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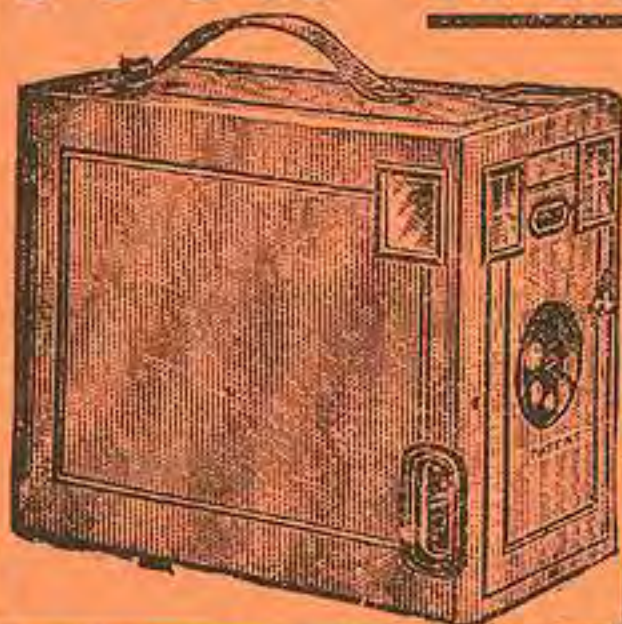
ROUGHING IT!

By
FRANK
RICHARDS



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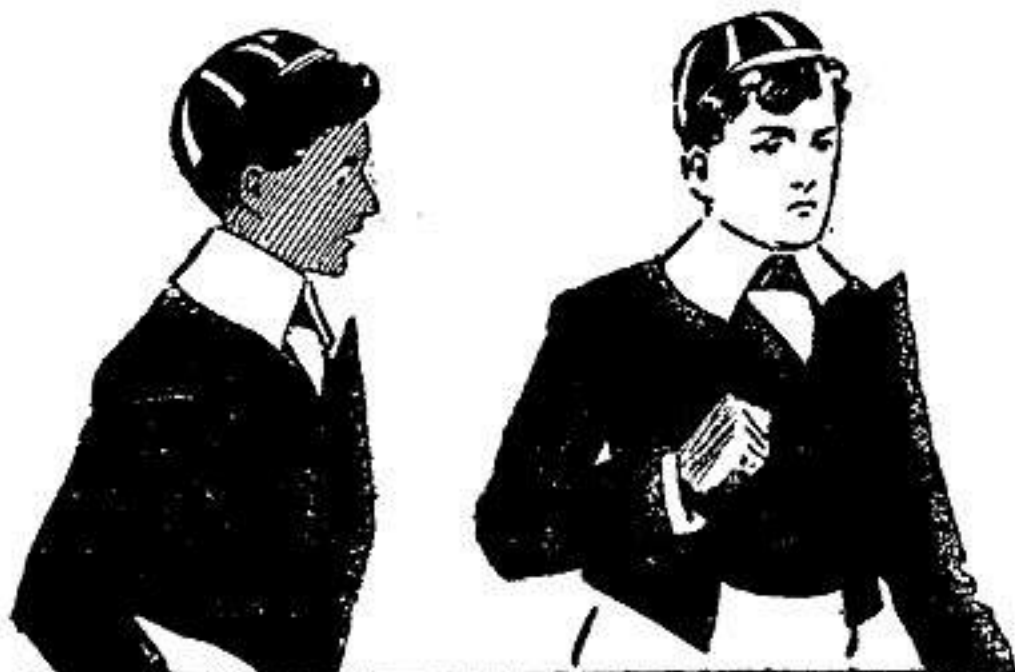
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ONE HALFPENNY



ROUGHING IT!

A TALE OF SCHOOL LIFE AT GREYFRIARS.

By FRANK RICHARDS.



THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Back to Greyfriars.

"HERE we are again!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. The train rushed into Friardale Station. Bob Cherry was leaning out of the window, his cheerful face aglow. Behind him in the carriage was a crowded bunch of Greyfriars juniors.

Harry Wharton, of the Remove, was coming back after the holiday, and with him were the Removites who had been spending Whitsuntide at Wharton Lodge. The chums of the Remove had enjoyed their holiday, but they were coming back to school cheerfully enough. The irrepressible Bob gave a yell as the train swept into the sleepy old station at Friardale, and waved his cap to the equally sleepy porter, who touched his cap with a sleepy grin.

"Here we are again!"

Bob Cherry jumped out of the carriage, and executed a shuffle on the platform. The juniors crowded out after him—Harry Wharton, handsome and sunburnt and looking very fit; Nugent, Hazeldene, Micky Desmond, Billy Bunter, and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, the Nabob of Bhanipur.

"Yes; here we are again!" said Harry Wharton, with a genial nod to the porter. "I say, Chippy, are the other fellows back yet?"

The sleepy porter shook his head.

"Not yet, sir."

"Nobody come at all?" asked Nugent.

"Nobody, sir; not by this 'ere line."

"Which means not at all, as there isn't any other line,"

said Bob Cherry. "Hasn't even the Head returned, Chippy?"

"I ain't seen him, Master Cherry."

"They're late," said Harry Wharton. "They ought to have been here hours before us. Anything wrong on the line, Chippy?"

"I heerd that there had been a breakdown somewhere," said Chippy. "The news hain't confirmed. Line blocked, or somethink, I believe."

"Oho! That accounts for it," said Bob Cherry. "Never mind; we'll take charge of the school till the Head comes. Have all that valuable luggage put on the hack, Chippy; and let it be sent along right side up, with care. As we're rather in a hurry, we're going to walk!"

"Yessir!" grinned Chippy.

"The walkfulness will be pleasant in the brightful June weather," remarked Hurree Singh, in the best Bengali English.

Bob Cherry slapped him on the back.

"It will be terrific," he said. "Come along, my dusky son, and let's strike up a song as we go. Blend your sweet voice with mine."

"Yes; come along," said Harry Wharton. "We—Hullo! What's that? Those confounded aliens at it again!"

There were still two juniors who had not alighted from the carriage. They were Hoffmann, the German, and Meunier,

the French youth. Their voices could now be heard, raised in recrimination. They never saw one another for a couple of minutes without the old national dispute breaking out, and Harry Wharton had had hard work to keep the peace during the holiday at Wharton Lodge.

"French pounder!"

"German peeg!"

"I flings you out of te carriages!" said Hoffmann, who was absolutely reckless with his plurals when he became excited. "You vas French peastly pounders!"

"Sherman rottair!"

Then there was the sound of a struggle. Harry Wharton looked into the carriage. The two juniors were bumping on the floor in a cloud of dust.

"Hold on, you asses!" exclaimed Harry. "The train is going to be shifted to a siding, and they won't wait for you."

"Ach! I vill come mit meinself after!" exclaimed Fritz Hoffmann, releasing Meunier, and bundling out of the carriage.

"Ciel! I come!" gasped Adolphe Meunier.

And he jumped out after Hoffmann like a monkey. The two rivals glared at one another in the hot June sunshine on the platform, and were evidently preparing to renew the combat, when Harry Wharton made a sign to Bob Cherry, and the two foreigners were seized and pinioned.

"Now, then," said Harry, "are you going to make it pax?"

"Nevair!"

"Ach! Nein, nein!"

"Then, we'll make it pax for you," said Harry. "Collar them, kids; and give them the frog's-march out of the station!"

"Good wheeze!" exclaimed Nugent.

"The wheezy idea is terrific," said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

The juniors were in a mood for fun. They crowded round the two aliens and seized them, and Hoffmann and Meunier struggled in vain against the odds.

"Now, then, march!"

"Faith, and it's what they want entirely!" exclaimed Micky Desmond. "Sure, and if ye don't stop strugglin', Meunier, I'll bump ye're head on the planks!"

"Cochon——"

"Oh, blow your coshong!" said Micky. "Come along!"

"Parbleu——"

"Sure, I don't know what that means, but it sounds like a swear-word!" said Micky. "Bump him down, darlings!"

And Meunier was bumped down upon the hard plank platform.

Chippy, the porter stood grinning as the Greyfriars juniors marched out of the station, with the two obstreperous foreigners in their midst, enjoying what Adolphe Meunier afterwards described as "ze march of ze frog."

In the quaint old street of Friardale, the two foreigners were set, upon their feet, and Harry Wharton shook a warning forefinger at them.

"Now, then, are you going to make it pax?"

"Ja, ja!" gasped Fritz Hoffmann, trying to set his collar straight.

"Oui, oui!" jerked out Meunier, with equal promptness.

Both had had enough. They were looking wrecks. The juniors set out for the school, and Bob Cherry struck up a song to enliven the route. He had linked his arm in the nabob's, and he insisted upon Hurree Jamset Ram Singh joining in the song.

"But the tunefulness is to me an unknown quantity!" objected Hurree Singh.

"Never mind; pick it up as you go along," said Bob Cherry.

"But the wordfulness is an equally unknown desideratum!"

"Never mind. Buzz it! What a fellow you are to make difficulties!"

The nabob was too polite to refuse anybody anything, and so he did his best. His attempt at singing, under the circumstances, could not be regarded as a success. But Bob Cherry was making enough noise for two—or, for half a dozen—so that really did not matter.

Harry Wharton was looking thoughtful as he walked along. The old grey tower of Greyfriars College rose above the beech-trees in the distance.

"What are you thinking about, Harry?" asked Nugent, looking at him. "Sorry the holiday is up?"

"Yes; though I'm not sorry to get back to old Greyfriars," said Harry. "But it isn't that I was thinking of. If there's been a breakdown on the line—and it looks like it—there's no telling at what time the Head and the rest of the fellows will arrive."

Nugent laughed.

"It will be fun having the school to ourselves, Harry."

"Yes—in a way. It will be a curious experience, anyway," said Wharton. "Anyway, Gosling, the porter, will be there to let us in."

"I say, you fellows——"

"Gossy is a grumpy beast," said Nugent; "and, for some reason, he doesn't seem to like us much, either."

"Remarkable, isn't it?" said Hazeldene. "We're so nice, too. It's shocking bad taste on the part of Gosling!"

"I say, you fellows——"

"If we have the school to ourselves," said Bob Cherry, having reached the end of his song, and turning his head, "I think we ought to have a high old time there. What do you say to rigging up a swing in the big school-room?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I say, you fellows——"

"Hallo, Billy! Did you speak?"

"I've been speaking for some time, Wharton," said Billy Bunter, blinking indignantly through his spectacles. "I really wish——"

"Well, what is it, kid?"

"I say, if the Head isn't there, and nobody's there, what are we going to do for grub?" said Billy Bunter anxiously.

"You don't seem to have thought of that, any of you."

Harry Wharton laughed.

"And it's such an important matter—to you, Billy."

"I should think it is," said Billy Bunter warmly. "I'm pretty sharp set after a long train journey and a walk, I can tell you. You ought to have thought of this while we were in the village, where we could have had a feed in case of accidents."

"Ha, ha! Never mind, Billy. We shall find something or other to eat at Greyfriars. If there's nothing in the cupboard, we'll eat Gosling, the porter!"

"Really, Wharton——"

"Too skinny!" said Nugent, with a shake of the head. "Gosling would cut up badly. He's not at all the sort of gosling for the table."

"Oh, really, you fellows, I wish you'd be serious! You'll be jolly serious enough if you get to the school, and find there's no grub——"

"Well, here we are at the school!" said Bob Cherry, as the juniors halted before the great gates of Greyfriars. "I'll ring the bell. Better make it pretty loud, in case Gosling is having a nap. I know he wouldn't like to keep us waiting."

And Bob Cherry rang the bell, with a peal that could have been heard in every corner and cranny of the ancient edifice of Greyfriars.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Bob Cherry Lights the Fire.

CLANG, clang! Ting-a-ling-a-ling!

Bob Cherry's solo on the bell was certainly a success, as far as noise went. The clang of it rang through the school, and came back to the ears of the juniors waiting at the gate.

The gates did not open.

"Gossy is asleep," said Nugent. "He's been indulging in the cup that cheers, I expect, and is napping in the garden."

Clang, clang! Ting-a-ling-a-ling!

Harry Wharton kicked at the gates.

"Gossy—Gossy, wake up!"

As it was four in the afternoon, there was no reason why Gosling should have been asleep, but asleep he certainly appeared to be. The bell rang and buzzed, and buzzed and rang, and the juniors kicked and thumped on the great gates. At last there was the sound of a movement within. The figure of the porter could be seen between the bars of the gates, and the Greyfriars juniors yelled to him in chorus.

"Gossy! I say, Gossy!"

"Buck up!"

"Get a move on you!"

"Are you going to keep us waiting here all night?"

The porter growled surlily as he came down to the gate, his keys rattling. Gosling's face was red and flushed, and his eyes heavy. It was extremely probable that he had been sampling too freely the excellent Greyfriars ale, and had been napping in the shady garden when the arrival of the juniors aroused him.

"Allo!" he growled, staring at the juniors through the bars of the gate. "Ow did you come here?"

"By train," said Bob Cherry; "and Shanks's pony."

The porter grunted.

"I don't mean that."

"Never mind what you mean, Gossy. Open the gates. We've been waiting here for hours—or, ten minutes, at least!"

"Which I've 'ad a wire from the 'Ead, saying that there was a breakdown on the line, and 'e wouldn't arrive till very late, if this night at all; and all the boys was in the same fix."

"Yes; but we haven't come from town," said Harry Wharton. "We came in on the local line from the other direction."

"Open the gates, Gossy," said Bob Cherry. "I know it's rather rotten of us to turn up when you wanted to snooze under a tree, but such is life! You must expect these things. Even a school-porter's life is not all lavender, though he has the inestimable benefit of seeing every day about him such nice young fellows as we are!"

The key grated in the lock, and the gates rolled open. The Removites walked in, the surly porter watching them grimly.

