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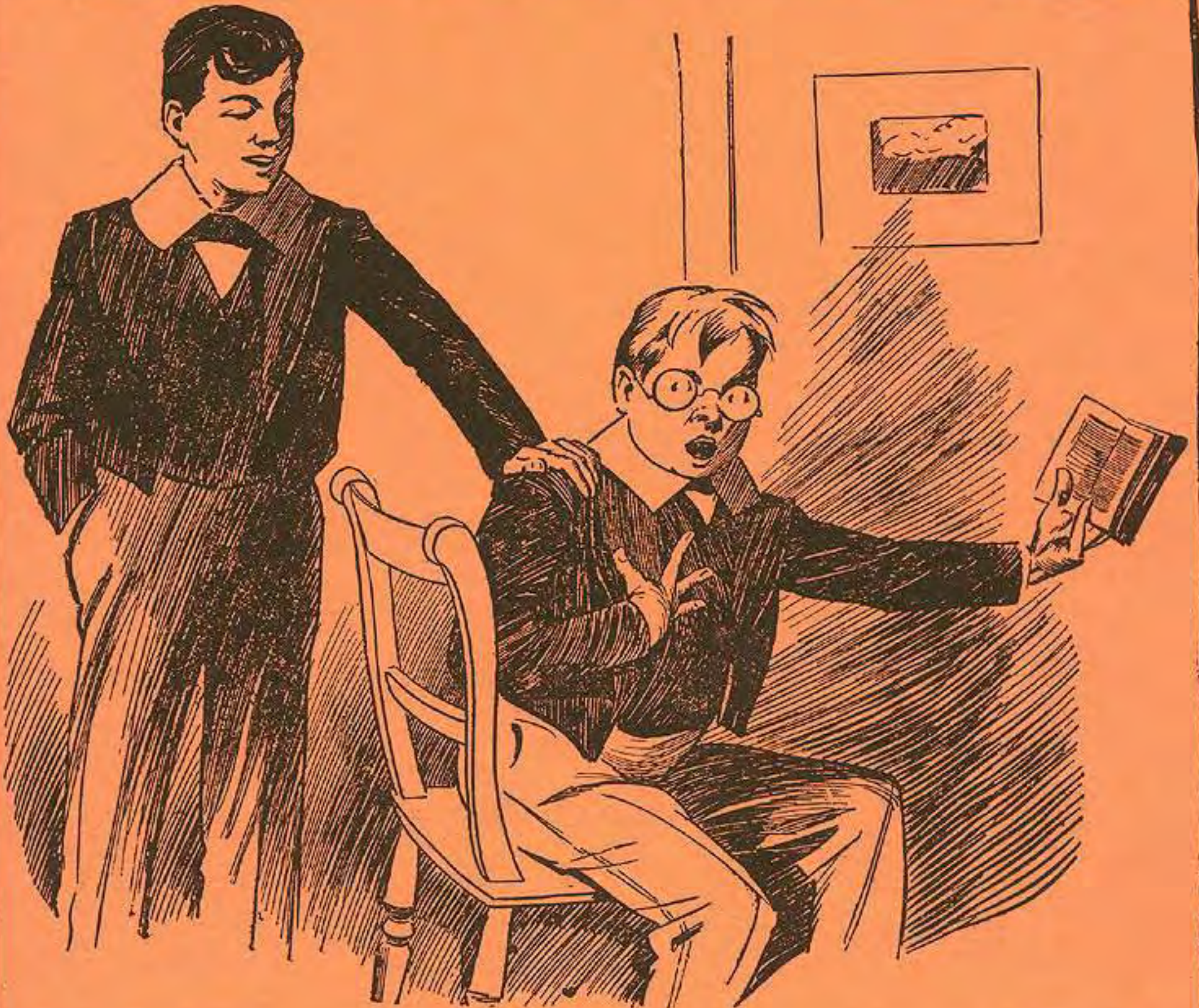
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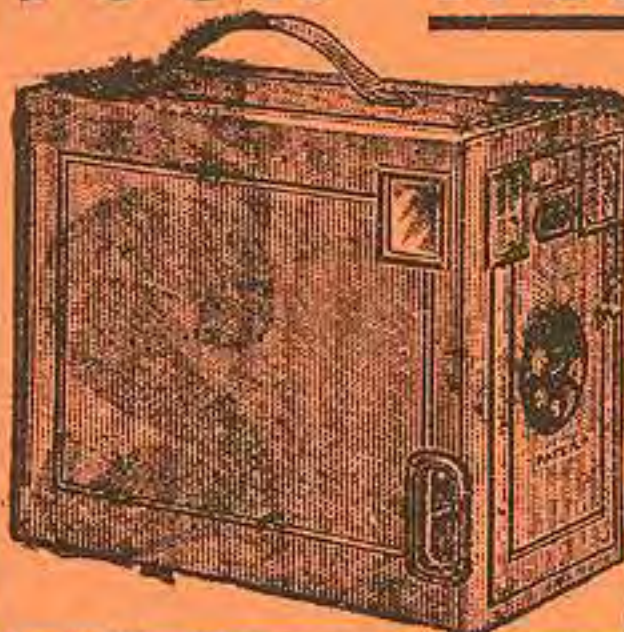
STAGE-STRUCK.

By
FRANK
RICHARDS



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BEING A SCHOOL TALE DEALING WITH
THE ADVENTURES OF HARRY WHARTON
AND HIS CHUMS.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

"The Play's the Thing."

"UNHAND me, villain!"
"Eh?"
"Or by my troth——"
"What?"

"Hallo, is that you, Wharton?"
exclaimed Billy Bunter, turning
rather red, and blinking at Harry
Wharton through his big spectacles.
"You—you startled me!"

"You young ass!" said Harry
Wharton. "What are you talking
that piffle for?"

Billy Bunter had been reading
when Harry Wharton entered Study
No. 1 in the Remove at Greyfriars,
with his eyes glued upon the book,
and Harry had tapped him on the
shoulder, with the foregoing result.

"You see, Wharton——"
"I don't see what you are driving at," said Harry.
"What's that you've been reading?"

"I'm studying up my part in the play," said Billy Bunter
apologetically. "It rather gets hold of a chap, you know."

Harry Wharton laughed. He understood now. For the
moment he had feared that the Owl of the Remove had
taken leave of his senses.

Of late there had been a wave of enthusiasm for amateur
theatricals passing over the Remove—the Lower Fourth
Form at Greyfriars.

It had really been started by an attempt of Harry
Wharton and his friends to give a performance of an opera,
music and all. The attempt had not turned out exactly as the
Wharton Operatic Company had intended, the result being
more comic than tragic; but, in a certain sense, it could be
regarded as a success.

The Wharton Operatic Company realised that the task of
producing an opera in a foreign tongue was one not lightly
to be undertaken, and a second representation of "Carmen"
had been indefinitely postponed.

Bob Cherry had suggested taking up a play instead, and



BY

FRANK
RICHARDS.

had promised to secure a regular "ripper," to use his own
expression, from his cousin in Manchester, who was of a
theatrical turn of mind and had a large store of such
things.

Wharton was rather inclined to patronise Shakespeare,
whom he justly regarded as quite worthy of the attention of
the Greyfriars Remove. Nugent was in favour of Peter
Pan, while Hazeldene suggested a drama in the Adelphi
style. It was agreed, however, to look at the play sent by
Bob Cherry's cousin in Manchester before deciding upon
anything.

"Has Cherry's play come, then?" asked Harry.

The Owl nodded.

"Yes, here it is. Bob Cherry opened it, and then Hazel-
dene called for him and they went out. I thought I'd better
look at it, you know. There's a part in it that will just suit
me."

"What's the part?"

"It's Valentine, the hero. He has a splendid part, and as
he's supposed to be a well-built, handsome sort of chap, the
part will suit me down to the ground."

"Does he talk that rot you were spouting as I tapped you on the shoulder?"

"Yes, that's part of his speech. The villain grasps him by the throat, and says: 'Aha—aha! I have thee in my clutch!'"

"Ha, ha!"

"No, not 'Ha, ha!' but 'Aha, aha!'" said Billy Bunter. "Then Valentine—that's me—says: 'Unhand me, villain—'"

"Ha, ha!"

"Or by my troth I will cleave thee to the chine!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I don't see what you want to laugh at," said Bunter. "It's not a comedy, it's a tragedy, and you are supposed to thrill at that part. Just you hear me roll off the hero's speech, and you'll see how good it is!"

"Please, don't!"

"Oh, it's no trouble! 'Ah, Colonel Koffdropski, at last we meet—'"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" exclaimed Bob Cherry, coming into the study. "Is that my play you're spouting?"

"Yes, Cherry, I've been learning up my part so as to lose no time."

"Your part? That's the hero's part!"

"Yes, I know it is."

"Well, Bunter for cheek!" said Bob Cherry. "My dear kid, you're going to be the chap who comes in and says, 'My lord, the carriage waits.'"

Bunter blinked indignantly through his spectacles.

"If you're joking, Cherry—"

"I'm not joking, I'm in deadly earnest. I say, you chaps, what part do you think Bunter has cast himself for?" exclaimed Bob Cherry, as Nugent and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, the Nabob of Bhanipur, followed him into the study.

"Oh, the hero, of course!" grinned Nugent. "That's like Billy's cheek!"

"I don't see where the cheek comes in," said Billy. "My idea is to cast for each character the most appropriate person—"

"The cheekfulness is terrific," said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, in his purring voice. "The cheekfulness of our Bunterful friend is only equalled by the fatfulness of his honourable and esteemed head."

"Look here, Inky—"

"My dear chap," said Bob Cherry. "Apart from the fact that you are a silly ass, you can't have that part. I had already cast myself as hero."

"Oh, come," exclaimed Nugent; "don't be an ass, Bob! There's one chap here, at least, who's more suited to play the principal role!"

"If you're speaking of Wharton—"

"Rats! I'm speaking of myself,"

"Joking, of course?"

"Nothing of the kind! I think—"

"No, you don't, or you wouldn't get an idea like that in your head," said Bob Cherry. "We shall have Inky saying next that he ought to act the hero!"

"And wherefore not?" asked the nabob gently. "If it is a question of the ableness to perform the part, certainly the allotment should be to my esteemed self."

"Oh, rats, Inky!"

"Wait a bit," said Harry Wharton, holding up his hand. "Before we argue about the hero's part, let us see whether the play will suit us."

"Oh, it will suit us rippingly!" said Bob Cherry emphatically. "There's not the slightest doubt on that point!"

"What's it about?"

"Oh, lots of things! The hero, Valentine, thrashes Colonel Koffdropski in the second act. Nugent can play Koffdropski—"

"Can I?" said Nugent, looking rather warlike. "Then you'll have to make a bit of an alteration in the part, and make Colonel Koffdropski thrash Valentine."

"Of course, that's rot."

"I don't see it. I'm not going to be thrashed by anybody if I know it."

"It's only in the play!"

"That's all very well, but—"

"Then there is the part of Gloxiana's brother; that will suit Wharton," said Bob Cherry. "Gloxiana is the sister of Albert and the heroine of the play. We may get Hazeldene's sister to take that part. Albert and Valentine have rows, but they are great friends. In the first act, they thrash Colonel Koffdropski and his lieutenant, Bunkoff. The part of Bunkoff will do for Hurree Singh. He can whiten his face for it."

"The thrashfulness would be a boot on the other foot if I take the part of the esteemed Bunkoff," purred Hurree Singh.

"It's in the play!" howled Bob Cherry. "You have to play what's in the play, ass!"

"There can be an alteration in the playfulness."

"Rats! If I took the part, I should take the licking!"

"Take the partfulness, then."

"Oh, that's rot; it's already settled!"

"That it isn't," said Harry Wharton. "We've got to have a discussion over this before we can settle whether to produce this play at all. What's the name of it?"

"By Order of the Tyrant!"

"Who's the giddy tyrant?"

"The Tsar, of course."

"Hum! It sounds to be rather blood-and-thundery," said Harry Wharton, shaking his head. "And it's a come-down for the Wharton Operatic Company, after giving Grand Opera."

"But the Grand Opera ended in a muck-up!" said Bob Cherry.

"That wasn't our fault. I don't see any objection to giving a Shakespearian representation, myself."

Bob Cherry shook his head.

"Not up to date enough. I'd rather adopt Nugent's suggestion, and give 'Peter Pan.' This is a regular ripper of a play!"

"I have a suggestive remark to make, my worthy chums."

"You have a what, Inky?"

"I have some suggestfulness to add to the discussion," said the nabob. "It would be a rippingful novelty to give a Hindoo play."

"Didn't know there were such things—"

"I can translate you a play written by a very learned babu in Bengal," said Hurree Singh. "There are fifty leading characters, and each has a very long speaking part, so—"

"My hat! Hands up for Hurree Singh's Hindoo play!"

Not a hand went up.

"It is extremely goodful," said the nabob, "and I could execute the translatefulness with the promptness of despatch."

"Don't bother, Inky; we couldn't give you all that trouble."

"The troublesomeness is nilful."

"Oh, you see, we must support home industries!" said Bob Cherry. "There are lots of English plays which don't want the trouble of translating. This one I've got here is a regular ripper!"

"I'd rather try 'Peter Pan'!"

"Oh, rats, Nugent! 'By order of the Tyrant!' sounds ripping!"

"Well, we'll see," said Harry Wharton. "But as for the hero, I really don't see how Bob Cherry is going to take that part!"

"Why not?" demanded Bob Cherry.

"Well, there's your face," said Billy Bunter, "and—"

Bob Cherry took a gentle grip upon Bunter's ear.

"There's what?" he asked pleasantly.

"Your—ow—ow—leggo!"

"There's what? What's that about my face?"

"I—I didn't mean that your face wasn't very nice, Cherry; and, besides, I know you can't help being like that, and I know you would if you could, and—ow!"

"Still, Bunter's right!" said Nugent. "The part really belongs to me!"

"Not exactly that, either, Nugent," said Harry Wharton thoughtfully. "The manager of a theatrical company has first choice. The actor-manager always takes the hero's part."

"He always takes all he can get, I suppose," growled Bob Cherry. "That's all well enough, Wharton—"

"Of course it is."

"But if you're going to take Valentine's part, I shall have to have Albert's. I'm not going to be one of the lot that are licked in the first act!"

