter in hand," he remarked. "The Upper Fourth fellows have begun chipping about it, too. I think we ought to make an example of Bunter."

"Let's yank him along to a bath-room now, and shove him in," suggested Skinner.

Bunter made a rush for the door. In two seconds he was outside the dormitory and speeding downstairs. The Removites, laughing heartily, followed him more slowly.

It certainly was a cold morning. There were heaps of snow in the quadrangle, but it was not freezing. There was a blur of dampness over everything.

Most of the juniors were looking forward to a spell of freezing weather. As soon as the ice on the Sark was strong enough to bear with perfect safety, there was to be an ice carnival, which was to be shared in by the Greyfriars fellows and the village folk, and—last, but not least—the girls of Cliff House. Marjorie Hazeldene and her friends at Miss Penelope Prinrose's Girls' School were great skaters, and they were anxious to show their friends at Greyfriars that girls could skate quite as well as boys.

All the fellows were looking forward to it, but the weather obstinately remained in a damp and muggy state, in spite of their wishes.

Hence, it is easy to understand Bob Cherry's exasperation at Bunter's false alarm that it was freezing.

It wasn't freezing, by any means, and there was no sign of it. But if the Removites couldn't skate, there was snow for a snow fight, and they had to content themselves with that.

The Remove poured out of the School House in the dim winter morning, and the Upper Fourth met them amid the snow. The chance was too good to be lost! In a few seconds the two Forms were at it hammer and tongs.

"Go for 'em!" shouted Temple of the

Upper Fourth. "Go for the Anti-Soap Brigade!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Listen to the rotters!" said Bob Cherry, turning red with wrath. "Only listen! That's all on account of Bunter!"

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"Br-r-r-r!"

"Oh, give 'em socks!" said Nugent.

And the battle of the snowballs raged furiously. Billy Bunter was early put hors de combat. A snowball burst under his chin, and another behind his ear, and he retreated to the doorway in hot haste.

As he went, another ball broke on his forehead, filled his eyes and covered his spectacles, and still another clumped upon his mouth. Billy Bunter gave a prolonged gasp, and dropped in the snow.

A rush of the Remove passed over and round him, and Bunter staggered to his feet at last, breathless and panting. He made a wild rush for the house door, and ran in. He was blinded by the snow in his eyes, and did not see Monsieur Charpentier, the French master, standing on the steps, looking out with an amiable smile upon the exhilarating scene.

"Buntair, you vas hurt— Ah, Ciel!"

The little Frenchman staggered back into the hall as Bunter butted him blindly fairly upon the waistcoat.

"Oh!" roared Bunter.

"Ah, Ciel! I am keel! I am slay! Ah, mon Dieu!"

"Yow!"

"Helas!"

Billy Bunter sat up, rubbed the snow out of his eyes, and wiped his spectacles. He was sitting upon something, but what it was he was too short-sighted to see without his glasses. Strange groans came from beneath him, and gasps and grunts.

"Ciel! I am slay! I am squash! Ah! Helas! A moi! Help!"

Bunter was still rubbing his glasses. Wingate of the Sixth came along, and gave a jump as he saw the fat junior sitting upon Monsieur Charpentier wiping his spectacles. He took Bunter by the back of the collar, and jerked him off.

"Ow! Oh, really, Carberry—"

"You young ass!"

"Oh, is it you, Wingate? I—I ran into somebody, I think—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Wingate. "I think you did." He gave Monsieur Charpentier a hand up, and the little Frenchman staggered to his feet. "Not hurt, Mossos?"

"Ah, I am knock down! I am almost keel! Buntair!"

But Bunter was scuttling off.

"Buntair!"

"He's gone, sir," grinned Wingate. "I think it was an accident, sir."

Monsieur Charpentier rubbed his waistcoat tenderly.

"I am much out of ze breath," he said.

"I zink zat I will go and sit down. Zat

garçon is always causing ze trouble viz himself."

And Mossou staggered into the dining-room. He was still looking very pale when the Remove, red and ruddy, trooped in to breakfast. Billy Bunter came in last, looking round cautiously for the French master. But Monsieur Charpentier affected not to notice him, and Bunter, with great relief, sank into his place at the Remove table.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Bunter's Wheeze.

"I SAY, you fellows—"
 "Shut up, Bunter."
 "Yes, but I say, I've got an idea—a little scheme—"
 "Go and boil it!"
 "Oh, really, Cherry! I suppose you fellows want to take the prizes in the skating event when it comes off?" said Bunter, with an air of injured dignity.
 "Of course, if you don't care for the honour of the Form, it doesn't matter."
 "What are you talking about?" asked Bob Cherry.

The Remove were going to their Form-room for morning lessons. Billy Bunter had been poking at the ribs of Harry Wharton & Co. all the way, but Bunter never was listened to when he wanted to speak.

It was really his own fault, for he seldom spoke about anything but himself—his schemes, or his cleverness, or his excellent appetite, and his various wants—and, as Bob Cherry remarked, it was possible to get fed up with Bunter, in the long run.

And so when Bunter started talking somebody generally said, "Shut up, Bunter!" from force of habit.

"You see, we can't get any skating while it's thawing," said Bunter. "But I've got a scheme for getting into form for the ice carnival."

"Oh, some more of your blessed physical culture, I suppose!" said Nugent.
 "Go and eat coke!"

"It's a ripping wheeze—"
 The Removites trooped into the room, Bunter still with his ripping wheeze un-uttered. The fat junior blinked indignantly at the chums of the Lower Fourth, but he did not venture to continue, for the Form-master was already in the room.

But a little later, when Mr. Quelch was busy with the blackboard, Bunter started again. He gave Harry Wharton a poke in the ribs that made him jump and give a gasp, and turn on the fat junior with a wrathful look. But Bunter was too short-sighted to see the wrathful look, and he went on quite placidly.

"I say, Wharton, about that scheme, you know—"
 "Shut up!"

"It's a ripping scheme. We could get permission to use the gym, you know, and the floor is really good—it has been used for the same purpose before—"

"What are you talking about, ass?"
 "My scheme. You could hire them in Friardale—I know that—"

"Hire what?"
 "The skates."

"I've got skates, and so have most of the fellows."
 "Yes, ice skates; but I'm thinking of roller-skates."

"Oh, I see!"
 "We could get the roller-skates in Friardale this afternoon, and turn the gym into a rink," said Bunter. "It's a ripping scheme, I think. I'm a dab at roller-skating myself, and I'd put you fellows up to it, you know."

"Well, it's not a bad wheeze," said Wharton.

"I'm rather short of money myself," said Bunter. "I've been disappointed about a postal order this morning. You could buy me a pair of skates—"

"Rats!"
 "I mean hire me a pair, you know—a slip of the tongue," said Bunter hastily.

"I know the gym has been used for roller-skating before."

Wharton nodded. Bunter's suggestion was really a good one. There had been very little ice near Greyfriars so far, and what there had been was thin and bad. If permission could be obtained to use the gym as a rink, nothing could be better for a half-holiday.

"What do you think of it, Wharton?"
 "Good! Don't jaw now, though—Quelch is looking this way."

"Yes, but—"
 "You are talking, Bunter," said Mr. Quelch.

"Oh, really, sir—"
 "Take a hundred lines!"
 And Billy Bunter relapsed into silence. He did not mention his great scheme

I'll see first if we can have the gym this afternoon."

"Better hand the money over to me, and—"

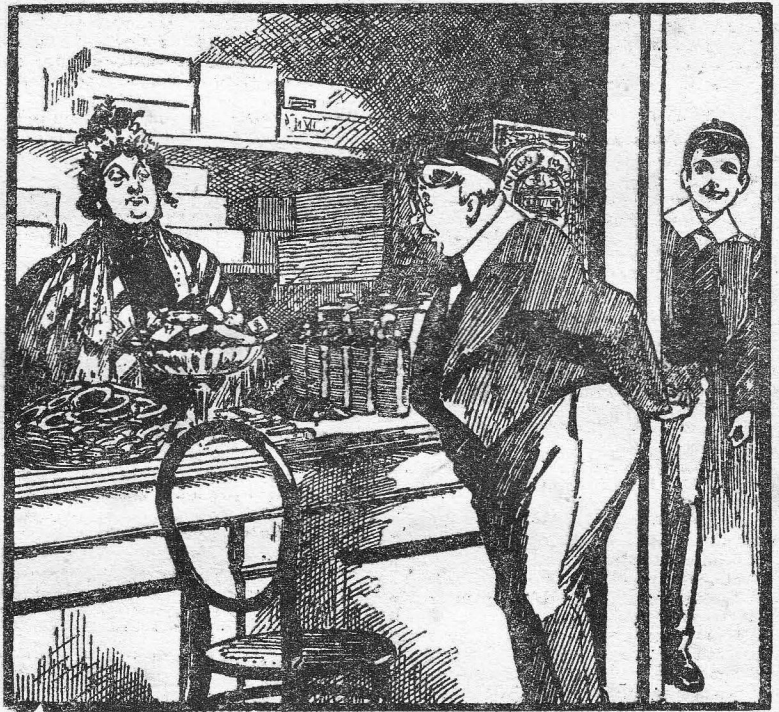
"Rats!"
 "If you can't trust me with a few shillings, Wharton, the sooner we cease this discussion the better."

"Quite so," agreed Wharton; and he walked away, leaving Bunter the picture of indignation.

It was a half-holiday at Greyfriars that afternoon, and the ground was in too bad a state for football to be thought of. When the idea of the roller-skates was mooted in the Remove, it was caught up with enthusiasm.

Nugent remembered that Fleet's, in Friardale, had a lot of roller-skates in; he had seen them the last time he was in the village. If the use of the gym could be obtained, there was no reason why the Remove should not spend a most enjoyable afternoon rinking.

Billy Bunter, as the originator of the idea, claimed to have the arrangements



"No more, Master Bunter, until you've paid my account!" said Mrs. Mimble, with emphasis.

again till lessons were over for that morning.

But as the Remove came out of the Form-room, he dug his fat knuckles into Harry Wharton's ribs.

"What about those roller-skates, Wharton?"
 Harry nodded.

"I'll run down to Friardale on my bike and see about them, Bunt. It's a really good idea for once."

"I'll go, if you like, while you're doing the lines."

"Eh! What lines?"
 "The lines Quelch gave me," said Bunter. "The beast! He gave me three hundred, and I don't know how I'm going to get them done."

Harry Wharton laughed.
 "Well, I'll help," he said; "but I'll go down to Friardale about the skates."

left in his hands; but his claim was far from being admitted. Bob Cherry pointed out to him that he would be getting the use of the skates for nothing, while the other fellows would have to pay for them; so he ought to be satisfied. Bunter couldn't see it; but that did not trouble the other fellows much.

"The question is about the gym, really," said Harry Wharton thoughtfully to a little meeting in the common-room after dinner. "If we can't have the gym, it's no good."

"And a lot of the fellows may want it, as the ground's too rotten for footer," Tom Brown remarked.

"We might claim it for an hour—or a couple of hours—"

"Rats!" said a voice at the door, as Temple, the captain of the Upper Fourth, came in. "You kids are getting too much cheek for anything. What's that

about having the gym to yourselves for an hour?"

"Little boys shouldn't ask questions," said Bob Cherry. "Run away and play."

"Are you coming out to finish that snow-fight?"

"Not to-day."

"What little game are you getting up to in the gym?"

"That's tellings."

"Look here—"

"Rats!"

Temple glared wrathfully at the juniors. He wished now that he had not spoken quite so quickly, as he might have heard what they were planning. But it was too late to think of that now.

The Removites, with the very natural misgiving that the Upper Fourth might forestall them if they knew what was on, prudently did not utter a single word on the subject of roller-skates.

"Travel along, Temple, old chap," said Bob Cherry politely; "we're talking."

"I say, you fellows—"

"Shut up, Bunter. Temple, are you going out on your feet or on your neck?"

Temple snorted, and went out on his feet.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Temple, Dabney & Co. Take a Hand.

"OH, really, Mrs. Mimble—"

"No more, Master Bunter."

"But just a few tarts—"

"Certainly not!"

"I say, I'm awfully hungry, you know," said Billy Bunter persuasively, leaning his elbows on the little counter of the school shop, and blinking at Mrs. Mimble through his big spectacles. "I never really get enough to eat, you know, Mrs. Mimble. My constitution is rather delicate, and I need keeping up with good, nourishing food. And your pastry is so good, you know."

"If it's good, it's worth paying for," said Mrs. Mimble with a sniff, which showed that she was not to be taken in by Bunter's blandishments.

"I hope you don't think I'm likely to act dishonestly, Mrs. Mimble? I am expecting a postal order this evening—"

"Nonsense, Master Bunter!"

"Oh, really—"

"I won't trust you with any more till you've paid my account," said Mrs. Mimble with emphasis. "You paid me up once, through using another boy's banknote—"

"That was a mistake—"

"Yes; and I should never have been paid otherwise. Now you owe me six shillings again."

"I'm expecting a postal order for ten to-night. Let me have four bobs' worth now, and you can take the whole postal order when it comes?"

"I don't believe there is no such postal order," said Mrs. Mimble.

"Oh, really—"

"Hallo, Bunter!" said Temple affably, coming into the tuckshop. "I say, what ripping tarts. Have some?"

"Certainly, Temple. This is very decent of you. I'll do as much for you fellows when my postal order comes. Did you say I was to have a dozen?"

"No, I didn't; you can have two," said Temple, throwing a shilling on the counter. "I've got a mouth, too, you know. Besides, you mustn't over-eat yourself, or you won't be fit this afternoon—that little game in the gym, you know."

Billy Bunter blinked at him in surprise. "I didn't know you knew about that," he said. "Has Bob Cherry told you? He warned me not to say a word about the roller-skates."

Temple jumped.

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"Roller-skates!"

"What! Didn't you know, after all?" exclaimed Bunter in dismay.

"Ha, ha! No, no; but we know now," grinned Temple.

"Oh, rather!"

"You may as well tell us the lot now," chuckled Fry. "Have some more tarts. We won't give you away to the others, you know. What's this rot about roller-skates?"

"It isn't rot," said Billy Bunter, with his mouth full. "I'll have another, please. I say, these tarts are ripping. You see, it was my idea to use the gym for a rink and have roller-skating there, to get into form for the ice carnival."

"Of course, the other fellows took it up, and showed me out of my own scheme, as they always do," said Bunter, in an injured tone. "There never is a good wheeze in the Remove that doesn't come from me, but I never get the credit."

"Of course, you don't," said Temple sympathetically. "You ought to be captain of the Remove, really; that's about your mark."

"Well, I'm glad to see there are fellows who can appreciate my qualities," said Bunter, taking another tart. "You see, I'm rather a dab at roller-skating, and I thought it would be a good idea. And Quelch has got us permission to have the gym to ourselves for an hour and a half—from three o'clock this afternoon."

Temple winked at his chums.

"Oh, good! But what about the roller-skates?"

"Wharton's gone to Friardale to get them."

"Oh, I see! How many?"

"Twenty pairs. There are twenty fellows going in for it, you know, and some of the others will have turns with the skates as well. I expect all the Remove will get into the gym."

"My hat! How's Wharton going to carry twenty pairs of roller-skates on his bike?"

"He isn't. Fleet's man will bring them in the handcart, of course. There's plenty of time—it's more than an hour to three now." Billy Bunter bolted the last tart. "Did you ask me if I'd like some ginger-pop, Temple?"

"No, I didn't," said Temple.

And the chums of the Upper Fourth walked out of the school shop, leaving Billy Bunter in the throes of a pathetic argument with Mrs. Mimble about ginger-pop. The three Fourth-Formers were chuckling.

"My only hat!" said Temple. "This is about the richest joke on record. You chaps like roller-skating?"

"Oh, rather!" said Dabney.

"Cut off, and tell the fellows they're to sneak into the gym in twos and threes, and stick there," said Temple. "Fry and I will wait on the road for Fleet's man. You come back and join us by the old oak, with two or three more. Savvy? It's no good giving Fleet's man the trouble to carry those skates up to the school."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Dabney hurried off, and Fry and Temple strolled down to the gates again. They waited and watched the road. It was a cold vigil, but the proposed jape on the Lower Fourth was worth it. They stamped their feet, till a whisper from Temple warned them to be cautious.

"Look out—here's a jigger coming."

There was a plugging sound of a bicycle driven through mud and thawed snow. Harry Wharton went pedalling past, without a suspicion that five pairs of keen and eager eyes were watching him from behind the old overhanging oak. The Upper Fourth fellows burst into a chuckle when he had passed.