"Blest if I know what you're goin' to do for grub!" said Gosling. "The housekeeper is away, and so is Mimble, the gardener, and his wife. There's no grub that I know on, and the school shop ain't open."

"What have you got to offer us, Gossy?"

"Nothing."

"Of course, we know you'd share your last crust with us, Gossy," said Nugent.

"Or the last drop in the bottle!" said Bob Cherry.

"Unless it was the esteemed whisky," said Hurree Singh. "In that case the excellent Goslingful porter would not be able to part with it."

"Oh, get along with yer!"

"But what are you going to give us to eat, Gossy?"

"Nothing."

"Then we shall have to carry out my original suggestion," said Harry Wharton. "Any port in a storm. We shall have to start on Gosling—"

"He will want washing first," said Nugent.

"True. We can wash him in the fountain."

"Good idea! Collar him."

The porter dodged into his lodge, slammed the door, and locked it. The juniors were quite capable of ducking him in the fountain, and he knew it.

The youngsters laughed as they walked on towards the schoolhouse. Only one face was very serious—that of Billy Bunter. The question of provender was a very serious one to the Falstaff of the Remove. But there was something in the novelty of the situation that appealed very strongly to the Greyfriars lads.

It was curious to be the first to return, and to find the masters as well as the other boys absent, and even the housekeeper and the gardener away and the school tuck-shop—the last resource of hungry juniors—closed and silent.

Strangely silent all the great, grey buildings seemed, deserted in the glowing sunshine. There was a neglected look about the cricket-field, and the windows of the gym seemed to stare like sightless eyes.

At that time the Close and the school should have been alive with boys returning from the holidays. The silence struck strangely upon the juniors.

"I say, you fellows—"

"What's the matter with you, Billy?"

"I'm awfully hungry," said the Owl pathetically. "What's to be done, Wharton? Has any of you fellows a sandwich about him?"

"I haven't," said Bob Cherry.

"Anything would do—"

"I've got a pegtop; is that any good?"

"Oh, really, Cherry! You know, I mean something to eat. I'm getting into a famished state, which I am afraid will have a bad effect upon my constitution."

"Oh, rats!"

"It's all very well for you to say 'Rats,' Wharton, but it's a fact. I eat so little that I'm bound to keep up my meals regularly, or else—"

"Yes, a chap who eats as little as you do must suffer a lot," said Nugent sympathetically. "But seriously, you chaps, we must prowl round and find some grub. I'm a bit peckish myself."

"So am I," said Bob Cherry. "I suppose we all are, though only Billy is in a dangerous state. Mind he doesn't suddenly fasten his teeth in one of you!"

"Really, Cherry—"

Harry Wharton tried the great oaken door and it swung open. The hall was dark, the blinds being down, and the hot blaze of the June sun without was changed for a subdued twilight as the juniors entered the house.

"Well, this is curious," said Bob Cherry. "It would be romantic and poetical if we weren't hungry. I wonder where there is any grub?"

"Nothing left in the study," said Bunter.

"Sure of that?"

"Yes; I looked in the cupboard before we left last week to see if there was anything there I could put into my lunchbasket."

"There's bound to be something downstairs," said Harry Wharton; "the supplies for the housekeeper must be there."

The juniors looked grave.

It was not a light matter to invade the quarters sacred

to Mrs. Marker, the worthy matron of Greyfriars School. Juniors who had raided jam from the larder during the term had been severely dealt with. In such a case Mrs. Marker was implacable.

But, as Harry Wharton pointed out, the case was altered now. Mrs. Marker was not there to look after her treasures, or to serve out supplies to hungry juniors.

"We've got to help ourselves," said Harry. "Gosling won't do anything for us—and perhaps he can't. We can't be expected to starve, I suppose?"

"Certainly not!" said half a dozen voices. And Billy Bunter shuddered at the mere idea of it.

"We shall have to help ourselves, then," said Harry; "and"—his face broke into a smile—"and it will be awful fun prospecting for grub, too, and getting up a feast in the kitchen!"

Billy Bunter's face lighted up.

"I say, you fellows—"

"Come on," exclaimed Bob Cherry, striding towards the shadowy kitchen stairs; "let's get on with it!"

"I say, you fellows—"

"Pull up the blinds, some of you, and let in the light," exclaimed Harry Wharton; "that will make things a bit more cheerful!"

"Right you are."

The blinds were raised and a flood of June sunshine swept into the hall. It raised the spirits of the juniors.

"I say, you fellows, I don't mind doing the cooking," said Billy Bunter. "If you chaps will make up a fire and find something to cook, I'll—"

"Right-ho, Billy! Let's get into the nether regions."

The adventurers descended the stairs. The kitchen at Greyfriars was an ancient room, with stone walls and floor and rafted ceiling. It was one of the most ancient parts of the old building, but it had been fitted up of late years with modern appliances for cooking. Harry Wharton found the switch of the electric light and turned it on, and the great apartment was suddenly illuminated. The juniors looked about them curiously.

The great range was spotlessly clean, but dark and fireless. That was soon to be remedied, however.

"Get some wood from somewhere!" exclaimed Bob Cherry, throwing off his jacket and rolling up his sleeves. "I say, Nugent, lend me your gloves, will you?"

"My gloves! What for?"

"I don't want to grime my fingers."

"Well, you cheeky villain, use your own gloves then!" exclaimed the indignant Nugent.

"I don't want to spoil them."

"Catch me letting you spoil mine!"

"Yours will do, Wharton."

"Rats!" said Wharton.

"Look here, I'm not going to touch coal and grate-bars with bare fingers, if you were all perishing of giddy famine!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "You'd better lend me a pair of gloves, Hurree Singh."

"Oh, certainly!" said the Nabob of Bhanipur.

A moment later the polite nabob tossed a pair of gloves to Bob Cherry, who put them on and was quickly at work. There was coal in the scuttle and wood was speedily found. Bob Cherry jammed wood in in a way that would have made the economical housekeeper weep if she could have seen it.

"Got any paraffin?" asked the amateur housemaid, turning his head.

"What do you want paraffin for?"

"Makes the fire light quicker."

"But it's dangerous."

"If you're afraid of danger, Nugent, when it's a question of saving Billy Bunter from a violent death by starvation—"

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"Hand over the paraffin, and I'll show you whether it's dangerous."

"Well, here's a can of it," said Nugent. "I don't mind, but I say that it's better and safer to be a little more patient and light the fire the ordinary way."

"That's all you know, Nugent!"

"Oh, have your own way, fathead!"

"Look here, I'll show you how to do a thing of this sort."

"Don't put the paraffin on the coal, anyway!" exclaimed Harry Wharton.

"Why not?"

"It won't—"

"Now, look here, you chaps, I'm lighting this fire!" exclaimed Bob Cherry, drenching wood and coal and most of the kitchen-range with paraffin. "I'll show you the quickest and simplest way to do these things!"

"You ass!"

"Give me a match, somebody!"

"If you light that it will flare up!"

"That's what I want it to do."

"Stand back, you chaps!" shouted Harry. "Mind your eye, Bob! You'll— My only hat, he's done it now!"

Bob Cherry tossed a lighted match into the grate, and a flare and a roar of flame followed that made him jump clear of the floor with a yell of alarm.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Billy Bunter, Chef!

"WHAT the—how the—what—"

"You fearful ass!"

"My hat!"

The juniors had crowded back from the flare of the lighted paraffin, but Bob Cherry was too near it to quite escape. He had instinctively clasped his hands over his eyes, but the rush of the flame licked his cheeks and singed his hair. A thick volume of smoke rolled across the great kitchen.

"My only hat!" gasped Bob Cherry. "Who'd have thought it?"

"I did," said Nugent. "I told you—"

"So did I!" exclaimed Harry Wharton. "We both warned you—"

"Oh, rats! Don't start saying you told me so, like a couple of nagging old ladies!" said Bob Cherry.

"Well, we did tell you so, you fathead!"

"By Jove, how it's roaring!" exclaimed Bob, changing the subject. "I wonder if the chimney will catch on fire?"

"If it does, you'll catch something yourself."

"Oh, don't croak!"

The fire was roaring up the chimney now with the noise of an express train. Blacks were settling over the juniors and everything else in the kitchen. The fire crackled away fiercely. Bob Cherry had certainly succeeded in lighting it thoroughly; the question was whether he had overdone it.

If the chimney had not been in a clean condition, it would almost certainly have caught on fire in that terrible upward rush of flame. The juniors listened rather nervously.

Bob Cherry's face was very grimy; there was a sniff of burning from his curly hair. It had been well singed, and he was fortunate to escape with no worse damage. The juniors listened to the roar of the flames in the chimney, and relieved their feelings by telling Bob Cherry what they thought of him.

"Of all the asses!" said Harry Wharton emphatically.

"Bunter's an ass," said Nugent, "but he's a shining oracle of wisdom compared with that shrieking duffer Cherry!"

"Oh, really, Nugent!" said Billy Bunter. "But you're right about Cherry. I don't think I ever met such an ass; present company excepted, of course!"

"I zink zat Sherry is ze shampion donkey!" remarked Adolphe Meunier.

"I tink so, too, mein gracious!" said Fritz Hoffmann.

"Ach! He might haf set fire to te kitchen before, and purnt up te school after!"

"Rats!" said Bob Cherry.

"Well, there's no denying that you are a duffer, Cherry," said Hazeldene.

"Sure, and it's a silly omadhaun he is!"

"The dufferfulness of the respected Cherry is terrific!"

"Oh, cheese it!" said Bob Cherry. "What do you all want to jump on a fellow for? Of course, I wasn't to know that the beastly thing would blaze up like that!"

"What did you expect when you swamped it with paraffin?"

"I wanted to make a thorough job of it."

"My hat! You've done that," said Harry Wharton. "Never mind; the fire's lighted, and the chimney doesn't seem to mean to catch fire. Let's see about getting tea."

"I think I shall go and get a wash first," said Bob Cherry. "I feel pretty mucky. There are your gloves, Inky. I'm afraid they're a little soiled."

The gloves were more than a little soiled. They were grimed with coal and dirt, and redolent of paraffin. But the nabob smiled a beaming smile, and did not stir to pick them off the table where Bob Cherry tossed them.

"Pray don't mention it," he said. "The gloves were quitefully at your esteemed disposal, my worthy chum."

"They're ruined," said Nugent. "You can use 'em for cleaning your bike in, but I think they'll never be worth anything else."

"It is a matter of no momentfulness," beamed the nabob.

"You see, my worthy chum, the gloves were not mine."

"Not yours?"

"Certainly not!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Bob Cherry. "Do you mean to say that you gave me somebody else's gloves, you funny ink-merchant?"

"Yes, I thought it would probably spoil my own to have

the fire lighted by the honourable wearer of them," explained the nabob.

"Ha, ha! You were right there. But whose gloves did you give me?"

"Your own!"

Bob Cherry's laugh suddenly ceased.

"What?"

"I thought your ownful gloves would be the most suitable for the occasion," the nabob explained, "so I handed them to do—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Nugent.

"You inky villain!" shouted Bob Cherry. "Is this one of your little jokes? You've spoiled my beastly gloves now, and—"

"Whoever is saucy to the goose must be saucy to the gander," said the nabob, "as your English proverb says. The biter is bit in the present case, and everything is gardenfully lovely!"

Bob Cherry could take a joke, even against himself. The wrathful look faded from his grimy countenance, and he joined in the general laugh.

"You've been done, Bob!" cried Harry Wharton. "Go and clean yourself; you need it, and we'll look for the grub."

"I say, Wharton, I've found some," said Billy Bunter, coming up and depositing an armful of provisions on the table. "There are lots of things in the larder."

"It was locked, I thought—"

"Yes; but the lock opened when I hit it with the chopper," said Bunter. "Of course; in a case like this we couldn't be expected to stand upon ceremony."

"Right-ho!" Harry Wharton looked over the things. They had evidently been sent in fresh by the tradesmen in Friardale, ready for the reopening of the school.

"Bacon, and jolly good bacon, too!" said Billy Bunter. "Ham and tongue, you fellows. Look at this ham—eh? My hat!"

"Pineapples," said Nugent, "and bananas. Good!"

"Not all meant for the Remove dining-table, I expect," said Harry Wharton, laughing. "But when you forage for yourself you're entitled to all you can find, I consider. We're going to have a feast this time."

"Yes, rather!"

"The feastfulness should be terrific, to celebrate the novel situation in which we discover our honourable selves."

"Exactly!"

"I've found a frying-pan," said Bunter. "I'll start with the bacon now. Will you fellows look for some sausages? I dare say there are some there."

"Certainly!"

"I want some butter to grease the pan. That fresh butter would do. We can't afford fresh butter to grease the frying-pan in the study, but it's different when you don't have to pay for things yourself!"

"Yes, I've noticed that about you before," grinned Hazeldene.

"Really, Hazeldene—"

"Oh, get on with the washing!" said Nugent. "You're always stopping to talk, Bunt. We're all fearfully hungry."

"We are waiting with terrific impatience for the washfulness to proceed" said the Nabob of Bhanipur.

"All right. I'm just going to begin."

The fire was settling down a little now. Billy Bunter took off his jacket and pushed back his cuffs. He had found a white apron in a drawer, and he tied it round him, and it really looked very businesslike. He greased out the pan with finest fresh butter—sent for the Head's table—and jammed it on the fire with the bacon. Billy Bunter was a cook of renown in the Greyfriars Remove. The chums knew that they could safely entrust the cooking to his hands, and Bunter usually fulfilled the trust nobly.

As he presided over the frying-pan, Billy Bunter fed himself with biscuits, which he had crammed into his pocket for the purpose. He had thought the matter out. The biscuits would certainly take the keen edge off his enjoyment when the feast commenced. But he felt that he could not remain hungry while any kind of provender was to be had. And as Bunter had almost unlimited stowage capacity, he was certain to do full justice to the feed, even after a pound or two of biscuits had taken the edge off his appetite.

