

“The Greyfriars Sleepwalker.”

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THE GREYFRIARS SLEEPWALKER.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

A Night Alarm and a Mystery.

"WHO'S that?"

Harry Wharton rapped out the question as he sat up suddenly in bed in the Remove dormitory at Greyfriars.

Midnight had tolled out from the school tower, and Harry Wharton had awakened as the last strokes came faintly through the silence of the night.

Dead silence followed the last stroke of twelve, and Harry turned drowsily on his pillow to sink into sleep again, when a creak from the dormitory door caught his ear.

In a moment he was wide awake.

There was more than one door to the Remove dormitory at Greyfriars, and it was the one nearest to Harry's bed that creaked when it was opened; and Harry Wharton knew that creak well.

The sound was only a slight one, but the junior knew that the door was being opened, and that fact was sufficient to startle him at such an hour.

A raid by fellows of another Form was not an unknown happening in a dormitory at Greyfriars, but midnight would have been an unusually late hour for a raid. Harry Wharton sat up in bed and rapped out the question in sharp tones.

"Who's that?"

There was no reply.

A faint creak showed that the door was closing again, and he heard the slight sound of the latch.

Harry drew a deep breath.

The dormitory was very gloomy, only a few faint rays from the stars stealing in at the high windows, and the junior could see only the beds that were nearest to him. No one else seemed to be awake in the long, lofty room.

"My hat!" muttered Wharton, as he pushed back the bedclothes. **"Whoever opened that door has shut it again, so he must have heard me speak. Was it a fellow from the Upper Fourth on a raid, or a burglar?"**

For a few moments the junior debated the matter, and then he slipped out of bed. If the unseen visitant had been a raider from the Upper Fourth he had doubtless retired

on finding that one of the Remove was awake. But it might have been a burglar, and Harry Wharton felt that it was "up" to him to make sure about it. He could not go to sleep again while the house was perhaps being robbed.

He hesitated for a moment whether to awaken his chums. Bob Cherry was sleeping soundly in the next bed on one side, and Frank Nugent on the other. Further along Hurree Jamset Ram Singh was fast asleep, his dusky face showing queerly on the white pillow as a ray of starlight fell upon it.

"No need to call them up," Harry muttered. "It may be nothing after all."

He slipped on trousers and slippers, and crossed quickly to the door—a door that did not creak as it opened. He stepped out into the corridor, and looked about him. The passage was very gloomy, a dim light falling in at the high window at the end. Harry Wharton listened intently.

A faint, indefinite sound came from below. Harry went on tiptoe to the staircase, and glanced down.

He could see nothing in the gloom.

But he was certain that it was a footstep that he had heard, and that it was in the hall on the ground floor.

There was no further doubt in Harry Wharton's mind.

A raider from another dormitory would not have gone downstairs for any reason, and Harry could only conclude that the midnight wanderer did not belong to Greyfriars, and that meant that he was a burglar.

A thrill ran through the junior at the thought, as he stood listening intently in the darkness.

He hesitated for some moments, and then stepped quickly to Wingate's door. Wingate, of the Sixth, was captain of Greyfriars, and the champion athlete of the school. He was probably equal to dealing with any burglar, and the junior preferred calling the college captain to calling a master.

He opened Wingate's door quietly and stepped into the room and closed it again.

"Wingate!"

He called the name softly.

An unmusical snore from the darkness was the only reply.

"Wingate!"

Snore!

Harry Wharton stepped nearer to the bed.

"Wingate!"

But the captain of Greyfriars was sleeping soundly. He snored again, and Wharton reached out his hand and shook him.

"Wake up, Wingate!"

"Hullo! Why—what—who—what's the matter? Who's that?"

"I'm Wharton."

"Oh, you are, are you?" growled Wingate, sitting up in bed and reaching out to get a grasp on the junior. "And I suppose this is one of your little jokes—the Remove idea of a jape, eh?"

"No, no. Let go my shoulder—"

"Yes, I'll let go your shoulder," said Wingate grimly, "when I've laid a cricket stump about you, not before."

"I tell you—"

"Is anything the matter?"

"Yes. There's a burglar in the house."

"Oh!" Wingate released the junior. "Is that a fact, Wharton?"

"Yes."

"That alters the case. How did you know?"

"He opened the door of our dormitory," explained Harry in a swift whisper. "I called out, and he shut it again. I came out and heard him downstairs. It must have been a burglar, as none of the boys would be on the ground floor for anything. I thought I had better call you, anyway."

"Good!" said Wingate. "I'll be up in a jiffy."

The captain of Greyfriars bundled out of bed and into his trousers. He picked up a cricket bat from the table.