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"A JOLLY OUTING."

Another Tale of Harry Wharton and his Chums,
By FRANK RICHARDS.

NEXT
TUESDAY.

"Albert's, or Valentine's, I don't care which for me," said Nugent. "But don't put me down for a licking in the first act, because I won't stand it."

"The same old sentiments are also mine," said the nabob. "The lickfulness is not flattering to the dignity of a Nabob of Bhanipur, my esteemed chums."

"Now, look here, you're talking rot!"

"If my esteemed chum intimates that I utter rotful remarks, he is in danger of receiving the dotfulness on his honourable nose."

"Hallo, here, what's the row?"

It was Hazeldene's voice at the door. The junior who had once been known as the cad of the Remove looked in.

"What's the argument, kids?"

"Look at that play," said Bob Cherry warmly. "Look at it, Vaseline, and just tell me who ought to have the part of Valentine."

"Certainly!"

Hazeldene took the play, and glanced down the list of the dramatic personæ.

"That's according," he said thoughtfully. "Am I going to be in this?"

"Of course you are!" said Harry Wharton.

"Well, then, I really think——"

"Oh, don't say you think Wharton ought to have it!" said Bob Cherry. "Anyway, don't say Nugent, for that's rot, on the face of it!"

"I wasn't going to say either, Bob Cherry."

"There you are!" said Bob, beaming. "I told you Vaseline was a chap with a jolly sound judgment, and could be relied upon to give a sensible opinion."

"I did not hear you say so," Nugent remarked.

"Well, I thought it, then. I always said Hazeldene was a jolly sensible chap, anyway. Who do you think ought to have the part of Valentine, Vaseline?"

"Well, I think it would about suit me," said Hazeldene.

Bob Cherry gave a jump, and the rest chuckled.

"What?"

"I think it would about suit me," repeated Hazeldene.

"You asked for my opinion, and there it is."

"And a jolly rotten opinion it is, too," growled Bob Cherry, in great disgust.

"Well, you asked for it."

"Of all the silly asses——"

"Oh, come, Bob!" grinned Nugent. "Hazeldene was one of the most sensible chaps you knew, a minute ago."

Harry Wharton laughed.

"Ha, ha, ha! He can always be relied upon for a sensible opinion, Bob."

"Oh, rats!" grunted Bob Cherry.

"Here's another fathead!" remarked Nugent, as a broad German face looked in. "I say, Hoffmann——"

"I hears te noise, and I looks in mit meinsel after," said Fritz Hoffmann.

"Well, look at that list, and pick out the chap in this room that's most suitable to take the part of Valentine," said Nugent.

Hoffmann obeyed.

"Dere is only vun here tat is goot for te part," he remarked, "and tat vun is——"

"Who?"

"Meinsel."

"Well, you conceited Dutch bounder!"

"I punches te head of te chap who call me Tutch pounder."

"Bosh! But I say, chaps, we might work Hoffmann in, as a comic character. He's comic enough, goodness knows."

"I haf sometings to tell you."

"Hallo, any news?"

"There have been fresh arrival at te school."

"New kid?"

"Nein! Old kid who come pack mit himself—Adolphe Meunier, te French poy."

"Oh, is Meunier back?"

"Oui, mon garçon." A good-natured Gallic looked in at the door. "I am back viz you vunce more, mes amis. I see zat Hoffmann still ze same fat prize cochon."

"You vas French peeg!"

"You vas Sherman rottair!"

"Ach! I gif you peans!"

"I give you zem back!"

"Peeg!"

"Rottair!"

The next moment the German and the French boy were staggering in the passage in a close embrace, hissing out "Peeg!" and "Rottair!" and pommelling frantically. Nugent laughed as he slammed the door shut.

"Now, both those foreign asses are back, I suppose we're going to have the Franco-German war starting again," he remarked. "My hat, what a row they're making in the passage! But to get on with the washing."

"We all want to be heroes," said Bob Cherry. "It can't be fixed like that, so some of us have to sacrifice ourselves for the good of the cause. You can withdraw your claims, and——"

"Is that what you mean by sacrificing oneself?"

"Yes, you will be sacrificing——"

"What about yourself?"

"It isn't necessary for us all to make sacrifices, and play the beastly thing without a hero at all," said Bob Cherry.

"Then we'd better put it to the vote," said Harry Wharton.

"Good!" said Hurree Singh. "The settlefulness will be satisfactory if the votefulness of the Dramatic Society be taken on the question. But we must have all the members present for the esteemed votefulness."

"Yes," said Bob Cherry, "and then——"

"I say, you fellows——"

"Then we'll put it to the vote, and we'll all abide by the decision," said Cherry. "It's the only way."

"I say, you fellows——"

"The four principal parts once settled, it will be easy to cast the minor characters," Harry Wharton remarked.

"There are lots of supers to be had."

"Ha, ha! Rather!"

"I say, you fellows——"

"Dear me, there's Billy Bunter talking! Have you got anything to say, Billy?" asked Bob Cherry, allowing the Owl of the Remove a word at last.

"Yes, I have, Cherry; and I've been trying to speak——"

"Buck up!"

"I've been trying to speak——"

"Oh, get on with the washing!"

"I've been trying——"

"Will you come to the point, or shut up?" howled Bob Cherry, seizing Billy Bunter by the shoulder and shaking him.

"Please don't shake me like that, Cherry. It disturbs my nerves, and you might make my glasses fall off; and if you broke them you would have to pay for them, and——"

"Have you got anything to say?"

"Yes, if you'll leave off shaking me, I've got a suggestion to make."

"Make it, then, and be quick."

"Certainly, Cherry. There's no need to get excited about it. I was only going to suggest that we should postpone further discussion till after tea, and have some grub now, as I'm awfully hungry."

Harry Wharton laughed.

"It's a good suggestion!" he exclaimed. "Let's have tea, by all means, and the cast for 'By Order of the Tyrant' can wait."

"It is a wheezy good idea, my worthy chums."

And the good idea was forthwith carried out.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Good News.

"LETTER for you, Wharton!"

Micky Desmond, of the Remove, came into the study, and tossed a letter upon the tea-table. It alighted in the butter.

"I saw it in the rack, and thought I'd bring it up," explained Desmond. "I knew you were having tea, you see. Those cream puffs look ripping."

"They are ripping," said Harry, laughing. "Take a seat, if you can find one, and wire in."

"Oh, that's all right; I'll sit on Bunter's knees."

"That you won't," said Bunter; "you'll be in the way. I'm awfully hungry, and I'm very busy at the present moment."

"Very well. Sure, and I'll have half your chair, then!"

"There isn't room."

"Oh, we'll find room!" said Desmond cheerfully; and he squeezed Bunter to one side and sat down. "Pass the cream-puffs, Hazeldene. Anything good in that letter, Wharton?"

"I haven't looked at it yet," said Harry, picking the letter out of the butter and wiping it as clean as possible.

"Oh, it's in my uncle's hand!"

"You can read it," said Bob Cherry. "We'll excuse you, and I'll have your cup of tea to save you time."

Harry opened the letter. He ran his eye over the contents, and a smile broke out on his face. It was evident that there was good news in the letter from Colonel Wharton.

Harry's relations had been very strained with his uncle till of late; but since Colonel Wharton's visit to Greyfriars, uncle and nephew had been on the best of terms. With all his wilfulness and waywardness, Harry could not help liking the kind-hearted old soldier, when he came to know him, and neither could he forget that Colonel Wharton had risked death to save him from the rushing river.

"Good news?" asked Nugent, noting Harry's expression.

"Yes, rather."

"Uncle coming down again?"

"No, but——"

"I say, Wharton, you ought to get him down here again."

said Billy Bunter. "He stood us a ripping picnic last time, you know. He is the kind of uncle to be encouraged."

"The encouragement should be terrific."

Harry laughed.

"He is not coming down, but he wants us to go to Wharton Lodge for a holiday."

Bob Cherry whistled.

"The whole family?" he queried.

"Yes; he says he's obtained the Head's permission for me to go to Wharton Lodge for Whitsun, and to take my friends."

"Sure, we're all your chummy friends," said Micky Desmond. "I've always loved you like a brother, Wharton."

"The lovefulness on my part has been great," purred the Nabob of Bhanipur. "The esteemed Wharton has been the lightfulness of my existence."

"And I worship the ground he walks on, and the grub he stands in the tuckshop," said Bob Cherry.

"What-ho!" said Nugent. "You'll find yourself the most popular fellow in the Remove soon, Harry."

"But is the number of your friends specified?" asked Hazeldene.

"No. The colonel says he has obtained permission for me to go, and take my friends with me; and that's how it stands."

"Sure, and the whole Remove will be round your neck as soon as that gets out!" said Micky Desmond. "Are you going to ask me, Wharton? Remember how I tended you with a mother's care from the first moment yez came to Greyfriars."

"I remember that you were one of the lot that ragged me on a dozen occasions or more," Wharton remarked.

"Sure, it was all for your own good, alanna!"

"I've got rather a good idea, kids," said Harry, looking round. "We're getting up a play, and if we rehearse it thoroughly, there's no reason why we shouldn't give a performance at Wharton Lodge, while we're there for the holiday."

"Bravo!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "That will be rewarding the colonel for his hospitality, won't it?"

"The rewardfulness will be great."

"Ahem!" said Nugent. "The colonel may or may not enjoy it. But we can't help his troubles. We ought to give the performance."

"I think it's a rather good idea," said Wharton thoughtfully. "We shall have a better chance of giving a really good show there than here, and it will be one way of killing time, you know. We can get into good form before we go."

"Ripping!"

"In that case, we shall have to take the whole caste along."

"Sure, and I'm to be the heroine!"

"Not this time, Micky."

"But didn't I play 'Carmen' intirely, and—"

"Yes; but this isn't 'Carmen.' This is 'By Order of the Tyrant,' and Hazeldene's sister is going to take the part of Gloxiana."

"Faith, and it's a stunning name!"

"But there's a second girl in the play," said Bob Cherry. "We shall want Micky for that part. It's Maria, the comic waiting-maid."

"Sure, and I'd rather do the heroine!"

"I dare say you would, but the lady's-maid is more your mark," said Bob Cherry. "Anyway, that's your part."

"Oh, I don't mind! Pass the jam-tarts, Hazeldene."

"I say, Desmond, you're pushing me off this chair!"

"Never mind, Bunter. What's the odds, so long as you're happy? Thank you, Vaseline. These tarts are really good."

"I think we can settle upon the lot of us going," said Harry Wharton. "We may want one or two other characters, too."

"The Head will be a bit surprised when he sees how long a list of personal friends you can make up," grinned Bob Cherry.

"He will have to pass it, though, as he's promised my uncle. Let's see—self and Bob, and Nugent and Billy Bunter, Hazeldene, and Desmond and Inky—that's seven."

"We are seven," said Bob Cherry, "and a nice little party. Now, gentlemen of the Operatic and Dramatic Society, I rise to suggest that—"

"You're pushing me off this chair, Desmond!"

"Sure, and ye're always complaining about something, Banty!"

"You've dropped some jam on my trucks."

"Then don't squeeze so close to me."

"Shut up, you two—"

"But I say, Cherry—"

"Dry up; I'm talking. I rise to suggest that as Wharton will be our host on the auspicious occasion of this holiday at Wharton Lodge—"

"Hear, hear!"

"We shall therefore waive—"

"I say, Desmond, will you stop pushing me? I shall be off the chair in a minute!"

"Sure, and it's a nice carpet intirely to fall on, Billy!"

"I tell you—"

"Order! Shut up!" shouted Nugent. "Go on, Bob. You were talking about waving something. Do you mean that we're to arrive at Wharton Lodge waving flags?"

"No, I don't, ass! We're not going down there like a gang of Bank Holiday bounders, I suppose."

"Oh, I don't know; that's your usual style, you know," retorted Nugent.

"If you want a thick ear, Nugent—"

"I say, I'm nearly off this chair, Desmond!"

Micky Desmond gave the fat boy of the Remove a push with his elbow, and Billy Bunter rolled on the carpet.

"Now you're quite off," said Desmond cheerfully, "and now I hope you'll be quiet."

"Ow! Ow! I—"

"Faith, and he's not satisfied yet!"

"Order! I was going to suggest that we should all waive our claims to represent the hero of 'By Order of the Tyrant' in favour of our esteemed host—"

"Hear, hear!"

"And therefore I beg to propose Harry Wharton for the part of Valentine in the giddy drama," said Bob Cherry.

"Hear, hear!"

"The hear-hearfulness is terrific," said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

Harry Wharton coloured a little.

"I say, I don't want it settled like that!" he exclaimed.

Bob Cherry waved his hand.

"My dear chap, it's settled. As a matter of fact, I have no doubt that you will perform the part almost as well as I could do it myself, and much better than any of the others."

"I was thinking the same," said Nugent. "I have a feeling that I could handle the part better than any of you chaps, but if I don't have it, Wharton is undoubtedly the second best."

"Hear, hear!"

"The questionfulness is passed with unanimous resolution," said Hurree Singh. "The esteemed Wharton can only reply with the graceful acceptance."

The esteemed Wharton grinned.

"Oh, if you fellows really want me to take the part—"

"We insist upon it."

"The insistfulness is only equalled by the hearty approbation of the honourable and esteemed company."

"Then I accept," said Harry Wharton; "I'll take Valentine's part."

"And I'll be satisfied with the part of Gloxiana's brother," said Bob Cherry.

"Will you?" said Nugent. "Of course, if I give up the hero, I take the part of the next chap."

"Now, really, Nugent, don't be an ass!"

"It's you that are playing the giddy ox."

"I'm going to play Albert—"

"Rats!"

"You see, chaps," said Bob Cherry, appealing to the company, "Gloxiana has to faint in Albert's arms in one scene, and so you want to have an Albert who can deal with the situation. Nugent would let her flop on the floor."

"Rot!" said Nugent. "I don't see why Gloxiana couldn't faint in my arms as well as in anybody else's arms."

"Don't you?" said Hazeldene. "Well, I do. Look here, if Marjorie is going to take the part of Gloxiana, I'd better take that of Albert."

"Well, of all the cheek—"

"Hazeldene's right," said Harry Wharton. "Gloxiana has to faint in her brother's arms, and a real brother would make it more realistic."