The juniors were all beaming now. Bob Cherry rejoined his chums, washed and beaming, too. There was a strange novelty in foraging for food in strange quarters, and it was very pleasing to the Removites. Even Hoffmann and Meunier forgot for the time to dispute, and joined in the general industry.

"How's the bacon getting on, Billy?"

"First rate! What shall we have to follow it?"

"Must have some kind of sweets," said Bob Cherry.

"Can't you make a pudding of some sort, Billy?"

Billy Bunter sniffed.

"I should think I could, Cherry. I'll make any sort of pudding you've got the materials for, and chance it!"

Harry Wharton shook his head.
 "A pudding would take too long," he said. "We can't wait two or three hours while it cooks."
 "H'm! Something in that."
 "Well, what price a custard?" said Billy Bunter. "There's custard powder in that jar—the yellowish powder."
 "This one?"
 "No; that's liquorice powder, ass! That's a medicine. The other jar."
 "Is there enough there?" asked Bob Cherry.
 "Yes; enough to make a good-sized custard. There are lots of eggs here, fortunately. Break a couple of dozen into that basin and beat them up."
 "Don't you think you'll have some of this liquorice powder—"

"No, you ass!"
 "It does look nice," said Nugent. "Nice and yellow, much the same as the custard powder, for all I can see."
 "Leave it there," said Billy Bunter. "A lot you fellows know about cooking, I don't think! Catch me taking any of your advice and spoiling my custard. There are a lot of apples there; you can peel them and boil them, and they will go first-rate with the custard."

"Oh, have your own way, chef!"
 "Billy knows best, when it comes to cooking," said Harry Wharton. "If he thinks the liquorice powder would be superfluous, leave it out. As a matter of fact, I don't think there's much to be said for putting it in."

"It looks yellowfully nice," said the nabob.
 "Things aren't always as nice as they look," grinned Hazeldene. "It would give you a twist, if I know anything about it."

"Get on with the custard, Billy. I'll look after the bacon. What about frying some eggs to go with it? There are lots here."

"I'm going to. You can break them for me."

"Ripping!" said Bob Cherry. "This will be a feast for the gods. Hallo, hallo, hallo! Who's that ringing the bell?"

Clang! Clang! Ting-a-ling!
 The juniors stared at one another in sudden dismay. They knew what that clanging meant.

Somebody was at the gate of Greyfriars, ringing the porter's bell with as much energy as Bob Cherry had displayed half an hour before.

And the same thought was in every mind, and it was expressed by the dismayed words that dropped from Nugent's lips.

"The Head!"

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

The New Boy.

THE chums of the Remove stood silent and dismayed. Was it the Head who had returned suddenly to Greyfriars?

Clang-ting-ling-ting!
 The porter's bell was ringing furiously, and Gosling, as usual, seemed to be in no hurry to answer it. Who was at the gate?

The juniors, rather thoughtlessly, had taken it for granted that the Head's delay would last some time, and that they were safe from interruption for the present.

As a matter of fact, the breakdown on the line, for all they knew, might be remedied in a short space of time, and the Head and the crowd of returning boys might arrive at any moment.

The novel delights of roughing it, and foraging for themselves in the mysterious domains below stairs, would be cut suddenly short if it was indeed the Head who had returned.

Whether they were called to account or not for the incursion into the kitchen, certainly their experience of "roughing it" below stairs would come to a sudden termination.

Clang-ting-ting-clang!
 "They're ringing pretty hard, whoever they are," said Harry Wharton, at last. "I wonder why Gosling doesn't open the gate?"

"He wasn't in a hurry to let us in," Bob Cherry remarked.

"He wouldn't dare to keep the Head waiting," said Nugent hopefully. "He'd know if it was the Head, too."

The juniors brightened up.

If it were a contingent of Greyfriars fellows at the gate, who had arrived by another road, that would not necessarily interfere with the promised feed.

"Well, one of us had better go and see," Wharton remarked. And he turned towards the door of the kitchen.

Nugent touched him on the arm.

"Wait a minute, Harry. If Gosling doesn't hear, is there any need to open the gate? Let 'em wait."

"Gosling is certain to hear sooner or later."

"H'm! I suppose so."

"Better go," said Bob Cherry. "We may as well know the worst at once. Come on!"

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The juniors left the kitchen and ascended the stairs. Only Billy Bunter remained. Bunter would not have allowed his bacon to spoil for anything. Only a direct order from the Head in person, or an earthquake, could have removed Billy Bunter from the kitchen at that moment.

The juniors went out into the Close, red in the westering sun. Gosling, the porter, was looking out of his lodge window, and smoking his pipe. His face was very surly.

"Why don't you open the gate, Gossy?" called out Nugent. The porter grunted.

"I ain't hopenin' the gate to every ragamuffin that comes along," he replied.

"It might be the Head."

"I know it ain't the 'Ead."

"Well, then, it's some of the fellows come back."

"No, it ain't!"

"How do you know?"

"'Cause I seen him."

"Then who is it?" asked Harry Wharton.

"Only a kid ringing the bell. I ain't attending to him, not me! It's trouble enough to hopen the gates to the varmint as belongs to the school."

"But the chap must have business here, or he wouldn't be ringing like that!" Harry exclaimed.

The porter grunted doggedly.

"The 'Ead wired to me not to expect 'im or the young 'uns till this evening at the earliest," he said. "Them is my horders!"

"Then it was remarkably kind of you to let us in," said Bob Cherry. "I suppose you knew we should get over the gate if you didn't and scrag you!"

"What I says is this 'ere—"

But what Gosling had to say was lost on the juniors, who passed on to the gates. A face was looking through the bars, and two hands were gripping them and shaking them violently.

"Open this gate!"

The juniors looked curiously at the stranger. He was a lad of about their own age, dressed in Etons, and wearing a straw hat. His face was not bad-looking, but the eyes were very keen and quick, and the glance incessantly shifting.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "And whom may you happen to be when you're at home, my young friend?"

The boy outside the gates looked at him.

"Why don't you open this confounded gate?" he exclaimed.

"I'm not a giddy porter!"

"I want to come in!"

"We haven't the keys," said Harry Wharton. "What do you want here? You don't belong to the school!"

"Yes I do!"

"Well, I've not seen you before!"

"Nothing surprising in that," snapped the other, "as I'm a new boy, only joining to-day. I came down here by myself, and now I can't get into the beastly school. What's the matter here?"

"Oh!" said Harry, comprehending. "You're a new boy?"

"Haven't I told you so?"

"Well, you might be a little more polite about it," said Harry sharply. "It's not our fault you can't get in!"

"Why doesn't somebody open the gate, then?"

"Better ring up the porter," said Bob Cherry, grinning.

"I've been ringing for five minutes or more."

"Truly, my worthy friend, the ringfulness has been terrific."

The new boy's quick, keen eyes fastened on Hurree Jamset Ram Singh as he spoke.

"Hallo! What are you getting at? Can't you talk English?"

Hurree Singh flushed under his dusky skin.

"I can speak the English language excellentfully," he replied. "I can also box in the English manner, and if you do not retain the civil tongue in the esteemed head, I shall castigate you with severity."

"My hat! What a corker!"

"I do not have the knowledge of what an esteemed corker is, but if it is an expression of opprobrium I shall castigate—"

"Can't you open the gate, some of you?"

"What's your name, young shaver?" asked Bob Cherry curiously. "I'm anxious to be introduced to such a nice-mannered young gentleman."

"None of your gammon!" said the new boy. "My name's Levison—Ernest Levison. I want to get into this confounded school."

"I'll get the key from the porter," said Hazeldene.

"And buck up about it, please!" said Levison.

The new boy's manner was not pleasing. But the juniors

did not wish to leave him outside the gates. He looked tired, and was probably hungry. Hazeldene walked over to the window of Gosling's lodge.

"It's a new kid," he said.

"New gammon," said the Greyfriars porter, with a sniff.

"I tell you it's a new kid, and if you don't let him in you'll be reported to the Head," said Hazeldene sharply. "Hand over the keys!"

The porter looked at him doggedly. Gosling had taken advantage of his freedom for that day to drink, and to drink deeply. It was a habit he had, and which he carefully kept concealed from the Head, who blissfully believed his porter to be a teetotaler. Gosling had drunk enough to be obstinate and ill-tempered.

"I hain't expecting nobody till this evening," he said.

"Will you give me the keys?"

"No, I won't!"

Harry Wharton looked at Hazeldene as he came back. He saw that the junior's hands were empty.

"Where are the keys?"

"He won't give them to me."

Harry Wharton's face set grimly.

"Won't he? We'll see about that!"

The captain of the Remove strode across to the window of the lodge. Gosling gave him a defiant leer as he came up. Harry Wharton looked him straight in the eyes, with a glance from which Gosling, in spite of himself, shrank a little.

"Give me the keys," said Harry quietly.

Gosling hesitated.

"Do you hear me?"

Clink! The keys rattled as the porter, with a sullen scowl, threw them from the window. Harry quietly stooped and picked them up, and went down to the gates.

"You've got them?" asked Hazeldene curiously.

"Yes."

Harry unlocked the gate. The new boy came in, and the gate rolled to again. There was no sign of anyone belonging to Greyfriars on the road.

Levison looked at the juniors suspiciously.

"What's the matter here?" he asked. "Why wouldn't the porter open the gate?"

"He's been drinking," said Harry quietly, as he relocked the gate and took out the key.

"My word! Don't they keep better order than that here?"

"Than what?" demanded Nugent sharply.

"Letting the porter get tipsy——"

"The Head's away."

"Then he has no business to be away to-day," said Levison. "He ought to be here. The school reopens to-day, doesn't it?"

"Yes."

"Then why isn't the Head here?"

"There's been a breakdown on the line, and the Head and all the masters, and all the fellows excepting ourselves, are hung up somewhere between here and London," Nugent explained.

The new boy sniffed.

There was something so extremely annoying about his sniff and his manner generally, that Harry Wharton quietly took him by the shoulder—quietly, but with a grip that was like iron when Levison tried to shake it off.

"You're passing comments on this place pretty freely," said Harry. "Don't you think it would be wiser to say less? You're in great danger of getting a ducking in the fountain yonder."

"Better give him one, anyway, sorter celebrate his arrival," said Bob Cherry. "I'll lend a hand."

"Here, none of your games!" exclaimed the new boy, in alarm. "I didn't mean any offence, either, only——"

"Then don't have so much to say," said Harry Wharton. "Here, Cherry, chuck these keys in to Gossy, will you? Let's get back to the kitchen!"

"Right you are!" said Bob Cherry, taking the keys.

The juniors turned towards the house again. Bob Cherry, as he passed the lodge, made a deft shot with the keys, and landed them on Gosling's chest. The porter gave a startled yell, and disappeared from the window. He had been tilting his chair backwards, and the sudden shock had sent him over.

The next moment he was brandishing his fist from the window. Bob Cherry kissed his hand in return as the Removites walked on to the house.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Something Like a Feed.

BILLY BUNTER looked up with a fat, shining countenance as the Removites entered the kitchen again. Billy was in a glow of heat and satisfaction, and the bacon and eggs were done to a turn.

"Is it all right?" he asked. "Don't say it was the Head?"

Harry Wharton laughed.

"No, it wasn't the Head, Billy; it's all right. It's only a new kid—chap named Levison."

"Where is he?"

"Somewhere in the Close," said Bob Cherry. "He seems to be a flippant, suspicious sort of brute. He can stay there till he gets more civil. I say, Billy, you've turned out those eggs and that bacon in ripping style!"

"I'm glad you like them," said Billy Bunter modestly.

"There's one thing about me; I can cook——"

"And eat what you cook!" said Nugent. "I don't know which you're greatest at!"

"Oh, really, Nugent——"

"This is ripping!" said Wharton. "We're roughing it here; but I rather think this is better than a study feed. We're roughing it pretty well, I think."

"Ha, ha! Yes. There's enough crockery, too; and we never have enough crockery in the study."

"To say nothing of the knives and forks," said Billy Bunter. "They were locked up in a drawer, and I had to open it with the coal-hammer. I'm afraid the lock is a little bit damaged, but I dare say that can be put to rights. There's a knife and a fork each for everybody. What do you think of that?"

"Ripping!"

"And plenty of clean plates. No turning your dinner-plate upside down for the pudding," said Billy Bunter. "I wish the breakdown on the line would last a week or two. I should get along first rate in this style!"

"Ha, ha! It is ripping, and no mistake!"

Bob Cherry looked at the basin of eggs, which were half beaten, and then at the custard-powder.

"You haven't made the custard yet, Billy."

"That takes next to no time," said Billy. "It will be all right. I've had a snack, so I'm not very hungry now. I'll serve you fellows first!"

"Good!"

"I only hope the custard will be enough to go round," said Bob Cherry.

"Well, it won't be a very large helping, you know, but there will be a good plateful each," said Bunter. "You must fill up first with bacon and eggs, and a jolly good feed, too, in my opinion, especially the way they're cooked."

"Right you are!"

Hurree Jamset Ram Singh was looking thoughtfully at the two jars of powder. He was not a great eater himself, but he liked to see others happy. He knew Bob Cherry thought that the addition of the liquorice powder to the custard would make it larger without doing it any harm, and the nabob was greatly inclined to do his friend Cherry that service.

It was no use speaking to Billy about it. A chef who has once made up his mind is past arguing with. Hurree Singh knew that. He simply waited till Billy was busily engaged in serving the eggs and bacon, and then quietly mixed the two powders in one jar and unobtrusively removed the one that had contained the liquorice powder.

Bacon was not one of the articles of diet that the Indian lad could partake of. He cheerfully feasted upon bread and bananas while the more sturdy English juniors revelled in a solid feed.

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By FRANK RICHARDS.

"Plenty more," said Billy Bunter, looking up and down the long table. "Another egg, Wharton?"