"Innocent babe!" murmured Temple.

"It's all serene! Now to wait for Fleet's

man. Look out, and if he gets by with the skates I'll scalp you and boil you in oil afterwards!"

And the Fourth-Formers waited and watched, while the damp dripped off the branches upon them, and their feet grew cold upon the half-frozen ground.

They stamped and waved and grunted, till the sound of a heavy machine driven along the slushy lane warned them that the time had come. A quarter to three rang out from the distant clock of Greyfriars.

"Here he comes!"

They peered through the hedge. A bicycle-cart, recognised at once as belonging to Fleet's Fancy Stores, was being driven up the lane by Fleet's young man. The Upper Fourth fellows swarmed out into the road, and the cyclist performance came to a halt.

Temple waved his hand commandingly, feeling a great deal like a brigand chief holding up an unfortunate traveller. "Down you get!" he said.

Mr. Fleet's young man stared at him in amazement.

"Eh?" he said. "What? I don't catch on!"

"The road's so muddy, we can't bear to think of your having to drive that rocky machine all the way to Greyfriars," said Temple blandly. "We've come to carry the skates for you!"

"But Master Wharton—"

"Blow Master Wharton!"

"Yes; but—but—"

"Now, look here," said Temple, "you know we belong to Greyfriars, so the skates will be safe enough. We're five to one, and if you object we shall yank you off your jigger and pitch you into the ditch. The best thing you can do is to hand over the skates, and go back to your shop, and tell Mr. Fleet it's all right. It's a jape on the Remove, if you want to know. Now, down you get!"

And as Mr. Fleet's young man still hesitated, Temple and Dabney took hold of his arms and helped him down. Then the back of the bicycle-cart was opened, and twenty pair of roller-skates, fastened in pairs, were revealed.

"Pack 'em into the bags," said Temple. "We can take some under our coats, too. It won't do to let the Remove kids see 'em. Good!"

"I—I can't prevent you," said Mr. Fleet's young man helplessly.

"Of course you can't," said Temple, pressing a shilling into his hand. "It's a jape, and it's all right. Get back to Friardale."

"But I ought to explain to Master Wharton—"

"If you come near Greyfriars under two hours we'll duck you, that's all," said Temple. "Don't I tell you it's a jape. Clear off!"

And Mr. Fleet's young man, looking very bewildered, as if he did not quite know whether he was on his head or on his heels, mounted his machine and pegged away slowly towards the village.

The Upper Fourth fellows, chuckling, packed the skates out of sight, and then strolled towards Greyfriars.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

One for the Upper Fourth.

HARRY WHARTON glanced up at the Greyfriars clock-tower. It was a quarter-past three.

"Fleet's man must have been, and gone," he said. "I suppose he's left the skates for us at Gosling's lodge."

"Let's go and see," suggested Nugent. And they went to see. Gosling, the school porter, came to his door grunting with discontent. Gosling did not like being disturbed, especially in the afternoon. Gosling had just been settling

down to the full enjoyment of a glass of gin-and-water, and he had spilt some of it over his waistcoat when a thundering rap had suddenly come at the door. The juniors did not possess a light touch in dealing with a knocker.

"Himps!" said Gosling. "Go away!"
"Has anything come for us?" asked Harry Wharton. "We're expecting a lot of roller-skates to be sent in from Fleet's."

"Well, they ain't come," said Gosling sourly. "And wot I says is this 'ere—"
But they did not wait to hear what Gosling said. They went down to the gates to look up the road, leaving Gosling to slam his lodge-door and return to what was left of his gin-and-water.

There was no sign of Mr. Fleet's young man on the road. The juniors concluded that he must have taken the consignment of skates up to the house, though it would have been easier to leave them at the lodge. But inquiry at the house elicited the information that nothing had been seen of Mr. Fleet's young man or the roller-skates. Harry Wharton looked, and felt, puzzled.

"I don't understand it," he said. "Fleet said he would send them at once, and he usually keeps his word, too."

"I suppose they can't have been taken to the gym?" suggested Mark Linley.

"Well, I told Fleet we were using the gym for a rink," said Harry. "It's barely possible. May as well have a look there, anyway."

And the anxious Removites hurried off to the gymnasium. They found the door fast, and it refused to budge when they tried to open it. From within the gym came a sound of voices, and another sound that the juniors could not quite make out. It was a sliding, scratching, swishing sound, and it puzzled them.

"Somebody else has got the gym," said Wharton, wrinkling his brows, "and we're locked out."

"Let's cut round and try the other door."

"Well, go; but I expect that's fastened, too, Bob."

Bob Cherry returned in about a minute, to admit that it was. Harry Wharton rapped sharply on the door with his knuckles. There was no reply from within; the shouting and that strange swishing noise went on incessantly.

"Boots!" said Bob sentimentally.

The juniors kicked at the door. They kicked, and kicked again, till the din they made must have been audible as far as the School House. Then there came a slackening of the voices and the noise within, and there was a rap of knuckles on the inside of the big door.

"Hallo!" called out Temple from within.

"Open this door!"

"Presently."

"We've got permission to use the gym from three o'clock!" bawled Bob Cherry. "Open this door at once, you Upper Fourth worms!"

"Who gave you permission?"

"Quelch."

"You never asked us," went on Temple politely.

"You! Asked you! That's likely!"

"Well, you fags must be kept in your place, you know. You can run away and play in the wood-shed. You can't have the gym; we can't allow it!"

Wharton kicked furiously on the door.

"You waster!" he roared. "Open this blessed door!"

"Go and eat coke!"

"We want to come in!"

"Ha, ha, ha! I'm afraid you would interfere with the roller-skating!"

"WHAT!" yelled the Removites.

"Ha, ha, ha! The roller-skating!"

"You—you've got roller-skates?"

gasped Wharton. "Where did you get them?"

Mr. Fleet's young man brought a cargo of them—we carried them in," said Temple. "Ha, ha, ha! This is where the Upper Fourth gloats!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"My only hat!" gasped Bob Cherry. "The beasts! It's a sheer do! They've got our skates, and our rink, and—Oh, my only Aunt Penelope!"

"I say, you fellows—"

"Oh, shut up, Bunter! What the dickens are we to do?" exclaimed Harry Wharton. "I—I confess I never looked for anything of this sort. I didn't know they knew anything about the roller-skating wheeze."

There was a sudden yell from Billy Bunter as Bob Cherry seized him by the collar and shook him as a terrier shakes a rat. Bunter's eyes rolled, and his spectacles slid down his fat nose, and he kicked and struggled and gasped spasmodically.

"Ow! Ow! Hellup! Leggo!"

"You fat owl! You told Temple about the skates!"

"Ow! Ow! Really, Cherry—"

Bob released him at last, glaring. Bunter gasped.

"You—you beast! Yow!"

"How do you know he told Temple, Bob?" asked Brown.

"Well, I suppose he did. He must have—somebody did, and it was pretty

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ANNOUNCEMENT!**

sure to be Bunter," said Bob. "If you didn't, Bunter, you can pass on that shaking to the fellow who did."

"Ow! Ow! Yow!"

The skating had recommenced inside the gym. That was the swishing sound the juniors had heard. Harry Wharton moved along to the nearest window, and looked on Bob Cherry's shoulders to

It was a merry scene inside the gym.

The floor had been cleared, and the smooth expanse, very well suited for roller-skating, had been turned into a rink, just as the Removites had intended. But it was their deadly rivals who now enjoyed the rinking.

Temple, Dabney & Co., and two-thirds of the Upper Fourth Form, were on skates, and dashed merrily to and fro, and the rest of the Form stood round, shouting and waiting their turns with the skates.

"Bother it!" said Bob Cherry.

"Something's got to be done, you know. We can't take this lying down!"

"Not likely!"

"But what?"

"We've got such a jolly good Form captain, you know," said Bulstrode, with a sneer. "That's why we always get licked by the Upper Fourth."

"Oh, shut up, Bulstrode!"

Harry Wharton's brows were wrinkled. He was thinking deeply.

"Look here," he said at length, "I've thought of a wheeze, if Temple & Co. haven't guarded against it."

"Go ahead! What's the idea?"

"The little store-room at the back of the gym—the window of that is near the ground. I don't suppose the Upper Fourth have thought of it. Temple wasn't built to be a great general, you know."

"But we should have to get in one at a time," said Ogilvy.

"That's so, but they wouldn't see us getting in, and we could all cram into the little room, and rush out on them when we were ready."

Bob Cherry gave Wharton a slap on the shoulder that sent him staggering against the wall of the gym.

"Ripping!" he exclaimed. "Splendid!"

"Oh, you ass!" said Wharton, rubbing his shoulder.

"Sorry—merely a little exuberance."

"Well, keep your exuberance for the Upper Fourth, duffer! Look here, half a dozen of you chaps stay here and hammer at the door, so as to keep them off the scent. You can slang them at the window, Skinner."

"What-ho!" said Skinner.

"The rest of you follow me."

Readily enough the Remove obeyed their young captain. Bob Cherry and a chosen band hammered and kicked at the door, and shouted breathless insults through at the skaters, to which the Upper Fourth fellows replied with an occasional yell of defiance.

Harry Wharton and the rest reached the rear of the gym, and stopped at the window of the store-room. The window was shut, but Wharton could see that it was not fastened. If it had been he could have forced back the catch, which was a simple one, with the blade of his pocket-knife.

As he had said, Temple was not built to be a great general, and in the flush of victory he had never thought about that weak spot in his armour.

In two minutes Harry had the little window open—opening it very cautiously, and making hardly a sound. He climbed through noiselessly, and stepped towards the door opening into the gym.

That door was ajar, just as Dabney had left it. Harry could see through the slit into the gym, where the Upper Fourth were making merry.

The skaters were whirling round and round merrily, and Temple was cutting strange figures. Harry stood at the door quietly, ready to jerk it shut, and keep it shut, while his fellows poured in behind him, if the Upper Fourth took the alarm.

But that they showed no sign of doing. They skated on merrily, while one by one the Removites climbed into the window, and ranked behind their leader.

The room was soon crammed, and there were still Removites outside, pushing on. Harry gave the signal.

"Follow me!"

He threw open the door, and stepped into the gym.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Bravo, Remove!

"SOCK it to 'em!"

It was a sudden yell from the Remove as they swarmed in after Wharton. There was a shout of alarm from the skaters.

"Look out!" yelled Temple.

"Oh, rather! It's those young cads!"

"Ware, Remove!"

But the warning came too late. The Removites were rushing vengefully to the attack. The fellows with skates fastened on their feet were at a disadvantage. The rush of the Remove sent them reeling, and it was not easy to get up in a hurry with roller-skates on their boots.

In a quarter of a minute the Upper Fourth were sprawling right and left, and most of the fallen Fourth-Formers had victorious Removites sitting on them. The fellows who were not on skates made the best fight, but they were hopelessly outnumbered.

Skinner and Price dropped in now, and rushed to the door and opened it to Bob Cherry and his comrades. The whole of the Remove were soon on the scene, and they made short work of the Upper Fourth.

There were yells and shouts and strugglings and rallying, but the Upper Fourth had no chance from the first.

Harry Wharton, after three minutes' hot work, looked breathlessly over the scene of combat.

Every Fourth-Former was on the floor, and every one was pinned down by a Removite, the more dangerous of the enemy having two or three fellows sitting on them.

"Look here, you cheeky fags," roared Temple, "I'm going—"

"Of course you are," agreed Tom Brown, unfastening his skates. "Take his other leg, Bob, and we'll help him along."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And Temple skated along on his back. Wharton, laughing, closed the big door and refastened it. One by one the Upper Fourth were marched into the store-room and ejected ignominiously from the little window.

There was no chance of their rallying there. The window was not large enough for more than one at a time to pass. As the last Fourth-Former was rolled out, the Removites sent a yell after their defeated enemies, and the window was shut down and the catch fastened.

Then, to make assurance doubly sure, Harry Wharton closed the wooden shutters within, which were secured by an iron bar. Then the juniors returned into the gym, and the communicating door, as a final precaution, was locked.

"They won't get in again in a hurry, I think," Wharton remarked, with a chuckle, as the key clicked in the lock.

"Not much," grinned Bob Cherry; and the Nabob of Bhanipur volunteered the opinion that the not-much-fulness was terrific.

"Now for the skating!" grinned Nugent. "This makes a ripping rink, and no mistake. It's the next best thing to ice skating. I wish Marjorie & Co. were here. Marjorie told me she liked roller-skating."

"Yes, I wish they were," said Wharton. "Marjorie said something about giving us a look in this afternoon, but she hasn't come. I suppose Miss Primrose wanted her. Phew! What a row those fellows are making!"

The Upper Fourth were not taking their defeat quietly. They were hammering at the door of the gym, just as the Removites had done before them, and yelling at the windows.

The Removites sent back a few counter yells and catcalls, but they soon ceased to do even that, being busy with the skates.

The score of fellows who had clubbed the money for the skates were busy fastening them on, and as they were adjustable, there was no difficulty about the sizes.

In a few minutes twenty skaters were chasing one another gaily round the gym. The fellows who were waiting for their turns with the skates stood about under the windows, watchful for any attempt on the part of the Upper Fourth. Temple, Dabney & Co. were still hammering at the door.

"Let us in, you beasts!" roared Temple.

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"Rats!"
"We'll lick you to dusty atoms later on!"

"More rats!"
And that was all the satisfaction Temple, Dabney & Co. received. The noise at the doors died away, save for an occasional knocking; the Upper Fourth had given it up in disgust. Meanwhile, the skaters were whirling round merrily.

Harry Wharton & Co. could skate very well, but not all the others were equally good. There were many falls, and naturally the bad skaters made things warm for the good skaters, and the best of them went down sometimes with the worst. But all was good-humour and merry laughter.

"My only hat!" Bob Cherry exclaimed, as he stopped for a moment to rest, and put his hand on the door to steady himself. "This is ripping! A little crowded, but simply spiffing!"

"The spiffingfulness is terrific!"
There was a rap on the door.

"Oh, go away!" bawled Bob Cherry.

"Take your face away and bury it!"

Rap!
"You escaped lunatic, go and buy a padlock and chain yourself up!" shouted Bob.

"We're not going to open the door, if you stay there till you're as blue in the face as you are weak in the head! Go and eat coke! Go and boil yourself! Yah!"

"Oh, dear!" said a sweet voice outside. "That is Cherry speaking, Clara."

"Oh, Marjorie!"

Bob Cherry sank weakly against the door. He had, of course, thought that the rapping proceeded from some of the Upper Fourth. And it was Marjorie and Clara, from Cliff House, who were there!

"Oh!" gasped Bob weakly.

And he leaned on the door. He had forgotten that he was wearing skates. In a second his feet were in the air, and he was sitting down dazedly.

"Oh!"

Harry Wharton and Nugent yanked him out of the way, and opened the door.

Marjorie Hazeldene looked in with a smile.

Bob Cherry sat dazed, and looked at her. He was trying to recall exactly what he had said through the door, and wondering how many sorts of an ass Marjorie would think him.

Some of the skaters went on whirling, and others came skating up to the door. The Removites were on the look-out, in case Temple, Dabney & Co. should make a rush.

But the Upper Fourth had long given it up, and they were nowhere in sight. It was poor fun to hang about in the snow and damp shouting to fellows who were enjoying themselves under cover.

"Marjorie!" exclaimed Harry, shaking hands with the girl from Cliff house.

"How jolly of you to come!"
"And how jolly you look here!" said Marjorie, laughing.

"Yes," said Miss Clara. "What fun!"

"Yes, it is jolly," remarked Nugent. "Bob prefers sitting on the floor, but the rest of us like roller-skating awfully."

"Oh, rats!" said Bob, getting up.
"You fell down?" asked Marjorie sympathetically.

"N-no, not exactly!" stammered Bob.

"You see—"
"Yes, I see."

"I mean I slipped. I forgot I had the skates on."

"Yes, that often happens, I know," said Miss Clara, with a wise shake of the head.

"But I wasn't skating at the time," said Bob warmly. "I was leaning against the door, and—"

"And the floor seemed to rise up and hit you," said Miss Clara. "I understand perfectly."

The chums giggled. Bob Cherry was growing perfectly crimson in his efforts to explain that he hadn't been skating at the time he fell down.

"I wasn't a duffer!" he exclaimed.

"I had stopped skating—"

"Yes, it often happens like that," agreed Miss Clara. "You stop skating, and then suddenly your feet walk away—"

"No, no; it wasn't that. You see—I say, I suppose you think me an awful ass for slanging you through the door?" said Bob, changing the subject. "I thought it was that Upper Fourth lot coming back, you know. I didn't dream it was you."