"That's all very well, but—"

"I vote for Hazeldene," said Harry Wharton decidedly. "Put it to the vote."

"Good!" said Micky Desmond. "I don't want the part, so I vote for Hazeldene."

"So do I," said Billy Bunter. "I really ought to have the part, but there's a lot of selfishness shown in these amateur theatricals. If I'm not to have it, Hazeldene will do as well as anybody."

Bob Cherry grunted.

"Well, you've got the majority, Vaseline," he said.

Hazeldene grinned.

"That's all right. I'll go lightly when I start licking you in the second act."

"If you start licking me in the second act there will be ructions," said Bob Cherry.

"Oh, you'll have to play the game!" said Wharton.

"That's all very well—"

"Of course it is. Let's go out for a stroll in the Close."

And the discussion was postponed for a time.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Billy Bunter Looks for Hidden Treasure.

"WHARTON, old chap!"

Harry Wharton started. It was Bulstrode who spoke, and as he spoke he tapped Wharton familiarly on the shoulder. Harry had reason to be surprised. Bulstrode had been cock of the Remove before Harry Wharton came to Greyfriars, and it was he who had caused his fall from the high estate. There had been very little love lost between them since.

Wharton stepped quietly back.

"What is it, Bulstrode?"

"I hear you are going home for a holiday."

Wharton understood.

"Yes, I am."

"And taking a party of friends with you."

"Yes."

"Your uncle is going to let you take as many as you like?"

"Yes."

"I was thinking that I should like to take a part in the play you're getting up," said Bulstrode. "I hear you're going to give it at Wharton Lodge."

"That's so."

"Well, would you like me to join the Operatic and Dramatic Society?"

"Not particularly."

"I hope you're not keeping up that old quarrel," said Bulstrode, with great friendliness. "Let bygones be bygones."

"I'm perfectly willing to do that, but I don't think we can chum up together, Bulstrode," said Harry quietly. "It would be a case of the two kings of Brentford in the story, you know. We should never get on."

"If you are going to put on side—"

"Nothing of the sort. But you are a domineering bully, and my temper isn't the gentlest in the world, so the less we see of one another the better."

And Harry Wharton walked on.

He left the bully of the Remove scowling. The glint in Bulstrode's eyes showed how little there was of genuineness in the overture of friendship he had made.

"Hang him!" muttered Bulstrode. "Hang him! I—"

"I say, Bulstrode!"

The bully of the Remove looked down at Billy Bunter.

"What do you want?" he growled.

"I hear that they've discovered an old vault in the excavations down by the river," said Billy Bunter. "I was thinking of going down and looking at it. Do you know where it is?"

Bulstrode grinned.

"Yes. Would you like to see it?"

"You're very obliging, Bulstrode. I'm sorry Wharton won't ask you to come down to the Lodge with us for Whitsun—"

"Who wants him to?" growled Bulstrode.

"Why, you do, don't you?" said Billy Bunter innocently.

"No, I don't."

"I'm sorry; my mistake. I thought you were hinting to him to ask you— Ow! Let go my ear, please, Bulstrode! It hurts!"

"You young cad—"

"I'm sincerely sorry if I've said anything to offend you, Bulstrode," said Bunter, rubbing his ear. "Will you show me where that vault is?"

"Oh, certainly!"

Bulstrode had an ill-natured grin on his face. Any boy more wide-awake than Billy Bunter might have suspected that he intended to play some trick, but Bunter was not suspicious.

The two Removites left the school grounds and skirted the wall towards the spot marked out for the erection of the new building, close to Greyfriars.

Many trees had been cut down, and the ground was being cleared for the new buildings, which was to be run by Herr Rosenblum as a foreign academy when it was completed, in connection with Greyfriars College.

In clearing the ground the workmen had come upon many traces of an ancient building which had once occupied the site.

Old weapons of the Middle Ages had been turned up, and lately a vault had been discovered. It was one of a series extending for some distance under the ground, the full extent as yet unknown.

Bunter blinked round him as they entered the ruins. The workmen had left the place, and wheelbarrows and ladders and implements lay about amid felled timber and heaps of earth.

"Where is the vault, Bulstrode?"

"There it is."

Bulstrode stopped at a spot where a pavement of flag-stones had been uncovered, and pointed to a dark opening in the centre.

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One of the great stones had been raised by means of an iron ring fastened in it, and laid beside the opening it had covered for probably centuries. It needed only a push, however, to send it clanging back into its place.

Billy Bunter adjusted his spectacles, and blinked down into the dim orifice.

The air had been foul when the opening was first discovered, but the foulness had now cleared off, and only a faint musty odour came up from the vault.

"Looks jolly dark, doesn't it?" said Bunter.

"It would be awful fun to explore it," said Bulstrode. "I shouldn't wonder if there were some treasure hidden down there."

Bunter's eyes glistened.

"Do you really think so, Bulstrode?"

Bulstrode winked at the beech-trees with the eye that was furthest away from the Owl of the Remove.

"Why not?" he replied. "You know what miserly fellows those old monks were. This old building was a priory, or something, in connection with Greyfriars. I think it's very likely that a vault like this would be used to store treasure in."

"But the workmen haven't seen anything —"

"They haven't been down yet. The air was foul when the vault was opened."

"I see. I say, Bulstrode, there are steps leading down," said Billy Bunter, peering into the opening. "It would be ripping to discover a treasure!"

"Well, it would be rather good, wouldn't it?"

"I should say so. I'm stony-broke just now," said Bunter. "I've been expecting a postal-order for some time past, but there's been some delay, and it hasn't come yet. It would be ripping to find a treasure, and be in funds for the rest of the term."

"Jolly ripping!"

"Suppose we go down there and look, Bulstrode?"

"Not a bad idea," said the bully of the Remove. "But how are we to get a light?"

"I can fetch Wharton's bicycle lantern."

"Never mind. Here are the lanterns the workmen have left. You can light one of them easily enough."

"Good! So we can. Will you come down with me?"

"Perhaps I'd better stay up and see that nobody comes along and shuts down the slab," said Bulstrode. "It would be no joke to get shut up in that vault."

Billy Bunter shivered.

"You're right there, Bulstrode."

"Look here, you go down and look round, and I'll keep guard," said Bulstrode. "We'll go halves in the treasure."

"Well, if I have the trouble of going down, I think I ought to take more than half."

Bulstrode grinned.

"Well, you shall have two-thirds, then."

"I may as well go. There's no danger."

"Of course there isn't, so long as I keep watch, and see that nobody comes along and plays tricks with the slab."

"Then, I'll go."

Billy Bunter soon had one of the big lanterns alight. Taking it in his hand, he stepped into the opening.

The stone steps were strong and secure. Billy Bunter flashed the light before him as he descended, and Bulstrode watched him from the top, the evil grin still upon his face. Bunter reached the bottom of the steps. Dark and dreary looked the vault as he flashed the light round him.

"See any treasure?" called out Bulstrode.

"Not yet."

"Have a good look."

"Oh, rather! Mind that slab doesn't get closed."

Bulstrode chuckled.

Billy Bunter looked round the vault in the lantern-light. From the top of the stone steps came a sudden dull thud. Bunter looked up in sudden alarm.

"Wh-what was that? Bulstrode—Bulstrode!"

But there was no reply; and Billy Bunter did not need telling what had happened. The square of daylight had been blotted out at the top of the steps.

The slab of stone had fallen into its place. He was shut in the vault!

With a gasp of alarm, the Removite dashed up the steps, and thrust his hand upon the stone that closed the opening; but it did not stir.

The strength of four or five fellows of Bunter's build would have been required to move that massive slab from below.

"Oh, dear! Bulstrode—Bulstrode!"

But there was no reply.

The bully of the Remove had walked away, laughing; and only the echo of his own voice replied to the victim of the cruel joke.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

The Rescue of Billy Bunter.

"WHARTON!"

"Hullo, Hoffmann."

The German boy stopped Harry Wharton in the Close, poking him in the chest with a fat forefinger.

"I wants to speak to you, ain't it?"

"Well, go ahead!"

"I tinks to meinself tat I likes to join te Oberatic and Dramatic Society pefore, ain't it, and dake brincipal barts in te blay after."

Harry Wharton laughed.

"Is that all you want, Hoffmann?"

"Ja, mein Knabe. Tat is all pefore. Tat French ass Meunier dink he can act, and he dink of asking you. I dells him he is ass!"

"Did he tell you you were another?"

"Ja, ja!"

"Quite right, too. You were both right," said Harry Wharton. "We might possibly find you a comic part in the play."

"I dakes der hero."

"You take the cake—for cheek, at any rate!" said Harry.

"If we accepted all the heroes who have offered their services, we should have a cast full of heroes, and no minor characters."

"Ten you picks out te pest—"

"The pest! What do you mean?"

"You picks out te pest—"

"What on earth are you driving at? A pest is a plague, isn't it? What do you mean by picking out the pest?" demanded the amazed Wharton.

"Te pest for te part."

"Oh, the best!" said Harry, comprehending. "Yes; we've picked out the best already. I'm taking the part myself."

"I tinks I take it petter."

"You can go on thinking so, Hoffy," said Harry; and he put his hands into his pockets and strolled away. He left the German junior shaking his head solemnly.

A dozen paces further on, a youth with a Gallic cast of features buttonholed the manager of the Wharton Operatic and Dramatic Society.

It was Adolphe Meunier, the French junior.

"Mon ami," he said, in his persuasive voice, "I zink zat I speak to you a few words. I hear zat you give dramatic representation."

"That's it!" said Wharton, with an inward groan. "Quite right!"

"I zink I act for you, mon garcon. I have had great success in ze amateur theatricals, and I zink I am ze person to take ze part of ze hero?"

"Rats!"

The French junior stared.

"You say 'Rats!' to me, Wharton, when I am offer my services for ze play viz you?"

"Yes. We're not looking out for any heroes. I might find you a part as a comic footman."

"Ciel! Zat is ze insult!"

"Well, you can put it in your pipe and smoke it. That's the best offer I can make at present," said the manager of the operatic society.

"I am insulted, I punches nose!"

"Get on, then. I'm ready for you to start."

"Hullo, hallo, hallo!" exclaimed Bob Cherry, coming up with Nugent, and Hurrec Jamset Ram Singh. "What's the row? What's that about punching noses?"

"Meunier is going to punch my nose because he can't play the hero in 'By Order of the Tyrant,'" grinned Wharton.

"Non, non! I punches nose because I am insulted."

"Let's insult him some more," said Bob Cherry. "Suppose we take him by the hair and the heels and duck him in the fountain?"

"That is a wheezy good idea. The cheekfulness of the Frenchful kid will be washed out in the cold water!"

"Lend a hand, then. Why, he's gone!"

Adolphe Meunier had not waited for Bob Cherry's good idea to be carried out. He was gone; and Bob, who had not been quite in earnest, grinned.

"We were just going to stroll down to the site of the New House," said Nugent. "Are you coming along, Harry? The workmen have discovered an old vault in the foundations of the building that used to be there hundreds of years ago."

Harry Wharton nodded.

"Yes; I was thinking of going down. Come on!"

The chums of the Remove strolled down to the site of the new building. Nugent stopped at the closed slab of stone.

"Hullo! This was open when I looked this way before. Somebody has shoved the stone in its place."

"There's an iron ring in it," said Bob Cherry. "We'll soon have it up again. We can shove one of these poles through the ring."

"Good! Hallo! What on earth's that?"

"Help!"

It was a faint, far-away cry, and it seemed to come from beneath the stone. The chums of the Remove stared at one another, startled.

"My hat! There's someone in the vault!"

"Somebody got shut up in it!" said Harry Wharton, in a low voice. "Good heavens! It's lucky we came out here. Get the stone up, for goodness' sake!"

The Removites lost no time. The pole was thrust through the iron ring in the stone, and the juniors grasped it and bent their strength to the task. With an effort they wrenched the great slab out of its place, and it rolled back.

There was a gasp from below. A white face, with a pair of spectacles, looked out of the darkness of the vault steps, and the chums recognised Billy Bunter.

"Bunter!" exclaimed Harry. "Here, let me help you out!"

Billy was white and shivering. He had not been ten minutes in the vault, but it had seemed like centuries to him. He had been thoroughly frightened by the darkness and the terrible thought that perhaps the stone could not be moved again.

Wharton helped him out, and he sank down helplessly upon the stone, trembling in every limb.

The juniors gathered round him anxiously. Bunter had evidently had a terrible shock, but they could only wait for him to recover from it.

"I—I say you fellows—" he gasped.

"You're all right now, Billy?"

"Ye-es. But—oh, dear, I've had a fearful time the last few hours!"

"The last what?"

"The last few hours. I've been shut up in that vault for hours and hours!"

"My dear kid, it's not half an hour since we had tea in the study!"

"You must be mistaken, Wharton. I've been in that horrible place for hours," said Bunter, with a shudder. "I began to think I should never get out alive."

Harry Wharton smiled.

"My dear chap, if you had been there for hours it would be dark now."

"H'm! I suppose it would, when you come to think of it," said Billy Bunter, recovering himself a little. "I suppose it seemed longer than it really was. But I have had a fearful time, all the same!"

"How on earth did you get into the vault, Billy, and close the stone over you?"

"I didn't! Bulstrode said there might be a treasure there—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I thought I might as well look, and Bulstrode stayed at the top to see that nobody came by and closed the stone. Then the rotter closed it himself."

"Bulstrode shut you up in the vault?"

"Yes. It's his idea of a joke, I suppose. I don't see where the joke comes in myself," said Billy Bunter; "I might have starved to death there."

Bob Cherry grinned.

"If Bulstrode shut you up there, Billy, he wouldn't leave you to starve to death. He'd come and let you out after a bit."

"Yes, I suppose so. But it was a dirty trick to play, when I trusted him; and I might have gone off my dot, you know!"

"Well, he was sure to let you out."

"You wouldn't feel so safe about it, though, if you were inside the vault instead of outside it!" retorted Billy Bunter.

"Well, there's something in that."

"It was beastly mean and cowardly of Bulstrode!" said Harry Wharton, knitting his brows. "It was a silly and dangerous trick to play! Suppose something had happened to Bulstrode himself, for instance—nobody would have known that Billy was shut up in the vault. And a silly ass like Bunter might really have gone off his rocker in the dark!"