"Thanks, yes."

"A rasher for you, Cherry?"

"Certainly."

"Can I help you, Desmond?"

"Sure and ye can, Billy, darling."

They were all helped at last, and still there was a liberal supply on the dish. Then Billy Bunter fell to. He had had a good many "snacks" during the cooking, but Billy Bunter always had room for more.

For fellows who were "roughing it," the Removites were doing uncommonly well. They enjoyed that feed in the school kitchen as they had seldom enjoyed a study treat. There was a shade of thoughtfulness lingering on Harry Wharton's brow, however.

"I wonder what that new chap is doing, Nugent?" he remarked, as he finished his third egg.

"Oh, never mind him!" said Nugent. "If he can't take the trouble to be civil, I don't see why we should bother our heads about him."

"I dare say he's hungry after his journey."

"Let him find his way here, then. He can have some grub."

Harry Wharton rose.

"I think I may as well fetch him in," he remarked.

"After all, he's a new chap, and will feel a bit out of place; especially arriving at the school under such curious circumstances."

Nugent nodded.

"Fetch him in by all means, Harry, if you like."

Harry Wharton coloured a little.

"It's not so long since I was new here myself," he said.

"I wasn't the easiest fellow to get on with myself, then, but there was a chap here who stood by me like a Briton."

Frank Nugent laughed.

"None of your blarney, Harry. Fetch the stranger in, and we'll kill the fatted calf for him. Somebody hold Bunter while I get the carving-knife."

Harry laughed and left the kitchen. Billy Bunter was mixing the custard, quite unconscious of the latest addition to his supplies. Wharton ascended the stairs, and in the hall above he came upon the new boy.

Levison was standing looking out of the hall window, his hands in his pockets and a rather dismal expression upon his face. He was alone in that great school, and he could hear the merry voices of the juniors below.

He looked round at Harry Wharton's step.

"Hallo!"

"I've come up for you," said Harry. "We're having a feed in the kitchen, you know, as nobody has turned up. Are you hungry?"

"I should say so!"

"Come down with me, then."

The new boy looked at him suspiciously.

"No larks!" he said.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean I'm up to your little games!" said Levison emphatically. "You want to get me down into the kitchen to play some lark on me, I suppose?"

Harry Wharton's lip curled slightly. There was a distrustfulness about the new boy that jarred upon him.

"Nothing of the sort," he said quietly. "I came to fetch you because I thought you were probably hungry after your journey."

The new boy winked in a way that made Harry's temper rise.

"No gammon, you know!" said Levison.

Harry Wharton turned on his heel.

"You can come or not, as you like, and be hanged to you!" he said; and he descended the stairs again.

"Oh, I'll come," said Levison. And he followed Harry Wharton down to the kitchen.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Gosling does his Duty.

LEVISON looked round him quickly and suspiciously as he entered the kitchen. It was evident that, in spite of Harry's assurance, he was uneasy lest the Greyfriars juniors should be planning some trick upon him; though, as a matter of fact, nothing was farther from their thoughts.

Billy Bunter looked up from his occupation.

"Hallo, you new kid! There's plenty of grub on the table, and I did the cooking, so it's all right. Fall to!"

"Thank you," said Levison slowly.

Nugent pushed over a clean plate and Bob Cherry found a knife and fork. Harry Wharton helped the new-comer liberally to bacon and eggs.

"Thank you," said Levison again.

He took up knife and fork and looked at the food on his plate. It looked tempting enough, and Levison was hungry. Then he looked up and caught Bob Cherry's eye.

"I say, there's nothing wrong with it, is there?" he asked. Bob Cherry grinned.

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"It's first chop, my dear kid," he replied. "We're not giving it away because it's no good. There's nothing charitable about us."

"It's all right—rather!" exclaimed Billy Bunter indignantly. "What the dickens do you think is the matter with it?"

"Oh, all right!" said Levison. "I know chaps in a school like this often play games on new-comers, and I'm not going to be taken in, that's all!"

"You've been taken in," said Nugent, "and you'll jolly soon be kicked out if you don't improve your manners!"

The new boy looked at Nugent and then at his plate again. Then he fell to without another word and cleared the plate in record time and glanced towards the dish. Billy Bunter, flattered and somewhat mollified by the testimony to the excellence of his cooking, helped him again very liberally.

"The custard's done, you kids," said Billy. "It hasn't worked out exactly as it should to look at—I fancy there was something a little wrong with the powder—but it tastes ripping; I've tried it! Are you ready?"

"Rather!" said half a dozen voices.

"Then shove along your plates!"

Billy Bunter ladled out the custard with a liberal hand. There was more of it than had been expected, and each of the juniors had a liberal helping. Levison, his lingering doubts removed at last, came in for the last helping and ate it with great gusto. It was a very pleasant finish to a good feed. The boiled apples were not quite done, perhaps, but the digestion of juniors is equal to almost anything. The feed was pronounced an absolute success, and Billy Bunter beamed.

Even Levison was satisfied, and he finished up his custard with great gusto. There was rather a peculiar flavour to that custard, but the juniors put it down to Billy Bunter's liberal use of spices.

"Well, this is ripping!" said Bob Cherry, stretching himself back in a deep armchair which belonged of right to the cook of Greyfriars. "It seems to me that the folk who work down here have a better time of it than we have upstairs in the class-rooms!"

"I've often thought so," said Billy Bunter seriously. "There's the cook, for example; she can always have something nice to eat whenever she wants it, and as much as she likes, too!"

"Which must be glorious," said Nugent.

"Well, I should rather say so, Nugent; though I don't believe you are speaking seriously. I've often thought that my constitution is being injured by the time I have to wait between meals."

"This is rippingful, so long as the rightful persons of this quarter do not returnfully come upon us!" remarked the Nabob of Bhanipur. "Then we shall receive the orderfulness of the boot and the cold shoulder!"

"And, sure, we shall be lucky if it's no worse than that!" grinned Micky Desmond.

"Zat is correct," Adolphe Meunier remarked. "But when ze housekeeper return viz herself, ve explain and apologise, and zat put ze mattair right."

Harry Wharton laughed.

"I fancy it will want more than an apology to soothe the housekeeper, when she sees the inroad we've made," he remarked. "But we couldn't be expected to famish in the midst of plenty."

"I only hope they won't return yet," said Bob Cherry;

"I feel quite comfy as I am."

Hurree Singh raised his dusky hand.

"Hark!"

There was the sound of a heavy footfall on the stair.

The juniors started and listened with painful eagerness. The footstep was repeated, and it was coming with slow progress towards the kitchen.

"Who can it be?" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "It doesn't sound like Gosling, and there's nobody else within the walls of Greyfriars that I know of."

"Better look," said Hazeldene.

He stepped to the door and looked out, and several of the other juniors followed. Hazeldene uttered an exclamation.

"It's Gosling!"

Bob Cherry gave a growl of disgust.

"And he's been drinking again!"

The cause of Gosling's peculiarly slow advance was seen as soon as they set eyes on him. The school porter was coming along clinging to the wall, afraid to let go of it lest he should roll over on the linoleum. He picked up each foot and set it down again with great care. He looked up with fishy eyes and saw the juniors looking at him from the wide doorway of the kitchen.

"Allo!" he growled. "So you're there?"

"Here we are," said Bob Cherry. "What do you want? You're not coming in here."

The porter stopped, holding to the wall, and fixed a glassy stare upon Bob. He had evidently been consuming much more liquor than was good for him, feeling secure in doing so owing to the Head's delay in returning.

"Ain't I coming in there?" said Gosling. "And why ain't I coming in there? What I says is this 'ere—I'm the porter of this college, I am."

"You wouldn't be for long," said Harry Wharton, "if Dr. Locke could see you now."

"Wot I says is this 'ere," repeated Gosling. "As the porter of this college, it's my dooty to see wot you young himps is doing of in the absence of the proper author—author—author—rit—rit—rit."

He got the word out at last and wagged his head solemnly at the juniors. Harry Wharton turned back into the kitchen with a gesture of disgust. There must be always something revolting in an intoxicated man to a lad of proper feeling. Pity could not fail to be mingled with scorn and contempt.

Gosling felt his way along the passage to the kitchen door. The juniors there did not move to let him pass. They had no mind to have a drunken man in their company. But Gosling's fuddled brain was filled with an idea of the importance of his duty in looking after the juniors, and he was determined to come in.

"Wot I says is this 'ere," he remarked, steadying himself by holding to the doorpost and staring glassily at the juniors. "I'm coming in to keep a heye on you young himps."

"You're not!" said Nugent. "Get out!"

"I decline to get hout! I'm coming in!"

"Oh, sheer off!"

"I hopes," said Gosling, with drunken gravity—"I hopes as how you won't force me to use violence, young gentlemen, in the pursoot of my dooty."

"Get out!"

"I'm coming in!"

And Gosling lurched heavily forward. No one was inclined to have the porter fall on him. The juniors crowded back, and Gosling reeled forward and rolled on the kitchen floor. He sat up, looking bewildered, and gazed round at the grinning juniors with lack-lustre eyes.

"If you think I'm intoxy—intoxy—drunk," he jerked out, "you're mistaken. If a gentleman can't take a drop of ale, I'd like to know what he can take. I'm sober as judge."

"Get out!"

"I will not get out. It's my dooty to look after you. I'm sober as a judge."

"Well, then, stay there!" said Bob Cherry.

"I will not stay here!" said Gosling, with the contradictory obstinacy of intoxication—"I certainly shall not stay here!"

"Oh, do as you like!"

"I utterly decline to do anything of the kind!"

Gosling slowly rose to his feet. He clutched at a chair to steady himself, and Hazeldene pushed it with his foot. Chair and Gosling went over together. The porter rolled on the floor, made an effort to rise, and then went off to sleep. The juniors stood round regarding him with mingled amusement and disgust, and his snores filled the kitchen with far from musical noise.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

A Little Joke on Gosling—Sudden Pains.

THE drunkenfulness of the honourable beast is terrific," said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, looking down at the slumbering Gosling. "It would be an excellent jokefulness to duck him in the cold-waterful bath."

"It would be no joke to try to carry him upstairs," grinned Bob Cherry. "Here he is, and here he'll stop. Something ought to be done to him, though. Has anybody got any crayons?"

"Crayons?" said Harry Wharton. "What on earth for?"

"I think we might cover up his ruddy complexion," explained Bob. "Nothing but an earthquake would wake him now, so it would be easy enough."

Hurree Singh grinned.

"That is a wheezy good idea, my worthy chum. I remember once seeing a German master's face thusly decorated in a railway-carriage. If we can find some crayons we may be able to turn the esteemed beast into a thing of beautifulness and a joy for ever."

"Good wheeze," said Nugent. "I don't see why soot wouldn't do as well as crayons, though."

"So it would," said Bob Cherry. "Get a capful of soot out of the chimney, will you, Hurree Singh?"

"Certainly!" said the nabob, picking up a cap and starting towards the chimney.

"I say, whose cap is that?" exclaimed Bob Cherry, rendered suspicious by his previous experience with the gloves.

"Yours," said the nabob beaming. "Surely you did not

think that I was going to use my own capful headgear for this purpose, my worthy Cherry?"

"Ass! The shovel will do!"

"Oh, very wellful!"

The shovel was soon laden with soot and carried towards the sleeping, unconscious Gosling. Bob Cherry poured a little water on it, and mixed it up into a thin paste, and then, using a rag as a brush, painted the face of the school porter.

Gosling did not even open his eyes once. He lay unconscious, while Bob Cherry blacked his face and turned him into a good imitation of a Christy minstrel.

The juniors stood round laughing.

Gosling's aspect, when his face was blacked, was certainly something new and strange, and decidedly comical. But Bob Cherry was not satisfied yet.

"Got any whitening?" he asked, looking round.

"We could find some, I expect," said Nugent. "But I really think he looks beautiful as he is."

"Behold, he is black but comely," purred the nabob.

"Yes; but a couple of white circles round the eyes would improve him," said Bob Cherry, cocking his head on one side to get a good view of his victim.

"Ha, ha! So they would!"

"What do you think, Wharton? I know you have a rather artistic eye? As an artist, would you say pure black, or a couple of white circles in relief?"

Harry Wharton laughed.

"The white circles, by all means," he replied.

"Then find some whitening, some of you," said Bob Cherry, rubbing in a little extra soot on Gosling's fat cheeks.

Billy Bunter soon found some whitening, and the white circles were added round the eyes. The effect was startling. The white circles gave the black face a peculiarly owl-like appearance. Nobody would ever have recognised this strange-looking object as Gosling, the porter of Greyfriars College.

"There, I think he will do!" said Bob Cherry, rising. "If any of you fellows can suggest any improvement, I'll add it."

"Ha, ha! He's all right!"

"You think that's the best we can do for him?"

"Absolutely!"

"Then we'll let it go at that," said Bob Cherry. "I suppose we shall have to leave him here. Still, as we're done with these quarters it doesn't matter. Let him have his snooze out. When he wakes up and looks in a glass he will have a shock, and it may be a temperance lesson to him, and as good as a course of lectures at Exeter Hall. Now let's go up and rig a swing in the big school-room."

"Oh, draw it mild!" said Harry. "We must stop somewhere. If the Head came back and found us swinging there, there would be a row."

"What do you propose, then?"

"Let us pay a roundful visit to all the Upper Fourth Form studies and wreck them," suggested the nabob thoughtfully. "That would be a surpriseful pleasure to Temple, Dabney, & Co. when they returned to the honourable school."

"That's a rather good idea," said Nugent. "We won't wreck the lot, but we may as well make a surprise or two ready for Temple and Dabney."

"Come on, then," said Harry Wharton. "Hallo, you new chap, what's the matter with you?"

Levison seemed to be twisting uncomfortably, as if he had a pain somewhere in his internal regions.

"Oh, nothing!" he said.