Marjorie laughed merrily.

"Well, I didn't really think that you were telling me to go and boil myself," she admitted. "I thought there must be some mistake."

"And so we stayed," said Miss Clara. "We were determined to stay if we became as blue in the face as we are weak in the head."

"Oh!" groaned Bob Cherry.

"Well, you frabjous ass," murmured Nugent, "you'd better sit down again and crawl out of sight somewhere! I say, Miss Hazeldene, you're going to skate, of course?"

"Oh, I should like it immensely!"

"Come on, then," said Harry. "I'll get you some skates."

And Nugent looked after Miss Clara, while Harry took charge of Marjorie. Skates were soon forthcoming, the smallest sizes being yielded up, and the juniors managing to fix them upon the girls' boots.

Then Marjorie glided into the rink with Harry, and Clara with Nugent, and very handsome couples they made. Bob Cherry locked the door again, in case the Upper Fourth should look in, after all.

The skating recommenced, and went on uninterrupted until tea-time. Then Marjorie announced that it was time they returned to Cliff House.

Wharton took off Marjorie's skates, and, a little breathless, but very bright and happy, they walked out of the gym.

"I have enjoyed it immensely," said Marjorie. "Our gardener says it is going to freeze this week, so we may get the ice-skating on Saturday."

"That will be ripping!"

"Of course," said Miss Clara, "you fellows know that we're going to beat you hollow?"

Harry laughed.

"Let the best man—or the best girl—win," he said. "Most of us are entering for most of the events. There will be a good many prizes, as Dr. Locke and Miss Primrose are both taking it up, as well as the Mayor of Holme."

"Yes; and there will be a good many competitors," Marjorie remarked. "The Pool will be the place, and there will be plenty of room—if it will only freeze."

"We're all whistling for a frost every morning," said Harry, laughing. "It can't be far off now, Saturday afternoon will be ripping."

"It will be after dark," remarked Nugent. "With Chinese lanterns and illuminations, and so on. It ought to be very effective."

TO THE BOYS AT THE FRONT.

If you are unable to obtain this publication regularly, please tell any newsagent to get it from:

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PARIS.

The chums of Greyfriars walked home to Cliff House with Marjorie and Clara, chatting of the coming affair all the time.

They said good-bye at the gates of the girls' school, and then set out on the return journey to Greyfriars.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.
Early Waking.

WILL it freeze?" That was the question the Greyfriars juniors were asking themselves every day.

And when there was a sharp frost on Friday, they blessed the weather, and hoped for the best.

All the fellows who had ice-skates had them ready, and all those who hadn't had managed to beg or borrow a pair, for nearly everybody was to be at the Pool that Saturday afternoon.

"Looks like real freezing at last," Bunter remarked on Friday evening. "There's a blessed lot of frost, and the ground's as hard as iron. I shall get up early in the morning to put in some practice with my skates."

"What for?" asked Nugent, naturally enough.

Bunter blinked at him in surprise. "For the competition Saturday afternoon, of course," he said. "It's finally fixed for to-morrow afternoon, now."

"Are you coming to look on?"

"Oh, really, Nugent—"

"Ha, ha, ha! You're not going to compete, surely?"

"Why not?" demanded Bunter indignantly. "I'm simply a dab on the ice."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I can see anything to cackle at. I've entered for the biggest events, anyway, and I suppose I've got as good a chance as anybody."

"My only chapeau!"

"I'm getting pretty sick of this jealousy, I can tell you!" said Bunter.

"I suppose you don't want me to walk off the prizes. I shall take the speed prize—that's three pounds offered by the Mayor of Holme—and the figure prize. I don't mind if the others go, as they're not cash prizes."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It will be five pounds altogether," said Bunter. "I hear that the Head is offering one pound for the one-legged race, and that Miss Primrose is putting up one pound for something. You fellows can have them, if you can get them. I'm going to rope in the three pounds and the two pounds."

"Go it," said Nugent. "The judges will have a fit when they see your form. Have you made any arrangements about insurance?"

"Oh, really, Nugent—"

"That's for the other fellows to do," grinned Wharton. "The other competitors will be in more danger than Bunter."

Bunter sniffed, and walked away. Opposition only made him the more determined, and it was useless to argue with him. The juniors chuckled at the thought of the figure he would cut on the ice.

"I say, Cherry," said Bunter, when they went to bed that night. "Will you call me in the morning, if you wake before rising-bell? You're always awake early."

Bob Cherry stared at him.

"I'll call you if you like," he said. "You won't get up. What's the little game?"

"I'm going out early to get some practice at figure-skating."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'm not joking. Look here, somebody will have to call me early to-morrow. Will you see that I really

wake up, and—and don't take any notice of anything I say, you know. Of course, I sha'n't feel like getting up, but I'm determined to."

"Oh, all right!" said Bob Cherry, grinning.

And the Remove went to bed. Bob had a shrewd idea that Bunter would repent by the morning; but he was determined to carry out his part of the compact, at all events.

Bob was often an early waker, and he frequently rose early to take a run before rising-bell with his chum, Mark Linley. On that particular Saturday morning he did not mean to get up early, but he was quite willing to wake Bunter if he woke himself. And he did wake!

The faintest grey glimmer of dawn was stealing in at the high windows when Bob Cherry opened his eyes and yawned.

He heard the clock chime three-quarters, and knew that it was a quarter to seven, and after lying for a few moments, to get quite awake, he raised himself on one elbow, and called to Bunter.

the pillow was knocked aside, and Bunter blinked wildly in the gloom.

"Groo! What was that? Oh!"

"It's all right, Bunter. It's my pillow. Chuck it over, will you? I'm not getting up yet."

"Ow! You beast!"

"Why, you asked me to call you!" exclaimed Bob Cherry indignantly.

"Yah! Lemme alone!"

"But you've got to get up early to get some practice on your ice-skates."

Bunter grunted and turned over.

"I've changed my mind. Shurrup! Gr— Snore!"

"You told me I wasn't to take any notice of anything you said," said Bob Cherry, with a shake of the head. "I'm going to keep my promise. Wake up, Bunter!"

Snore!

"I say, Bunter! Are you up?"

Snore!

Bunter was fast asleep again. Bob Cherry gave a sleepy chuckle, and dropped off into slumber, too, with his head resting on his arm in lieu of a pillow. And there was no more early waking in the Remove dormitory that



"Oh! Br-r-r-r! Gr-r-r-r! It's freezing!" stuttered Billy Bunter.

"Bunter! Bunter! It's a quarter to seven! Wake up!"

A deep and melodious snore was the only reply from Bunter's bed. Bob Cherry grinned, and turned over in his mind the best method of waking Bunter without getting out of bed.

It was bitterly cold in the dormitory, and Bob had a natural objection to getting out if he could help it. He finally decided upon the pillow.

"Bunter! I say, Bunter!"

Snore!

Bob Cherry sat up, and grasped the pillow. He took deadly aim, over Nugent's bed, which was between him and Bunter's. The pillow flew through the air, and dropped fairly upon Billy Bunter's head.

"Gr-r-r-roooh!"

There was a wild splutter from Bunter, and his fat arms came flying out, and

morning—not an eyelid wagging until the rising-bell clanged through the frosty air.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.
On the Ice.

BUNTER did not get any practice that morning. He had a narrow escape, in fact, of not getting his breakfast, so late was he down.

And it was not an extraordinary attention to his ablutions that delayed him, either, as Bob Cherry remarked.

The washing of Bunter showed the regular amount of diminution, and it was calculated by some fellows in the Remove, who had a gift for mental arithmetic, that it would disappear altogether before Christmas.

There were whispers in the Form of a

surprise waiting for Bunter in this connection, of some discipline he was to be put through on the subject, but for the present the juniors were thinking too much about the ice to think much of Bunter and his deadly vendetta against soap and water.

For it was freezing. There was no doubt about that. At any other time, perhaps, the juniors would not have welcomed the fact that their toes were nipped with cold in the class-room, in spite of the roaring fire kept up there, and that their fingers were almost too stiff to hold the pens.

But on this particular morning even that was a subject for rejoicing, for it was proof that the ice was holding, and that the Pool of the Sark would be as hard as iron that evening.

And when, after school, the juniors dashed down to the Sark, and found it frozen as hard as bricks, there was a cheer.

"It's all right!" roared Bob Cherry, the first to reach the bank, in a voice that rang far along the stream and woke the echoes of the Black Pike, and Hurree Janset Ram Singh opined that the allrightfulness was terrific.

And now eager eyes devoured watches and clocks till it was time to get to the Pool.

It had been agreed that it would be more fun to have the affair after nightfall, and there was the advantage, too, that it gave a chance to the men and lads engaged in business during the day who wished to compete.

The ice carnival was, indeed, a very mixed gathering, and all the better for that. The Greyfriars fellows turned up in great force, all Forms being represented.

Marjorie & Co. were there in force.

Dr. Locke, of Greyfriars, and Miss Penelope Primrose, the Principal of Cliff House School, were on the scene, with the Mayor of Holme, and several Greyfriars masters and Cliff House mistresses.

The dusk had deepened into the blackest night at an early hour; but the whole scene was lighted up by electricity.

Besides the electric lights, which made the Pool and the surrounding banks as light as a summer's day, there were coloured Chinese lanterns in all the trees near the river, and they gave a fairy-like and enchanted aspect to the scene.

The ice was indeed in splendid condition. It was hard and firm, and there was not the slightest chance of anything going amiss.

The first event was a speed test, and half Greyfriars had entered for it. Wingate and the best skaters of the Upper Forms had chivalrously kept out of it, to give the youngsters a chance; but Carberry had entered, and Loder and Carne, Billy Bunter, of course, was on the scene, and he called on Harry Wharton to help him put his skates on.

"You young ass!" said Wharton, in a low voice. "You'll only make a silly ass of yourself! Keep off the ice."

"Ass!"

"Oh, I know you want to keep me from winning the cash prizes. You needn't mind, as, if I win them, I shall stand a big feed, and ask you fellows."

"You can't skate."

"I suppose I ought to know best about that!" said Billy Bunter, with dignity.

"Are you ready?" called out Wingate, who was arranging the heats.

He was not competing himself, and he was invaluable in making arrangements.

"Yes," said Wharton; "but Bunter—"

"Wharton wants me to keep out of it. Wingate; but I'm not going to. Will

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you fasten that skate on for me, Wharton, or will you not?"

Wharton made no further objection. Wingate grinned; but he knew Billy Bunter, and he said nothing.

Bunter was among the first starters.

"Hurrah!"

Down the smooth, shining ice went a dozen skaters, in line, and down on his back in the first three feet went one of them. Needless to say which one.

"Oh! Ow! Yah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the crowd on the bank. "Bravo, Bunter!"

"Ow! Help! The ice's cracked! Help!"

Wingate and another Sixth-Former stepped on the ice-track (dragged Bunter off, and plumped him on the ground.

The fat junior sat there dazedly. He jammed his spectacles straight on his little fat nose, and blinked round him. He expected to see a big hole in the ice, but he only saw a firm and smooth surface and a circle of grinning faces.

"Wh-wh-what's happened?" he demanded.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I—I thought the ice had given in."

"You young ass!" said Wingate good-humouredly. "You can't skate. Your feet went up into the air as soon as you started. That's all."

"Oh, really, Wingate, I'm a dab at skating, you know."

"Rats!"

"You'd better put me in the second lot—"

"I'll put you in the nearest ditch if you begin any more of your piffle," said the captain of Greyfriars. "Take those skates off, and go and sit down somewhere!"

"Oh, really—"

"Clear out, I tell you!"

And Bunter, on reflection, thought that he had better.

The skaters were swift, the ice in splendid condition. The races were watched in great excitement by a thronging crowd on both sides of the river.

In the final test were Harry Wharton and his chums, and Trumper, and Miss Marjorie Hazeldene, and Carberry of the Sixth.

Round the flag went five of them—Harry, Tom Brown, and little Wun Lung, the Chinese, and Marjorie, and Carberry. Half-way back to the winning-post Carberry, Sixth-Former as he was, dropped behind, quite blown, and a second later Tom Brown took a tumble, and Wun Lung took a tumble over him.

Harry and Marjorie were left speeding on side by side. Harry was drawing ahead, and he glanced back and saw the pretty face with a set look of determination upon it.

And he slackened till they glided level. Miss Marjorie turned her eyes upon him and met his glance, and her eyes said as plainly as her tongue could have said, "If you let me win I will never speak to you again!" And Harry understood—and he smiled, and shot ahead.

He breasted the tape a yard ahead of Marjorie.

"Wharton wins!" said Wingate.

"And Marjorie takes second prize!" said Miss Clara proudly, as she hugged her chum.

Marjorie laughed, and shook hands with Harry.

"You deserved to win!" she said. "It would have been mean of you if you had let me take the prize when I couldn't win it. I'm glad you won."

"Good!" said Harry. "And I'm glad you're pleased!"

And Marjorie laughed again.

Bob Cherry gave Harry a hearty slap on the back as he came off, knocking nearly every ounce of breath out of his body.

"Jolly good, old chap!" said Bob. "I hope you'll do as well in the figure-skating; I've not entered for that. Buck up for Greyfriars!"

"Then leave me a gasp or two of breath to do it with."

Bob grinned, and turned to Miss Hazeldene.

"I congratulate you, Miss Marjorie—"

"Not the same way, please!" exclaimed Harry, interposing hastily. "Marjorie isn't made of iron, you know, and—"

"You ass!"

"Well, I thought—"

"You frabjous duffer!"

"Next event!" said Wingate.

The events followed one another briskly.

Marjorie and Clara divided the ladies' prize for figure-skating, and the gentlemen's prize was divided by Harry Wharton and Mark Linley.

For skating couples Harry and Marjorie were easily first, though Nugent and Miss Clara made a good second.

And when the last event had been skated off, the prizes all awarded, and the last speech made, the whole crowd poured on the ice for an hour or two of skating and sliding before the meeting broke up.

The meeting wound up in great style. The results had been good for Greyfriars, and especially honourable for the Remove; for, beside the other prizes, the Removites had carried off between them a sum of six pounds in cash, two pounds more being in the possession of Miss Hazeldene.

"It's ripping!" said Harry, as he chatted with Marjorie before saying good-bye. "We're in funds now, and no mistake!"

"So are we," smiled Marjorie.

"My idea is that we ought to get up some sort of affair together to spend the tin," said Harry; "some sort of celebration, you know."

"Good wheeze!" said Clara.

"Oh, Clara!"

"So it is," said Miss Clara. "I think it's ripping! Let's pool the funds, you know, and have a real ripping time—high jinks, I think you call it."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Jolly good idea!" chimed in Billy Bunter. "I say, you fellows, if you like to let the celebration take the form of a feed, I don't mind taking the matter in hand, and running it for you, and making all the arrangements, and so on, you know."

"You're too generous, Billy!"

"Well, you know, my intention is to be generous," said Bunter, blinking. And he wondered why a laugh followed his remark.

And when the Greyfriars chums parted with the girls of Cliff House, it was fully agreed that the cash prizes should be expended in some tremendous celebration, though what form that tremendous celebration was to take was not yet decided. But it was pretty certain that it would not take the form suggested by Bunter—the form of a big feed with Billy Bunter as the central figure!

THE END.

Next Friday's Grand Long Complete Tale of Harry Wharton & Co. is entitled:

BILLY BUNTER'S CHRISTMAS DREAM!

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THE RIVAL HOUSEMASTERS!

A Magnificent Long Complete Tale,
dealing with the Early Adventures of
TOM MERRY & CO. at St. Jim's.

— BY —

MARTIN CLIFFORD.

THE FIRST CHAPTER. Montsith Makes a Discovery.

RAILTON'S looking worried this morning," said Tom Merry, as the juniors of the School House sat at breakfast.

His companions glanced towards Mr. Railton.

The Housemaster did, indeed, wear a worried look, and he answered absently to several remarks that were addressed to him by the senior boys.

"Not so much talk there, kids!" said the prefect in charge of the Shell table.

"All right, Darrel!" said Tom Merry under his breath. "Keep your whiskers on!"

"Did you speak, Merry?"

"Sort of thought aloud, Darrel."

"What did you say?"

"H'm! It's a jolly fine morning, isn't it?"

"Was that what you said?"

"Well, no," admitted Tom Merry cautiously, "that wasn't exactly what I said. But—"

"Well, shut up, or I shall come along and warm you!" said Darrel, laughing. And there was silence for about half a minute.