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"The bully ought to be punished," said Bob Cherry. "Suppose we wait till he comes here to let Billy out, and shove him in himself and drop the stone shut?"

"Good wheeze!" exclaimed Nugent.

"The wheezefulness is excellent."

Harry Wharton shook his head.

"I think I've got a better plan than that, chaps; one that will really make the brute sit up!"

"Expound it then, my son."

"Look at that tree," said Harry Wharton, pointing to

one that had been half sawn through by the workmen and left in that state by the call of the "hooter" which announced the close of the day's work. "How much do you think would be wanted to make it fall?"

"Not much," said Bob Cherry. "The saw's still there, and we could give it enough in five minutes to make it come down. But what good would that do?"

"Don't you see? When it falls, it will fall directly across this trap, as it's leaning this way."

"The workmen will have ropes on it to pull it the way they want it."

"I know; but we want it to fall this way."

The chums of the Remove stared. They could not understand in the least what their leader was driving at.

"What do we want a big tree to fall on the trap for?" asked Nugent. "Can't see anything in it, myself."

"Bulstrode will come along later to let Bunter out, or else send somebody else to do it. If the tree's down, he'll think it fell of its own accord. The opening will be blocked up for good and all; it would take twenty men to move that tree when it is once down. Bulstrode won't be able to open the vault, and he'll think Billy is in it. Bunter will have to keep out of sight, of course."

"Hurrah!" shouted Bob Cherry. "It will give the brute the fright of his life!"

"By Jove," exclaimed Nugent; "it's a ripping idea! I fancy Bulstrode will be in the bluest funk of all his natural."

"I fancy so," said Wharton. "It will be a punishment for his bullying, and we can let him know the truth when we feel inclined, after he has been put through it a bit. You will have to keep dark a bit, Bunter."

Bunter grinned gleefully.

"I'll take jolly good care of that, Wharton. I'll go up to the school now and get into the study——"

Harry Wharton gripped him by the arm.

"That you won't, you young ass. Bulstrode will very likely meet you on the way."

"Dear me; I never thought of that! I should be sincerely sorry to give the game away!"

"You'll stay with us. Don't let him out of your sight, kids. Now, then, some of you lend a hand with this saw."

The huge, two-handed saw was under a tarpaulin. The juniors soon had it out, and they put it into the deep cut already made in the tree.

"Now, then, saw away!" said Harry cheerfully.

"I say, this is a jolly lot like work!" grunted Bob Cherry, as he slaved away with the heavy, slow-moving saw.

"Never mind; it will do you good."

"The goodness of the exercise is great."

"Lend a hand, then, Inky, and get some of the goodness yourself."

"Not at all, my worthy chum. I would not willingly deprive you of the beneficiality of the esteemed exercise."

"Wouldn't you?" exclaimed Bob Cherry, grasping him by the collar and jerking him to the saw. "Now you take hold, or I'll knock your inky head against the tree!"

"Please do not promote the excitedness," said Hurreo Singh. "I am willing to take my sharefulness of the honourable labour at the request of my worthy chum."

"Go it, then, you lazy bounder!"

"All together!" said Nugent. "We'll soon be through. Mind you keep out of the way of the tree when it falls. It would crush you as flat as a pancake!"

"By Jove, it would! Keep your peepers open!"

"Where are you going, Bunter?" roared Harry Wharton, suddenly perceiving that the Owl of the Remove was strolling away.

Bunter looked back.

"I'm rather peckish, Wharton; I'm going to get some grub."

"Stop where you are."

"But, really, Wharton——"

"Fetch him back, Inky; quick!"

The nabob darted after Bunter and dragged him back. The Owl protested vigorously, but the nabob was not to be denied.

"Really, Wharton, I should have taken great care not to let Bulstrode see me. If I had seen him coming, I should have dodged very quickly."

"If you had seen him, you Owl! Do you ever see anything?"

"But, really, I'm expecting a postal-order by every post now; and the post is in, and I want to go and see if it has arrived."

"Oh, rats!"

"If my postal-order has come, I should like to stand a feed to all you chaps for getting me out of the vault," said Bunter. "We'll have a feed, anyway, and if my remittance hasn't come you chaps can have a whip-round to settle. Suppose we let Bulstrode off, and leave him to his conscience? It's a good idea to leave a villain to his conscience; and I'm awfully hungry."

"Mind he doesn't go, Inky!"

"He will not be able to take the departfulness without

leaving a goodly portion of his ear to me, finger and thumbfully," said the nabob.

"You are hurting my ear, Inky!"

"I offer the profound and sincere apologies, my worthy chum."

"Yes, but let go!"

"That is impossible, my esteemed Bunter. I have got the right pig by the ear this time, you know, and the let-gofulness is impossible."

"Ow! I——"

"Look out; she's coming over!"

"Buck up!"

The tree was sagging. The juniors scuttled back. They were all on the safe side of the slant of the trunk, but it was as well to get to a safe distance. The tree was going at last, the slant causing it to fall directly upon the slab which closed the entrance to the vault.

Crash!

With a terrific concussion the tree-trunk crashed upon the flagstones. The juniors ran forward.

"My hat; the vault is safe enough now!" exclaimed Harry Wharton. "The workmen won't be able to remove that trunk without sawing it up into pieces. And, now, shove that saw out of sight; and let's get out of sight ourselves and wait for Bulstrode."

There was plenty of cover close at hand, among the impedimenta of the clearing. The juniors took shelter behind a heap of displaced earth, among ladders and wheelbarrows, whence they could look out without much risk of revealing themselves. And there they waited for the bully of the Remove.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

A Shock or Bulstrode.

BULSTRODE came through the trees from the direction of the school with a grin on his face. He had little regard for the feelings of the victim of his practical joke, but he felt that it would not do to leave the Owl too long in the vault.

"My—my hat!"

The bully of the Remove gave a violent start at the sight of the tree stretched across the slab of stone which closed the vault. He broke into a run, and arrived on the spot panting.

"Great—great Scott!"

He gasped out the words. By thrusting a pole through the iron ring he could have raised the slab of stone to release Bunter, but he could not have shifted that huge trunk if he had had the strength of half the Remove in his own person.

He stood staring down at the tree in dismay. Then he knelt beside it and tapped on the stone slab, in a part where it was not under the trunk, with a fragment of stone. The slab gave a dull ring back to the blow.

"Bunter!"

Bulstrode called out the word in shaking tones.

"Bunter! Billy Bunter!"

No sound came from below.

The bully bent his head to listen, and his face grew pale as the silence continued. He tapped again with the fragment of stone.

"Bunter! Billy Bunter!"

Still no reply. Dead silence hung over the spot. Bulstrode rose with a frightened look. What was the matter with Bunter? Why did he not reply?

Had he fainted? Had he wandered away in an attempt to escape from his prison, and lost himself in an underground labyrinth of vaults?

The bully realised at last that his cruel jest might have its serious side. He stood staring in dismay at the slab and listening with painful intensity.

Not a sound!

Behind the cover of the thrown-up earth, five juniors were watching and stifling their laughter.

The terror and dismay of the bully were evident to the watching Removites, but not a hint did they give Bulstrode of their proximity.

"Good heavens! Bunter! Bunter!"

Bulstrode fairly shouted out the name; but only the echoes from the trees around answered his frantic call.

"What shall I do? I can't move the tree. I shall have to get help; but then, they'll know I shut him up here. But he must be let out. Oh, heavens! I wish I hadn't done it. If he hadn't been such a fool, he wouldn't have gone into the vault at all. The young idiot might have guessed I was only fooling him!"

The stammering words were audible to the hidden juniors in the quiet of the summer evening. Billy Bunter knitted his brows with anger. Bulstrode's reference to him was not complimentary.

"I say, you fellows——"

Bob Cherry clapped a hand over his mouth in time.

"Shut up!" whispered Harry Wharton savagely.

Billy gurgled, and was silent. Fortunately, Bulstrode had heard nothing. He was still staring blankly at the slab and the tree that pinned it down.

The chums were curious to see what he would do. If he called for help, the tree might be moved and the slab raised. But then, he would have to own up to having shut Bunter in the vault—a trick that might be regarded very seriously by the Head of Greyfriars. Yet, it was surely impossible for him to leave Bunter in the vault. To do so might end seriously for the junior—that is, of course, if he had really been there, as Bulstrode believed.

True, if, when finally released, Bunter accused him of having shut the stone down upon him, Bulstrode could deny it. There had been no witnesses; and he could say that he had gone away, leaving Billy in the vault, and that the stone had toppled down by itself; or, perhaps, had been knocked into its place by the falling tree.

The fellow who got himself into trouble by bullying was not likely to hesitate at getting out of it by lying. But Bulstrode was not all bad, and he was really anxious for Bunter, apart from his uneasiness as to himself.

Harry Wharton pressed Billy Bunter's arm.

"Keep out of sight," he whispered. "Don't you show yourself when we leave you, or I'll skin you presently!"

"All right, Wharton. I really—"

"Shut up!"

"But—"

"You remain with him, Nugent, and bash his head against the stones if he utters a sound! Will you?"

"Certainly," said Nugent; "with pleasure!"

"You others, come along. We'll come on Bulstrode by surprise, and see what he has to say for himself."

"Good wheeze!" chuckled Bob Cherry.

"The wheezefulness is ripping!" purred the nabob.

"Mind he doesn't see you. Keep in cover," whispered Wharton, as he led the way from the place of concealment, leaving Nugent mounting guard over Billy Bunter.

"Right-ho! Lead on, Macduff!"

The juniors skirted the heaps of old masonry and earth turned up by the excavations, and entered the trees, and gained the rear of Bulstrode without being seen by the bully of the Remove. Then they walked carelessly on, as if they had just come from the school. Bulstrode was still standing at the slab, staring at it in dismay and indecision. He turned at the sound of footsteps, and gave a guilty start at the sight of the chums of the Remove.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" exclaimed Bob. "Anything wrong, Bulstrode?"

"Wrong? No!" stammered Bulstrode.

"You're looking rather queer about the gills."

"Am I? What rot!"

"Haven't seen a ghost, have you?" asked Bob Cherry.

"You look as if you had; or as if you had committed a murder, and couldn't get rid of the body!"

Bulstrode gave a start.

"Don't talk rot!" he said savagely.

"The rotfulness of the esteemed Cherry's remarks is only equalled by the politeness of the worthy Bulstrode!" remarked the nabob.

"Look here, what are you badgering me about? I—"

"Have you seen Billy Bunter?" asked Harry Wharton.

Bulstrode's lip trembled.

"No; not lately."

"He walked out of the gates with you a while back, that's all."

"Oh, yes! We separated then."

"I wonder where he is?" said Bob Cherry gravely. "I say, do you fellows see that there's a tree fallen over this slab? We sha'n't be able to explore the vault."

"The explorefulness will have to be postponed," said Hurree Singh. "I am afraid we shall not find our Bunterful chum here, my esteemed friends. Are you quite sureful that you have not beheld the august Bunter, Bulstrode?"

The bully of the Remove scowled savagely.

"Of course I am, confound you!"

"There is no cause to get out the ragfulness," said the nabob. "We do not suspect you of having murdered the esteemed Bunter."

Bulstrode started again, and then gritted his teeth and walked away. The next moment he could have sworn that he heard a yell of laughter. He looked quickly back, but the Removites had faces as solemn as Egyptian mummies.

The bully of the Remove strode on towards Greyfriars. He disappeared among the trees, and then Nugent and Billy Bunter came out of the place of concealment.

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Nugent. "If ever there was a chap in a blue funk, it's Bulstrode at this moment."

"The bluefulness of the funk is terrific!"

"Bet you he won't say a word about it at Greyfriars!"

grinned Bob Cherry. "But when Bunter's missed at calling-over—"

"But I sha'n't be missed at calling-over, Cherry," said Bunter. "I shall have to show up by then; in fact, before then, as I'm getting fearfully hungry."

"My dear Billy, you can't be allowed to spoil a good joke on account of your unearthly appetite!" said Nugent, shaking his head.

"Look here, I can't starve to death!" said Bunter wrathfully. "It's more than an hour now since a morsel has passed my lips!"

"You wouldn't be missed if you did, except at meal-times," said Bob Cherry comfortingly. "You chaps got any objection to Bunter starving to death?"

"Not at all," said Harry.

"Not the least in the world, as far as I am concerned," said Nugent.

"You see, Billy, the majority's against you, so this is where you shut up."

"Look here, Bob Cherry—"

"We'd better not keep it up after calling-over," said Harry Wharton thoughtfully. "If Billy doesn't answer the roll, there will be an inquiry, and we don't want to bring the matter before the masters. We've punished Bulstrode ourselves. But Bunter will have to lie low until roll-call, and then dodge into the hall without Bulstrode seeing him. It will give him a start when he hears Bunter answer to his name, when he thinks the young porker is in the vault all the time."

"Really, Wharton—"

"So you can hide yourself again, Billy."

"I can't possibly do so until calling-over. If I go hungry for any length of time, it has a bad effect on my constitution."

"You can hide yourself in—"

"I can't, Wharton—I can't, really!"

"You can lie low in—"

"I really can't! I'd do anything to oblige you, Wharton, but I can't risk wrecking my constitution even for your sake! I really—"

"You can lie low in the school shop."

"Eh? What?"

"You can lie low in the tuckshop, and treat yourself to a feed there till calling-over," said Harry, laughing.

Bunter's expression changed at once.

"Now you're talking!" he exclaimed emphatically.

"Ha, ha! Bunter will lie low in the tuckshop as long as you like!" grinned Bob Cherry.

"I always like to be obliging," said Billy Bunter. "I'd do anything in reason for you fellows. As for the feed, I'll let you stand it, but I shall make it up to you when my postal-order comes. I expect it to-morrow morning by the first post, if it isn't already waiting for me in the rack."

The Removites grinned. They knew all about Billy Bunter's postal-order.

"We'll get in over the old wall, and through the doctor's garden," said Harry Wharton; "then we shall be sure to keep out of Bulstrode's way. Once in the tuckshop, Bunter will be safe. Bulstrode won't feel much like feeding in his present state of mind. Come on!"