"If I get in a cosh with this it will stop the giddy burglar burgling for some time, I think," he remarked. "Downstairs, you say?"

"Yes. Will you take a light?"

"No; don't want to scare him off. Stay here."

"No fear!" said Harry. "I'm coming, too."

Wingate laughed shortly.

"Well, come on, if you like."

He stepped out into the gloomy corridor, the cricket bat in his hand. Harry Wharton followed him.

"Shall I call anybody else?" Harry whispered.

"No. We'll make sure there's a burglar first."

"But I tell you I heard him!"

"Perhaps you dreamed it," said Wingate. "Anyway, we'll make sure before we wake up the house. We don't want to make a big pother and get cackled at. Besides, if there's only one of him I can manage with this bat, I fancy."

"Good."

Wingate passed silently down the stairs. Harry Wharton kept close to him. The junior had brought no weapon, but he paused in the hall to take a walking-stick belonging to Mr. Quelch from the stand. Wingate went down the lower passage and looked into the other passages and into some of the studies. There was no sign of the burglar, and the captain of Greyfriars gave a grunt.

"I think you must have dreamed it, Wharton?"

"I am certain of what I heard," said Harry quietly. "But if there is a burglar here he has probably heard us, and is hiding. You will never find him without a light."

"True! I'll get a lamp."

And with a light glimmering before him Wingate resumed the burglar hunt. The two went round examining the doors and windows, but there was no trace of any of them having been opened.

Wingate paused at last, grunting again in a very expressive manner.

"You dreamed it, Wharton?"

"I did not."

"Well, it must have been some fellow wandering about, then. There's no sign where any burglar has entered," said the captain of Greyfriars impatiently. "Jolly good thing we didn't wake the house. We should be laughed to death. Let's get back to bed."

"I thought it best to call you—"

"Oh, that was quite right. But it's pretty clear it's a false alarm, and my feet are getting cold, so we may as well chuck it."

Harry caught his arm quickly.

"Hark!"

"My hat!" muttered Wingate.

Faintly from the darkness came a sound—the sound of a quiet footstep on the stairs.

"What do you think of that, Wingate?"

"By jove, it was somebody!"

"He was on the stairs—"

"Come on, kid!"

Wingate hurried on, holding the lamp up before him with his left hand and gripping the cane handle of the bat in his right.

There was no one to be seen when they reached the staircase again. Wingate went up three steps at a time. A faint creak was audible in the stillness.

"That's a door opening—"

"It's a door in the Remove dormitory," muttered Harry Wharton excitedly. "I know that creak. That was what I heard first of all."

Wingate gave a short chuckle.

"It's very likely some Remove fellow been out—"

"Let us see."

They hurried on to the Remove dormitory and entered. Wingate flashed the lamplight up and down the lofty room.

There was no trace of a burglar, and every bed was occupied.

Wingate looked closely at each face in turn, going from bed to bed. He had a strong suspicion that the author of the alarm was a Remove who had been making some midnight excursion for reasons best known to himself. But every boy in the dormitory was fast asleep.

There was no doubt upon that point. Wingate's experience of juniors was too long for him to be deceived in such a matter. He could have told at once if one of the boys had been shamming.

The Remove, with the exception of Harry Wharton, was safe and sound in the arms of Morpheus.

The captain of Greyfriars looked puzzled.

"What do you think now?" asked Harry Wharton quietly, as the captain of the school turned away from the sleeping Removes.

"It wasn't one of these kids, I think."

"But he came in here, by this door—"

"Then he dodged out by one of the other doors," said Wingate. "It's pretty clear that he's not here now."

Harry Wharton nodded. He looked up and down the room and under the beds, but there was no burglar.

"Anyway, it's not a burglar," said Wingate decidedly. "The fellow couldn't have any motive for coming upstairs again, and dodging through this dormitory. I suppose it's one of the youngsters playing a trick, and probably laughing in his sleeve all the time at the dance he's led us." The expression of Wingate's face became very grim. "I'll find out who that youngster is, too, and give him a lesson that will make him think before he starts in the funny business again. Get back to bed. I'm going."

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!"

Bob Cherry sat up in bed. The light on his face had awakened him, and he stared in amazement at Wharton and Wingate.

"Anything the matter, kids?"

"No!" grunted Wingate. "Good-night!"