"It's queer about Railton," said Mellish of the Fourth, after breakfast.

"What do you know about it, Mellish?" asked Kangaroo.

"Railton had a letter this morning."

"Nothing wonderful in that," said Tom Merry.

"He was all right till he opened it," said Mellish. "I saw him. Then his face came over black, and he muttered something. And he's been looking worried ever since."

"And what do you conclude from that, ass?"

"That it is the letter that's worrying him," replied Mellish. "Very likely some beastly poor relation writing to him to ask for money, or something of that kind."

"I suppose that would worry you, Mellish; but it might not worry him. He's not such a champion mean man as you are, you know."

"Oh, rats!" said Mellish.

Tom Merry, like most of the School House boys, was strongly attached to his Housemaster, and he gave more than one glance in the direction of Mr. Railton.

The master's preoccupation was certainly noticeable.

Kildare, at breakfast, had made several remarks, and received answers almost at random, and had relapsed into silence, his look showing how surprised he was.

Mr. Railton caught the expression upon the captain's face, and coloured slightly, and, as if recollecting himself, began to talk in his usual cheery way.

But he left the table quickly when breakfast was over, and went down the steps into the quadrangle. The juniors poured out into the quad before going in to morning school.

Tom Merry caught a glimpse of Mr. Railton under the leafless elms, intent upon reading a letter he held in his hand. Evidently he was reading over again the missive which Mellish had declared had had such a gloomy effect upon him when he received it that morning.

But Tom was not the kind of fellow to trouble himself about affairs that did not concern him. He was not at all curious. And, as it happened, his attention was wanted elsewhere.

The morning was hard, and cold, and clear. There had lately been an early fall of snow, which was frozen as hard as iron in the quadrangle, so that the ground was as slippery as glass.

The boys rejoiced in it. Outside the New House Figgins & Co. had made a slide, which was gradually lengthened until it extended well within the School House territory. Much less than that was required to send the Terrible Three on the warpath.

"Look at those horrible bounders!" said Tom Merry, horrified by the presumption of Figgins & Co. "Actually sticking their old slide into our ground! Fancy such cheek! This is where we snatch them bald-headed!"

"Let's collar their slide!" suggested Manners.

"Bravo!" yelled Lowther.

"What a weally wipping idea!" said D'Arcy.

Tom Merry chuckled.

"Come on, ye cripples! We'll have their slide!"

And a crowd of School House juniors rushed to the fray.

A long line of New House boys, with Figgins at their head, had just entered, one after another, on the slide, and were coming at a whizzing speed towards the School House.

Tom Merry, starting from the other

end of the slide, went whizzing to meet them, and after him at lightning speed came his followers.

Figgins gave a yell.

"Get clear, you beasts!"

But Tom hadn't the faintest intention of getting clear. He knew that there would be a terrific collision, but he didn't mind that.

"Clear the course, you silly ass!" bawled Figgins.

It was impossible for the New House junior to stop himself. He was going at an express rate, and Tom Merry was coming with almost equal impetus to meet him. And, in fact, only a few seconds elapsed before the rivals met at the centre of the slide.

"Oh, oh, oh!" gasped Figgins, every ounce of breath knocked out of his body. He felt like a pancake between the School House juniors in front and his own followers behind.

Biff, biff, biff! went the sliders, unable to stop themselves, crashing each into the one in advance of him.

Figgins gasped and collapsed, and rolled over, and Tom Merry went down with him, and over them sprawled and scrambled a heap of inextricably-mingled juniors.

And belated sliders coming up fell over the heap, and added themselves to it, until it seemed that half St. Jim's had piled itself there in the quadrangle.

Tom Merry and Figgins, who were undermost, were nearly suffocated.

"Gerrof mo neck!" gurgled Tom Merry.

"Lemme gerrup!" gasped Figgins.

But it was some time before the mixed-up juniors could sort themselves out and allow the breathless leaders to rise. Tom Merry and Figgins staggered to their feet at last, and Figgins, inadvertently stepping on the slide as he did so, sat down again with surprising suddenness.

"Oh, crumbs!"

"Now, that was neat, Figgys!" said Tom Merry. "I should like to see you do that again."

Figgins scrambled to his feet, taking care this time to avoid the dangerous spot.

"Clear out, you cads!" he exclaimed. "What do you mean by coming on our slide?"

"Oh, that's all right!" said Tom Merry. "Fair play's a jewel. You made the slide, and we're going to use it."

it—that's an equal division of labour. What have you got to grumble about?"

"You ain't coming on our slide, you School House bouncers!"

"Your mistake, Figgy. We've come."

Tom Merry went along the slide cheerfully, knocking several New House juniors out of the way as he proceeded.

Lowther and Manners and the rest followed fast, right up to the New House, laughing and cheering.

That was a good deal more than Fig-gins & Co. could stand.

"Sock into 'em!" he shouted. "Buck up, New House!"

And the New House juniors, bursting with wrath, rushed to the attack, to drive the intruders away by main force.

A glorious melee followed, and as the footing on the frozen ground was extremely uncertain, falls were frequent—indeed, there were more of the combatants on the ground than on their feet most of the time.

"What ever is this disturbance about?"

Mr. Railton came hurrying towards the scene of action. The master still held the letter in his hand that he had been reading when the terrific din of the disputing juniors had drawn him away from its perusal.

"What is the matter here?"

Mr. Railton came swiftly towards them—too swiftly, in fact, for he ran upon the slide without seeing that it was there.

The next moment the solid earth seemed to have wriggled away from beneath him. He was flying along at lightning speed, with one leg in the air and his mouth wide open with astonishment, and his arms waving frantically like the sails of a windmill.

"Oh!" gasped Mr. Railton. "Oh! Ah! Ugh! What— Oh, oh—ah!"

Right into the juniors he went, spinning along the slide, and cannoned into Tom Merry and Figgins, fetching them both down and falling on top of them.

"Ah!" gasped the Housemaster. "Oh, dear me! What ever has happened?"

He tried to scramble up, but at that moment came another of the lamentable chapter of accidents. Monteith, the head prefect of the New House, had sallied out, cane in-hand, to put an end to the disturbance.

He came out of the New House with a run, stepped on the slide as Mr. Railton had done, and came upon the scene much quicker than he had intended.

The New House prefect whizzed up as Mr. Railton rose, and ran straight into the Housemaster, and floored him as if he had been shot. With a desperate effort Monteith managed to keep his own feet.

"I—I'm sorry!" he gasped. "I beg your pardon, sir! I—"

"I should thank you do!" gasped Mr. Railton, as Tom Merry helped him up. "How could you be so absurdly clumsy, Monteith?"

"I stepped on the slide, sir, without noticing it. You did the same yourself."

"Well, so I did," said Mr. Railton between his gasps for breath "so I suppose I must not blame you. Really, the slide should never have been made here! It is too dangerous!"

"Quite so, sir. I have no doubt Tom Merry was at the bottom of it, and—"

"It wasn't Tom Merry!" said Figgins sturdily. "We made the slide, Monteith!"

"Then take that!" said Monteith, giving him a cut with the cane, annoyed at Figgins' outspokenness. "And, remember—"

"Monteith, that is brutal!" said Mr. Railton sharply. "I do not like interfering with a prefect, but you have no

right to strike the lad like that. It was very right of him to own up so promptly."

Monteith scowled.

"I do not think, sir, that Mr. Ratcliff would approve of your interfering with one of his House prefects!" he exclaimed.

"Maybe," replied Mr. Railton drily. "At all events, I order you not to touch that junior again!"

"Very well. But I shall certainly lay a complaint to Mr. Ratcliff!"

"Do so, if you choose!" said Mr. Railton contemptuously.

The bell began to ring at this moment, and the boys hurried away, and Mr. Railton hurried in.

Monteith scowled after him.

The head prefect of the New House shared Mr. Ratcliff's dislike of Mr. Railton, and this public rebuke had not improved his feelings.

"Confounded cheek!" he muttered. "If he thinks—"

He broke off. A sheet of paper lying on the frozen snow attracted his attention. It was a letter, and had evidently been dropped there by someone a few minutes ago.

Monteith picked it up. A line had caught his eye, quite sufficient to arouse his curiosity.

"I must have the money on Thursday night, or—"

The prefect put the letter into his pocket and walked back quickly into the New House. His curiosity was strongly excited.



He had no scruples about reading another fellow's letter; he had done meaner things even than that in his time. But the thought was in his mind that the letter did not belong to a boy, but to Mr. Railton.

Before coming out of the New House he had seen the Housemaster hurrying towards the scene of the disturbance with what looked like a letter held in his hand. Was this the letter? It was very probable. In that case, he was on the track of—something.

Inside the New House Monteith turned and looked out of the high hall window without showing himself. In a couple of minutes he was gratified by seeing Mr. Railton reappear in the quadrangle, hurrying towards the scene of the late disturbance, with an anxious expression upon his face.

Monteith grinned.

The School House master stopped and began to search in all directions, evidently looking for something he had dropped there.

There was no longer any doubt as to whom the letter belonged to.

But Monteith had no intention of restoring it to its owner. He walked away to his own study, leaving Mr. Railton still searching in the quadrangle for the letter that was not there. Undoubtedly the Housemaster had remembered the letter, and missed it, and had returned at once to look for it—at once, but too late.

In his own study Monteith calmly unfolded the letter and read it. But as he read it he gave a low, prolonged whistle of amazement, and his eyes opened wide. He read it again, the same astonished expression still upon his face.

"My hat!" he muttered. "I thought, from the little bit I saw, that it was something against the bouncer; but this—well, I never expected anything like this! My hat!"

Monteith whistled again, and placing the letter in an inside pocket, walked away slowly and thoughtfully towards the Sixth Form-room. The letter had given the New House prefect food for reflection.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Mr. Ratcliff on the Track.

"CAN I speak to you for a few minutes, sir?"

"Certainly, Monteith. Is anything the matter?" asked Mr. Ratcliff, looking in surprise at his head prefect's serious face.

"I am afraid so, sir. I am not quite sure whether it concerns our house or the School House. But perhaps you will decide what is best to be done?"

"Come into my study," said Mr. Ratcliff, his interest aroused. Monteith had followed him to his door after morning school.

They entered the room. Monteith took the letter he had picked up in the quadrangle from his pocket.

"I picked this letter up in the quad this morning, sir. It was dropped there by someone who was mixed up in a scramble over the slide, and I looked at it to discover to whom it belonged, with a view to restoring it to its owner. But you will see that it bears no name; and the contents are of such a serious nature that I think a master ought to see them, and decide what is to be done."

"Quite right, Monteith."

Mr. Ratcliff took the letter and read it through at once. His face expressed amazement, not unmingled with satisfaction, as he did so.

This is how the letter ran:

"My dear Cousin,—I hoped to hear from you, but you have not written. I told you plainly that a hundred pounds would be needed to enable me to leave this neighbourhood. What do you mean by not letting me know your decision?"

"It is not safe for me to linger here much longer. I need not go into details; you know as well as I do that it would be better for me to go. Now, to put it plainly, I must have the money by Thursday night, or the consequences will be serious."

"Are you going to let me have it? Do you want to get rid of me? In any case, meet me to-morrow—Monday—night as before in the castle ruins, and we can talk it over. I want to come to an arrangement if possible. I shall be there at ten o'clock. B. H."

Mr. Ratcliff read the letter through twice, and then laid it down upon the table. His little eyes were glittering.

"Have you any idea, Monteith, to whom that letter belongs?"

"Well, sir, it was dropped by one of the persons mixed up in the row in the quad."

"They were mostly juniors, I believe, of both Houses?"

"Yes; nearly all Fourth-Formers and Shell fellows."

"You must see that it is quite impossible for this letter to have been addressed to a junior, or, in fact, a boy at all, junior or senior."

"Well, it would be a bit queer to ask

a boy for a hundred pounds," said Monteith, with a nod. "It struck me in that light."

Mr. Ratcliff pursed up his thin lips.

"The letter evidently belongs to some grown-up person, Monteith. The question is, was there any grown-up person on that spot at the time, who might be supposed to have dropped the letter there?"

Mr. Ratcliff knew very well that the master of the School House had been there. Monteith knew that he knew it; but he answered gravely:

"Mr. Railton was there, sir; but, of course, it would be absurd to suppose that he could have received such a letter as this."

"Yes, indeed!" agreed Mr. Ratcliff. "The letter is evidently written by a blackmailer, and contains veiled threats of what will happen if the money is not paid."

"It looks as if the affair might bring disgrace upon the school, sir," said Monteith diffidently. "Don't you think it ought to be looked into, sir?"

"Undoubtedly!" said Mr. Ratcliff, with a snap of the teeth.

"If there's a man here being blackmailed by some scoundrel, sir, it shows that he must be a pretty bad lot himself," the prefect went on. "He ought to be exposed and got rid of before he brings St. Jim's into disgrace. The difficulty is, that we don't know to whom the letter belongs."

"That is unfortunate."

"But I think that possibly Mr. Railton could tell us, sir."

"Indeed! What makes you think that, Monteith?"

"Just after I picked the letter up I saw Mr. Railton looking round in the quad, as if he had lost something. Of course, I could not insult him by supposing that such a letter belonged to him. But he may know something about it."

The eyes of prefect and Housemaster met. They understood each other perfectly.

Each of them knew perfectly well that the letter belonged to Mr. Railton, and there was no need of words. Without speaking, they had agreed that the letter must be used to Mr. Railton's disadvantage if possible. It was a weapon in their hands against the enemy, and they did not mean to spare him.

"It is possible," said Mr. Ratcliff, with an air of judicial reflection. "However, I could hardly approach Mr. Railton on the subject. I think it would be better for me to look into the matter myself. For the credit of the school it ought to be cleared up."

"You could go to the ruins at ten to-night, sir, and then you would see who met this man who signs himself 'B. H.," suggested Monteith. "That would be proof positive, and he would not be able to crawl out of it."

"You are right, Monteith; that is what I was thinking of. I cannot say I like the task." But Mr. Ratcliff smiled as he spoke in a way that hinted that he really did like it. "But I cannot consult my personal inclinations when it is a question of the good name of the school that is at stake."

"I agree with you, sir."

"You may safely leave the matter in my hands, Monteith. I will certainly see to it. You may leave the letter with me."

"Certainly, sir."

And Monteith quitted his Housemaster's study in a mood of the most profound satisfaction. In spite of the solemn humbug Mr. Ratcliff had seen fit to keep up in talking with the prefect, Monteith knew that he would do his worst.

There were breakers ahead for the master of the School House. Monteith had realised, when he first read the letter, what a weapon it would be against the School House master. But he could hardly venture to make use of it himself.

His nerve was not quite good enough for that. To leave it in the hands of Mr. Ratcliff was safer, and just as sure; and this arrangement suited the cautious, spiteful prefect admirably.

When Monteith was gone Mr. Ratcliff read the letter through once more.

"Dear me," he murmured, "it really looks as if Monteith's surmise is correct, and Mr. Railton does know something about the letter. However, I shall ascertain the facts to-night, and I sincerely hope they will be to the credit of Mr. Railton."

And Mr. Ratcliff gave a slight laugh.

it rained cats and dogs, and snowed elephants and blackbeetles. Wouldn't he just like to have the grin of us, if I didn't turn up, too?"

"I suppose so. But you were a giddy ass to agree to it."

"Well, if I hadn't accepted his challenge, I shouldn't be worth much as commander-in-chief of the School House juniors, should I? Wouldn't the New House have crowed over us?"

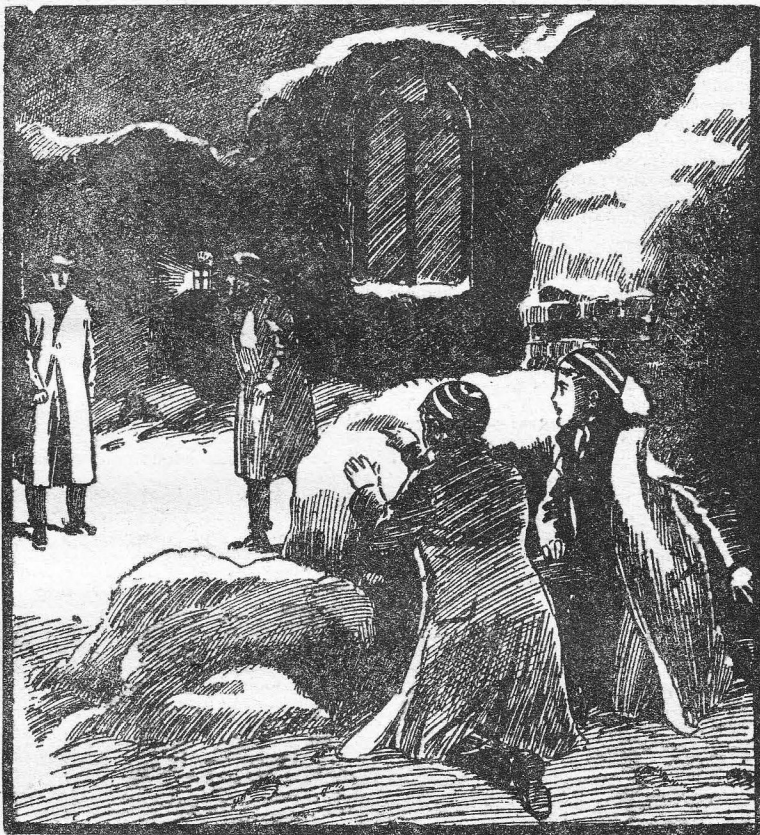
"You bet," said Lowther. "But I don't like you going alone, Tommy. Let one of us come with you."