The chums of the Remove were soon within the school walls, and they reached the shop kept within bounds by Mrs. Mimble, the gardener's wife, without seeing anything of Bulstrode. Billy Bunter was ensconced in the tuckshop with a plateful of provisions, and a pile more at his elbow, and the chums left him with his fat face wreathed in happy smiles.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

A Surprise for Bulstrode—"The Play's the Thing!"

THE boys crowded into the hall at Greyfriars for calling-over as the dusk of the May evening grew thicker on the old Close. Bulstrode was almost the last in of the Remove.

He came in with a slow step and a pale face. As yet, he had not said a word of the mishap at the old vault. He dared not face the "music," if he owned up that he had shut Billy Bunter in the vault; and yet he was tormented in his mind as to what might have happened to Bunter in that dark and dreary recess.

Bulstrode took his place with the Remove. Mr. Quelch was taking the roll-call, rapping out the names in his usual quick, staccato manner.

"Bulstrode!"

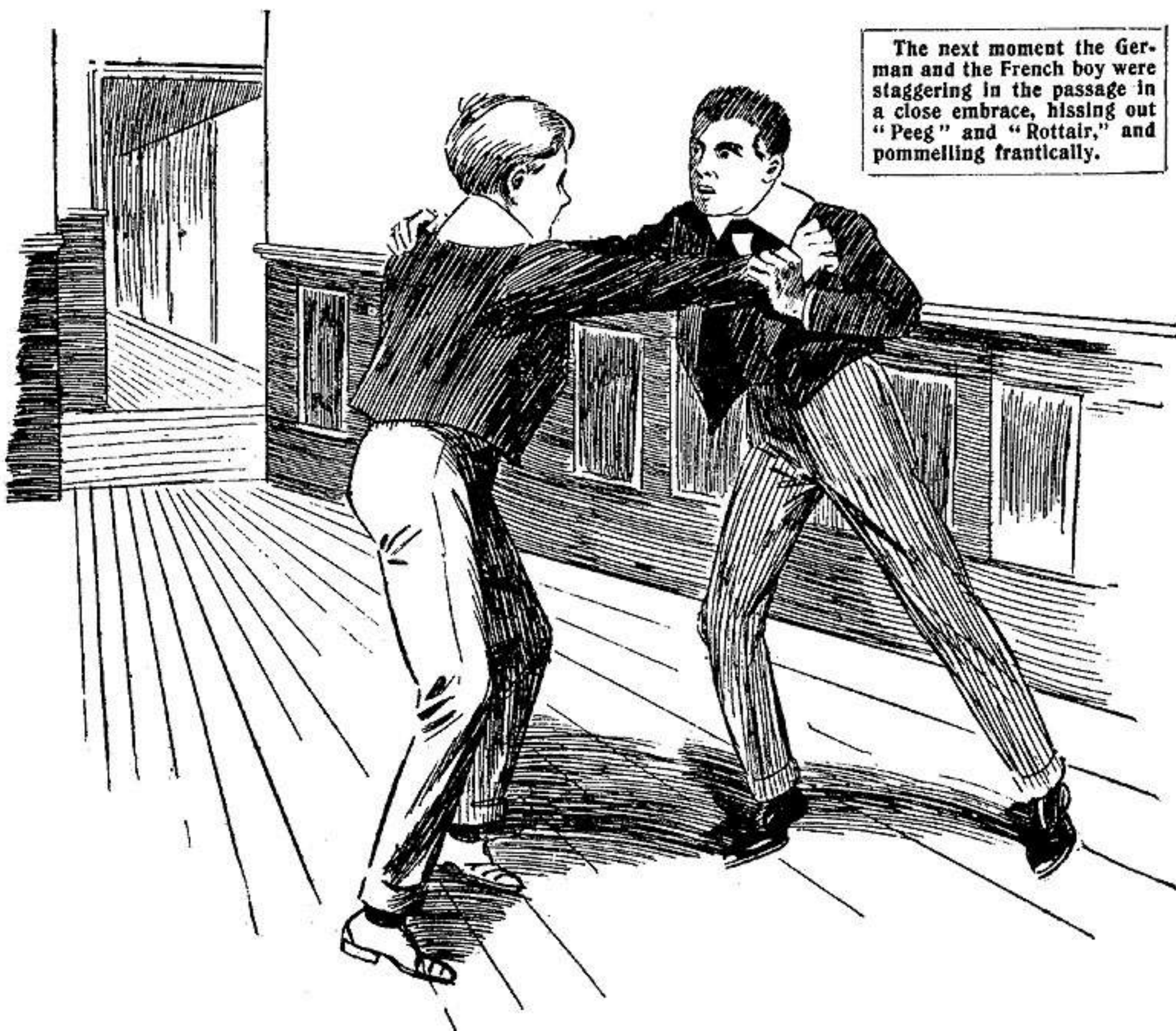
"Adsum!" said Bulstrode.

"Bunter!"

"Adsum!"

It was Billy Bunter's piping voice.

Bulstrode gave a violent start, and looked along the ranks of the Remove. He could scarcely believe his eyes at what he saw.



The next moment the German and the French boy were staggering in the passage in a close embrace, hissing out "Peeg" and "Rottair," and pommelling frantically.

There was Billy Bunter, in his usual place, his fat face looking a little more plump and well-fed than when the Remove bully had seen him last.

"Bunter!" gasped Bulstrode.

Hazeldene, who was standing next to the bully of the Remove, looked at him curiously.

"What's the matter with you, Bulstrode?" he asked.

"N-nothing! But did you see Bunter come in?"

"Bunter? Yes. He came in a few minutes before you, with Wharton and Cherry and the Indian."

"Wharton?" Bulstrode gritted his teeth. "Ah, I might have guessed that he was at the bottom of it!"

"At the bottom of what?"

"Nothing."

"But you said—"

"Never mind what I said! It's no business of yours, Vaseline, anyway!" said Bulstrode rudely.

"Silence in the Remove!"

Bulstrode was greatly relieved in his mind. He could not help guessing now that Billy Bunter had left the vault before the great tree had fallen upon the slab. After calling-over, he found the first opportunity he could of speaking to the Owl. He met Billy Bunter in the hall, and grasped him by the shoulder.

Billy Bunter blinked at him. Wharton was within call, and Bunter felt safe, though the bully of the Remove had a dangerous gleam in his eyes.

"So you have been playing a trick on me, you young imp?" said Bulstrode between his teeth, shaking Billy by the shoulder.

"Please don't shake me like that, Bulstrode. You might make my glasses fall off. And if you break them, you'll have to pay for them, so I warn you."

"You young rotter! You played—"

"I didn't. You played a trick on me, Bulstrode; and Wharton says it was a mean and dirty trick, and I really think it was."

"You rat, why didn't you let me know you had got out of the vault?"

"Wharton thought he'd give you a lesson," chuckled Billy Bunter. "He, he! It was really a good joke, wasn't it, Bulstrode?"

The Remove bully shook him again.

"You little fat rotter, I've a great mind to wipe up the floor with you!"

"If you make my glasses fall off, and break them, you'll have to pay—"

"I'll—I'll—"

"No, you won't! Wharton won't let you," grinned Bunter. "I'm to tell Wharton if you bully me over this, and he has promised to give you a licking if you do. You remember he gave you a licking once, Bulstrode, and you had an awfully rough time. Ow! Don't shake me like that; you'll make my glasses fall off! Wharton! I say, Wharton!"

Harry Wharton came quietly up.

"Let Bunter alone, Bulstrode."

"Mind your own business."

"This is my business. Billy did as I told him. I thought you ought to have a lesson for being a cad and a brute."

"Wharton!"

"That's plain English," said Harry Wharton disdainfully. "If you don't like it, come over to the gym., and I'll back up my words in a way you can understand. But you are not going to bully this kid. Let him alone!"

Bulstrode, quivering with passion, released Bunter.

"I will settle with you for this another time, Wharton," he said thickly.

Harry shrugged his shoulders.

"Whenever you like."

Bulstrode muttered something and strode away.

"The great man is angryful," murmured Hurree Singh, as Wharton rejoined him. "His terrible frownfulness is no longer terrific since he has received the lickfulness, but he will get used to it. Shall we go up to the study for a rehearsal, my worthy chums?"

"Just what I was thinking," said Bob Cherry.

The chums of the Remove were soon in the study. Harry Wharton, who was always methodical in his work, suggested getting prep. done first, and done it was. Then, books being cleared away, the play sent so kindly by Bob Cherry's cousin in Manchester was produced, and the juniors read through it.

Bob Cherry pronounced the play absolutely ripping, but each of the other juniors kept to his own opinion that something else would have been better. Harry Wharton still favoured "Hamlet," Nugent "Peter Pan," and the nabob a weird composition which he had a manuscript copy of, and which he averred was frequently performed in princes' palaces in India. But there was no chance of the juniors agreeing in their opinions, and as it was acknowledged that Bob Cherry's play was easier than the others, they came to a compromise, "By Order of the Tyrant" being adopted as the work that was to receive the attention of the Wharton Amateur Operatic and Dramatic Society. Further argument on the subject being vetoed by general consent, and the play being read through, the next question was to form the caste.

Wharton had already been selected as Valentine, the hero, and Hazeldene was to take the part of Albert, the heroine's brother. Bob Cherry jibbed a little at the part of Colonel Koffdropski, the villain of the piece, but he preferred it to a minor character, so his name went down on the list as Colonel Koffdropski. Nugent was cast as Lieutenant Bunkoff, the colonel's factotum and secondary villain.

Billy Bunter blinked disapproval the whole time. Billy wanted the hero's part, first of all, and had indeed learned up some of the lines. Then he would have compromised on the part of Gloxiana's brother. After that, he was willing to take either of the villainous parts. When he was cast as a comic page he sniffed.

"If the whole thing falls through, and we get grinned at, don't blame me," he said. "I could save it for you if you liked."

"We'd rather not be saved," said Bob Cherry. "You'll do rippingly as a comic page. You haven't much to say, and you only have to look funny; and goodness knows you look funny enough, without making up for the part."

"Really, Cherry—"

"Then there's Inky—"

"But I say, you fellows—"

"No time for you to say anything."

"But I want to speak a minute."

"Go and do it in Skinner's study, then. He won't mind. Now, there's Inky. What part is he going to take?"

"Russian police spy, I suppose," said Wharton.

The nabob nodded.

"I shall have terrific pleasure in playing the part of the Russian spyful person," he said. "I hope I have a considerable amount of speakfulness."

Harry Wharton looked thoughtful.

"Well, I don't know, Inky. Popoff, the police spy, has a lot to say, but I was thinking of cutting it."

"Then where would my speakfulness come in, my worthy chum?"

"The fact is, the less you say on the stage the better. Inky, as you would give the thing away with your—your unique way of expressing yourself."

"You mean that my variety of the noble English language is not exactly samefully similar to the manner of your honourable style?"

"Yes, that's it."

"But I studied the English under the rippingest native master in Bengal," said Hurree Singh. "The causefulness of the differentiation is that the English tongue has degenerated, and the English I speak is the old original ripping good English."

"My dear Inky—"

"I am quite certain of this, as my master in Bengal told me so," said the nabob. "But the little difficulty of the differentiation can be easily extirpated. I shall learn the lines heartfully in the memory, and speak them with exact thusness, and so there will not be any signfulness displayed of this slightful differentiation."

"You might make a slip."

"I shall take the extreme care to avoid the pitfall of the slipfulness."

"Very well, we'll see," said Wharton. "Anyhow, you go down as the police spy, Popoff. Young Desmond is to be

the waiting-maid, Maria, and Hazeldene's sister, Gloxiana. That's the whole caste, excepting police, servants, soldiers, and so on."

"I say, you fellows—"

"Now, let's see about going through the lines," said Wharton. "We shall have to carefully rehearse the great scene in the second act, where Hazeldene and I thrash Colonel Koffdropski and Lieutenant Bunkoff."

Bob Cherry and Nugent exchanged glances.

"Shall we?" said Bob. "I really think that scene ought to be cut out, Wharton."

"My dear chap, it's the most telling scene in the play."

"Yes, but—"

"Colonel Koffdropski insults Gloxiana—"

"Look here, I'm not going to insult Marjorie Hazeldene—"

"Ass! It's all in the play."

"It may be in the play. But I tell you I'm not going to be rude to a girl, whatever Colonel Koffdropski may have done."

"It's in the book!"

"It can stop there."

"But if you don't insult Gloxiana, I can't rush on and seize you by the throat, and dash you to the ground."

"You'd better not do that, anyway, unless you particularly want a thick ear."

"Now, look here, Cherry —"

"I tell you I'm not going to speak rudely to a girl, play or no play. You can cut that part out."

"Might be done," said Hazeldene. "Instead of you rushing on when the colonel insults Gloxiana, you could rush on a little earlier, Wharton."

"It would spoil the effect."

"Stuff!" said Bob Cherry. "Suppose you come on a little earlier, as Vaseline suggests, and I'll quarrel with you on some other account. Instead of insulting Gloxiana, I'll say something about I can't understand why such a nice girl could possibly look twice at a funny-faced bounder like you."

Harry Wharton turned red.

"You can't turn a drama into opera-bouffe like that, Cherry."

"Well, I'll insult you instead of Gloxiana, and you can choose your own insult," said Bob Cherry. "Anyway, I'm not going to insult Marjorie Hazeldene."

Wharton rubbed his chin thoughtfully.

"Well, perhaps we can fix it," he said. "You can say something about driving the British flag from India, and then I'll jump on you."

"No, I can't! I'll call you a liar, if you like."

"That wouldn't work in."

"Well, a thief, then."

"Ass! It wouldn't do."

"Oh, leave it over," said Nugent pacifically. "We can think of some insult afterwards that will suit both parties. Let's get on with the washing now."

"The impatience with which I await the proceeding of the washfulness is terrific," purred the Nabob of Bhanipur.

"Very well," said Harry; "that can be easily arranged, with a little thought. Now to get on to the scene. Gloxiana is standing under the tree when Colonel Koffdropski comes up with Bunkoff and insults her."

"And doesn't insult her."

"I mean, and doesn't insult her," amended Harry. "Then I rush on— But look here, if Koffdropski doesn't insult Gloxiana, there's no reason why I should rush on. I might as well walk."

"Well, walk, then," said Bob Cherry.