"Something disagreed with you?" asked Nugent.

"I—I think so. I felt a pain then," gasped Levison. "Something like a dagger, and something like a red-hot needle."

"My hat! It must have been a regular twister, then. I've never swallowed any daggers or red-hot needles that I can remember, but they can't be nice."

"I believe it was something I've been eating."

"Have you been scoffing any Chicago tinned beef? If you have, you've very likely got ptomaine poisoning," said Bob Cherry sympathetically.

Levison grunted.

"I haven't! I've eaten nothing but what you gave me here."

"Well, there was nothing wrong with that!" said Billy Bunter promptly. "I cooked it myself."

"With his own fair hands," said Nugent.

"Well, it's curious I should have this pain, and none of you others," said Levison. "I might have known you would play some little game on me."

Harry Wharton's lip curled.

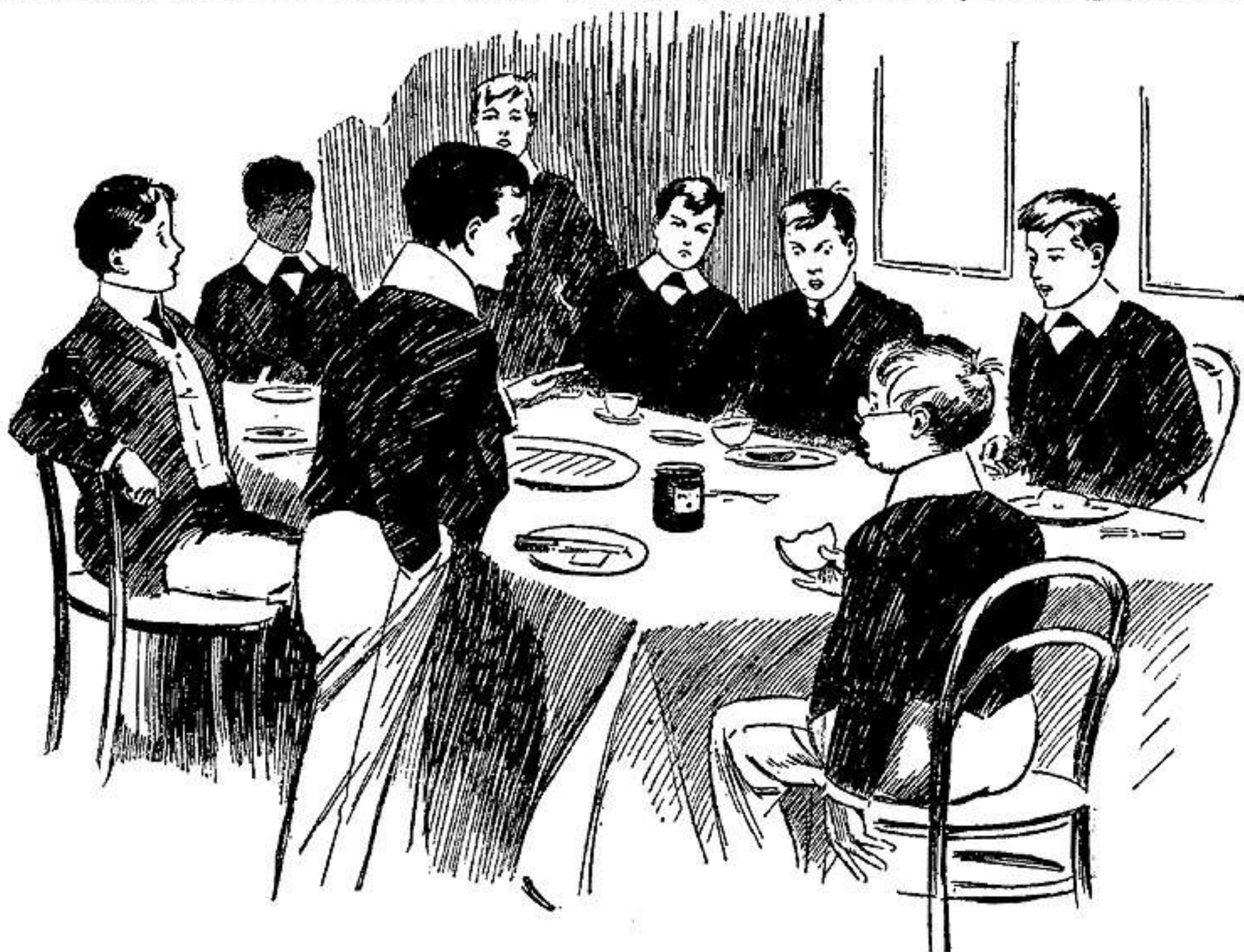
"You are a suspicious rotter!" he said, in his direct way.

"There has been no game played on you!"

"I know what I feel like. Ow!"

"Oh, rats!"

The Greyfriars juniors went upstairs. Levison followed



The juniors stared at one another in dismay. "It must be the Head ringing!" said Nugent.

them more slowly. The school porter still lay extended upon the floor, snoring.

At the top of the stairs Hazeldene stopped, and pressed his hand to his side, with a sudden gasp for breath. Wharton glanced at him.

"What's the matter?"

"Oh, nothing! I thought I felt a pain."

"Hallo, hallo, hallo, have you got pains, too?" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "I say, as a matter of fact, I had a sort of stitch just then. There couldn't have been anything wrong with the bacon, could there?"

"My hat!" ejaculated Nugent. "There was something wrong with something, or there's something wrong with me. I've just had a pain."

"What was it like?"

"A good deal like what Levison described—something like a needle, and something like a red-hot dagger."

"Wrong! What Levison had was a dagger and a red-hot needle."

"Well, I can't see much difference there."

"Ow!"

"Hallo, you're grunting yourself now! What's the matter with you?"

"I—I had a pain like a pair of burning pincers—"

"My hat! Sure it wasn't like a red-hot dagger?"

"Well, it might have been. I— Ow!"

"The painfulness of my worthy chums seems to be terrific," said Hurree Singh. "Meanwhile, the headful doctor may return momentarily, and the wreckfulness of the honourable studies of the Upper Fourth is not yet done."

"Rats! I've got a pain!"

"So have I!"

"Go and wreck the beastly studies yourself!"

"Ach; I feels him meinself!" grunted Fritz Hoffmann. "I know not if it is te same pain, or some oder pain, put he is ferry painful. I feels him in vat you English calls te bread-pasket."

"Ciel!"

"Hallo, Froggy, what are you twisting about?"

"I have ze pain!" groaned Adolphe Meunier—"I have ze fearful pain! Parbleu, it is frightful! I have ze horrific pain in ze region you call ze tummy."

"Ow!"

"Ah!"

"Ach!"

"Mon Dieu!"

Harry Wharton looked serious. He was feeling a strange pain himself, and it really looked as if something were the matter. Hardly one of the Greyfriars Removites seemed to have escaped.

Hoffmann was sitting on the floor, glaring straight before him. Meunier was clinging to the banisters in the hall. Bob Cherry was tightening his lips to endure it, and Nugent looked very pale. Hazeldene groaned aloud. Billy Bunter, as white as a sheet, was sitting down on a stair in dumb suffering. Micky Desmond was walking up and down very quickly, as if trying to walk it off.

"There's something wrong," said Harry Wharton.

"Only just found that out?" sneered Levison. "You don't seem to be feeling it yourself. I suppose you played this trick on the lot of us?"

"There has been no trick played that I know of."

"Then what is the matter with us all?"

"I haven't the faintest idea!"

Levison's sneer grew more pronounced. He was evidently in a suspicious mood, and his temper, none too good, was not improved by the inward pain he felt.

"Rats!" he exclaimed. "There's something wrong with all of us, and nothing wrong with you. You're at the bottom of it."

Harry Wharton clenched his fist.

"I tell you I am not! I know nothing about it."

Levison shrugged his shoulders.

"As a matter of fact, I do feel the pain myself," said Harry quietly. "I am not making a row about it, that is all. I think there is something wrong, and it looks to me like ptomaine poisoning, or something of that sort."

"There was a general chorus of 'Oh's!'"

"Bacon might give you something of that sort in the hot weather," said Harry. "That's the only explanation I can think of."

Billy Bunter looked up.

"The bacon was all right," he said huskily. "I cooked it myself. The bacon was all right, Wharton. I'll answer for that. I ate six rashers, so I ought to know."

"Anyway, one thing's jolly certain," exclaimed Harry Wharton decidedly, "we all ought to see a doctor."

"Yes, that's certain," said Bob Cherry. "Whatever it is, we ought to see a doctor about it. It might be serious."

"It feels serious!" groaned Nugent.

"The seriousness is terrific!" murmured the Nabob of Bhanipur.

"Have you got it, too, Inky?"

"I have a terrific twistfulness in the inwardness of the interior works!" groaned the dusky junior. "It may be a sign that the dreadful termination of the existence is nigh. I feel thusly, my worthy chums."

"Oh, rats! You're not going to kick the bucket yet," said Bob Cherry. "I feel just now as though I shouldn't mind dying, though, myself. Ow!"

"Ow!" said Billy Bunter. "Wow!"

"Oh, come on!" said Harry. "We'll get down to the village and see the doctor. Come on!"

And he threw open the school door, and the juniors, in various attitudes of suffering, staggered out into the rich June sunset in the Close.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

A Dismal Drive.

HARRY WHARTON walked straight on, quietly repressing any audible sign of the strange pain he inwardly felt; but Harry was made of sterner stuff than the other juniors. Before Billy Bunter had taken half a dozen steps, he collapsed, and sat down in the gravel of the path.

Hazeldene sat down a yard away, and then Fritz Hoffmann rolled in the grass. Adolphe Meunier speedily joined him there. Harry Wharton stopped, and looked round.

"Oh, come on!" he said.

"I c-c-can't!" groaned Billy Bunter. "I'm dying! I—I say, you fellows—"

"Make an effort."

"I c-c-can't! I'm expiring! I say, Wharton, I'm sorry I sold your cricket-bat that time! I—I say, Cherry, I beg your pardon!"

"What for?"

"I was going to sell your pocket-knife with the three blades and the saw and file, to stand a feed—"

"You young bandit!"

"Oh, I was going to redeem them when my postal order came. I was expecting a postal order a day or two from now," said Billy Bunter. "It would have come before the vacation, only there was a delay in the post. You see, as cook and manager to the study, I have to see that there are funds for feeding you all, and your pocket-knife was to have followed Wharton's bat, but now I am dying!"

"Rats!"

"Now I am dying I am sincerely sorry I was going to sell it. I'm sincerely sorry for all the wrong things I've done. I haven't done many. Now I am dying it's a great comfort to look back on many noble actions—"

"Bosh!"

"Really, Cherry—"

"Look here, make an effort, and come along," said Harry Wharton, "and don't talk that silly rot about dying, Billy, or I shall punch your head!"

"I'm really dy—"

"I say, Wharton, I feel I can't get along," said Hazeldene.

"It's only a short walk."

"I couldn't do it."

"Sure, and couldn't ye get the docthor here?" exclaimed Micky Desmond. "There's a telephone in the Head's study."

"The Head's study is pretty certain to be locked up while the Head's away."

"I know it is," said Nugent.

"Then what's to be done? I can't walk."

Harry Wharton frowned.

"If that beast Gesling were sober, he could drive us over!" he said. "Look here, I can get into the stable, and you know I can drive. You chaps stay here while I get out the pony and trap, and I'll drive you into the village."

"Good!"

"I sha'n't be long."

Harry Wharton walked quickly away. Bob Cherry was at his side in a moment.

"I'm going to help you, Harry."

"You're not fit."

"I'm as fit as you are, I expect."

"So am I," said Nugent, joining them. "We can manage it. Poor old Hurree Singh is simply doubled up. He's not so strong as us, you know. Let's get the horse out. I say, Harry, have you any idea what's the beastly matter with us?"

Harry shook his head.

"Not unless it's ptomaine poisoning, Nugent."

"Then it may be dangerous?"

"Well, it would be only a slight attack. We should feel worse than we do, I expect, if it were dangerous."

"I don't think I could feel much worse than I do."

"Well, the sooner we get to Dr. Mackenzie the better," said Harry Wharton. "Here's the pony. He'll have a lot to pull, but he's fit enough."

It did not take the juniors long to harness the pony in the trap. Then they led him out, and round to the School House. The juniors they had left there were lying in the grass, looking utterly overcome.

"Here we are!" exclaimed Harry as quickly as he could. "Jump in!"

Billy Bunter groaned.

"Don't be cruel, Wharton! Fancy talking about jumping now! I couldn't jump an inch to save my life!"

"Well, scramble in, then!"

"I can't move!"

"We shall have to sling him in," said Bob Cherry. "You cut into the porter's lodge, and get the key for the gate, Nugent."

"Right you are!"

Nugent hurried off. Bob Cherry and Harry Wharton assisted the juniors into the trap. It was a crowd in the by no means roomy vehicle, but that could not be helped.

Wharton took the reins, and drove down to the gate. By that time Nugent had the gate open, and the trap passed through. Nugent shut the gate and locked it.

"Bring the key along!" called out Harry Wharton. "We've got to get in when we come back, you know."

"Right-ho!"

Nugent climbed into the trap. Harry Wharton shook the reins, and the pony broke into a trot. The trap, with its load of suffering humanity, rolled off towards the village.

It was a short drive to the local doctor's. Dr. Mackenzie's house was on the outskirts of the village, towards Greyfriars. The trap soon reached his gate, and Bob Cherry jumped down and opened it, and Harry drove the trap in. The next moment Bob was thundering at the knocker.

Knock! Bang! Knock! Crash! The door was opened by a startled maid-servant.

"Is Dr. Mackenzie at home?" gasped Bob.

"Yes."

"Tell him we're all dying of ptomaine poisoning, and want to see him at once!"

The amazed maid fled. The juniors tumbled out of the trap, and poured into the house.