"Good-night!" said Harry. The captain of Greyfriars quitted the dormitory. Harry slipped off his clothes. Bob Cherry was asking amazed questions, and Nugent and Hurree Singh were awake now. Harry explained in a few words as he got into bed. "It wasn't a burglar," said Bob Cherry. "Some giddy kid playing a little jape on us, I suppose." "One of our own Form, I expect," said Nugent. "Yes, rather!" "The ratherfulness is terrific," said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "I say, you fellows!" It was the piping voice of Billy Bunter, a few beds along the row. "It wasn't a Remove fellow," said Harry Wharton quietly. "Every fellow was asleep when we came in to look." "Might have been shamming." "I think not; and Wingate thought not." "Then it was probably somebody from the Upper Fourth," yawned Nugent. "I say, you fellows——" "Anyway, I'm going to sleep," said Nugent; and he turned over on his pillow. "I say, you fellows——" "Hallo, hallo, hallo! Is that you, Bunt?" "Yes, it is, Bob Cherry. What's the matter?" "Nothing!" "I mean, what's the row about?" "There isn't any row." "Well, what are you all awake for?" "Because we're not asleep, Bunt. Good-night!" "Really, Cherry, I think you might explain." "Somebody heard something, and thought it was something, and it was something else," Bob Cherry explained lucidly. "Now go to sleep, Billy, or you will get hungry!" "No, I don't feel at all hungry, Cherry. That's rather curious, too, as I am generally hungry when I wake up in the night. Of course, I could eat anything if you happened to have it in the dormitory. Jam tarts, or toffee, or——" "I haven't. Good-night!" "But what I want to know is——" Snore! "I say, Wharton——" Snore! "Nugent!" Snore! "I say, you fellows!" Chorus of snores. Billy Bunter grunted, and turned over, and began to snore, too.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

The Remove under Suspicion.

HARRY WHARTON was usually one of the first to awaken in the Remove dormitory at Greyfriars, but when the rising-bell went the following morning, he was still fast asleep. He started out of a dream as Bob Cherry shook him vigorously by the shoulder. "Hallo, hallo, hallo! Going to stop there all the morning?" asked Bob cheerily. Harry rubbed his eyes. "Has the bell gone?" "Yes, rather!" "The ratherfulness is terrific," remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "The honourable bell has rung clangfully, while the esteemed Wharton was still reposing sleepfully in the arms of Murphy!" "In the arms of what?" demanded Nugent, looking round with a wet face from his ablutions. "In the arms of the honourable Murphy!" "Ha, ha! You mean Morpheus, I suppose?" The Nabob of Bhanipur shook his head gently. "No, my esteemed chum, I do not mean Morpheus. According to the lessonful instructions I received from my honourable native professor in Bengal, it is Murphy. The excellent Wharton was still reposing in the honourable arms of Murphy——" "Well, up you get from the arms of the honourable Murphy," exclaimed Bob Cherry, "or else I shall squeeze this esteemed sponge down the back of your honourable neck." Harry Wharton laughed, and slipped out of bed. "I feel rather drowsy this morning," he remarked. "That's through spending the night in hunting for burglars who don't exist," said Bob Cherry. "Next time you hear a burglar you'll know that there isn't one, I hope, and stay in bed." "I say, you fellows——" "There was somebody wandering about in the night, at all events," said Harry Wharton. "Who it was I can't say." "I say, you fellows, has there been a burglary?" "No, Billy, there hasn't. Your toffee is still safe under the corner of the mattress." "That it isn't, Cherry; I woke up a little while ago and

ate it. I felt rather peckish, and thought I had better have a snack," said Billy Bunter.

"Wharton's last!" said Hazeldene. "Buck up, and we'll wait for you."

The chums of the Remove were the last to quit the dormitory. As they went downstairs, Harry Wharton observed several fellows with serious faces in conversation with Mr. Quelch, the master of the Remove, in the hall. They were Sixth Form prefects, and their expression showed that something was amiss.

"Some row on, I suppose?" Nugent remarked.

"Looks like it."

"The honourable Carberry has an expression of extreme scowlfulness," the nabob remarked. "Something has happened to disturb his august serenity."

The Removites entered the dining-room. There was a buzz of whispering at most of the tables. As there was no master yet at the Remove table, the Removites allowed themselves full freedom of conversation. The table was in a hum from end to end. Russell leaned over towards Wharton as he sat down.

"Have you heard, Wharton?"

Harry looked at him.

"Heard what, Russell?"

"About what happened last night?"

Wharton started.

"No. What is it?"

"Blessed if I know, but they are making out that there has been a burglary or something."

"My hat! A burglary!"

"Yes, or something of the sort. In the kitchen."

"The kitchen!"

"Yes, or the pantry, or larder, or somewhere."

"Are you joking?"

"Not a bit. Ask Desmond."