"It's a good scene spoiled! Well, I walk on, then, and the colonel insults me. Then I go for him. Oh, I say, it's rotten! If he insulted Gloxiana, I could go for him all right, but an insult to me wouldn't be a sufficient excuse for using violence before a lady. I should be acting like a ruffian."

"Perhaps you're right there," said Bob Cherry thoughtfully. "Perhaps I'd better dot you on the nose instead."

"That's all right," said Nugent. "You'd have to hit back, and then the dust-up could proceed as per book."

"Well, yes, that might do. I thrash Colonel Koffdropski without mercy—"

"Oh, draw it mild!"

"Do you want to spoil that scene, too, Cherry?"

"No; but I think I ought to have a look in somewhere. We might arrange it that we have a fearful fight, and part on equal terms. The audience will be just as pleased. The fight is what they want, and they don't care who wins."

"Impossible! Lieutenant Bunkoff has to rush to your aid as you're getting the worst of it, and I am attacked by the two scoundrels—"

"The two what?"

"Scoundrels! I'm not referring to you and Nugent, ass, but to Colonel Koffdropski and Lieutenant Bunkoff."

"And then I dash in," exclaimed Hazeldene—"I dash on the scene, exclaiming: 'My friend! My sister! My sister! My friend!'"

"And we give the colonel and his myrmidon a fearful hiding," said Wharton.

Bob Cherry looked grim.

"I know that's in the play——"

"It will have to be in the representation, too. We can't have a good scene mucked up and ruined to save your feelings. We've already cut out your insulting remarks to Gloxiana. You'll want the whole play cut out next."

"Nugent agrees with me——"

"What-ho!" said Nugent. "I don't see why I should be bumped about the stage by Vaseline, a chap I could lick with one hand."

"Rats!" said Hazeldene.

"If you think I couldn't——"

"That's not the question," said Harry Wharton, interrupting. "This isn't a real fight, but a dramatic representation. I must say that I think you chaps are unreasonable. You will spoil the whole thing."

"How would you like to be licked with Marjorie Hazeldene looking on?"

"There's no alternative."

"Oh, let's get on!" said Bob Cherry. "This play isn't such a really ripping one as I thought at first. Of course, I intended to have been the hero, and then it would have worked out more satisfactorily. But let's get on with the washing!"

"I am waiting for the washfulness, my worthy chums."

"Right you are. Inky has some lines in the beginning of that scene as Popoff, the police spy. He explains to Gloxiana, under the tree, that she is doomed to Siberia, unless she consents to marry Colonel Koffdropski."

"Then I suggest that he should hand her a note instead, supposed to contain all that explanation," said Bob Cherry. "He's bound to come out with some of his beautiful English in a moment of absent-mindedness."

"I should declinefully refuse to hand the honourable note," said the nabob, shaking his head. "I am willing to heartfully learn the lines, and deliver them rotefully by word of mouth, to insure their correctfulness."

"We'll give Inky a trial," said Wharton. "If he has the lines pat by the time we are ready for the final full-dress rehearsal, he shall speak; and if not he shall deliver a note to Gloxiana, who shall read it aloud, and so let the audience know what is going on."

"That is fairful, and I agree with the great alacrity."

"Then you'd better start learning your lines, Inky," said Bob Cherry.

"I will start at oncefully."

"A good idea is to copy them out, and carry the copy always about with you," said Wharton. "Then you can whisk it out and have a look at any time—in the passages, or the fields, or in the intervals in the class-room."

"It is a wheezy good idea. I think that I shall soon have the lineful words of the esteemed Popoff quite heartfully, my worthy chums."

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Hurree Singh Studies his Part.

THE Wharton Operatic and Dramatic Company had entered upon the thing in good earnest, and they did not waste time. During the next few days little was heard in No. 1 Study save lines from "By Order of the Tyrant!" In and out of season the juniors studied and spouted their lines, and gradually got their parts by heart, though it is safe to say that none was letter-perfect.

The colonel's kind invitation had been accepted, of course, and Harry had written a very grateful letter to his guardian. Arrangements were made for the dramatic company to accompany Harry on his holiday to Wharton Lodge. There was little difficulty about that, but about the destined heroine of the play there was more. Harry wrote to the colonel, asking his counsel, and the result was a letter from Miss Wharton, the colonel's sister, to Marjorie Hazeldene. Miss Wharton was the aunt who had spoiled Harry in his earlier days, and she was as devoted to her favourite as ever. Her letter to Marjorie was so kind that the girl could have no hesitation in accepting her invitation to spend Whitsun week at Wharton Lodge. When the juniors heard that the matter had been arranged, they were jubilant.

"The difficulty is that Marjorie won't be able to come here for rehearsals," Hazeldene remarked. "But she has a gift for this sort of thing, you know, and she will pick up her part in next to no time. We sha'n't be giving the play the first day at the Lodge, I suppose?"

"Oh, no!" said Wharton. "Miss Hazeldene will have a couple of days at least to rehearse with us, and then I've sent her a copy of the play already."

"Marjorie will be well up in it; better than most of us, I expect," Hazeldene said confidently.

"I'm sure of it! I wish she could come here for the early rehearsals, though," Bob Cherry remarked.

Hazeldene grinned.

"Well, if you are going to cut up rusty in the second act, when Wharton wallops you, perhaps it's better not," he said.

"Wharton isn't going to wallop me."

"Yes, I am," said Harry. "Don't be an ass, Bob! You're not going to muck up the whole thing out of sheer obstinacy, are you?"

"Of course not."

"I shall be careful not to really hurt you. You can have some red ink, if you like, on your handkerchief, and I won't really make your nose bleed!"

"You'd better not, that's all," grunted Cherry.

"Of course, it's no good grumbling at trifles. If you got a knock or two——"

"Somebody else would get three or four," said Bob Cherry.

"Oh, don't be an ass!"

"Then don't you be a donkey."

"My dear friends and chumful comrades," said Hurree Singh, coming up with a manuscript in his hand, "I have learned the greater portion of my part heartfully. Would you care to hear me say a few lines?"

"Oh, go ahead!" said Wharton.

Hurree Singh twisted up his features into a really ferocious expression, and began:

"Aha! I see you here beneath the tree——"

Bob Cherry looked alarmed.

"What the dickens are you looking like that for, Inky?" he exclaimed.

"Like what?" asked the nabob, breaking off.

"Like a giddy burglar, or a fearful assassin!"

"I'm putting on the honourable expression suitable to the esteemed Popoff. He is a police-spy, and chocked full with villainousness."

"I see. I thought perhaps you were having a fit or something."

"Not at all. I will continue the lineful declamation."

"Aha; I see you here beneath the tree!"

'Tis now the hour when Bunkoff should be nigh,
And stern Koffdropski. Trembling English maid,
I tell you that unless you wed Koffdropski,
The drearyful plainfulness of Siberia will——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You are interrupting my honourable declamation with your esteemed snigger, Bob Cherry," said the nabob reproachfully.

"You're off the line, Inky. I knew you'd drop into your own beautiful idiom sooner or later," grinned Bob. "Better leave out the drearyful plainfulness."

"That was only a little slipfulness."

"Well, I told you so."

"An asinine person can say 'I told you so,'" said the nabob. "I will continue with a more terrific carefulness."

"I tell you that unless you wed Koffdropski,

The dreary plains of cold Siberia

Will greet you ere the weekful time has passed——"

"Ha, ha! There he goes again!"

"It was only a little slipfulness."

Harry Wharton laughed.

"You'll have to learn them up a bit more carefully, Inky," he remarked. "But there's plenty of time, and you only want to stick to it."

"The stickfulness will be terrific."

And to do Hurree Jamset Ram Singh justice, he did stick at his task with untiring energy and determination.

Whenever the Indian junior was seen, he had that well-thumbed copy in his hand and was studying his part. At intervals in the class-room, when the keen eye of Mr. Quelch was not upon him, Hurree Singh devoted his attention to the lines of Popoff, with curious results sometimes to his lessons.

His absent replies had more than once excited the suspicions of Mr. Quelch. The Remove master was a very keen man in school hours, as Hurree Singh learned in time.

"Hurree Singh!" exclaimed Mr. Quelch suddenly, on Saturday morning. "You will go on from where Wharton left off!"

Hurree Singh gave a start.

Wharton had been construing the *Æneid*, and Hurree Singh had been studying a folded paper hidden in the palm of his dusky hand.

The Indian lad looked up, hastily concealing the paper. The lines from "By Order of the Tyrant!" were fresh enough in his memory, but the lesson might have been going on in Japan for all Hurree Singh had heard of it. He did not even know his place in the book.

"Hurree Singh."

"Yes, sir."

"You will go on construing."

"Certainly, sir."

"Well," exclaimed Mr. Quelch, "why do you not go on?"

"I—I have lost the place, honourable sahib."

"Show him the place, Nugent."

Nugent showed Hurree Singh the place. Hurree Jamset Ram Singh stood up, in a great state of confusion. Mr. Quelch's eye was on him like a gimlet.

"Go on, Hurree Singh."

"Certainly, sir. I shall have great pleasurefulness in going on."

"Then do so at once!" rapped out the Remove-master.

"And Æneas began—" whispered Nugent, giving the nabob the clue.

"Nugent, you are speaking to Hurree Singh; you will take twenty lines!"

"If you please, sir—"

"Silence! Go on, Hurree Singh. If you keep me waiting any longer I shall know that you were not paying attention to the lesson, and shall punish you accordingly."

"Certainly, sir—I mean, certainly. And Æneas began—"

"Well, what did Æneas begin?"

"And Æneas began—"

"Go on."

"The honourable and esteemed Æneas began—"

"What did he say?"

"I—I—I—"

"Nothing of the sort," said Mr. Quelch sarcastically. "I don't think you will find that in the Æneid, Hurree Singh."

And the whole class giggled, as in duty bound when a Form-master condescended to make a joke. Hurree Singh grew more confused.

"And Æneas began—aha!"

"What?"

"Aha; I see you now beneath the tree!"

"Tis now the hour when Bunkoff should be nigh,

And stern Koffdropski—"

"What?" shouted Mr. Quelch.

But the bewildered nabob was deaf to him now; he had quite lost his presence of mind; and he went plunging on, while the class shrieked and rocked with laughter.

"And stern Koffdropski. Trembling English maid,

I tell you that unless you wed Koffdropski marryfully,
The drearyful plainfulness of Siberia

Will greet you ere the honourable week has passed—"

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

The class were in convulsions. Mr. Quelch's amazement was as funny as Hurree Singh's blundering. The Form-master stamped his foot.

"Hurree Singh; silence!"

The nabob broke off, because he had forgotten what came next. Mr. Quelch glared at him with an expression that a basilisk might have envied.

"Leave the class-room instantly!" he thundered. "I will deal with you presently, Hurree Singh. Leave the class-room!"

Harry Wharton was on his feet in a moment.

"If you please, Mr. Quelch—"

"What have you to say, Wharton?" rapped out the incensed Form-master.

"Hurree Singh did not mean to be cheek—impertinent, sir. He has been studying a part in a play, and it was absent-mindedness—"

"He's an absent-minded beggar," murmured Nugent.

Mr. Quelch's brow cleared a little.

"Indeed! Is that the case, Hurree Singh?"

"Certainly, sir," gasped the nabob. "I have terrific sorrowfulness at my great mistakefulness. I beg a thousand pardons of my honourable and esteemed instructor sahib, and I assure him—"

"So that is why you have been so inattentive in class of late?" said Mr. Quelch. "Well, as you are so fond of lines, you shall write out two hundred from the 'Æneid' this afternoon. You will find them much superior to those you have been learning by heart. Now, we will continue, please!"

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

The Dress Rehearsal.

"WHAT time the dress rehearsal, Wharton?"

"Seven, precisely."

"In the Remove-room?"

"Yes."

"Anybody coming?"

"Anybody that likes."

Bob Cherry chuckled.

"I fancy most of the Form will be there to see how we figure, Harry."

"Well, let them come," said Harry Wharton. "It will get us used to facing an audience, and that's an advantage."

"Yes; rather," said Nugent. "A Remove audience isn't the easiest in the world to face. We managed them all right with our version of 'Carmen,' because we decided at the last minute to make it mostly comic. But serious business—"

"Well, really, we ought to aim at improving their minds as much as anything, Nugent. The aim of the stage is not wholly to amuse, or to make money. The true actor has a mission in life. His mission, like that of the author, is to educate and elevate through the medium of amusement."

"Yes; but I'd rather try to educate and elevate any other crowd than a Remove one," said Nugent. "Still, I'm game. They can't do worse than throw things at us."

"Oh, that will be all right!" said Harry, laughing. "It won't be as bad as that. Anyway, this is only a rehearsal. Even if it isn't wholly a success, that's no reason why the show at Wharton Lodge shouldn't be a success."

"Well, we shall have a gentler audience there."

"Yes; and it will come as a bit of a rest after facing the Remove."

Bob Cherry was right in thinking that most of the Remove would turn up for the dress rehearsal of "By Order of the Tyrant."

When the notice was put up on the board, it was read with great interest by the Remove, and many fellows of the Upper Fourth, too.

Temple, Dabney, & Co., of the Upper Fourth, made up their minds to come and see the youngsters make asses of themselves, as Temple kindly expressed it.

During the afternoon, while Hurree Jamset Ram Singh was working off the lines he had earned by inattention in class, Harry Wharton and the rest of the party paid a visit to the village of Friardale, and had a satisfactory interview with the costumier, who had several times supplied their wants.

The clothes for "By Order of the Tyrant" were not at all unique, and they were easily to be obtained, and it was chiefly a question of fitting.

This difficulty was overcome, and the costumier promised that the goods should be delivered at the school without fail by half-past six.

Mindful of the raid of the Upper Fourth fellows on a previous occasion, the chums of the Remove were on the look-out when the carrier was due.

The bulky parcels were duly delivered, and borne up in triumph to No. 1 Study, where the Removites examined them with great satisfaction.

Harry Wharton looked very handsome as Valentine, the young British officer who was the hero of the play, when he donned the garb; and Hazeldene made a passable Albert.

Bob Cherry, in a Russian uniform, with immense moustaches, looked terrible as Colonel Koffdropski; and Nugent was unrecognisable as Lieutenant Bunkoff.