"Rats! Figgy is going alone."

"But—"

"I'd like to have one of you," said Tommy, "but it can't be did. I've got to go alone, but one of you can stay awake to let me in."

"We'll toss up for that," said Monty Lowther.



Tom Merry and Figgins exchanged a look of mute amazement as the figure of the School House master came into the circle of light cast by the lantern which the waiting stranger held up.

THE THIRD CHAPTER. Mysterious!

TOM MERRY looked out of the window of his study. The quadrangle was dark, save for the glimmering of the snow, and a keen wind whistled and wailed among the old elms.

"Looks pretty parky, doesn't it?" said Lowther. "I believe it's going to snow."

"Shouldn't wonder."

"You're going, I suppose?"

"My dear kid, have you ever known your uncle back out when he had made up his little mind to do a thing? Besides, what would Figgins say?"

"Blow Figgins! Do you think he'll be there?"

"Of course he will! He'd turn up if

"Right you are!"

And Tommy turned away from the window.

"Come, let us eat, drink, and be merry!" he exclaimed. "I shall face it better with some tommy and hot coffee inside me. Gimme those sassingers."

And he put a frying-pan on the study fire, and Lowther handed him the butter and sausages, and he set to work as cook. The grateful odour of frying sausages soon filled the study.

Although Tommy seemed as cool and unconcerned as ever, the prospect before him was not exactly enticing. He had accepted a challenge from Figgins without the slightest hesitation, and had no intention of backing out of it. But what

he had to do was neither easy nor pleasant.

Some distance from St. Jim's, an easy walk in summer, but a far from easy tramp in winter, was the old ruined castle on the slopes of the hill. Local rumour had it that the ruins were haunted, and that on dark nights spectres could be seen gliding to and fro amid the masses of fallen masonry.

Whether the spectres really kept such late hours was not certain; but it was certain that after dark the ruins were avoided by all the dwellers round about Rylcombe and Wayland.

In the daytime, the juniors of St. Jim's liked to explore the ruins, not greatly troubled by the fact that they were out of bounds. Tommy knew his way about them pretty well.

There had been a heated discussion among some of the juniors of the two Houses, which had led to a challenge from Figgins, which Tom had not been slow to accept. Figgins having expressed an opinion that the School House leader would funk going to the ruins after dark, Tommy had offered to fight Figgins on the spot. But, as Figgy pointed out, that would have proved nothing either one way or the other.

Figgy thereupon dared Tom to prove, by going to the ruined castle that very night, that he did not funk it, to which Tom Merry retorted that he would go if Figgins would meet him there. The New House leader had not expected that, but he was not the fellow to back down. And in order to go one better than the School House, he said that he would get there first, and wait for the captain of the Shell.

Probably both the juniors wished they had not been quite so argumentative when the night set in with a bitter wind and biting cold, and with a few flakes falling to give a hint of what was coming later.

But the challenge had been given and accepted, and there was no getting out of it, and neither Tommy nor Figgins was the fellow to admit to himself that he had the remotest desire to get out of it.

"When will you start, Tommy?" asked Monty Lowther.

"About half-past nine," replied Merry. "It's no good trying to get away till after lights-out. Then, after the prefect has gone his rounds, I'll nip out of the dorm, and get out into the quad. So long as I get there by ten o'clock, it will be all right. Figgy has agreed to wait till the church clock strikes ten. You can hear it from the ruins."

"Suppose you meet the ghost?" said Manners.

Tom Merry laughed.

"Well, as Figgy has to get there first, he'll interview the ghost first, if there is one. I suppose he'll have explained matters before I arrive. But it isn't the ghost that will bother me so much as the snow. Never mind, let's tuck into these sassaengers! Go ahead!"

The chums enjoyed the feed. Then they roasted chestnuts and ate them till bedtime.

The talk ran on in a strain which was not exactly grateful and comforting to Tom Merry, with the night expedition before him.

Manners related a ghost story, in which a fellow visiting a ruined castle had been seized from behind by a grim goblin, and had disappeared from human ken.

Lowther knew a tale of a chap who had seen a spectre while going through a lonely wood at midnight, and had died the next morning.

Tom Merry was rather glad when bedtime came, and the Shell went up to their dormitory. Kildare came along to see

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lights out, and he found all the juniors tucked up in bed.

He glanced along the row of white beds, said good-night, and turned the light out. The door closed, and the captain's footsteps died away along the corridor.

Tom Merry yawned and sat up.

He had removed only his outer clothes, but the dormitory was cold, and he shivered.

He hopped out of bed, and was soon fully dressed again. He went to the big window and looked out.

"Which of you kids is going to keep awake?" he asked.

"Oh, I will," said Manners willingly.

"Good! Put some clothes on."

Manners quietly slipped on coat and trousers.

Then the two juniors quietly left the dormitory. They tiptoed down the stairs, and reached a little window at the end of a deserted passage, and Tom Merry quietly opened it.

"When you hear a pebble clink on the dorm window, it will be time to come down and let me in," said Tom Merry.

"Right-ho!"

Tom Merry pulled himself out of the window. He slid to the ground, and then picked his way carefully across the snow. Manners fastened the window and crept back to the Shell dormitory.

Tom Merry left a trail of deep footprints behind him, but fortunately the snow was falling fast enough to cover them. He made for a point in the wall where the masses of ivy made scaling an easy task. He had crossed the wall in that place more than once, by the aid of a slanting oak.

But as he arrived there, he gave a low whistle of dismay. The ivy was heavy with masses of snow, and the climb was likely to be an exceedingly difficult one.

Tom Merry stood for some moments in reflection.

"Well, it's got to be done!" he said to himself at last. "Figgy must have got out somehow, and what a New House bouncer can do, I can do."

The next instant Tom Merry dodged with surprising suddenness into the shadow of the ivy.

He had caught a sound near at hand—a sound faint but unmistakable, quite sufficient to alarm a junior in the act of breaking bounds. And he took cover with great promptness.

"Who's that?" he murmured.

A figure loomed up out of the darkness and the falling snow—a sturdy form in a long overcoat with a cap pulled down over his ears. Tom Merry, peeping out cautiously, saw the form and knew it at once.

"Railton, by Jove!"

For a moment he thought that the Housemaster had discovered him. But his fears were soon relieved. Mr. Railton passed on, and stopped at the little wicket let into the high wall. This gate was used by the masters at St. Jim's when they wished to go in or out after Taggles had closed the big gate for the night.

Tom Merry heard the click of a key, and the Housemaster disappeared. He had evidently quitted the precincts of St. Jim's.

"My hat!" murmured Tom Merry. "What a night to take a walk in! How lucky he didn't run against me! I wonder if there's any more giddy wanderers out to-night?"

It did not seem likely, but he was very much on the alert now.

A slight cough came to his ears. He lay low in the black shadow of the ivy. "That's old Ratcliff's bark, if I know it!"

Mr. Ratcliff it was. The master of the

New House, his long thin form well wrapped up, and a soft hat crushed down on his head, came quickly towards the little gate, unlocked it, and passed out. It closed again, and Tom Merry rubbed his eyes.

"Is everybody on the giddy mouch to-night?" he muttered. "I suppose I shall see the Head coming along next."

But no one else appeared, and after waiting five minutes, the Shell fellow ventured to leave his concealment. He was considerably surprised.

"Looks almost as if Ratcliff was following Railton," he muttered. "He was so close behind him, and yet never showed himself till Railton was gone. But I suppose he couldn't have been. It's queer, though."

He tackled the ivy again. His first attempt brought a shower of snow down upon him, and he plumped back upon the ground. The snow was soft to fall upon there, however, and he was not hurt. He returned to the attack indomitably, and succeeded in reaching the summit of the wall. To drop down outside was easy enough.

The wind was blowing hard on the road, whirling snowflakes to and fro. Tom set his face against it, and started off. There was no sign of either Housemaster, and he could not see their tracks, which were already hidden.

He had no suspicion that either of them was going in the same direction as himself. He followed the road at a swinging pace, and turned into the footpath through the wood.

Under the trees the snow was thinner, but the darkness was like pitch. He wondered where Figgins was. The thought of the New House chief, perhaps already at the ruins awaiting him, made him buck up. He tramped on swiftly.

He came out of the shadow of the wood on the slopes of Wayland Hill. Had it been daylight the old castle would now have been visible. He could see nothing but whirling flakes; but he knew the way blindfold. Without a pause he strode on.

A figure loomed up before him. It was white with snow, but Tom Merry knew it. The long, ungainly figure of Mr. Ratcliff was not easily mistaken.

Tom Merry paused in dismay.

What on earth was Ratcliff doing there? What could possibly be his object in going to the ruined castle on such a snowy night?

The junior was utterly bewildered.

Mr. Ratcliff might have discovered that Figgins had broken bounds, but that would hardly be enough to take him out so far. It wasn't that. His visit to the castle had nothing to do with the juniors, Tom Merry felt sure.

But it made things very awkward. If he found Figgins there, there would be a row. And if Figgy was already on the spot, he would show himself as soon as he heard someone coming, thinking it was Tom Merry. He could never dream that Ratcliff could be coming there.

The thought of giving up the expedition had crossed Tom Merry's mind at the sight of the New House master. He dismissed it now. He had to get to the ruins before Ratcliff, and warn Figgins.

To get ahead of the Housemaster was not difficult. Tom Merry made a detour, avoiding the path Ratcliff was following.

Mr. Ratcliff, with a wintry wind in his face, was going slowly. Tom Merry easily got ahead, and came back into the path again some distance in advance of the Housemaster. Then he ran on as fast as he could through the snow.

The thick snow beneath him deadened his footsteps, and what slight sound he made was lost in the wind. It was fortunate for him, for all of a sudden he

caught sight of a figure ahead, and stopped in time to avoid running into it.

He knew whom it was. He would have guessed, even if he had not recognised Mr. Railton's shoulders, and his coat and cap with the flaps over the ears.

"Railton, by all that's funny!"

Tom Merry was simply astounded.

It was surprising enough to find Mr. Ratcliff heading for the ruined castle, but to find the other Housemaster there also!

The vague suspicion that had come into his mind when he saw the two Housemasters leaving the quad now recurred with the force of certainty.

Mr. Ratcliff was following Mr. Railton with the intention of spying upon him!

It was quite clear now, and so Ratcliff's presence there was explained. Now, the question was, what on earth did Railton want at the ruins at such an hour?

"This is getting a bit thick," murmured Tom Merry. "I've dodged one, now I've got to dodge the other. What in the name of goodness does it all mean, anyway?"

There was no guessing that. The situation was growing rather thrilling. There was a deep mystery somewhere, and Tom Merry seemed likely to get mixed up in it. He had no time to waste. He left the path, as he had done before, and made a detour.

Mr. Railton was going on at a steady tramp, and Tom Merry was easily able to calculate so as to get ahead of him. He came back into the path close before the castle, and passed through the ruined arch of the great gateway. The snow was falling more thickly than ever, and he hoped it would cover up his tracks before Mr. Railton arrived.

The ruins of the ancient castle covered a wide space of ground. Only a portion of the old hall was still standing and there were some fragments of the roof which still afforded a partial shelter from the snow. This was where Figgins was to wait, and where the School House junior expected to find him.

Tom Merry hurrying through the ruins, among masses of masonry and fragments of walls, reached the spot where he expected to find his rival. A dim form came out of the gloom.

"That you, Tom Merry?"

It was the voice of Figgins. It came jerkily through chattering teeth.

"Yes, my son. Seen any giddy ghosts?" asked the Shell fellow.

"Oh, don't talk!" said Figgins sharply. "I've been here an hour, I think."

"Well, if you had been a little later you'd have seen Railton and old Ratty."

"Rot!"

"Honest Injun," said Tom Merry seriously. "I passed 'em both, and had to dodge 'em. Railton is coming here for something, and Ratty is following on his track like a giddy Sherlock Holmes, spying on him. Honest!"

Figgins gave a gasp of astonishment. "I don't know what it means," said Tom Merry, "but it will mean a tremendous licking if either of them spots us here. So this is where we lie low."

"Rather!" said Figgy fervently. "If we were caught out of bounds this time of night, we'd be taken up before the Head! My aunt! What can it all mean?"

"Don't know, and don't care much, only we've got to keep out of sight."

"Hallo! There comes somebody!"

There was a sound of tramping in the ruined hall. From over the wood in the distance came chiming bells, and then the hour struck. Ten strokes boomed through the snowy night.

As the last stroke died away, the new-

comer halted within a dozen paces of the boys, and a light gleamed out. Tom Merry and Figgins shrank back into the shadows. The light gleamed upon the snow from a lantern, and in its light they saw the man plainly. He was a stranger to them—a somewhat broadly-built man, with a reddish moustache and wisp of beard. He was wrapped in a greatcoat, and wore a soft hat.

"Who on earth's that?" whispered Figgins.

Tom Merry gave a hopeless shrug.

"Can't say. It seems as if all the giddy neighbourhood is going to gather in these beastly ruins to-night, just because we're here for a lark."

"I say, do you think Railton is coming to meet that chap?"

"I shouldn't wonder, Figgy. And old Ratty wants to know what it's all about. Yes, I fancy that's the giddy explanation!"

"Look! There's Railton."

The figure of the Housemaster came into the circle of light cast by the lantern. His face was decidedly gloomy, but the waiting man turned to him with a grin.

"Hallo! You're here on time, my dear cousin!"

THE FOURTH CHAPTER. Trouble for Ratty.

TOM MERRY and Figgins exchanged a look of mute amazement. The two juniors, crouching among the masses of brickwork a dozen paces from the men were

**TURN
TO PAGE 15
FOR
AN IMPORTANT
ANNOUNCEMENT!**

quite invisible, and they did not venture to move.

But now it occurred to both of them that if they remained where they were, they would be compelled to play the unpleasant and dishonourable part of cavedroppers.

"Yes, I am here on time." It was Mr. Railton's voice, hard and cold. The juniors had never heard him speak like that before. "A pleasant night to be brought to such a place as this, Hunt."

Hunt laughed.

"How was I to foresee that there would be a snowstorm? It was fine enough last night, when I wrote the letter to you."

"That letter may cause trouble yet," said the Housemaster angrily.

"Why? I suppose you haven't left it lying about, have you?"

"I have lost it."

"Well, you must be a— I won't say what," said the other, in tones of deep disgust. "Fancy losing a letter like that!"

"It was not my fault. I was reading it over again when I was interrupted. I met with an accident over a slide, and the letter somehow must have fallen from my hand, and I was too shaken up to notice it at the time. Then I had to hurry off to a class, and when I remembered the letter and came back to look for it, it had disappeared. It wasn't two minutes, but the letter was gone."

"That looks very much as if someone had picked it up."

"Yes, though it may have blown away. But I shall not be easy in my mind till I know what has become of it. If it fell into certain hands at St. Jim's, it might cause me a great deal of trouble. I have enemies there."

"I don't suppose it will ever turn up, though. Very likely it was trampled in the snow."

"Perhaps. I hope so. But look here, Hunt, if you write to me at the school again, I will wash my hands of you entirely, whatever the consequences."

"Oh, stuff! I couldn't foresee that you would be so careless. Besides, you hadn't communicated with me, so what was I to do?"

"I hadn't made up my mind."

"Have you made it up yet?"

"I suppose I must yield to your demand, if I have some guarantee that it will really be the end of our dealings."

"I give you my word, Railton."

Mr. Railton made no reply, but the expression of his face showed that he was not inclined to place much reliance upon the word of his cousin.