"Sure, and it's fact!" exclaimed Micky Desmond. "I heard Quelch talkin' about it to Wingate himself, you know. The prefects are goin' to look into it."

"More like a job for the police, I should think." "Faith, and ye're wrong. It's not valuables that have been stolen."

"What the dickens is it, then?"

"Grub!"

"What?"

"Grub!"

"It's a fact," said Skinner, joining in. "From what we hear, it seems pretty certain that somebody broke into the pantry last night, and boned some grub."

Harry Wharton laughed.

"Oh, I see! Some fellow has been robbing the cook! It's not a burglary!"

"Well, it will be jolly serious for the fellow when he's found out, that's all," said Bulstrode. "I heard one of the maids say that the lock of the pantry had been broken."

"By Jove! That will mean a row if it's true!"

"The rowfulness will be terrific!"

"Here's Quelch! Cheese it!"

Mr. Quelch came in, and took his place at the head of the Remove table. The master of the Remove was looking somewhat pale and worn, the effects of a recent illness. He had only a day or two before returned to Greyfriars to resume charge of the Form. In his absence they had been under the rule of a faddist Form master who had made various unwelcome alterations in their diet and their manners and customs, and the Remove were very glad to have Mr. Quelch back again. Mr. Chesham had been too "utter" for anything, as Bob Cherry put it. And since the return of Mr. Quelch, the Remove had been on their very best behaviour, to show him how glad they were to see him again.

The breakfast-table had resumed its normal appearance under the rule of the old master, and bacon and eggs were placed before the hungry Removites. Billy Bunter, who had suffered more than anybody else from the extremely simple life enforced by Mr. Chesham, basked in the sunshine of plenty once more.

Extremely good accord had reigned between Mr. Quelch and his class since his return, and now for the first time the boys saw their Form master's face darkly clouded.

"Quelchy looks as if he were waxy with us," Nugent whispered. "I don't see what we can possibly have done."

"Of course you don't," said Levison, in an undertone, with a very perceptible sneer upon his face.

Nugent looked at him quickly.

"What do you mean, Levison?"

"Oh, nothing!"

"You do!" said Nugent sharply. "You're hinting that I've been up to something to make Quelch waxy, after the arrangement we all agreed to about giving him an easy time for the next week or so. What do you mean?"

"I dare say Wharton could tell you."

"Wharton? How—"

"What do you mean, Levison?" asked Harry angrily.

"I'll—"

"Silence!"

Mr. Quelch's voice had an unpleasant edge to it, and the Remove table relapsed into dead silence at once.

The breakfast was finished without a word being spoken, and then the boys left the room, most of them looking uneasy. As a rule, the Remove were guilty of misdemeanours enough to justify frowns from their Form master, but just now they had an unusual sense of perfect innocence. Nobody had been breaking any rules; nobody had been late for class since Mr. Quelch's return to Greyfriars, and prep. had been done without fail, and unusual attention given to lessons. Under the circumstances, it was rather rough that Quelch should lose his temper with them.

And the Remove were looking very subdued as they filed into their class-room. They looked at Mr. Quelch out of the corners of their eyes. The Form master's face was hard and grim.

"Boys!"

"Hallo, there's a speech coming!" muttered Bulstrode.

"Shut up!"

"Boys, I have a few words to say to you before we commence morning lessons," said Mr. Quelch. "There has been an outrage committed during the night—an outrage which I should be very sorry to see traced to a member of my Form."

The Remove were silent and expectant.

"During the night," said Mr. Quelch in measured accents, "the pantry was broken open, and a large pie taken away."

"Phew!"

"My hat!"

"Silence! This pie was placed upon the kitchen table, and the purloiner ate it there, or most of it, leaving only a few fragments in the dish."

"Must have been hungry!" murmured Billy Bunter. "I can quite understand a chap doing it, too, if he was hungry, and had the nerve."

"Now," resumed Mr. Quelch, "you will see that this is not an ordinary breach of rules that can be dealt with lightly. The lock of the pantry was smashed, being forced open with an iron poker, and considerable force must have been exerted. This, added to the fact that so large a pie was almost wholly devoured, leads me to conjecture that there were, perhaps, two boys concerned in the matter—if not more."

There was a dead silence.

"Now," went on the Remove master, with emphasis, "if a boy in this Form was guilty of this outrage, I offer him an opportunity to confess at once."

Dead silence.

"If he confesses, he—or they—will receive a sound flogging as a punishment for this unexampled act of audacity."

"What a temptation!" murmured Bob Cherry. "I should think the guilty boulder would rush forward to seize a chance like that."