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"THE GREYFRIARS CHALLENGE." Another Tale of Harry Wharton and his Chums, By FRANK RICHARDS. NEXT TUESDAY.

THE NINTH CHAPTER. The Sufferers.

NINE suffering juniors stood in a row in Dr. Mackenzie's consulting-room, and the little doctor adjusted his glasses and looked at them curiously.

"If you please, sir, we're dying!" said Billy Bunter, tremolo. "We've all got ptomaine poisoning, and we may drop down dead any minute!"

"Indeed!" said the medical man. "Is that the usual result of ptomaine poisoning, Master Bunter?"

"I really don't know, sir."
"Then don't make assertions on things you don't know!" said the doctor. "What makes you think you have ptomaine poisoning?"

"We've got fearful pains——"

"Awful——"

"Like red-hot daggers——"

"And something like a burning carving-knife——"

"Ach! I feels ferry pad!"

"Mon Dieu, I am suffering terribly!"

"The sufferfulness of your honourable servant is terrific!"

"Begorra, it's dyin' I am intirely!"

"What have you been eating?"

"Bacon and eggs."

"Bacon and eggs wouldn't hurt you. Was there anything wrong with the bacon?"

"Nothing, sir," said Billy Bunter promptly. "I cooked it myself, and I ate six rashers, and it was simply ripping."

"I did not eat the bacon," said Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh; "but I ate of the eggs, and as far as they were concerned, everything was gardenfully lovely."

The little doctor turned to him quickly.

"You did not take any of the bacon?"

"None, sir, as I——"

"Then it cannot have been the bacon, as I presume you are feeling the same pains as the others?"

"Yes, honoured medical sahib, but a little worseful than the others, I think."

"Rats!" groaned Billy Bunter. "You haven't got them worse than I have. I am slowly dying by inches!"

"You couldn't expect to die quickly by inches," murmured Bob Cherry.

"Don't be heartless, Cherry! When the grass is growing green on my grave, you will think——"

"I shall think of the seven-and-six you owe me!"

"Really, Cherry——"

"You did not feel this pain till after you had eaten?" asked the medical man.

"No, sir," said Harry Wharton.

"Was it immediately after?"

"No, sir; some time afterwards."

"Were the eggs fresh and good?"

"Ripping, sir!" said Billy Bunter. "I ate nine of them, so I ought to know."

"Did you eat anything else besides the eggs and bacon?"

"Bread, sir."

"The bread was all right," said Billy Bunter, "so was the butter. I had eight slices, and so I can answer for the bread-and-butter."

"Did you have anything after the meal?"

"Boiled apples and custard, sir."

"The apples were rather underdone," said Bob Cherry.

"But I've eaten underdone apples many a time and oft, and they never made me feel like this."

"Ach! It is terrible!"

"Ciel! It is frightful!"

"Begorra, it's dyin' I am intirely!"

"Let me see! Was the custard properly made?"

"I made it myself," said Billy Bunter, "and I ate as much as anybody, excepting Levison. It was a ripping good custard."

"I know what's the matter," said Levison sulkily.

"Indeed!" said the doctor drily. "Then you may as well tell me, and save me the trouble of inquiring."

"Somebody has been playing a trick."

"What kind of a trick?"

"Putting something in the food."

"Who has done it?"

"Wharton, I believe. He was very anxious for me to come down and join in the feed, and very likely he's putting on those symptoms. He doesn't feel it as much as we do, anyway, or he wouldn't be so quiet about it."

Harry Wharton flushed with anger. The doctor looked at him.

"Is there anything in this lad's statement, Wharton?" he asked.

"Nothing, sir. So far as I know, a trick has not been played; and if it has, I know nothing whatever of it. As for my being anxious to have Levison down to the feed, that is only because I knew he was hungry, and there was nothing for him otherwise."

"How is that?"

"There has been a breakdown on the railway, and the Head and the masters have not returned. There is no one at the school excepting the porter."

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"Oh, I see! Then you have been cooking the food yourself?"

"Yes, sir."

"I cooked it," said Billy Bunter. "I can answer for the cooking being all right. I've cooked for years, and nobody's ever found any fault with my cooking."

"You may have mixed some foreign ingredients in the custard," said Dr. Mackenzie. "Was there anything of a foreign nature close at hand?"

"There were Hoffmann and Meunier, sir."

"Eh?"

"Hoffmann and Meunier were the only two foreigners present."

"Pish! I mean was there any material of a deleterious nature near at hand which might have got mixed into the custard by mistake?"

A curious look came over the dusky face of Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh. The others did not notice it for the moment.

"No, sir," said Billy Bunter, with emphasis. "The custard-powder was in a jar, and I was very careful about it. The eggs were all right."

"It is possibleful——"

"You don't know anything about it, Jampot, if you think there was anything wrong with the custard," said Billy Bunter obstinately. "I'm not going to have people say that my custard made them ill. The idea is preposterous!"

"But I think——"

"Oh, don't be an ass, Inky! The custard was all right."

"But——"

"I tell you——"

"Let Hurree Singh speak," said Dr. Mackenzie quietly.

"What is it, Hurree Singh? Do you know of anything wrong with the materials of the custard?"

"No, sir; but there was a slight lack of materials for the honourable custard, and Bob Cherry suggested the admixture of a quantity of liquorice powder."

"Of what?" exclaimed the doctor.

"Liquorice powder, sir."

"Ha, ha! That accounts——"

"But it wasn't put in," exclaimed Bob Cherry. "I thought it would be all right, and give the custard a flavour, but Bunter wasn't taking any."

"I should think not!" exclaimed Billy Bunter indignantly. "If you chaps knew anything at all, you'd know that——"

"But the liquorice powder was put in the custard all the same," said the nabob. "I wished the worthy Cherry's honourable idea to be carried out, and when the worthy Bunter had turned his esteemed head, I placed the liquorice powder in the jar that contained the honourable custard-powder, and mixed them togetherfully."

"Ha, ha, ha!" gasped Dr. Mackenzie.

"I cannot think that the admixturefulness can have caused the painful sensations we have experienced in our honourable inward regions," said the nabob. "I merely mention the circumstance in order to place you in possession of the complete factfulness of the case, honoured medicated sahib."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Billy Bunter brandished a fat fist in the face of the astonished Hindoo.

"You black villain!"

"What?"

"You howling lunatic!" roared Hazeldene.

"Eh?"

"You poisonous assassin!" shrieked Nugent.

"But——"

"Ach! Tat accounts for te pain! I tink——"

"Ciel! All is explained! I zink——"

"Dear me!" said the doctor, wiping the tears of merriment from his cheeks. "All is explained now, and you need not be alarmed. There is nothing in the nature of ptomaine poisoning the matter with you. You have had an overdose of—— Ha, ha, ha! It will not hurt you much."

"Won't it?" groaned Billy Bunter. "Ow! Wow! I'd give Wharton's cricket-bat to anybody who'd suffocate that nigger!"

"Really, my worthy friends——"

"You horrid villain!"

"I fail to perceive the causefulness of the angerful countenances of my esteemed chums. If the medicated sahib would explain——"

"It is, as a matter of fact, an over-dose of medicine," explained the medical sahib. "It was a ludicrous mistake to make."

"I don't believe it was a mistake," growled Levison.

"The confounded nigger did it on purpose."

"Nonsense! Hurree Singh has suffered as much as anybody."

"That is very trueful," said the nabob ruefully. "I

really and truly consider that I have even suffered more fully."

"Rot! It was a trick."

"I assure you, my worthy friend, on the word of an honest Injun, and honour brightly, that it was not a trickful jape."

"Rot!"

"If you doubt my wordful assurance—"

"And I jolly well do!" said Levison, with emphasis.

"Then I can only consider it in the light of an insultfulness to the honoured dignity of a Nabob of Bhanipur," said the Indian junior, "and I shall forthwithfully proceed to castigate you with the extreme severity."

"Here, sheer off!"

"The sheer off-fulness is impossible under the honourable circumstances," said the nabob, squaring up to the new boy at Greyfriars. "Pray defend yourself fistfully, or you will be knocked downfully to the carpet in the twinkling of the lamb's tail."

"Come, stop that!" exclaimed the doctor, laughing. "You must not fight in my consulting-room, Hurree Singh."

The nabob ceased his attack at once, much to Levison's relief. Hurree Singh turned to the doctor with a deep bow.

"I humbly beg to apologise to the honoured medicated sahib for the thoughtlessness of the forgetfulness," he said. "I have profaned his esteemed consulting-room with the rudeness of the fisticuffs."

"Never mind!"

"But I assure the honourable doctorful sahib that no disrespect was intended or conveyed, and I kiss his hands."

"No, you don't!" said Dr. Mackenzie. "Now, my lads, there is nothing whatever the matter with you that will not soon pass off—"

"Ow!" groaned Billy Bunter.

"So you may as well return to school. I should advise you to be a little more careful—ha, ha!—in the selection of materials the next time you make a custard."

"It was that ass Inky!"

"The goodness of the intention is a balance to the unfortunatefulness of the unpleasant result. I—"

"Good-bye, boys!"

"Good-bye, sir!"

The juniors, relieved in their minds, and somewhat relieved in their bodies, for the pains were growing less keen, climbed into the trap, and drove off to Greyfriars. Only Levison was sulkily silent. The idea was still in his mind that he had been the victim of an intentional trick, and it was evidently useless to attempt to argue him out of it. And no one felt inclined to take the trouble of doing so.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

A Strange Arrival.

"DEAR me! Whatever is the matter here?"

It was Dr. Locke, the august Head of Greyfriars, who spoke. He was standing outside the great gates of Greyfriars, and with him were several of the college masters, and a horde of returning boys.

The June evening was setting in, and the delayed school had at last appeared before the gates of Greyfriars. But though Mr. Quelch had been ringing the bell for a good five minutes, the gates were not opened.

"This is really remarkable!" said the Head. "Where can Gosling possibly be? I wired to him after the break-down not to expect me till this evening."

"Probably he looked for us later than this," Mr. Quelch remarked, "and he may have gone out."

"That would be against my positive orders. There is no one else at all at Greyfriars, and he has no right to go out," said the Head, frowning.

Mr. Quelch coughed slightly.

"He may have done so, however. He certainly does not appear to hear the bell."

"Please ring once more, and as loudly as you can," said the puzzled Head. "I really do not understand this at all."

Mr. Quelch rang again, loud and long. They could hear the bell clanging away from the interior, but there was neither sound nor sight of the porter. Gosling was evidently absent from his post.

"Dear me! This is very annoying!"

It was extremely annoying. The Head felt that the position was ridiculous. The boys of Greyfriars were crowded outside the gate like sheep seeking shelter, and already they were grinning at the failure of the masters to obtain entrance.

"Shall I climb over the gate, sir?" asked Wingate of the Sixth, the captain of Greyfriars.

The doctor shook his head.

"I am afraid it would be dangerous, Wingate. Fortunately I have a key to the wicket, and can get in that way, and open the gates myself. I cannot imagine what

has happened to Gosling. I shall speak to him very severely."

The Head felt in all his pockets, and at last produced a key, and went along the ivy-clad wall to the little gate usually used by the masters during the term when the great gates were closed. He opened the gate and went in.

"As I may not be able to find Gosling, you had better all come in this way," he said. "I really fear that Gosling has taken advantage of this delay, Mr. Quelch, to leave the school and go out on some business of his own."

Mr. Quelch smiled.

"It looks like it, sir."

"I shall speak to him very severely."

The grinning boys filed in at the little gate. The quadrangle was growing very dusky, and the school, with not a single window lighted, loomed up a black mass before them over the dim elms.

Dr. Locke waited till all the boys were in, and then locked the gate again. Then he led the way towards the School House.

"There is certainly no one in the lodge," said Mr. Quelch; "I have looked. Gosling is absent. No one appears to be in the house."

"The windows are all dark—"

"There's a light in the kitchen-window," said Dabney of the Upper Fourth. "I can see it, sir!"

"H'm! Is the light on?"

"No; it seems to be a red glow from the fire, sir."

The Head looked puzzled.

"Gosling has no right to light a fire in the kitchen," he said; "and it would be curious for him to be down there without the light on. This must be looked into. But first we must get into the house."

The Head opened the great door with a key and entered. He switched on the electric light and looked round. Not a sound was to be heard in the great building.

"Will you look in the kitchen, Mr. Quelch, and ascertain—"

"Certainly sir!"

The master of the Remove went to the kitchen stairs and descended in the gloom. A ruddy glow came from the open door of the kitchen, showing that the fire had not yet died out. Mr. Quelch entered the kitchen. The room was in darkness, save for the ruddy glow from the fire, which was burning red, and very low in the grate. The Remove master stumbled over something on the floor and uttered an exclamation. The Form master was no coward, but his heart jumped into his mouth. For he knew that it was a human body he had stumbled over.

"Ah!"

Was it Gosling, dead or disabled by burglars? It was an unpleasant thought. Mr. Quelch shuddered and looked quickly round. Then he stooped and touched the face of the prostrate form.

"Wharrer marrer? Gr-r-r-r!"

Mr. Quelch gave a jump.

"Dear me!"

The fallen form scrambled up. Gosling had been rudely disturbed, and he had awakened in a semi-sober state. He scrambled up savagely and glared at the Form master, whom he did not recognise in the gloom.

The red glow from the fire fell full upon his black face, with the white circles round the eyes. Mr. Quelch gave him one terrified look and fled.

"Help, help!"

"Wharrer marrer—"

"Help!"

The Remove master bounded up the kitchen stairs. But his cry had been heard, and Wingate came rushing down to his aid. He met Mr. Quelch half way on the stairs, and crashed heavily into him.

"Oh! Help! Ow!"

The Form master rolled down the stairs, and Wingate rolled with him. They sprawled over the linoleum at the bottom, and, as they did so, a shadowy figure whisked past them and ran upstairs. It was Gosling, who was more frightened in his fuddled state than Mr. Quelch could possibly be.