Hurree Jamset Ram Singh required most making up as Popoff, the police spy, his dusky complexion requiring obliteration; but the grease-paint was not spared, and the make-up was a great success.

Billy Bunter gave a great deal of attention to his get-up as Snipski, the comic page. The page's garb had to be let out considerably to suit his ample proportions; and Bob Cherry, in making him up, left a great dab of red on his nose, by way of a joke, which Bunter did not notice at the time. The question of the spectacles was a difficult one with Bunter.

"I think I ought to have the glasses off," he remarked. "It looks out of place in a serious drama to wear glasses."

Read the
Stories of

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**NOW
ON SALE.**

"A JOLLY OUTING."

Another Tale of Harry Wharton and his Chums,
By FRANK RICHARDS.

**NEXT
TUESDAY.**

"But you're a comic character," said Nugent.
 "Yes; but even a comic character can be rendered dignified by the quality of the acting," replied Billy. "I intend to make a jolly good thing of Snipski's part, and I shouldn't be surprised if it attracted more attention than any of the stuff you fellows go in for."

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 "You can laugh as much as you like, Nugent; but I know jolly well I was born to be an actor! I never go to a theatre without feeling that I could do the thing better than any of the fellows that I see upon the stage."

"But every conceited ass thinks that!"
 "Really, Nugent—"
 "Look here, if you have your glasses off, you'll blunder into people, and make a bother," said Harry Wharton. "Better keep them on, Billy."

"I'll have them in my pocket, Wharton, ready to slip on in case of necessity."

"Oh, very well!"
 "Sure, and we're ready now!" said Micky Desmond, giving the final touches to his face, which glowed with the ruddy complexion of Maria, the waiting-maid. "It's a great pity ye're sister can't come to the rehearsal, Vaseline."

"Can't be helped."
 "No; but how are we going to work the scene without her in the second act? There must be somebody there for Colonel Koffdropski to insult."

"The insults to Gloxiana have been cut out," said Bob Cherry hastily.

"But there must be a heroine for Wharton to defend against the Russian spalpeen."

"She won't need defending."

"Anyway, there must be a girl in the scene," said Micky.

"That's all right," said Harry Wharton. "We can't have anybody to speak the lines; but, of course, one of the company is sometimes missing from a rehearsal. Fritz Hoffmann is going on in a cloak to stand under the tree, and have the speeches made at him, and he won't say anything. We must have somebody standing there to be talked at, or the audience will think it's a soliloquy."

"If Hoffmann begins to talk—"

"That's all right; he's agreed not to. Later, we can put him into the play as a police spy without a speaking part, as I should like him to come down to the lodge. This evening he's Gloxiana in a cloak."

"Well, I'm about finished," said Bob Cherry. "It's pretty near time we were in the Remove-room, as we fixed seven o'clock."

"Better have a snack to eat first," said Bunter.

"Well, I'd really forgotten tea," said Harry; "but really, we had better have something to eat. Don't bother to make tea. Anything will do."

"I say, Wharton, that's not very sensible, you know. A chap acts so much better after a square meal."

"Well, you can stay here and have a square meal if you like, Billy, while we get on with the rehearsal."

"Oh, no; only I think—"

"Cold ham and brown bread," said Nugent, opening the cupboard. "What could be nicer? There's enough milk for a swig all round, and it's been boiled. Now, then."

Curious enough looked the cast of "By Order of the Tyrant," in their various costumes, eating bread and ham, and drinking milk from teacups.

Billy Bunter started first, and left off last, and then he was far from satisfied. But he did not wish to be left out of the rehearsal, and so he accompanied the others when they left the study.

An interested and admiring crowd followed the amateur dramatists to the Remove-room, passing free and not wholly complimentary remarks upon their personal appearance.

"Did you ever see such guys?" Bulstrode asked Russell.

"Yes, old chap. I can see one now," said Russell, looking at him.

And Bulstrode growled.

"My hat!" said Skinner. "Inky has changed colour, and no mistake. What have you done with the ink, Hurree Jampot?"

"The inkfulness—"

"And Nugent, too. What giddy moustaches!" said Jameson. "Hallo! Where are you running to, young shaver?"

"I'm sincerely sorry!" said Bunter, who had taken off his glasses. "I didn't mean to run into you, Skinner. I didn't see you."

"It's not Skinner, ass! Where are your barnacles?"

"I have taken my spectacles off for the part, you see. Hallo! What is that?"

"You've trodden on my toe, you young villain!" howled Russell.

"I'm sincerely sorry. I didn't see you."

"Here, come along!" exclaimed Bob Cherry, seizing Bunter by the arm. "You'll do some damage if you run loose."

"Don't jerk me so much, please, Cherry. You might make my glasses fall off; and if you broke them, you would have to pay—"

"Cheese it, and buck up!"

And Bunter was jerked into the Remove-room. That apartment was pretty well filled. A cheer, somewhat ironical in its tone, greeted the appearance of the amateur dramatists.

"Here they are!"

"My hat! What a sight!"

"More guys!"

Taking no notice of these comments, which came chiefly from fellows belonging to the Upper Fourth Form, the Wharton Operatic and Dramatic Society marched up the room.

The raised dais at the end was to serve them as a stage, and a curtain had been put up to bar off the green-room. There was no scenery. That had to be understood. But as Bob Cherry remarked, the acting was the thing. Give an audience good acting, and they don't care for anything else. And the Wharton Operatic and Dramatic Society resolved to give them good acting.

"Go it!"

The audience shouted encouragement. Harry Wharton had cautioned his company to take no notice of remarks from before the footlights, and consequently the juniors wore expressions of sublime indifference.

"Ach! I am here before you after, ain't it!"

It was Fritz Hoffmann who spoke, as the company passed behind the curtain into the green-room. The German junior had on the long cloak and shady hat he was to wear as Gloxiana.

Bob Cherry looked at him rather disparagingly.

"Don't let the audience see your feet, if you can help it," he said.

"I keeps te cloak over my feet, ain't it!" said Hoffmann.

"And your face, too—"

"Ach! I keeps pack to te audience."

"Good! You may pass, so long as you don't open your mouth. Are you chaps ready?"

"Quite ready!"

"Bunter's got a red patch on his nose," said Wharton.

"You rotter, Cherry!" breathed Bunter.

Bob Cherry grinned.

"By Jove! I meant to rub it off, and I forgot. Here goes!" And Bob commenced to rub away with his handkerchief at Bunter's nose. Billy wriggled.

"Ow! You'll have my nose off in a minute, Cherry."

"There you are!" said Bob.

"Now we're all right!" said Harry, with an anxious glance round. "They're calling to us to come on, and it's turned seven. Ready?"

"Rather!"

"Ratherfully, my esteemed chum!"

"Then ring up the giddy curtain!"

Hurree Singh looked round.

"Where is the curtain that is to be upped ringfully, my worthy friend?"

Harry Wharton laughed.

"That's a figure of speech, Inky. You just walk on—or rather, I just walk on, as I open the ball with a soliloquy."

"Go it, Harry!"

And Harry Wharton appeared on the stage, to be greeted by a mingled uproar of cheers and groans.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

Something Like a Row.

HARRY WHARTON had plenty of nerve, and any sign of hostility from an audience only made him obstinately determined to brave out their disapproval. He knew that Temple, Dabney & Co. wanted to "muck up" the dress rehearsal if they could, and he was resolved that they should not have a chance. He knew that he could depend upon the Remove to back him up against the rival Form.

Harry delivered his lines with perfect elocution and great spirit. The play was, of course, melodramatic stuff, but the audience were not artistically critical. The Remove applauded the soliloquy, and the Upper Fourth groaned it, which was exactly what was to be expected.

Harry having broken the ice the rest of the company felt more assured; and they, too, faced the audience as their cues came, with good composure. Hurree Singh had only a few lines to speak in the first act, and he managed to leave out any of his peculiar English. Gloxiana, when she appeared, kept silent. The first act went off pretty well, and the company retired behind the curtain for a brief and well-earned rest.

"It's jolly good!" said Nugent. "We might as well have called it a performance as a dress rehearsal, as it's going down so well."

"The performfulness is excellent!" said Hurree Singh.

"If we keep up to the sameful mark for the rest of the play, the successfulness will be terrific."

"Yes, I really think we are doing well," said Harry Wharton. "But, of course, the fighting scene in the second act is the piece de resistance. That is what will fetch the audience every time."

"Rather!" said Hazeldene. "The fellows will cheer when we lick the two Russian officers. We shall have to give them a knock or two to make the thing realistic."

"Rats!" said Bob Cherry. "You'd better not. I say, they're calling us, so let's get on."

The second act commenced.

The scene was Gloxiana standing under a tree, waiting for her lover to appear. Fritz Hoffmann stood there in the long cloak, his back to the audience. Enter, instead of Valentine, Popoff, the police spy, alias Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Aha! I see you here beneath the tree," began Hurree Singh.

"Ja, I am here before!" said Hoffman.

The audience gave a yell. A fierce whisper came from the wings.

"Shut up, Hoffmann, you ass!"

"Ach! I pegs your pardons I forget mit meinsel!"

"Shut up!"

"I shuts up before."

"Aha, I see you here beneath the tree,

'Tis now the hour when Bunkoff should be nigh,

And stern Koffdropski. Trembling English maid,

I tell you that unless you wedfully marry Koffdropski—"

"Ass!"

"I mean, 'unless you wed Koffdropski,

The dreary plainfulness of cold Siberia—"

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

"You go on, Bob," muttered Harry. "I might have guessed he'd do it. Fortunately it's only a rehearsal. But go on and stop him."

And Bob Cherry entered as Colonel Koffdropski, followed by Nugent, his faithful Bunkoff.

"Ah, my good Popoff, you may leave me now,

"And I will talk to this proud English maid."

Hurree Singh stared at him.

"I have not yet concluded my speechfulness, my worthy chum," he remarked.

The audience shrieked.

"Get off, you villain!" muttered Bob Cherry.

"Oh, very well! But I regardfully consider—"

"Get off!"

And the nabob disappeared.

"Let him come back! Let him finish his speechfulness!" roared Temple.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Encore, Inky!"

But Harry Wharton was clutching Hurree Singh behind the curtain, and he could not reappear in answer to his call. Bob Cherry went on with his lines.

"My lovely Gloxiana, you are here,

And I am here to talk awhile with you.

Your lover Valentine is far away,

And I and Bunkoff only—"

"False Russian! 'Tis a lie, for I am here!" shouted Harry Wharton, rushing upon the stage. "Fear not, my Gloxiana, I am here!"

"Ach! I dinks—"

"This Russian traitor, sweet, shall harm thee not,

While I am here to die in your defence."

"Bunkoff, to me, and we will give this youth a stern chastisement 'fore the lady's eyes!" exclaimed the villainous Koffdropski.

"My noble master, I am at your call!" said Lieutenant Bunkoff.

And the colonel and the lieutenant attacked the English officer. Valentine gallantly faced the two, drawing his sword, and there was a clash and clang of steel. The audience were keenly enough interested now.

"Go it!"

"Chop him, Cough-drop!"

"Slice him, Wharton!"

"Hurrah!"

"My friend! My sister! My sister and my friend!" exclaimed Hazeldene, rushing upon the scene.

"Aid me, brave Albert, 'gainst these coward foes!" cried Harry.

The combat now grew really terrific.

Sparks flew from the steel, and the juniors trampled to and fro over the stage, in terrific excitement.

"You ass, Cherry!" muttered Wharton. "It's time for you to be disarmed. Let your sword go, you howling ass!"

"That's all very well!"

"Play the game, idiot!"

Bob Cherry let his sword go, and it clanged to the floor. Then Lieutenant Bunkoff followed his example. The two Russians were disarmed, and at the mercy of the justly-incensed champions of insulted beauty.

Then Harry Wharton delivered the most telling lines of the piece.

"Away with these unnecessary arms!" he cried, throwing down his sword. "Swords are not needed in this combat, friend! An Englishman needs but an English fist to bring the foreign foe to his knees!"

"What-ho!" shouted the Remove.

And Valentine and Albert rushed upon Colonel Koffdropski and his myrmidon Bunkoff.

The foreign foe should then have received a severe thrashing, but it did not work out exactly like that, for Bob Cherry and Nugent were both getting excited.

The Remove were shouting to them, too, urging them to put up a good fight, with utter disregard for the fact that the scene was supposed to be a dramatic representation.

"Go it, Nugent!"

"Go it, Cherry!"

"You're not half fighting!"

"Don't let them wipe you up like that!"

"Go it!"

And Colonel Koffdropski and Lieutenant Bunkoff did go it. Nugent closed with Hazeldene, and got his head into chancery; and Hazeldene struggled and roared and hit out. Bob Cherry landed a right-hander on Harry's nose. Harry was getting excited too, and he replied in kind, and the two juniors were soon at it hammer and tongs.

Hurree Singh rushed on the stage to separate them, and he received a drive in the chest that sent him staggering. He bumped against Hoffmann, and knocked him over, and the German promptly retaliated with a thump on the chest. The blood of all the Nabobs of Bhanipur boiled up in wrath, and in a second more Hurree Singh and Hoffmann were fighting desperately.

The audience were all on their feet now, shrieking with laughter. They roared and shrieked, and urged on the combatants. Wingate and two or three other prefects rushed into the room with canes in their hands. The uproar was terrific, and it had not been long in bringing the prefects upon the scene.

"Stop that row!" roared Wingate.

And as no notice was taken by the excited combatants, he ran on the stage, and brought the cane into play. They stopped then. Billy Bunter, who blundered into Wingate's way, received most of the punishment. The combatants, looking rather sheepish, separated.

"What the dickens are you up to, you young rascals?" demanded Wingate angrily.

"It's only a rehearsal!" stammered Harry Wharton.

"A what? My hat! If that's how you rehearse, what would the play be like, I wonder? Clear out!"

"But—"

"Clear out!"

And the Wharton Operatic and Dramatic Society had no choice in the matter. They cleared out. Dusty and dishevelled, they returned to the study, followed by roars of laughter from the Remove and the Upper Fourth.

"Of all the asses—" began Harry Wharton, looking at Bob Cherry.

"Of all the asses—" said Bob Cherry, returning his look.

Harry burst into a laugh.