And there was a slight giggle from the boys nearest to Bob Cherry.

But a glare from Mr. Quelch froze the giggle.

"If the guilty party does not confess," said the Form master, in measured tones, "strict investigation will be made, and his guilt will certainly be brought to light. Then he will be more severely punished. It is very probable that Dr. Locke will expel him from Greyfriars; but, in any case, his punishment will be far heavier than if he adopts the manly course of confessing at once."

"There's a chance for someone!" murmured Bob Cherry. "You play up in a really manly way, and there's a flogging thrown in with no extra charge."

"What have you to say, my boys?"

The Remove were silent. Apparently they had nothing to say.

"I should be very glad," said Mr. Quelch, after a pause, "to think that the culprit would not be found in my Form. Unfortunately, the evidence—such as there is—seems to point towards the Remove."

"I could have told you that!" murmured Levison.

"Did you speak, Levison?"

"I, sir?" stammered the new boy in the Remove.

"Yes! Did you speak?"

"Only—only to myself, sir."

"And what did you say?" said Mr. Quelch grimly.

"N-n-nothing of any consequence, sir."

"You will repeat to me what you said, and I shall judge whether it is of any consequence," said the Form master.

"I—I—I only said—"

"Go on!"

"I—I said I could have told you so," said Levison reluctantly.

"Yes; I judged from the expression of your face, which I happened to catch, that you made some observation of that kind," said Mr. Quelch, with a grim smile. "I shall be pleased to hear what you know about the matter, Levison."

"I don't know anything about it, sir."

"Then what do you mean by saying that you could have told me that the evidence points towards the culprit being in the Remove?"

"I—I—I—"

"You will be quite frank with me, Levison."

"I don't think I ought to be called upon to sneak, sir."

Mr. Quelch compressed his lips.

"I do not look at it in that light, Levison. However, we will pass over the matter for the moment. Wharton!"

"Yes, sir!" said Harry.

"You were awake last night?"

"Yes, sir; at midnight!"

"Wingate has acquainted me with the circumstances," said Mr. Quelch. "When he learned that there had been a robbery in the kitchen, he thought it his duty to tell me all he knew. It seems that you woke him up about midnight, and that both of you looked for a burglar whom you thought you had heard, for half an hour or more."

"That is the case, sir!"

This was news to most of the Remove, who had been fast asleep during Harry's nocturnal excursion, and they looked at the captain of the Form with great interest.

"Now," said Mr. Quelch, "in the case of some boys in this form"—and his glance appeared to linger for a moment on Bulstrode, and then on Hazeldene—"I might have suspected this story of hearing a burglar to be a fabrication, devised to throw dust in the eyes of those investigating last night's affair. But I have every reason to believe you implicitly, Wharton. I know you to be an honourable lad, and I believe you to be incapable of a lie."

"Thank you, sir!"

"Therefore, do not imagine for a moment that I doubt your explanation," said Mr. Quelch. "But I think you made a mistake last night. It was not a burglar whom you heard, but the culprit who robbed the pantry."

"I suppose so, now, sir."

"It seems that you heard him open the door of the Remove dormitory?"

"Yes, sir; that was really what woke me."

"And you imagined it to be a burglar, or someone else, entering the dormitory from without, and that your calling out scared him away?"

"Yes, sir."

"But, as we know now that it was not a burglar who was abroad last night, but a lad whose object was to rob the pantry, can you perceive any reason why he should attempt to enter the Remove dormitory at all—if he did not belong to the Remove?"

Harry Wharton shook his head.

"No, sir, I cannot. If he came out of one of the other dormitories, I should have expected that he would go straight downstairs."

"Then is it not more likely that the door was opened, not from the outside, but from the inside, and that what you really heard was some member of this Form leaving the dormitory?"

Wharton gave a start.

He had not thought of that before, but it was really a simple explanation. Now that it was mentioned, he could see that it was in all probability true.

"I did not think of that then, sir."

"But now that you think of it—"

"It looks like it, sir."

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"Good! Later, after a fruitless search for the burglar, you heard someone go upstairs again, and tracked the sound to the Remove dormitory?"

"Yes, sir."

"The individual, whoever he was, entered that dormitory, but, so far as you know, he did not leave it again?"

"He might easily have done so without my knowledge."

"True! But no reason can be given why he should take the trouble to enter the Remove dormitory at one end and leave it by the other."

Wharton was silent.

"You see now," said Mr. Quelch, "how it is that the evidence points strongly towards the culprit being in the Remove. There is no evidence of the sort to point to any other dormitory. For my part, I may as well say I am quite convinced that the culprit is in the Remove."

The juniors were silent.