"Sorry, sir!" gasped Wingate. "I heard you calling, and ran down—"

"It was an accident," said Mr. Quelch, picking himself up and rubbing his bones ruefully. "But—did you see that terrible-looking negro—"

"That what, sir?"

"A ferocious-looking negro who was in the kitchen. I greatly fear that he has murdered Gosling, and—"

"Help!"

It was a shrill cry from the top of the stairs. Wingate dashed up, and the Remove master followed more slowly.

They found the Head standing in the glare of the electric light, as pale as death, leaning helplessly against the wall.

"What is the matter, sir?"

Dr. Locke gasped for breath.

"A fearful-looking ruffian has just torn past me!" he panted. "He came from the kitchen stairs. A horrible-looking negro—"

"It was the one I saw!" exclaimed Mr. Quelch. "A most terrible-looking ruffian, with savage eyes—"

"His eyes were fearful. They were large, and seemed wide open, and to have white rims," said the Head, shuddering. "I fear something terrible has happened here."

"I was thinking that Gosling—"

"The poor fellow may have been attacked and murdered."

"We'll soon capture this chap, whoever he is," said Wingate determinedly. "I'll go after him, sir, with some of the Sixth—"

"No, no, Wingate! The danger—"

"If he's a murderous ruffian, sir, there's more danger in letting him go loose," said Wingate. "I'll take a dozen Six-Formers and hunt for him!"

"That is true. Take some weapons, then, Wingate—pokers or cricket-stumps. I should never forgive myself if you came to harm."

"We'll be careful, sir."

"See that the younger boys are safe in a class-room, Mr. Quelch," said the Head. "You will select your companions, Wingate. Some of the masters may take a part."

The younger masters of Greyfriars were only too eager to do so. So were the Sixth, and the search-party was soon formed. The Lower Forms would gladly have joined in the hunt, but that was not permitted. The Remove, much to their discontent, were marshalled into their Form-room and detained there, and the same was done with the rest of the Lower Forms.

The strange object seen by the Head had escaped into the Close, and in the Close the search-party hunted for him. There was a sudden yell from Wingate, who was looking under the elms. The others rushed towards him.

"Did you see him?" exclaimed Elliott of the Sixth.

"Yes, he was dodging through the trees."

"Which way did he go?"

"Towards the gates, I think. Come on!"

The searchers ran swiftly on.

"What was he like?" asked Mason.

"I caught only a glimpse—he was a negro, with very curious-looking eyes," said Wingate. "He was gone in a second, though."

"There he is!" shouted a Sixth-Former.

"Where?"

"He's just dodged into the porter's lodge."

"Come on!" cried Wingate. "He's cornered now!"

There was a sound of a slamming door and a rattling chain. Wingate ran up to the door of the porter's lodge and bumped up against it. But it did not budge.

"He's locked himself in!"

The searchers gathered breathless outside the porter's lodge. The unknown desperado was not captured yet, but it was something to have run him down and cornered him. In the porter's lodge, at least, he could do no damage. The place was evidently otherwise unoccupied.

"We've got him," said Wingate, as he gave up the useless attack on the door. "It's only a question of getting in and collar him now."

"Perhaps we had better send for the police—"

"Make us look asses, sir, not being able to deal with a single man without help," urged the captain of Greyfriars.

The Remove master hesitated.

"But how do you propose to get at him, Wingate?"

"I dare say he will give in now he knows he's got no chance, sir. We can get in at the window, otherwise."

"He may be armed—"

"Well, I have a poker—"

"I cannot allow—dear me! What is that?"

"That" was the clang of the great gates swinging open. A pony and trap came in, the latter crowded with juniors, and there was a general exclamation of amazement.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

The Mystery is Cleared Up.

"WHARTON!"

Mr. Quelch rapped out the name in utter astonishment as he recognised the youthful driver of the trap.

Harry Wharton was equally astonished. He had not guessed that the school had returned, of course, and, after the visit to Dr. Mackenzie's, he had expected to find Greyfriars as he had left it.

Instead of that, he found the School House blazing with lights from the class-room windows, and an excited crowd of masters and Sixth-Form seniors gathered in front of the porter's lodge. He drew the pony to a halt, and the juniors clambered out of the trap. Mr. Quelch came towards them.

"How did you open the gates, Wharton? Have you just returned to school?"

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"We came in the afternoon, sir," said Harry, touching his cap respectfully. "Glad to see you again after the holiday, sir!"

"Thank you, Wharton, but you will kindly explain yourself. The Head and the rest of the school returning from Victoria were stopped by a breakdown on the line—"

"Gosling told us about it, sir."

"Then you have seen Gosling?"

Harry Wharton laughed.

"Yes, sir."

"Where is he?"

"He was asleep when we went out, sir."

"Do you mean to say that you have taken the liberty of driving out in the doctor's trap?" exclaimed the Remove master severely. "I should hardly have expected this of you, Wharton!"

Harry coloured.

"I should not have done so, sir, but it was necessary. We were all taken ill—"

"Taken ill?" ejaculated the Form master.

"We were here without food, and Gosling could do nothing for us, so we cooked some grub for ourselves in the kitchen—"

"Ah, then it was you lighted the fire there?"

"We had to, sir; we were fearfully hungry! We didn't mind roughing it, though," said Harry, his face breaking into a smile. "We have had a jolly good time, sir, and we liked it. Only we ate something that disagreed with us, and we thought we had ptomaine poisoning, and we had to go to the doctor's—"

"I see. That was careless of you, but I suppose, under the circumstances, you cannot be blamed for foraging for yourselves."

"We have been here four hours or more, sir."

"You could not be expected to go hungry all that time," agreed the Form master. "But I do not understand—"

"The hungerfulness was terrific, honoured sahib—"

"Ach! It was notings to te pain after!"

"Ciel! I zink—"

"I tink—"

"Please allow me to speak," said Mr. Quelch. "While you were here, boys, did you see anything of a powerful and ferocious-looking negro?"

The Removes stared.

"A negro, sir!" ejaculated Harry Wharton, in amazement.

"Yes, a black ruffian, whom I surprised in the kitchen on my return, and who has now locked himself up in the porter's lodge."

Harry Wharton shook his head.

"He wasn't here when we were here, sir. I can't understand it. We locked the gates when we left, too."

"Inky was the only nigger here—" began Billy Bunter.

"My worthy chum, if you apply the niggerful similitude to me, I shall be compelled to castigate you severely."

"There wasn't anybody here but ourselves and Gosling, sir," said Bob Cherry, "and this new fellow, Levison. We saw nobody else."

"Have you been long absent at the doctor's?"

"Less than an hour, sir."

Mr. Quelch looked puzzled.

"Then I cannot understand it. When I entered the kitchen in the dark I stumbled over a savage-looking negro, who has now locked himself in Gosling's lodge. I am very much afraid that something has happened to Gosling, as he did not answer our ringing, and is not in his lodge. Where did you see him last?"

"He was in the kitchen when we left, sir, asleep."

"A strange place for Gosling to go to sleep in," said Mr. Quelch, in astonishment. "You are sure of what you say, Wharton?"

"Quite, sir," said Harry, who did not feel called upon to mention that the school porter had been intoxicated. That could be left for Mr. Quelch to find out for himself.

"Then I am afraid more than ever that something has happened to him, as the negro was in the kitchen. Has he answered you, Wingate?"

The captain of Greyfriars was approaching, looking very puzzled. He shook his head in reply to the Form master's question.

"No, sir. I've called out to him to surrender, and he doesn't answer; but I can hear somebody mumbling in the lodge, and it sounds like Gosling's voice."

"Gosling! Can he be in there?"

"It sounds like him, sir."

The amazed Form master hastened to the lodge again, and knocked at the door. The boys followed him, Harry Wharton and his chums with the rest.

"Listen to me," called out Mr. Quelch, through the key-hole. "You cannot possibly escape now, you ruffian, so I advise you to surrender."

"Wot I says is this 'ere—"

It was a mumbling voice within, and Mr. Quelch started. The tones were unmistakably those of Gosling.

"Gosling! Are you there?"

"Wot I says is this 'ere, that I won't be plagued by them boys. It's my dooty to look after them in the habsence of the 'Ead."

"He has been drinking," murmured Mr. Quelch, aghast. "What can this possibly mean? Are you sure the negro really entered the lodge?"

"Quite sure, sir."

"Gosling! Can you open the door?"

"I shall not open the door. Wot I says is this 'ere, that a porter's lodge is a Henglishman's castle, and I will not open the door."

Wingate grinned.

"It's pretty plain what he was doing while he was waiting for us to arrive, sir," he said, in a low voice. "It's curious that we hear nothing of the negro. I am certain he is in there. Suppose we try the window?"

"It's open," said Mason.

"Let me look in first," said the Remove master. He strode to the window to look into the dusky lodge, and then started back with a cry.

A black face, with white circles round the eyes, loomed up suddenly before him, and the strange-looking eyes glared at him, and there was a distinct odour of spirits on the evening air.

Mr. Quelch started back.

"Goodness gracious! Villain, surrender immediately, or you will be dealt with very severely. You hear me?"

Bob Cherry gave a roar that drowned the mumbling reply of the man in the lodge.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Mr. Quelch turned upon him wrathfully.

"Cherry! How dare you!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Cherry—"

"Excuse me, sir!" gasped Bob, with the tears of mirth running down his cheeks. "I really couldn't help it, sir! Ha, ha, ha! Don't you see, sir—can't you see who it is?"

"Who it is! What do you mean, Cherry?"

"It's Gosling, sir."

Mr. Quelch gave quite a jump.

"Gosling!"

"Wot I says is this 'ere," mumbled the strange-looking figure at the window. "It's my dooty to look after them boys in the habsence of the 'Ead. I looks after them when they're a-gorging of themselves in the kitchen. It's my

dooty. If anybody says I'm drunk, I repudiates the suggestion with scorn!"

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

Mr. Quelch was utterly amazed. There was no doubting that the voice was the voice of Gosling, but the face—what was that the face of?

"So it was Gosling all the time," said Wingate. "The ruffian has been drinking, and got his face covered with soot somehow."

"Dear me!" gasped Mr. Quelch. "Did you know Gosling was in this—this state, Wharton?"

"Yes, sir," said Harry Wharton demurely. "I remember noticing that he had some soot on his face before we left him in the kitchen."

"The sootfulness was terrific, and the worthy Cherry had— Pray do not tread on my foot, Cherry, as the hurtfulness in my toes is great."

"I think I understand," said Mr. Quelch, his face involuntarily breaking into a smile. "You all deserve to be caned, but if the trick was played through a natural disgust for the state of that rascally fellow, I can hold you excused. Perhaps it will be a lesson to him, if Dr. Locke allows him to remain at Greyfriars. You may go in, boys. I will explain matters to the Head."

Gosling leaned out of the window and addressed the crowd as they turned away. His unconsciousness of the appearance of his face added to the absurdity of the scene. He wagged his head solemnly at Mr. Quelch.

"Wot I says is this 'ere," he remarked, with great gravity. "It's my dooty to look after the boys in the habsence of the 'Ead. When the 'Ead comes back I shall tell him that I have been scandalously treated. This blessed lodge is a-turning round and round, and I shall insist upon having it fixed in a proper and comfortable manner, suitable for a gentleman to live in. If any man present says that I'm intoxicated, I hurls back the insinivation with scorn. Wot I says is this 'ere—"

But the rest of the valuable remarks of Gosling were lost. A little later, the Removes were in their dormitory, and the chums, completely recovered by that time from the internal twinges, related their experiences to their interested and envious Form-fellows, and long after lights were out the Removes were listening to the story of how Harry Wharton and his chums had been "Roughing It."

THE END.

(Another long, complete tale of Harry Wharton and Co. next week, entitled "The Greyfriars' Challenge." Please order your copy of THE MAGNET in advance. Price One Halfpenny.)



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 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 pugilist—visits a Mr. Abrams, a dealer in postcards and a man known to be friendly with McDonald. Dennis shows the dealer an incriminating card that McDonald had dropped in the street; and which Grip had brought to his master. On seeing the card, Abrams at once shows alarm. "Give me that card, or you don't leave thith room alive!" the Jew exclaimed. "Open that door!" replied Dennis.

NEW STORY SHOWING HOW TWO BOYS SUCCEED AS DETECTIVES.

By LEWIS HOCKLEY.

Frank Dennis in Danger!

Breathing heavily, the pair stood still eyeing each other fixedly. But there was a certain, if subtle, distinction between the bearing of each. Dennis was composed and confident; the Jew controlling his inward fury only by a severe effort, and with something of that ferocity which is born of fear.

"Are you going to open that door?" demanded Dennis.

"Not until you have given me that pothcard," the Hebrew answered firmly.

"Very well, then; I shall open it myself."

Dennis believed in taking the initiative—in being the first to act. Already detective work was having an influence upon his character; it was giving to him a decision and a quickness of action he had previously lacked. He was developing.

"I will give you five poundth for it."

Abrams knew his physical disadvantages and the probability of coming off second best in the event of an appeal to force. But have that card he must.

"THE GREYFRIARS CHALLENGE." Another Tale of Harry Wharton and his Chums, By FRANK RICHARDS.

NEXT
TUESDAY.

"Not for fifty!" Dennis replied. "Stand aside!"

One thought Abrams gave to the vanished prize-fighter. With him to aid the recovery of that incriminating postcard would be assured; and then he hurled himself upon Frank Dennis, who had made an advance towards the door. He leaped upon the young man like a cat, snarling and spluttering, and, twining his legs around him, sought to throw him to the floor. But fierce as was his onslaught, he was no match for the athletic West-countryman.

Neither heard a sudden noise behind Dennis.