Hunt read his expression, and gave a shrug of the shoulders.

"You can trust me!" he exclaimed.

"I have reasons as great for getting away from this country as you can have for wishing me away."

"Yes, I suppose so. But put that lantern out, Hunt. We can talk in the dark, and we don't want to attract attention here."

"Right you are!"

Hunt extinguished the lantern.

Tom Merry drew a deep breath, and nudged Figgins.

"This is where we hook it," he whispered. "They're going to talk, and we mustn't hear. It may be something awfully important and secret."

Figgins returned his nudge.

"Right-ho! Let's cut!"

While the lantern burned, there had been danger of revealing themselves if they moved, for the gleam of the snow on their coats and caps would have caught the light in the dim shadow of the ruins.

And, more for the sake of Mr. Railton himself than for their own sakes, the boys would not have let him know of their presence there for worlds. They had heard little, but they knew that Mr. Railton must have some powerful motive for meeting his relative in so secret a manner. There was some shadow over the Housemaster, which he evidently wished to keep from common knowledge.

Tom Merry rose and glided away, treading softly, and Figgins followed.

The soft snow under their feet deadened the sound of their steps, and in a minute or less they had placed a portion of the old wall between themselves and the two men.

The murmur of voices came still to their ears. Mr. Railton and Hunt were talking again, but now the juniors could not hear what they said.

Tom Merry stopped in the thick shadow of the wall, and gripped Figgy's arm.

"Look out!" he muttered.

A dim figure was stealing softly through the snow, making for the opening in the ruins from which the juniors had emerged a minute before.

Figgins drew a deep breath.

"Mr. Ratcliff, by Jove!"

The long, lean figure of the Housemaster passed within six paces of the crouching juniors, and stopped at the opening in the fragment of wall, and bent down there, and remained still, with shoulders craned forward, and head bent to listen.

Tom Merry and Figgins knew at once what that meant.

"The beast is listening," whispered Tom Merry. "He's followed Railton here to listen. Very likely he picked up that letter Railton was speaking of, and read it. He's got it up against him, and you can't say he's playing the game, Figgy, old boy."

"The beast!" muttered Figgy. "Shall we stop him? There's plenty of snow here, and if we gave him a surprise, it would shut up his little game, and he'd never know who did it. Got the nerve?"

Tom Merry chuckled silently. "That's exactly what I was thinking of, Figgy. He ought to be stopped. He may learn all sorts of giddy things that don't concern him."

"Then get a snowball, and chip in."

"I'm on!"

The two juniors, grinning gleefully, bent down and gathered handfuls of the thick snow, and each quickly provided himself with three or four snowballs.

"You can have first shot if you like, Figgy," said Tom Merry, with much consideration. "He's your Housemaster, you know."

This concession quite touched Figgins. He nodded, and, with glinting eyes, took aim at the dim form crouching in the opening of the wall. His hand jerked forward, and the snowball flew. It caught Mr. Ratcliff in the small of the back, and broke there.

The blow was not a severe one, but the unexpectedness of it made the Housemaster jump and utter a sudden, startled exclamation.

The sound of voices in the ruins ceased instantly. The noise made by the Housemaster had reached the ears of the talkers there.

Mr. Ratcliff stared round behind in amazement, wondering what had hit him. Another snowball flew, and caught him under the chin. He gave a jump and a yelp.

"Good shot!" muttered Figgy, and the next instant his second ball smashed on Mr. Ratcliff's prominent nose.

The Housemaster grunted and staggered; his foot slipped on the snow, and he fell with a thump. As he struggled to rise, the two juniors pelted him with hearty good will, and ball after ball smashed and crashed on every part of the unhappy spy.

Like lightning the juniors darted past him, and disappeared ahead long before the startled and confused Housemaster could catch a glimpse of them.

"Well, we're clear of that, Figgy!" panted Tom Merry, as they entered the footpath through the wood. "And a jolly narrow escape. I reckon this is the last time I shall amble about an old castle in the middle of the night, my son."

"Well, it was a narrow shave, but it was exciting!" grinned Figgins. "But, I say, I should like to know what the giddy mystery is. What does your Housemaster mean by visiting his giddy relations in a ruined castle in a snowstorm?"

"That's his business, Figgy. I suppose there's some mystery at the bottom of it, but it don't matter to us. I'll race you through the wood. If you fall and break your leg, that doesn't count."

"Right you are!"

And the juniors made a record back to St. Jim's. There Figgins helped Tom Merry over the wall, and Tom Merry pulled him up from above, and then they went to their respective houses.

Tom Merry groped in the snow at the foot of the School House wall for a pebble, and found one, and tossed it up to the dormitory window.

Then he went round the house to wait for Manners to let him in.

He was not without some uneasiness

that Manners might have gone to sleep, and forgotten all about his duties for the night.

Fortunately, Manners hadn't. The little window opened, and Tom Merry climbed in, and found himself in the dusk with his chum.

"Oh, you've got back!" grunted Manners.

"Looks like it, doesn't it?" said Tom Merry.

"Seen the ghost?"

"No."

"What happened, then?"

"Tell you in the morning." And with that he made his way to the dormitory, and was soon between the sheets.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Tom Merry's Little Joke.

TOM MERRY'S study was very quiet the next day. Tom Merry was sitting in the armchair, his brows corrugated in deep thought. Monty Lowther was writing out an imposition, and Manners was cutting films. Tom Merry was gazing into space, his brain evidently very hard at work.

Suddenly a prolonged chuckle broke the silence of the study. Two heads were raised at once, two pairs of eyes fixed in mute inquiry upon Tom. He was grinning joyously.

"Well, what's the wheeze?" asked Manners.

The chums knew that something was coming.

"I've been thinking of a wheeze for paying back old Ratty for spying on Railton!" said Tom Merry.

"Oh, good!" said Manners and Lowther, who were fully acquainted with Tom Merry's adventure of the previous night. "Let's have it, old son."

"Well," said Tom Merry. "Ratty seems to be a good hand at finding people's letters and reading them, and then toddling along to a giddy rendezvous. So why shouldn't we gratify him in this harmless and necessary amusement? Why shouldn't we write a nice little letter, and put it where he's bound to find it, and then—"

The chums shrieked at the possibilities of the joke rushed upon them.

"Good old Tom!" said Lowther. "Oh, it will be ripping! Something blood-curdling, that will make Ratty think he's got hold of something specially prime!"

"Bring in a murder!" suggested Manners. "That will wake him up!"

Tom Merry grinned serenely.

"That's the wheeze!" he said. "If we could get old Ratty to a convenient rendezvous, we could put him through a regular course of surprises, and teach him a little lesson about playing the giddy amateur detective!"

"Yes, if he doesn't spot us!"

"We shall have to take care that he doesn't, of course! He's on Railton's track like a blughound, and so he's bound to swallow anything! Now, this is what I was planning in my little head, kids."

Tom Merry dashed off a letter. He read it aloud as he finished:

"Sir,—Our meeting at the castle having been interrupted, I must see you again as quickly as possible. Unless you hand me the hush-money, I shall denounce you to the police, and you will be arrested at once. You know that when your fearful crime becomes known, you will have no escape from penal servitude. If you dare to disregard this letter, tremble! Meet me at eleven o'clock to-night outside the shed in the Acre Field, or take the consequences!"

"ONE WHO KNOWS YOUR SECRET."

The Shell fellows simply yelled.

"How's that for high?" exclaimed Tom Merry. "Now that old Ratty's on the scent, a discovery like that ought to please him. You see, I haven't mentioned any names; so if the letter should fall into the wrong hands, it won't do any harm. The allusion to the meeting at the castle is enough to show Ratty that it's addressed to Mr. Railton."

"You're a howling genius!"

"The penal servitude is ripping!" said Lowther. "But couldn't you make it the galloys?"

"No; that would be a bit too strong, and might make Ratty smell a mouse! Penal servitude is good enough, and it will make Ratty chortle!"

"Mind you disguise your hand!" said Lowther. "There would be a howling row if we got spotted over this jape!"

"Rather!"

Tom Merry carefully wrote out the precious epistle in disguised writing.

"Now, the question is, to get it into Ratty's hands without making him suspicious," said Manners.

"Leave that to your uncle," said Merry.

And with the letter in his pocket he quitted the study.

The junior passed quickly out of the House, and scuttled across the quad in the deep winter dusk. In a couple of minutes he was in the New House, and a glance round showed him no one in sight but a couple of juniors coming downstairs.

They spotted Tom Merry at once, and accelerated their pace to come to close quarters with the bold intruder.

Tom Merry faced them, and placed the thumb of his right hand to his nose, extending the fingers, while at the same time with his left he dropped the precious letter behind him on the little rug just outside Mr. Ratcliff's study door.

The New House juniors had not the least suspicion of the hidden action; they saw only Tom's attitude of defiance, and came for him with a run, breathing vengeance.

"Collar the cheeky bounder!" exclaimed Redfern.

They rushed at Tom Merry. Tom dodged quickly out of the way and put out his foot. Pratt went sprawling over it, and crashed against Mr. Ratcliff's door. At the same moment Tom Merry seized Redfern, and, with a twist, dropped him on top of Pratt.

In a second afterwards Tom was outside the New House.

Five minutes later he re-entered his study with a beaming smile.

"Well, what luck?" asked Manners and Lowther.

"First class."

And Tom explained what had occurred.

"But are you sure he had the letter?"

"Rather! I watched him through the hall window, and he picked it up and took it into his study. That's all right."

"Then if he doesn't smell a mouse—"

"I don't believe he will, but we shall have to chance it. Now, who's coming with me to the Acre Field to educate him to-night?"

"I am!" said Manners emphatically.

"And I!" exclaimed Monty Lowther.

"All serene! We'll all go!" said Tom Merry. "So that's settled. I'll get Blake to open the window for us when we come back. We won't let on to him what the wheeze is, of course. That's our giddy secret."

Anxiously enough the famous four waited for the appointed hour. Would Ratcliff be there? Would he have a suspicion that the letter was a "spoof" one, and fail to bite?

There was no telling, but they hoped

for the best. When they went up to the dormitory at bedtime, Tom made his arrangement with Blake.

When half-past ten rang from the clock-tower Tom Merry & Co. tumbled out of bed.

They left the dormitory, and, having called Blake of the Fourth, the chums went downstairs, and Blake let them out and closed the window. The Terrible Three lost no time in getting over the wall, and they warmed their chilly bodies by a race to the Acre Field.

There was no snow falling, but the ground was thickly carpeted with it. The Acre Field was close to the college. The chums did not go in by the gate on the roadside, in case they should leave footprints to alarm the expected victim. They entered the field by a gap in the fence, and approached the shed from the rear.

The shed was a half-ruined structure, with a good many gaps in the roof. The gaps showed black in the white covering of snow. The door was closed, but it was fastened only by a latch. In the summer the shed sheltered cattle, but in the dead of winter it was never used.

Tom Merry, from behind the shed, took a cautious survey of the field. The stars were glinting in a dark, steely sky, and the night was not dark. The snow round the shed was undisturbed.

"Nobody here yet," said Tom. "It's still a quarter to eleven, and Ratty won't be in a hurry to come and freeze here. But, I say, I expect he'll come scouting

loft, and could play the listener with ease and impunity.

Mr. Ratcliff was evidently up to snuff. But the fact that there was to be no rendezvous at all, and that the whole affair was a hoax, made the situation so utterly funny that the juniors could hardly contain their laughter.

Tom Merry held up his hand as a sign to his companions to keep still, and then cautiously crept round the shed.

Mr. Ratcliff had closed the door after him. Tom drew a strong wire from his pocket, and with deft and silent fingers secured the latch so that it could not by any possibility be unfastened from inside. As the door opened inwards, it was impossible even to burst it open from within.

Mr. Ratcliff was a prisoner!

Tom Merry rejoined his comrades. He gave a nod in reply to their inquiring grins.

"He's a giddy prisoner," he said. "Now keep out of sight, and we'll wait till he gets tired of marking time in there."

Under the dark trees the juniors waited. They made a pile of snowballs to fill up the time, and stamped to keep themselves warm.

Eleven strokes boomed out from the clock-tower at St. Jim's, distinctly audible across the frozen field.

Tom Merry chuckled. It was the hour of the supposed rendezvous, and he could imagine Mr. Ratcliff's feelings at

Lowther. "He'll be getting out of one of the gaps in the roof before long."

"Yes, that's the only thing he can do, unless he wants to stay there all night," assented Tom. "How lucky for him, kids, that dutiful youths are here, with an unlimited supply of snowballs, to give him a warm time on this cold and chilly night! When his head comes out of the roof, mind, I have first shot. If I don't get a bullseye, you can jump on my neck."

The crisis was coming. They heard the Housemaster rummaging about in a small lean-to attached to the shed. Then a hand came out of a gap in the roof, and a head followed it. Mr. Ratcliff was so tall that when he stood upright in the lean-to his head and neck were in the open air through the gap.

Tom Merry's arm jerked forward.

A snowball, beautifully aimed, smote the Housemaster under the chin, and the head disappeared with surprising suddenness.

Tom Merry threw himself on the ground, and gurgled.

"Oh, dear! Oh, dear! I know I shall burst a boiler!" he gasped.

The head came out of the gap again.

Mr. Ratcliff's face was white with fury.

He attempted to scramble out of the gap. A volley of snowballs greeted him, and he went in again. Then the juniors, shaking with suppressed laughter, hurried away from the spot.

They thought he had had enough, and

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behind the shed, for he won't want to leave his giddy trail in the snow across the field. Keep in cover."

The shed was in a corner of the field. Behind it were trees, now leafless and bare, but covering the ground with black shadow, and here the ground, partially sheltered, had very little snow upon it. The chums had left few traces, and these were concealed by the shadow of the trees.

The chums crouched in black shadows. A tall, thin figure passed in the dim starlight. It went round the shed, treading softly so as to leave as little trace as possible in the snow, pushed open the door, and entered.

Keeping still as mice, the juniors exchanged glances.

It was Mr. Ratcliff who had passed them as lightly and silently as a spectre; it was Mr. Ratcliff who was now inside the shed.

The wheeze had worked!

The juniors made not a sound. They hardly breathed lest the Housemaster should hear them. They knew what Mr. Ratcliff's plan was as well as the master himself.

There was a small loft over the shed. If the master of the School House and the supposed blackmailer met outside the shed, Ratcliff, inside, would hear every word that was uttered. If they entered the shed, he would be concealed in the

hearing nothing of the men he was waiting for.

The minutes passed away slowly. The chums were exercising and keeping themselves warm, but the Housemaster, who dared not, of course, make a sound inside the shed, must have found his quarters pretty chilly.

A quarter struck from the tower. There was a slight sound in the shed.

"Getting impatient," murmured Lowther. "Wait till he tries to open the door, that's all. That's where the laugh comes in."

Half-past eleven floated through the keen night air.

There was a rattling sound. The inmate of the shed was trying to open the door. Doubtless the failure of his efforts surprised him, but he kept on at it. He tugged and dragged, and dragged and tugged, but the door did not budge.

The juniors listened in silent bliss.

Mr. Ratcliff was getting reckless now. He must have realised that he was trapped, and, of course, he set it down to Mr. Railton.

Evidently Railton had discovered that he was watching, and had fastened him maliciously up in the shed. Every effort to open the door having failed, the imprisoned Housemaster threw all concealment to the winds. He kicked violently upon the door.

"Keep your peepers open!" muttered

no doubt he thought so, too. As soon as they were at a safe distance from the shed they stopped and gave vent to the mirth that oppressed them.

"Oh, oh, oh!" gasped Tom Merry, when he had laughed till the tears ran down his cheeks. "What price this for a night out? But buck up, kids! We don't want him to spot us going in. I shouldn't wonder if he comes home in a nasty temper."

The juniors made all haste to get back within the walls of St. Jim's. Blake was wakeful, and let them in. Blake wanted to know what had happened, and the Terrible Three explained. And Jack Blake staggered back to the Fourth Form dormitory in a state bordering on hysterics.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER. The Mystery Clears.

AFTER breakfast on the following morning Mr. Railton received a message by a fag from the Head of St. Jim's. The Head requested the master of the School House to visit him as speedily as possible in his study.

The School House master entered the Head's study. Mr. Ratcliff was there, his nose redder and his eyes more watery than ever. His adventure overnight had not improved his cold. Mr. Railton

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lowed slightly to his fellow Housemaster, and looked at the doctor.

"You sent for me, sir?"

"Yes, Mr. Railton." The Head's face was very grave. "Mr. Ratcliff has told me an astounding story—a story so utterly astounding that I cannot credit it, but feel certain that there is some terrible mistake."