From the way the clear-witted Form master had worked out the evidence it seemed pretty plain that the burglar of the pantry was in the Remove, and there was a general wondering as to who it could be.

More than one accusing eye was turned in the direction of Billy Bunter.

Nobody would ever have suspected Billy of an action that required nerve and determination, but for the fact that it was a pie that had been taken by the unknown marauder. Bunter was more likely than anybody else in the Remove to burgle a pie.

"And now," said Mr. Quelch, "having explained to you that it is clear that the culprit is in this Form, I again offer him the opportunity of confessing, and thus clearing up this painful matter, and mitigating his own punishment."

"Buck up, Bunter!" muttered Bulstrode.

Billy Bunter glared round indignantly through his big spectacles.

"What did you say, Bulstrode?"

"Now's your chance, Owl!"

"Do you think I scoffed the pie?"

"Who else would do it?"

"Well, I didn't!"

"Rate!"

"You are talking, Bunter! What is it?"

"Bulstrode seems to think that I burgled the pantry, sir," said Billy Bunter indignantly. "He thinks I scoffed the pie."

"And did you?"

"I, sir? I only wish I had had the chance—I mean, I wouldn't do such a thing for worlds! I know what pie it must have been, because I saw the cook take it out of the oven yesterday, and—"

Mr. Quelch concealed a smile.

"Were you out of bed last night, Bunter?"

"Certainly not, sir! I'm sincerely sorry that you should attach any importance to this absurd suspicion of Bulstrode's. I didn't wake up last night till I heard Wharton and the others talking."

"That is quite true, sir!" said Harry Wharton.

"Possibly! Wingate also assured me that all the boys in the dormitory were asleep when he looked at them," said Mr. Quelch drily. "But it seems to me perfectly evident that at least one boy was pretending."

"And that one was Bunter," murmured Bulstrode.

"It wasn't, Bulstrode; I assure you—"

"Silence! As the culprit refuses to confess, the matter must be left where it stands. I can only repeat that it would be better for the guilty party to confess at once. Levison, have you any information to give me?"

"No, sir."

"It appears to me that you know something about the matter," said Mr. Quelch sternly. "Was it you who broke into the pantry?"

Levison stared.

"I, sir? Certainly not!"

"Very well. The matter will be investigated. We will now commence first lesson."

But there was little attention given to lessons that morning by the Remove. And, for the first time since his return, Mr. Quelch began to give out impositions right and left.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Billy Bunter does some Calculating.

"ROTTER!" said Nugent emphatically.

Nugent made that remark as the Remove crowded out of the class-room after morning lessons.

Relations had been strained between master and pupils, and impositions had fallen—if not like the leaves in Vallambrosa, at least quite thickly enough to fill up a great deal of leisure time for the Removites.

Nugent's remark was endorsed by all.

"The rottenfulness is terrific!" Hurree Jamset Ram Singh remarked. "The worthy instructor sahib seems to have got his honourable wool off this morning!"

"No wonder," said Harry Wharton, with a laugh. "Nobody was paying any attention to the lessons."

"Under the circumstances, that was natural enoughfully."

"But you couldn't expect Quelch to take it lying down."

"Perhapsfully not."

"What I say is, that the guilty party ought to own up," said Levison.

"We all say the same," agreed Bob Cherry. "Quelch has promised to let him down lightly; and the chap, whoever he is, really has a grand opportunity of getting off cheaply, if he comes out at once."

"Ratherfully!"

"Now then, Bunter," said Bulstrode, with a grin.

"I'm sincerely sorry, Bulstrode, that you should doubt my word. I certainly did not wake up last night till I heard Wharton and the others talking."

"Nobody but you would burgle a pie."

"I never even thought of it; and then, I shouldn't have had nerve enough to bust a lock besides!" said Billy Bunter, shaking his head. "Perhaps it was you yourself, Bulstrode."

"What are you saying, you young rat?"

"Perhaps it was you yourself, and you are trying to throw suspicion upon me, because I am known to have a healthy appetite. Ow! Leave go my ear, and stop shaking me like that! You'll very likely make my spectacles fall off, and if they break you'll have to pay for them."

"Let Bunter alone, Bulstrode," said Harry Wharton.

"Mind your own business!"

"Let him alone, you bully, or—"

"Do you think I am going to have him saying that I—"

"You said the same about him."

"That's different."

"I can't see it. Let him alone."

"Well, he's not worth licking," said Bulstrode, forcing a laugh as he released the fat junior. There was a gleam in Harry Wharton's eyes that the bully of the Remove did not like.