"Well, it's been a muck-up, and no mistake; but it's no good ragging one another. But one thing's settled, we sha'n't play 'By Order of the Tyrant.' It leads a little too much to ructions. When we play at Wharton Lodge in Whitsun week, we'll play 'Peter Pan.'"

And the rest of the company, as they rubbed their bruises, agreed that that was a good idea.

THE END.

Next Tuesday!

"A JOLLY OUTING."

A grand, long, complete Tale of the Chums of Greyfriars.

By FRANK RICHARDS.

Please order your copy of "The MAGNET" Library in advance.

"A JOLLY OUTING."

Another Tale of Harry Wharton and his Chums,
By FRANK RICHARDS.

**NEXT
TUESDAY.**



NEW STORY SHOWING HOW TWO BOYS SUCCEED AS DETECTIVES.

By LEWIS HOCKLEY.

GLANCE OVER THIS FIRST.

Frank Dennis and Bob Lomax, two City clerks, are thrown out of employment. Having no prospects they decide to make the detective business their profession, and assume the name of "Maxennis."

Grip, their dog, in a strange manner is instrumental in getting their first client—a Mrs. Brewer—who is continually receiving threatening picture postcards from Leigh-on-Sea from a man evidently aware that his victim is coming into a legacy. Lomax visits Leigh, and pursues his investigations among the regular senders of picture postcards in the district. Meanwhile, Dennis having strong suspicions of one of Mrs. Brewer's lodgers—"Sleeping" McDonald, a puglist—visits Wonderland. McDonald loses his fight, and, in a fit of temper, savagely attacks Dennis on leaving the building. However, Dennis eventually reaches home, and is awakened the next morning by Bob Lomax, who reports that the first of the postcards were sent to Mrs. Brewer as a malicious joke by a schoolboy at Leigh named Martin. Dennis reminds Lomax that the postcards were not all sent by the same person, and then tells of his visit to Wonderland. "Did McDonald knock you out?" chuckles Lomax.

A New Theory.

"You're a bit nearer the truth than you fancy," Dennis answered; and he gave a recital of the events resulting from his visit to the boxing-hall.

"Well, all this is interesting," observed Lomax; "but how does it help us?"

"That's what I haven't quite determined; perhaps you can assist. Didn't you tell me of a chap named Abrams—Solomon Abrams?"

"Yes, the picture postcard chap I met in the train. What of him?"

"Well, I learned that he knows McDonald; that he's the man's principal backer in his fights. He was with him last night."

"Phew-w-w-w!" Lomax whistled to himself for quite a long while. "This is something, lad. Now, what does it mean? How d'you know it was he?"

"This fellow who came to my assistance told me. He knows them well."

Dennis sketched a short description of the individual in question, and Lomax nodded.

"That's the man," he agreed. "Now, what— Oh, confound this, Frank; we're getting worse and worse! The further we go on the more complicated things become. What is your idea?"

"I can't make it out at all," Dennis confessed. "Do you see how this man Abrams could be connected in any way with the sending of the cards?"

"Why, what on earth has put that idea— Hallo! Stop—why, man alive, is it possible? Have you stumbled on the answer to it?" And Lomax, for once in his life really excited, got up and stamped about the room.

"What is it, Bob?" his partner called out; and Lomax came and sat down again.

"It seems a mad-headed idea, but—well, truth's stranger than fiction, and it might be so. Here, the cards come from Leigh—Leigh's one of the places this Abrams is always going to."

"Just so!"

"He knows the school where this kid Martin is; probably knows the boy; anyway, he's been warned away from the school. Suppose he'd happened on, quite by chance, what silly trick that kid was playing, and—"

"McDonald knows him, he lodges in Mrs. Brewer's house, and must have known of the cards; the forged ones

were all amongst the last received; McDonald might have told him," interposed Dennis.

"Yes; and Abrams conceived the idea of turning it to his own profit—he and McDonald between them. By Jove, it might be! And yet— The coincidences are alarmingly close. The Jew's a sharp beggar; given a confederate, the game wouldn't be so hard to carry out. Between them, the precious pair might reckon on terrifying our client into parting with her money. Is that your idea, Frank?"

"I tell you I didn't have any clear sort of idea; but those several things seemed to hang together in some way, and a connection between them was not unlikely. But how—"

"Here, let's tackle the job in a logical fashion," interrupted Lomax. "Now, this is where we stand—Abrams and McDonald are pals, the latter lives in the house of the woman who has received the threatening postcards. Some of the postcards are detected to be forgeries, the rest were written by a schoolboy at Leigh, and Leigh is one of the places Abrams visits pretty frequently. McDonald is found in possession of a postcard exactly similar to the forged ones his landlady has received. Query—how did he get hold of it? Probability is that he wrote it, if not, someone he knew did. Why? To send to Mrs. Brewer and frighten her into paying money. Query No. 2.—Is McDonald the class of man who would be likely to hit upon such an idea as forging postcards sent by a silly kid of a boy for no other purpose than annoyance? Maybe yes, maybe no; McDonald's pal is a sharp chap, a Jew. Query No. 3, suggested.—Could the Jew have evolved the idea and left the working of it to the boxing-man, so that if anything went wrong he wouldn't get himself into trouble? It is understood that the Jew is acquainted with the kid at Leigh. How does that sum up the situation, Frank?"

"That's about it," Dennis answered slowly. "Now, after accepting all this, what are we going to do?"

"Fix the connection, if any, between the Jew and the picture postcards," Lomax replied, with brisk confidence, "That's our ticket!"

"If we can do it," Dennis added.

"Precisely," assented Lomax. "Now, I've an idea."

"Out with it!"

"Well, we've shown McDonald his lost postcard, and the sight of it don't do him a bit of good—he's scared and furious. Why not show that same card to Mr. Solly Abrams, and see what effect it has on him?"

"Well, that's not so bad. If he's a sharp chap, he'll act as if he'd never seen it before—knows nothing about it."

"He may; or he may come to the conclusion McDonald has been playing him tricks and give himself away. He might, granting there's anything in our idea, want to get hold of that card."

"He probably would," Lomax said. "And, needless to say, he wouldn't get it; and, by the way, if one of us could see Mrs. Brewer, I reckon it wouldn't be lost time to go and have a chat with her. What d'you say? Will you go?"

"And you?" asked Dennis.

"I'll go and see our friend Abrams at his Houndeditch address."

"Suppose I were to go to see him," suggested Dennis.

"Why?"

"Well, if McDonald were at Mrs. Brewer's house when I arrived, and he saw me, there might be trouble. Abrams don't know me."

"H'm—perhaps! He saw you last night, though, so you say, outside Wonderland," Lomax objected.

"Yes; but he probably wouldn't recognise me again."

"And you mean me to interview our client?"

"If you wouldn't mind."

"But McDonald knows me also; didn't he see me here when he called in answer to our letter?"

"Confound it! So he did! I'd forgotten that."

Ultimately it was agreed that Dennis's suggestion should be carried into effect. If McDonald were at Mrs. Brewer's house there was less likelihood of trouble if he saw Lomax rather than Dennis, against whom, under the circumstances of the previous evening, he would be likely to bear the stronger animus.

While this conversation was going on there was taking place in a dark, little room, half parlour, half office, on the ground floor of No. 142, Houndsditch, a dialogue, the report of which would have been an agreeable confirmation to "Maxennis" that their theory of the postcard mystery was not so wild and far-fetched as it appeared when discussed in cold blood.

In this room were seated two men, one of whom, despite the temporarily-altered condition of his features, would have been recognised by anyone who had seen him once before as Sleeping Sandy, while his companion was the black-eyed, black-haired, cunning-looking Hebrew gentleman who was, a picture postcard maker by profession, a professional backer of horses, fighting men, and whippets, by way of amusement—and profit—and one or two other things besides strictly for the latter consideration.

The conversation was not proceeding on the most amiable lines. The professional boxer's expression was one of sulky, angry sullenness, that of the Jew of keen annoyance and disappointment. He eyed the pugilist with something of the air with which a gamekeeper or hunter regards a hound which, by the committal of some egregious error, has occasioned his master a serious loss.

"Vat the dickenth d'ye mean by that thow of yourth latht night?" Mr. Abrams demanded. He was more than a little excited, and his style of speech and manner were not as careful and correct as when he conversed with Robert Lomax on the journey towards Leigh.

"I couldn't help it!" growled the pugilist.

"Couldn't help it? D'ye know that you've loht me clothe on a hundred quid? Ninety-five golden sovereignth! Fighting worth than a kid at theool, and then telling me you couldn't help it! Vat d'ye mean?"

"I tell yer I couldn't help it, guv'nor!" repeated McDonald sullenly. "Straight, I couldn't! I c'd've bashed that chap into the middle o' next week, and I c'dn't!"

"You didn't, you mean. Vat'h the meaning of it—eh? Here, I've put down my money for you to lick him, and then you go an' play me a trick like thith!"

Mr. Abrams' little eyes sparkled dangerously; he looked positively wicked.

"If it's a croth," he began—"If you thold that fight—"

McDonald's fist clenched, and he banged it hard on the table.

"I ain't never sold a fight in my life!" he cried loudly. "I've allus fought straight an' square; an' no man's ever said as I ain't—it wouldn't pay him to! Don't yer say that about me, guv'nor, or—"

He looked threateningly across the table whereat the precious pair were seated.

"I thall thay jutht vat I think," retorted Abrams, in no way dismayed by this show of violence. "If you've fought a croth—and I'll thoon find out if you have or not—why—why—blow me! I'll have you in gaol ath thoon ath look at you. I don't lothe my money for nothin', I can tell you!"

"Don't yer talk to me about gaol; I knows a lot that'd send other people to gaol along o' me!" the prizefighter said darkly. "Yer've lost yer money, I know, but I've lost the fight. Yer can go an' make some more easily, yer knows plenty o' ways of doin' it, but what's goin' to happen to me now? An' all because o' that—S'elp me! I'd ha' licked that blessed African chap with one 'and, I'd ha' wiped 'im out in one blessed round, I'd ha' killed 'im!"

"Vell, vhy didn't ye?" demanded the Jew.

"Becos' I couldn't!" growled the man, with a quick return to his former sullenness. "An' now I've lost th' match; put up a blessed fight like a fifth-rater—a blessed mug; an' what's people goin' to say about me now? It makes me fair wild! I c'd've killed 'im—killed 'im! And s'elp me, I will kill 'im nex' time! Wot did yer want to interfere for?"

"Vat ith it you're talkin' about?" cried the Jew. "Th'emth to me you're crathy. Kill who? Vhy didn't you kill 'em when you had 'em in the ring? Vath the good o' takin' about it now? You've loht!"

"I know it; don't yer keep on-tellin' me!" And again the man's anger blazed out.

Brute as he may have been, McDonald had a certain pride in himself, pride in his strength, the ferocious skill and courage that had won him the reputation he valued so greatly, and which had been so blackened, almost wiped out altogether as he believed, by his last inglorious display.

He had spoken the truth; he was a fair fighter: fair in that he always did his best, though he would employ every trick and shady artifice that the conditions governing his means of livelihood would permit, to get the better of his adversaries. He had never fought a "cross" or faked fight. He was strictly honest according to his lights; and to have it suggested to him—and he knew there were others who would make the same insinuation behind his back—by the man at the table, the man whose money had been lost by his defeat, that he had tricked him by selling the fight, by permitting himself to be beaten, aroused all the wounded vanity in the man's heart—and he had a more than average share of it—and turned his sullen anger to white-hot passion.

"Vell, vhy didn't you lick him?" demanded Abrams again.

"I tell yer I couldn't. I ought to, I could, but I didn't!"

"Tho it appeared; but why?" sneered the Jew.

"Becos'—becos'—'Ere, blow me! Becos'—and again his heavy fist smote the table—"becos' of yerself! Yer've only got yerself to blame becos' I lost. If it hadn't been for you an' that game yer let me into, I'd ha' beat that bloke last night; beat 'im 'ollow, an' then yer wouldn't ha' lost yer money, an' I'd still 'ave the championship."

Solomon Abrams looked surprised; he didn't understand the pugilist's outburst in the least.

"Vat ith it you're talking about?" he asked. "Hath lothing th' fight made yer lothe yer theneth?"

McDonald's little eyes gleamed furiously at the reminder.

"No, it ain't," he retorted. "An' it's the truth. Yer knows very well wot I'm talkin' about, though yer does seem so blessed innocent!"

"I don't!"

"Why, then, that blessed business o' old Mrs. Brewer's? It was that, yer an' that, wot lost me last night's fight!"

"Who're you getting at? You're drunk!" rejoined the Jew.

"No, I ain't; it's truth. If it 'adn't a-been for that, I'd ha' been as right as rain. I wouldn't've been lookin' all round th' blessed 'all, wonderin' where was the coppers that was goin' to nab me. 'Ow can a man fight when 'e's expectin' to be lagged at the end of it!"

"You're crathy!" repeated Abrams, with weary impatience. "How vath you going to be lagged? Vat'd the polithe got to do with you? Why should they interfere?"

"Becos' that feller was there," McDonald retorted. "I saw 'im in the 'all, an' 'e saw me. An' after wot 'ad taken place, 'ow o'd I fight?"

"Vat fellow?" demanded Abrams. He was thoroughly mystified by the man's half explanations, which were to him so much Chinese. He did begin to understand that McDonald had been put off his game during the fight; that something had taken place which had prevented the man from fighting as he always did, and so doing himself justice. Whatever it was, it had caused him to be beaten and his backer to lose his money. Abrams's interest and curiosity were awakened.

(Another instalment next week.)

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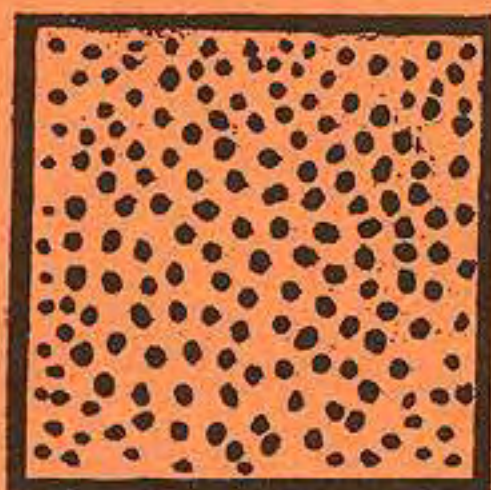
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