Mr. Railton changed colour slightly for a moment. He knew what was coming now—or, rather, part of what was coming. Of the affair of the previous night he, of course, knew nothing.

The Head did not fail to mark the slight change in his countenance, and his expression grew a little harder.

"You will repeat your statements, Mr. Ratcliff, in Mr. Railton's presence," he said. "I only hope that Mr. Railton will be able to explain them away."

"I certainly hope to be able to fully explain anything that may be considered derogatory to my character," said the Housemaster calmly.

"Very good," said the Head. "Go on, Mr. Ratcliff."

Mr. Ratcliff gave the master of the School House a venomous glance.

"In the first place," he said, "I wish it to be understood that I have acted solely from a regard for the honour of the school, and not from any personal ill-feeling towards Mr. Railton. I felt in duty bound to act as I have done."

"Certainly," said the Head courteously. "No one will suspect you, Mr. Ratcliff, of having acted from any other than the very best motives, and I am sure Mr. Railton will acknowledge this if fortunately it turns out to be a mistake."

Mr. Railton did not speak.

"Then I will go on," said Mr. Ratcliff. "I have told you, sir, how a letter came into my possession. Monteith, my head prefect, picked it up in the quadrangle, and as there was no name on it, he very properly brought it to me. I have told you that the contents of that letter made me visit the ruined castle, to ascertain who it was at St. James' College that was being blackmailed."

"Quite so, Mr. Ratcliff."

"There I was assaulted by a person I did not see. But I had seen Mr. Railton meet a person who certainly looked most disreputable—a person named Hunt."

"Go on."

"Unfortunately, I was unable to discover more than that Mr. Railton had gone there in reply to a demand for money. I reflected upon the matter, and decided that for the honour of the school I ought to keep my eyes open; but I thought it would not be fair to bring any accusation until I had proof."

"Quite correct."

"Mr. Railton must have come to my study the next day, when I wasn't there, for he let fall another letter outside my door."

The School House master looked astounded. He was about to speak, but the Head held up his hand.

"Let Mr. Ratcliff finish first, please."

"Very well, sir!" said Mr. Railton.

"I found this letter by accident," said the New House master. "There was no name on it, and I did not guess that it was Mr. Railton's till I read it. Then a reference to the previous meeting at the

castle enlightened me. I have placed that letter in your hands, Dr. Holmes."

"I have it here. You shall see it when Mr. Ratcliff is finished, Mr. Railton."

"The writing was disguised," went on Mr. Ratcliff. "But I knew it must be from the same person as the other letter. I went to the rendezvous to ascertain. Then I was locked up in the shed, and assaulted brutally when I tried to escape from the gaps in the roof. That is all, Dr. Holmes. I have only to ask you if Mr. Railton is a proper person to remain at the school after what I have told you?"

"If Mr. Railton cannot explain, certainly not," replied the Head. "Now, Mr. Railton, I am waiting for your explanation. But I feel certain that you can explain everything."

"It is simple," replied the School House master, with quiet dignity. "I do not desire to conceal anything from you, sir, now that Mr. Ratcliff has troubled himself to acquaint you with so many details of my private affairs."

"Read that letter, Mr. Railton, before you answer."

Mr. Railton accepted the letter the Head handed to him. It was Tom Merry's precious effusion.

Mr. Railton's lips twitched as he read it through.

He laid it down on the table when he had finished.

"Now for my explanation, sir. I have the misfortune to have a cousin, by name Bernard Hunt, who is frequently getting into scrapes, and expecting his relations to get him out of them. His latest freak is to get mixed up in a transaction which brings him within the shadow of the law. He is really guiltless, and has been a catspaw of a gang of scoundrels; but there is great danger that he may be made the scapegoat."

"He fled, instead of facing his difficulties, and that action will tell so heavily against him, that now his only hope is to get out of the country. To do this, he requires money. That is why he has come to the neighbourhood of the school."

"I was both angry and annoyed by his conduct; but blood is thicker than water, and I resolved to help him. His demand for a hundred pounds, however, was more than I could at once meet. I am happy to say, however, that I have since raised the money, and that Hunt is gone to Southampton, and sails this morning for America, when he will certainly not return."

"Very satisfactory so far, Mr. Railton. But that letter?"

"That letter, sir, is an absurd hoax, and I marvel that it could have deceived Mr. Ratcliff. It was never sent to me, and I see it here this morning for the first time."

Mr. Ratcliff gasped.

"A hoax!" he muttered.

The Head could only stare.

"What does it mean?" gasped the Head at last. "Who could have written it?"

Mr. Railton smiled slightly.

"It seems that some person—someone evidently with a turn for practical jokes—has discovered that Mr. Ratcliff was watching me," said the School House master. "That humorous person wrote

this absurd letter, and placed it where Mr. Ratcliff found it."

"It's—it's false!" gasped Mr. Ratcliff.

Mr. Railton shrugged his shoulders.

"You say you were assaulted last night?" he said. "At what hour?"

"Soon after eleven."

"Ah! Last night I was in my study preparing examination papers; and at eleven o'clock," said Mr. Railton, "Mr. Lathom came in to smoke a pipe with me. Mr. Lathom will bear me out, if my word is doubted."

"I don't think it will be necessary to send for Mr. Lathom," said the Head drily.

Mr. Ratcliff could only gape in his dismay. Mr. Railton looked the doctor full in the eyes.

"I can only say, further, sir, that my past is open to the fullest investigation," he said. "There is nothing in it that I desire to conceal. This letter speaks of penal servitude. If there were any foundation for it, the police would, of course, be able to establish the fact from their records. I defy Mr. Ratcliff to appeal to them!"

The Head frowned.

"Enough!" he exclaimed. "The thing is too evidently only a hoax! I am quite satisfied, Mr. Railton. I should certainly not desire that you should suffer for the follies of your relative, and I can only admire your generosity in parting with so considerable a sum of money in order to give him a fresh start abroad. The rest of the affair is a mere joke. Mr. Ratcliff has been deceived, and I cannot help thinking, Mr. Ratcliff, that your prejudice against Mr. Railton must have been very deep and unreasonable to cause you to be deceived so easily!"

The affair had worked out in the most unexpected manner, and devoutly the New House master wished that he had let Mr. Railton's affairs severely alone.

"I suppose you admit," continued the Head icily, "that it is all a mistake, Mr. Ratcliff?"

"I—I suppose so!"

"Very good! Mr. Railton, I can only apologise for having been induced to force you to acquaint me with your private concerns!" said the Head.

Mr. Railton bowed.

"Mr. Ratcliff, of course, will apologise," added the Head. "He has wronged you grievously!"

"I am sorry, Mr. Railton!" said the New House master, with averted eyes. "I am very sorry! I beg your pardon most sincerely!"

"And I grant it!" said Mr. Railton.

The Head shook hands cordially with the School House master, and Mr. Railton quitted the study. Mr. Ratcliff remained for a private conversation of five minutes' duration with the Head.

A little later in the day, the chums of the Shell met Mr. Railton crossing the quad. There was a smile on his face, and the careworn look had vanished.

They realised then that the trouble which had recently worried the Housemaster had disappeared, and when, that same afternoon, they passed Mr. Ratcliff, with a sour expression on his face, they felt confident that he had not come out on top in the duel between the Rival Housemasters!

THE END.

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THE FIRST CHAPTER. Smythe's Smoking Party.

"I HOPE we catch the Hun!" Jimmy Silver expressed himself very emphatically on the point, and Raby, Newcome, and Lovell, his chums, nodded.

The Fistical Four were enjoying the rare feeling of being able to do something for their country—if they kept their eyes open.

A Hun prisoner of war had escaped from a concentration camp the previous day, and he had been seen near the little river Ebb, about five miles from Rookwood.

The Head, like "an absolute sport," as Jimmy Silver said, had given the Rookwood fellows permission on the half-holiday to try and spot the Hun, providing that they kept together.

So Jimmy Silver & Co. were on the banks of the Ebb. Tommy Dodd & Co., the Modern juniors, had thrown in their lot with the Fistical Four for the time being, and were near at hand.

Raby sniffed. "I expect that the Hun's been caught already," he said. "I don't suppose he'll come out of hiding and say 'Kame-rad!' to us—unless, of course, he sees your face!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" "Nothing like being prepared, my son," said Jimmy Silver. "It doesn't need a handsome chivvy like your own to catch a Hun. If it did we wouldn't have had all the captures we've got, by any means. Not many like yours in the world, you know."

"Ha, ha, ha!" A voice from the bushes further along the bank floated down to them.

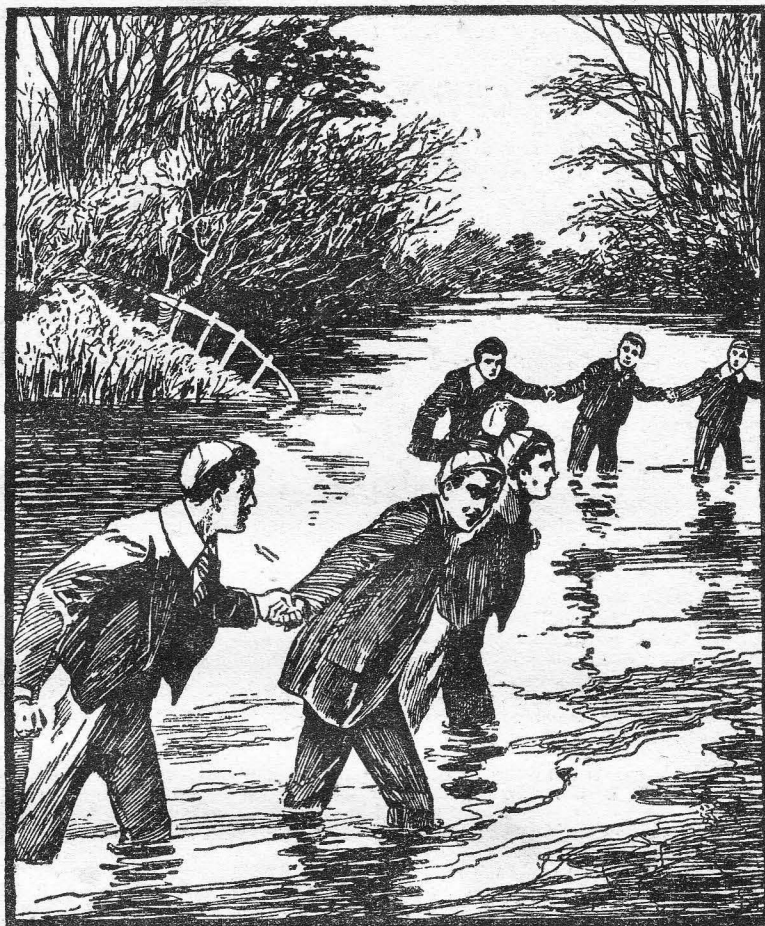
"Not so much noise!" shouted Tommy Dodd severely. "You'll let the Hun know we're here."

"Rats!" said Lovell truculently. "We'd come and slosh you," said Tommy Cook from the distance, "if it wasn't for the fact that we're doing our bit for our country!"

"B-r-r-r-r!" remarked Lovell. But for all that, the Fistical Four proceeded less noisily. They kept their eyes open for the Hun, but they did not expect to have much success.

There were plenty of Rookwood fellows about the bank, and all were following the Head's single condition, and keeping together in good numbers.

A little further along, they caught up



The seven juniors, hand-in-hand, crossed the river grimly, knowing that there was a desperate man waiting for them on the other side.

with Tommy Dodd & Co. The Modern juniors were evidently waiting for them.

"Afraid to go home in the dark?" asked Jimmy Silver sweetly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The three Moderns scowled.

"You're quite safe," said Lovell playfully. "No one would want to kidnap you three. You're too ugly!"

"Rats!" said Tommy Dodd shortly.

The hatchet was buried for the moment, but there was still the feeling of rivalry between the Classical and Modern juniors, and they were quite ready to pull each others' legs.

"Seen a spook?" asked Raby.

"Something like it," growled Tommy Dodd. "We just spotted old Manders along the bank. He'll be getting on to us for disobeying the Head's orders if we don't all stick together."

"That is so," said Jimmy Silver. "Tommy, you have a wonderful head for these little details."

"Don't know why Manders is here at

all," growled Tommy Cook. "I suppose he can't jolly well trust us."

"He knows you Moderns," said Raby cuttingly. "He's a Modern himself!"

"Oh, cheese it!" snapped Tommy Doyle. "We don't want to start mobbing you in the presence of the enemy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The seven juniors pressed on their way, and raised their caps to Mr. Manders as they passed. He returned their polite salute with short nods.

The Modern "Stinks" master would rather have enjoyed reporting someone to the Head. He found that he had taken his journey in vain, so far, for all the fellows were obeying orders and keeping together.

In addition, Mr. Manders was alone, and not being particularly plucky where a fellow of his own size was concerned, had inward misgivings that he might have the bad luck to get the honour of encountering the Hun on his own.

The Fistical Four and the three
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Tommy's, however, knew nothing of these thoughts, although they might have guessed them. But Manders was not worth worrying about. As he was there, though, they decided to keep together.

There was a little boathouse further up, and on the near side a boat under repair. No one was working on it, and it was evident that whoever had been there had joined in the man-hunt. His tools were still spread about over the ground.

"What about having a boat out?" queried Jimmy Silver as he saw it.

Lovell shook his head. "Bit chilly," he said. "Let's get warm first. We'll—Hallo!"

He pointed ahead. A boat had just drawn into the bank, and five fellows were getting out of it. The chums recognised the nuts of Rookwood—Smythe, Tracy, and Howard of the Shell, and Townsend and Topham of the Fourth.

"Wonder where they're going?" muttered Raby.

"Blagging," said Tommy Dodd shortly. "What else can you expect from Classical worms? Shurrup, young Silver!"

Tommy Dodd sprang back, and the Classical junior charged him.

"Don't," said Jimmy Silver, "talk disrespectfully in the presence of your superiors."

"Ahem!" said Tommy Cook. "I've heard you called a lot of things before, but never heard that!"

"Don't carry on like a lot of silly geese!" growled Raby. "I thought we decided to bury the hatchet before we started out on this. There's that wretched Hun to think about."

"Excellent advice," said Jimmy Silver. "And, as a matter of fact, I believe you suspicious Moderns are correct."

He paused, and watched the five nuts. They had not seen the allied juniors, and apparently considered that they were unobserved.

The boat was tied to the bank, and then Smythe & Co. dived into the bushes.

"I believe they've just come out here to blag about," said Jimmy. "I'd swear that Smythe had a packet of fags in his hand."

"That's about it," said Tommy Dodd. "They've scouted round in the boat, and seen that the coast is clear, watched old Manders pass, and taken the opportunity."

The Fistical Four nodded sorrowfully. They were ashamed that Smythe & Co. were Classics.

"We'll do a bit of scouting," said Jimmy Silver suddenly. "If those fellows are blagging when they're out supposed to be looking for a Hun, we'll scalp them."

"Not much doubt about it," said Tommy Dodd cuttingly.

"Oh, rats!"

The seven juniors passed the boathouse, and crept through the bushes in the direction that the nuts had taken.

They went cautiously, for they could hear Smythe's voice in the distance, and they did not wish to disturb the slackers before necessary.

It was easy for the juniors to follow the sound. It led them towards a part where the bushes were thick, and provided plenty of concealment for anyone who wanted to be alone.

The juniors paused as they came to the bushes, and peered through. The five nuts were seated on the grass in a circle, and they were all smoking cigarettes. The juniors eyed them grimly.

"Charge the cads!" cried Tommy Dodd.

Jimmy Silver restrained him. "Just a minute, Tommy," he said. "I've got an idea."

He drew the Modern junior away and whispered in his ear. A grin overspread the Modern's face.

"Jolly good wheeze!" he said. "You cut off, and we'll attend to the business at this end!"

Jimmy Silver turned and darted back, leaving the business in the hands of the others for the moment.

He ran along to the boathouse which they had passed on the bank, and, groping amongst the tools lying round, selected a brace with a large bit.

Putting it under his coat, he picked up a handful of tow, and ran along to Smythe's boat.

There he got to work quickly. The boat was empty, and there was no one about. Jimmy jumped into the boat, and, bringing the brace and bit into action, made a hole under the floorboards through the shell of the skiff.

Before there was time for much water to come in he plugged it lightly with the tow, and made another hole. Four were completed in all, and then he replaced the floorboards and jumped out on to the bank.