"It's rather beastly, getting on bad terms with Quelch again so soon," Bob Cherry remarked. "We were going to turn over a new leaf and be a model Form, to show everybody that it was only that ass Chesham we were bucking against, and that we knew how to keep order as well as the Fifth or the Sixth."

"And this has spoiled the whole thing."

"Yes. It's rough on us, because all our good behaviour the last few days goes for nothing now. We might as well have let things go."

"Yes; it does seem a waste," said Nugent; "all through some gourmandiser scoffing a pie in the middle of the night!"

"And it's pretty clear that it was a Remove fellow, too."

"It looks like it, at any rate."

"He ought to confess," said Harry Wharton.

"So I think," Levison remarked, with a sneer.

Harry Wharton swung round upon the new boy in the Remove.

"Look here, what are you driving at, Levison?" he said sharply. "You were hinting at something in class when Mr. Quelch caught you up."

"You can't say I sneaked to him."

"No; it seems to me that you made him suspect that you had a hand in last night's affair, by your confounded cleverness."

"You know whether I did or not."

"How should I know?"

"You were out of the dormitory."

"But I did not see the other fellow who was out."

Levison shrugged his shoulders.

"Was there another fellow out?" he said.

Harry turned scarlet.

"What you mean to say, then, is that I was the guilty party myself, and yarned about hearing a burglar, to cover up my own tracks?" he exclaimed hotly.

"I don't say so."

"But you are implying it."

"I only go on the evidence. You can't deny that that's what it looks like, anyway."

"And my word counts for nothing?"

"I don't see why it should count more than another's."

"I've got only one reply to a fellow who calls me a liar," said Harry Wharton, with blazing eyes, and his fist clenched hard.

Nugent pulled him back by the shoulder.

"Hold on, Harry!"

"Let me go!"

"Hold on! It's no good rowing about it, and the cad isn't worth licking."

Wharton gave a short laugh.

"Perhaps you're right. Let him go."

Levison shrugged his shoulders and walked away. It was evident that his suspicious mind was made up. Levison was

one of those fellows who always know a little more than anybody else, and whose pride it is that they are never taken in. And, like most suspicious persons, he had a way of jumping to wrong conclusions.

"Don't take any notice of the rotter!" said Nugent. "He can't help being an unpleasant beast. He'll get knocked into shape if he stays in the Remove, I fancy."

"Or knocked out of shape!" grinned Bob Cherry.

"Yes; one of the two. To come back to business, this is a most unpleasant affair. The ass who went so far as to break a lock to get at a pie ought to be kicked out of the Form! I can understand a jape or a raid; but that's going too far, and is a little too much like Bill Sykes to suit me."

"I say, you fellows——"

"Just what I think," said Hazeldene. "The fellow ought to own up. It's pretty certain that he's in the Remove. I wish we could find him out."

"I say, you fellows——"

"Oh, don't bother, Billy!"

"But, I say, I want to speak to you, you know. I hope you don't suspect me of having burgled the pantry last night," said Billy Bunter, looking distressed. "I should be sincerely sorry to be suspected, because I didn't do it, you know. I knew that pie was there, and I went to sleep dreaming about it, and I dreamed that I ate it, as a matter of fact; but I never went near the pantry. You fellows know that I was asleep till you woke me up."

Harry Wharton patted him on the shoulder.

"That's all right, Billy. We believe you."

"I'm glad of that, Wharton. Of course, if the pantry hadn't been locked, I should very probably have raided the pie. I thought about it, but I knew it wouldn't do to bust a lock, and I quite gave up the idea."

"You young cormorant! You had a big feed at tea-time last night, and another at supper," said Bob Cherry.

"Yes; but I've never really recovered from that awful time under Chesham," said Billy Bunter, blinking distressfully through his big glasses. "He cut down our food till I was reduced to something like a shadow——"

"Ha, ha! A jolly substantial shadow."

"Well, I know that I felt like wasting away. It had a disturbing effect upon my nerves, which I don't know if I shall ever recover from. I believe the effect on my constitution will be lasting. All I can do is to keep myself well fed up, and never go short of anything I fancy. If I am careful on that point, I hope to pick up in time."

"Well, you're attending to the cure pretty well, I think!" grinned Bob Cherry.

"I have done my best; not because I am fond of eating, but from a sense of duty, Cherry. And that reminds me, I have run out of cash."

"Really?"

"Yes, really. I was expecting a postal-order this morning, which would have set me up again, but there has been some delay——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's no laughing matter, you fellows. It's rather a serious disappointment, for Mrs. Mimble won't trust me with a farthing's worth of anything!"

"Knows you, perhaps?" suggested Nugent.