Throwing his arms around Abrams' body, Dennis, with a big effort, wrenched him away. It was no time for gentle handling, and, lifting him high in the air, the detective flung his opponent violently from him with a vigorous twist from the chest, that a more experienced wrestler than the Jew would have found it difficult to counter.

As he did so, Frank felt a sudden fierce shock on the back of his neck, as if a flash of lightning had struck him; a thousand bright, fair points of light danced before his suddenly darkened eyes, and he was hurled forward, his outstretched hands coming into contact with the opposite wall alone saving him from going down headlong on his face.

He straightened himself and swung round almost with a simultaneous movement, to find himself facing the truculent face and savagely exultant eyes of Sleeping McDonald.

The open door of a large cupboard behind the prize-fighter was evidence whence he had appeared.

The senior partner of "Maxennis" made his way to the house of Mrs. Brewer with the intention of having an interesting conversation with their client. There were a good many things Bob Lomax wanted to know before he unreservedly accepted the theory which he and Frank Dennis had recently assumed. That, however, it could not be so very wide of the mark he firmly believed.

The discovery of the schoolboy—Dick Martin—at Leigh as the sender of the postcards—or some of them—on which he had prided himself, was actually of very slight importance, though undoubtedly search in this direction had been the indirect means of throwing light upon the conspiracy of which his partner had an inspiration. The schoolboy's missives had been no more than a piece of juvenile mischief, but the attempt of Solly Abrams, with the prizefighter as the cat-paw to pull the chestnuts out of the fire for the benefit of his Hebrew backer, was a very serious matter.

Lomax intended to find out whether Mr. Abrams was known to his client. He believed it must be so, for he did not credit Alexander McDonald with the concoction of the nefarious scheme. It seemed to him incredible that the professional pugilist should have planned to extort money from his landlady simply from becoming aware of the continual sending of Dick Martin's cards. He wasn't clever enough, Bob decided. And that the fortuitous mention of the fact of their receipt by McDonald to Abrams had led to the conspiracy, Bob also was unwilling to believe.

But when he reached Mrs. Brewer's house he was faced with a disappointment. A slovenly-looking girl opened the door and informed him Mrs. Brewer wasn't at home, that she was unaware when she would be, and that she didn't know where she had gone. All this was communicated to Lomax in one breath, and the dirty, untidy girl made to close the door. But Bob detained her. Was Mr. McDonald in?

No, he wasn't; he'd gone out.

Had any more postcards arrived for Mrs. Brewer?

When Bob asked this question, a scared expression came into the girl's eyes, and, without answering, she again tried to shut the door, but Bob's foot was in the way.

"Don't be afraid, my good girl," he said pleasantly. "I'm acting for your mistress, you understand, and I particularly wanted to see her."

"Well, you can't; she's out, I tell yer!" the girl answered, in a sulky voice, regarding Bob suspiciously.

"Then I'll leave her a note asking her to call at my office," Lomax said. "Please don't forget to give it to her."

The girl waited while Lomax wrote a short note on a slip torn from his pocket-book, nodding her head as she took the note, and Bob repeated his caution.

"You're sure there have been no postcards recently," he said carelessly, as he prepared to leave.

"No, there ain't!" And the door was banged in his face.

The recollection of his partner's visit to Mrs. Biddlecombe occurred to Bob before he was half-way out of the street, and he turned back to interview that voluble lady.

Mrs. Biddlecombe was at home; she didn't know Bob Lomax from Adam, but notwithstanding, she was pleased to give him a good deal of her valuable time, wherein she varied her relation of all the gossip of the neighbourhood, and everything concerning Mrs. Brewer that occurred to her mind, with artful questions and remarks for the purpose of finding out who was her caller, and what was his business with her friend and neighbour.

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Bob left after half an hour, and he turned his steps in the direction of Gracechurch Street. He meant to go to No. 142, Houndsditch.

He was rather disturbed in his mind as a result of his conversation with Mrs. Biddlecombe. Mrs. Brewer, so the good lady informed him, had left her house the morning of the previous day and hadn't been seen since. Mrs. Biddlecombe was sure she hadn't come home—leastways, she had called eight times to know if her neighbour had returned, and, on each occasion the girl who looked after the house—Lomax's late adversary—had answered in the negative.

Mrs. Biddlecombe was much upset about it. The girl—she was a bad lot she was sure; really rude and offensive, and Mrs. Brewer should be told of her conduct when she returned, if she ever did return—poor thing!—seeing that it was her neighbours' belief the Anarchists who wanted her money had got hold of her and done her to death—didn't know where her mistress was; at least, she said she didn't; but what was most peculiar was the fact that Mrs. Brewer hadn't communicated her intention of going away—if she had one—to her dear friend.

Mrs. Biddlecombe, arguing from this, and considering the intimacy between them, believed that her neighbour hadn't intended leaving home for long. She had gone out as she usually did every morning, had talked with her friend on the doorstep for several minutes, saying nothing about leaving home, and had never returned. To the quick-tongued lady in the house adjoining, it was painfully evident Mrs. Brewer had come to some terrible harm; and what should it be but the threatened vengeance of the Anarchists who had been responsible for those terrible postcards?

Of these last, by the way, none had been received by Mrs. Brewer for some time; at least, not since that day when the nice young gentleman with the dog had called upon her and asked so many questions about Mrs. Brewer. Perhaps, no one ever knew, and such queer people went about nowadays, perhaps that young man himself was one of the bloodthirsty Anarchists.

Anarchists! Poor Dennis!

The salient fact was that Mrs. Brewer had been away from home for thirty-six hours, and no one knew where she was. Also, it was to be presumed, she had not any previous intention of going away.

Lomax was quick to make up his mind. He would go to 142, Houndsditch; if he were lucky he might get there before his chum had left, and between them—Lomax meant to go to any length to ascertain this, using all real and imaginary powers he possessed—force from the clever picture postcard maker a declaration of his acquaintance with Mrs. Brewer, and the plot of which she was the victim. The sudden disappearance of his client would be a strong card in his hand.

With Grip trotting obediently at his heels, Lomax walked at top pace. It did not take him very long to reach Houndsditch, and soon he was nearing the number he required. The street was curiously deserted of people; in fact the only person Bob saw near the Jew's shop was a dirty, disreputable, ill-fed and worse-clothed lad about twenty years of age, who was loafing about the doorway of a public-house a few yards away. Furtively, curiously, this individual watched Lomax as he stopped outside No. 142 and knocked.

There was no reply to the knocking, although it was repeated again and again, and Bob, placing his ear against the door, listened intently. From the deserted appearance of the dwelling, he began to think it to be unoccupied.

But it wasn't, if the muffled, dull sounds he heard indicated anything. It seemed as if someone away at the back of the shop was moving furniture about in a clumsy fashion. Once or twice Lomax thought he detected a sharper noise, like the shouting of a human voice.

He knocked again; there was no answer, and, as he stood undecided, he felt a touch on his shoulder. Facing round, he looked into the eyes of the young man who had been standing at the public-house entrance.

"Wanter git in there?"

The words were spoken eagerly; the lad's face was flushed, and he seemed to be labouring under some sudden excitement. Lomax looked at him with eyes full of surprise.

"Wanter git in there?" the lad repeated. "That's Solly Abrams's show," he added.

"Yes, I know," Lomax answered vaguely. "But—"

"He's there."

"Is he?"

"Yus; and there's a gentleman with him."

Lomax was hardly conscious of what his tongue was saying; a sound had come to him through the door—for his ears were strained to the utmost point of hearing—as if an

"THE GREYFRIARS CHALLENGE." Another Tale of Harry Wharton and his Chums. NEXT TUESDAY. By FRANK RICHARDS.

exceedingly heavy article of furniture had been shifted. A sudden thought came to him, disagreeable and startling.

"I want to get in, and no one answers my knocking," he said hurriedly, and swiftly faced the white-faced lad again. "P'lice?"

"No, no; I'm not the police. Confound you!"

A shade of disappointment came into the face of the lad, who was none other than Punch, with whom Frank Dennis was already acquainted.

"How can we get in?" Lomax demanded sharply.

"We can do it from the back, guv'nor; I'll show yer the way," was the unexpected answer.

Without a moment's hesitation, Punch dived into an alley-like way beside the public-house entrance, and Lomax following, they found themselves in a narrow yard, where a man was washing bottles.

"Callin' on Solly Abrams, an' his front door's locked," called out Punch to this worthy, who seemed to recognise the lad, nodded, and went on with his occupation.

The yard was long though narrow, paved with broken and sunken flagstones, and littered with the most heterogeneous collection of lumber possible to imagine. Costermongers' barrows, sound and broken, lay about together with piles of packing-cases, and boxes, crates, scrap-iron, and paper galore. Straw lay about in profusion; while in places the cases and boxes were piled higher than a tall man's head, thus forming barricades which prevented one from seeing into the windows of the several houses backing on to the yard. In justice to these, however, it may be said that such barricades were quite superfluous, since those windows which were not shuttered were so thick with the dust and dirt accumulated through many years of neglect that the glass had become perfectly opaque.

Punch dodged round the piles of rubbish, and made for a door beside a closely shuttered window.

"This way, guv'nor!" he cried, in whispered excitement. "This is Abrams' back door. Wot'll yer do? Bust it open?"

"Yes, yes!" answered Lomax.

Though his fears may have been based on a very false assumption, or rather suspicion—no less than that Solomon Abrams was in some way or other responsible for the disappearance of Mrs. Brewer—Lomax felt within him a moral certainty that his chum and partner was somewhere in the dwelling of the Jew, and that he was in danger. It was absurd, of course, unreasonable; for what harm, even if he actually intended it, and that was mere supposition, could a wretched whipper-snapper, such as the Hebrew, do to an athletic, powerful fellow like Frank Dennis? And yet—the sounds he had heard! What could they mean?

Lomax didn't stop to reason; for once in his life, as will even the most level-headed and matter-of-fact individuals, he acted upon a sudden impulse. He ran at the door, at which his companion was already vainly pushing and hammering, and added all his own sturdy weight and strength to the attack. Behind them the terrier was leaping and growling in a state of wild excitement.

The door stood, in spite of the violent blows dealt it; but though the clamour must have been audible to those within, no one appeared—and for good reason. Those within were too thoroughly occupied with their own concerns to be able to pay attention to any disturbance without. Frank Dennis was giving his companions all they wanted, and a bit over for luck.

And then Lomax lost patience. Looking round the yard, he caught sight of a pickaxe; snatching it up, he assailed the door with mighty strokes. It gave at last; the lock had gone, and it was held by top and bottom bolts. Having smashed in the panels, Lomax was able to put in his arm and draw the top bolt. The bottom one held for but a little after that, and Grip in advance, Lomax and his companion rushed into a scullery, through what had been a big kitchen, but was now occupied by presses and tables covered with stamps and dies, and so to a door. It

was fast, but on the other side Lomax heard the sound of voices, and he recognised that of the Jew postcard printer.

"Downed at latht, by Motheth! Don't let him up again!"

With a drive of his heel Lomax smashed down the door and burst into the room. One glance was sufficient for him to take in the state of things, and without the slightest hesitation he acted. He had a pair of knuckle-dusters in his pocket, and these he had slipped on his hands immediately upon breaking into the house. It would go ill with either of the two men who leaped up to face him if his fist came into contact with their heads, for the Yorkshireman's blood was up, and he had no mind to spare his opponents, or to hit lightly.

Never was a room in a more terrible state of disorder; the table was overturned, as well as several chairs, and the floor was strewn with debris of all descriptions. Frank Dennis had not gone under without making a fight of it.

But he had gone under. When Lomax entered—and afterwards the Yorkshireman recalled that he had felt no surprise whatever in finding his chum where he did, or that Solly Abrams and Sleeping McDonald were the men he had to face—Dennis was lying on the floor at full length, half-stunned, his knuckles torn and bleeding, and his face smothered in blood. At his head, his face turned towards his victim's feet, his knees firmly planted on the biceps muscles of his outstretched arms, was Sandy McDonald, his clothing torn and dishevelled, and his face looking considerably the worse for wear. Beside the prone man knelt Abrams, glaring through his one seeing eye at the various objects which his busy, shaking fingers were dragging out of Dennis's pockets.

Lomax's interruption, with Punch and the growling terrier at his heels, created a sensation; it took both the scoundrels fairly by surprise. The clamour of their own fighting had deadened the sounds of the new-comer's forcible entry into the house, and not until the door of the room was driven in, were they aware of the intervention at hand.

With a fierce oath, McDonald leaped to his feet; he had recognised Lomax, and the thin-faced lad behind was known to him. There was no need to ask their intentions, and he met them like an angry bull.

There was no stopping Robert Lomax's fierce onslaught; he drove straight at McDonald, and his right hand shot out with terrific force as he came within striking distance. The pugilist threw up his right arm mechanically to guard the blow, and at the same time countered with his left hand. But his guard was feeble compared with the blow it met; it robbed the stroke of somewhat of its force, but that was all. Lomax's clenched fist, with its four rings of hard steel around the fingers—the T-piece to which the rings were joined pressing into the palm of his hand, caught him fairly on the cheek, and he was hurled back as if he had been suddenly shot. Four distinct gashes were left on his face, the imprint of the knuckle-duster, and McDonald uttered a yell of pain.

It was drowned by one even yet more shrill. Grip had seized Solomon Abrams by the seat of his trousers.

Punch, on seeing that both the Jew and the prize-fighter were being well taken care of, turned his attention to Frank Dennis. While McDonald, his back against the wall, was defending himself as well as he could against Lomax's steel-ringed fists, and Abrams was hopping about the room, screaming and trying frantically to rid himself of his four-footed assailant, who hung on with a tenacity that savoured of the bulldog breed and left one in doubt of the perfect purity of his pedigree, he raised Frank into a sitting position, wiped the blood from his face, and made use of more than one of those secret artifices which cunning ringside seconds employ to reawaken life and animation in their wounded charges and nullify the effects of unconsciousness-producing blows.

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