He returned quickly to the boathouse, and replaced the brace and bit and the remainder of the tow. Then he returned to the place where the boat was tied up, and made off through the bushes.

The sound of excited voices reached his ears, accompanied by the howls of the nuts of Rookwood. Jimmy Silver grinned as he ran towards them.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.
Five Men in a Boat.

AS Jimmy Silver sped away to work his great scheme, Tommy Dodd turned and explained exactly what the wheeze was. The others chuckled silently.

"Now, no tying them up and leaving 'em," said Tommy Dodd. "We'll just given them a pleasant ten minutes while Jimmy Silver does the deed, and then we'll give 'em a chance to escape. Savvy?"

"Yes," said Lovell. "Carry on!"

Tommy Dodd broke through the bushes.

"Charge 'em!" he roared.

Smythe & Co. started round, to see the six juniors bearing down on them. They tried to spring to their feet, but they were too late. They had been making so much noise that they had not heard anything of the juniors' approach.

Topham and Townsend swallowed a mouthful of smoke each, and were out of action, coughing violently, at once. Smythe, Howard, and Tracy sprawled before the charge of the juniors, without getting a blow in. The victory was sudden and complete.

"Bai Jove!" gasped Tracy. "What is the meanin' of this?"

"Tie their hands!" snapped Tommy Dodd.

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Smythe & Co. found themselves rolled over, and their hands pulled together and tied. Townsend and Topham were left alone for the moment. It was evident that they would be harmless for a

little longer. They were still coughing violently.

"Release us at once!" howled Smythe. "You'll get a whoppin' thick ear from me if you don't!"

"Per-haps!" grinned Lovell, as he secured the leader's wrists with his own handkerchief.

"I'll punch your silly heads!" roared Howard, as he was subjected to a similar indignity.

"They all seem to be able to punch backwards!" said Raby, in mock alarm. "Just stand clear, you fellows!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The grinning juniors stepped back to survey the result of their labours. The smoking-concert had come to an inglorious termination.

"Now, we're just going to give you a little lesson," said Tommy Dodd. "Moderns, you see, have no use for smoky cads. Of course, we know it's Classical, and all that—"

"Cheese it!" growled Lovell. "You'll get a thick ear if you ain't more civil!"

"Well, they are Classics, ain't they?" demanded Tommy Dodd.

"We know that!" growled Raby. "Get on with the business, and don't be so jolly insulting!"

"You can't get away from the fact—" began Tommy Dodd, when Newcome interrupted him.

"You can't get away from anything!" he growled. "Look here, you smoky cads, we're going to give you a lesson in playing the game!"

"Hear, hear!"

"We were sent out here—or, rather, allowed out by the Head—to look for a blessed alien enemy who's roaming round, and might do anything. He's a danger to the country until he's caught!"

"Course he is!" declared Tommy Dodd.

Smythe grinned cynically. "And you clever kids are going to catch him, I suppose?" he asked.

"Going to have a good try!" retorted Newcome. "Anyway, before we do any more, we're going to show what we think of cads who come out blagging instead. It ain't playing the game at all!"

Smythe grinned again. The juniors did not understand why for the moment, but they soon knew the reason. Smythe could see behind the juniors' backs, and he saw that Townsend and Topham, having got over their coughing fit, were preparing to make a dash to liberate them.

A second later the juniors knew all this, too. Townsend and Topham charged at the backs of the raggers.

The attack was sudden, and Tommy Dodd and Lovell went sprawling. Then, before the others could do anything, the two Fourth-Formers were on the ground, struggling furiously to undo the knots which held Smythe & Co. prisoners.

But they were not quite smart enough. Raby, Newcome, Cook, and Doyle leapt on them, and, rolling them away, quickly put them out of action in the same way that they had dealt with the others.

Tommy Dodd and Lovell picked themselves up, and surveyed the prisoners.

"Five little nigger boys," said Lovell, "all in a row! S'pose they think there's safety in numbers!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, we can't waste time with 'em," said Lovell practically. "There's this man-hunt to get on with. These chaps are only delaying things. I vote that we bump 'em and let 'em go!"

"Give them a minute to clear out!" said Tommy Dodd. "That ought to give them a sporting chance!"

"Bump 'em, then!" said Tommy Doyle.

Smythe, Howard, and Tracy were picked up and solemnly bumped.

None of them seemed to like it.

"Groooooogh!" roared Smythe.

"Yarooooooogh!" howled Tracy.

And Howard said:

"Yooooooop!"

But the juniors carried on the good work, for all that. They bumped the three Shell fellows until they considered that they had had enough punishment for blagging, when they ought to be out trying to do their bit. Then they were dropped, and Townsend and Topham were taken in hand.

Jimmy Silver returned just when the process was finished. All the nuts were looking considerably ruffled. They had had rather a rough time.

"Enjoying things?" asked Jimmy Silver brightly.

Smythe scowled and said nothing.

"Certainly look as though they've had enough!" said Jimmy Silver. "Might as well let them go now!"

"I think they've had enough!" agreed Tommy Dodd. "Let 'em go. We'll give 'em a minute to reach the boat!"

The handkerchiefs were removed from the wrists of the discomfited nuts, and Smythe & Co. rose to their feet, looking very venomous.

"Charge 'em!" rapped Smythe suddenly.

He lunged forward at Jimmy Silver,

midstream. And even as the juniors watched it went lower down in the water.

"Look out! We're sinking!" yelled Townsend.

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed the juniors on the bank.

The sight was certainly a very funny one. The nuts had properly lost their heads, and now the water was washing all round their legs. Jimmy Silver's holes were allowing the water to simply stream into the boat.

"Pull, you fatheads!" roared Smythe.

But Tracy and Howard, who had the sculls, were too scared to pull. They scrambled to their feet, and as they did so the gunwale of the boat disappeared below the surface, leaving the other three looking as though they were sitting on the water.

Tracy overbalanced, and fell into the water with a tremendous splash. But when he came up it was seen that the water only came up to his waist, and he was no worse off than those in the waterlogged boat.

As he commenced wading ashore, Townsend, Topham, and Howard jumped out of the boat and followed his example. Jimmy Silver & Co. stood on the bank and laughed.

"A life on the ocean wave!" chanted Jimmy Silver humorously, "And a home on the rolling deep!"

The juniors looked along the bank, but there was no sign of him.

"Must have drifted down the river, silly bounder!" muttered Jimmy Silver. "Let's go along, and see if we can see anything of the chump."

THE THIRD CHAPTER.
The Hun!

THE juniors made their way along the bank.

A little further along the river bent out of its course to go round a rocky piece of ground which jutted out from the opposite bank, and was covered with bushes.

It was a very wild spot, for at the back of it was a tall chalk cliff—evidently the remains of a landslip—which made it impossible to approach the spot except from the water.

The juniors, however, were keeping their eyes on the river, and as they turned the corner of the path Jimmy Silver suddenly gave a little cry of horror.

In midstream, about fifty yards away, was the figure of a boy. The juniors recognised it at a glance. It was Smythe, and Smythe, apparently, was unconscious.

Jimmy Silver darted forward until he was level with the figure, and then

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and just missed his mark. Then he retreated suddenly as a volley of blows rattled on him. His companions hesitated, and then turned, and Smythe was not long in following. The five slackers were no match for seven healthy juniors.

The Fistical Four and the three Tommies laughed as they watched the retreating forms.

"Do it all right, Silver?" asked Tommy Dodd.

"Yes," said Jimmy. "I made four holes. The tow will come out as soon as they get their weight in the boat, but they won't notice anything until the water rises above the floorboard, and then it will be too late."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We've given 'em a good minute," said Lovell suddenly. "Come on, and watch the fun!"

By the time the juniors reached the bank they saw that the nuts had pushed off into midstream. They had not started rowing yet, and they were drifting slowly away with the current, which was fairly swift there.

"Watch carefully," said Jimmy Silver.

He had hardly said the words before there was a shout of anger from Smythe. "The boat's leaking!" he shouted.

A moment later there was a wild pulling of oars. But as everyone did differently the boat merely spun round in

"The spirit that's made old England what she is!" murmured Lovell admiringly.

The four jaded nuts clambered out of the water, and stood shivering on the bank. There was not much danger of their catching cold.

It was not a chilly day, and the man at the boathouse made quite a good business out of drying clothes for people who got in the water.

"Who said the spirit of adventure was dead?" demanded Tommy Dodd.

"Who said— Yarooogh!"

He broke off suddenly, and bolted. The others followed him. For the nuts, fed-up to the eyes, had suddenly charged.

Jimmy Silver & Co. had no wish for an encounter with them at close quarters under present conditions. The nuts were wet and muddy, and most undesirable companions.

The japing juniors took to the bushes and scattered, remaining in concealment until the nuts got tired of trying to find them, and made off for the boathouse, to get their clothes dried in the proprietor's little house. Then Jimmy Silver & Co. came back to the bank.

Smythe had still been sitting in the waterlogged boat when last they saw him, but now he had gone. The river was empty.

plunged into the water, wading out towards the boy.

Smythe's face was very white, and his eyes were closed. Jimmy Silver caught hold of him very tenderly, and, lifting him on to his back, waded ashore.

Several hands were stretched out to receive him. Smythe was unconscious, but his face had been out of the water. They laid him on the bank, and as they did so, saw an ugly bruise on his head.

"I wonder what's happened?" murmured Tommy Dodd, in an awed voice.

"No time to wonder," said Newcome roughly. "I know first aid. We must try it at once."

He set to work to give artificial respiration, while Jimmy Silver and Raby chafed Smythe's hands. For a moment nothing happened, and then suddenly Smythe's eyelids flickered and opened.

He gazed round for a few seconds vacantly, then a light of understanding came into his eyes.

"The man?" he muttered hoarsely.

"Have you seen him?"

"Man?" asked Jimmy Silver. "What man?"

Smythe's eyes closed.

"Don't question him yet," said Newcome. "He hasn't quite got over the effects of the blow. Look at that bump on his head."

Under Newcome's directions the

juniors set to work to restore Smythe once more. It was evident that he had had a bad time of it; but Jimmy Silver was relieved to hear the mention of a man.

He had feared at first that Smythe had met with some accident, and hit his head on the rocks. But there was no reason why he should have stopped in the boat at all, for the river was quite shallow, and he could have waded ashore any time.

Smythe suddenly open his eyes again. The juniors did not question him for a minute, but when it was evident that he was feeling better Jimmy Silver dropped to one knee and spoke quietly.

"What happened, Smythe?" he asked. Smythe appeared to pull himself together with an effort.

"Something hit me," he said.

"Did you see anyone?"

"I just caught a shadow of a man—a big sort of fellow."

"And is that all you remember?"

"Yes."

"Where was it?" demanded Jimmy Silver.

Smythe indicated the rocky piece of ground on the other side of the river.

"The boat drifted down with me," he said, "and struck the shore over there. I landed, and got amongst the trees, intending to give you fellows a fright."

He paused.

"Yes?" said Jimmy Silver quickly.

"Something suddenly rustled behind me, and I was just turning when I felt a bang on the head. That's all I remember till I found you fellows round me. I suppose you discovered me in the water? My clothes are wet."

"We did," said Jimmy Silver quietly. "But I say, you fellows, there's some mystery here. Who is the fellow on the other shore?"

"I wonder if it is the Hun?" speculated Tommy Dodd, with sudden inspiration.

"Must be," said Jimmy Silver quickly.

"Look here, he can't escape from there without being seen. He could hardly climb that big chalk cliff at the back, and, anyway, we'd be bound to see him. Otherwise, there's nothing left for him to do but take to the water."

"Yes?"

"Well, you fellows stay here and watch the place, while Tommy Dodd and I run Smythe back to the boathouse. Then when we return we'll cross the river and investigate."

"Don't be too long," said Lovell.

"Right-ho!"

Jimmy Silver and Tommy Dodd took Smythe up between them, and ran along to the boathouse. The lady of the establishment was there, and she quickly promised to see that Smythe was well looked after.

The two juniors then returned to their companions, to find them still waiting on the bank.

"Anything happened?" asked Tommy Dodd.

"No," said Baby.

"Good! Then that means that our man is still waiting for us. What's the best thing to do?"

"Well, we must stick together," said Jimmy Silver. "I think that we had better join hands, and wade across. The river is quite shallow enough for that. We can stretch right out, and prevent him breaking away, if he tried to make a bolt for it. What do you think?"

"Good idea!" said Newcome.

"Come and join up."

The seven juniors joined hands, and stepped to the edge of the bank. Then they leapt together into the river.

The water did not come much above their knees. They paused for a second to see that all were together, and then advanced towards the other side.

The seven juniors, hand-in-hand, crossed the river grimly. They knew that there was a desperate man waiting for them, and any moment he might make a bid for freedom.

But they reached the opposite shore without incident. There was not a sound from the shrubbery.

The dauntless seven climbed on the bank, and then started advancing through the trees. It was certain that there would be an alarm any second now, and they were ready to rally at a moment's notice.

Jimmy Silver was the first one to spot their quarry. He saw, all of a sudden, a crouching figure dressed in grey behind a bush, and he was just in time to leap out of the way as a heavy club was hurled at his head.

"Help!" he roared.

Next moment he had sprung at the man, and was locked in a fierce embrace. But his strength was not sufficient. He was picked up and literally torn from his grasp, then thrown to the ground.

And as the fellows came dashing to the spot the Hun broke cover and darted for the river.

In an instant Jimmy Silver was up again, and leading the chase. The man dashed through the undergrowth, and, coming to the river-bank, leaped into the water, and started wading across. Jimmy Silver, however, went one better.

He was an expert at the long jump, and now he showed his skill. He took a run for the bank, and then flung himself forward through the air. His aim was good. He landed fairly and squarely on the Hun's shoulders, and the two of them disappeared under the surface.

The next minute was a nightmare for Jimmy Silver. The Hun rose to the surface, and, gripping Jimmy, held him under water. The unfortunate junior felt hands clutching at his throat, and through the green water caught a distorted vision of the Hun's angry face.

He felt that he was choking, and struggled violently. But he was powerless in that grip. Where were the others? Where—

Dark figures blotted the green on his right. And then suddenly the Hun released his hold. But he was too late to escape. Tommy Dodd and Lovell were on him, and the remainder were not long in adding their weight to the struggle.

The Hun disappeared below the surface, and came up gasping. He took

one terrified look at the overwhelming numbers, and then thrust up his hands.

"Kamerad!" he said feebly.

Tommy Dodd snorted.

"Jolly fine kamerad you are!" he growled. "I wouldn't be your kamerad if you paid me. Are you all right, Silver?"

"Quite," said Jimmy Silver weakly. The struggle had told on him, and the juniors noted it.

"Tried to kill a couple of our fellows, you Hun," said Lovell furiously, "and then you want to be a kamerad! Serve you right if we lynched you!"

The Hun turned pale. He was a square-faced, brutal-looking fellow, with light, closely-cropped hair. And he really believed that the chums meant what they said.

"Haf mercy on poor prisoner—yes," he mumbled.

"Oh, we sha'n't eat you!" said Tommy Dodd disdainfully. "I hope they'll keep you under lock and key next time. You're not fit to be about. You don't know anything about playing the game!"

The Hun blinked.

"I tank you from der bottom of der heart," he mumbled.

"Don't trouble," said Tommy Dodd, as he hauled himself out of the water, and helped Jimmy Silver to follow. "But don't try any more of your tricks, or you won't find that you've struck a picnic-party!"

The Hun was marched along towards the boathouse by the triumphant juniors, and on the way they encountered Mr. Manders. The Modern master pulled up with an exclamation of surprise.

"Bless my soul!" he exclaimed. "Who is that fellow you are holding?"

"The German prisoner, sir," said Jimmy Silver.

And he explained in a few words what had happened. Mr. Manders' eyes opened wide. He was rather sorry that he had not been in at the death; but his fears of a sudden attack from the ambushed Hun were certainly dispelled.

"We must get him a change of clothing at the boathouse, and have him locked up at once," said Mr. Manders.

"That is what we are going to do, sir," said Jimmy Silver quietly. "Good-afternoon, sir!"

And the juniors walked on with their prisoner, leaving the unpopular Modern master staring.

The Hun was escorted by the soldiers to his proper quarters without further attempt at escape, and the juniors returned at length to Rookwood with dry clothes, and none the worse for the adventure.

Smythe spent a couple of days in the sanny; and, in view of the fact that he was partly responsible for this, Jimmy Silver owned up to holing the boat. But as this had really been instrumental in capturing the Hun, and Jimmy Silver had played such an important and plucky part in the affair, nothing more was said.

THE END.

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