"Well, I think it's very inconsiderate. I asked her what she would feel like if I fell down dead from hunger in her shop, and she said that if I did anything of the kind she would complain to the Head. I thought it heartless of her!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What I was thinking is, that I could do a little matter of business with one of you fellows——"

"We're all sticking to our tin, Billy."

"Oh, I don't want you to give me anything!" said Bunter loftily. "If you think I've come to you cadging, this discussion may as well end."

"Right-ho!" said Harry Wharton. "It's lasted long enough. Come on, kids, and let's get a quarter of an hour at the nets."

"Hold on, Wharton! Don't be in such a hurry. As I was saying, I haven't come to you cadging. I should be sincerely sorry to do anything of the sort. It's a mere matter of business. I want you to cash a postal-order for me."

"But you haven't got one."

"No; but it is coming by to-night's post at the latest——"

"Then you can wait till to-night's post."

"So I could, Nugent; only I'm afraid for my constitution. After what I suffered at that faddist chap's hands, it is a marvel to me how I keep up at all. I have to be very careful to get enough to eat. Now, the postal-order will be for at least ten shillings——"

"How do you know?"

"Well, it can hardly be for less. Still, as I want to treat you generously in this matter, I'll fix the figure at eight. Say

eight shillings. Well, you give me six shillings now, and you take the whole of the postal-order when it comes."

"When?"

"You get two shillings interest on six shillings for a day's loan," said Bunter. "That's at the rate of 33 odd per cent. Call it 33 per cent. That's for a single day. There are three hundred and sixty-five days in the year——"

"Have you worked that out on paper?"

"Oh, don't make rotten jokes when I'm in the middle of an important calculation. Three hundred and sixty-five times thirty-three is twelve thousand and forty-five."

"How do you know?"

"I did it in my exercise-book. Say twelve thousand, for the sake of round figures. Now, you see how it works out."

"Blessed if I do!"

"Why, you lend me six bob, and you receive interest for it at the rate of twelve thousand per cent. per annum," said Billy Bunter.

"My hat!"

"Two shillings interest for a loan of six shillings, for a day, is interest at the rate of twelve thousand per cent. per annum."

"You're too generous, Bunt."

"Well, it is generous, Nugent, but not too generous, considering how very badly I want the ready money," said Bunter. "Of course, like all moneylenders, you get a high interest to pay for the risk. There's just a slight risk that the postal order may not come to-night——"

"Ha, ha, ha! Any risk that it may not come at all?"

"Oh, no, that is quite out of the question."

"Anybody feel inclined to start in business as a Shylock, with a capital of six shillings, and twelve thousand per cent. per annum for a start?" asked Bob Cherry, looking round with a grin.

Harry Wharton laughed, and shook his head.

"I haven't six shillings, anyway," he remarked.

"Same here," said Nugent; "and twelve thousand per cent. is really too much. I couldn't accept it."

"The toomuchfulness is terrific," said Hurree Jamsat Ram Singh. "The only set-off against the toomuchfulness of the honourable interest is the undoubted factfulness that the esteemed postal order will never arrive."

"The interest covers the risk," urged Billy Bunter. "I tell you that there are jolly few fellows who get a chance to lend out six shillings at twelve thousand per cent."

"Go and give some of them a chance, then," said Nugent, yawning. "I say, are we going down to the cricket?"

"Wait a minute, you fellows. If you're too mean to accept my terms, say what interest you'd like. I'll make it twenty thousand per cent——"

"Why not make it a million per cent.?" said Bob Cherry gravely. "It wouldn't cost you any more to settle."

"Really, Cherry——"

The nabob was feeling in his pockets. Billy Bunter blinked at the chums through his big spectacles in a rather indignant way.

"Well, I must say you're awfully mean," he remarked.

"You see me wasting away before your eyes, and you won't accept twelve thousand per cent. interest on a small loan. When Bulstrode was in our study, before Cherry came, he used to lend me tin——"

"All I have in the world," said Bob Cherry, "is a French penny and a pegtop. You can have either of them."

"Fortunately, I have some plentiful cashfulness," said the nabob. "I will not accept the esteemed Bunter's fat-headed offer, but I will advance him the loanfulness of the semi-crown——"

"The what?"

"The semi-crown," said the nabob, extending a half-crown to the willing fingers of Billy Bunter. "You are welcome to that honourable coin, my worthy Bunterful chum."

"Of course, it's understood that this is a loan, to be repaid with interest," said Billy Bunter. "I could not possibly accept it under any other conditions. If you could make it up to six shillings, Inky, it would save me working out a fresh calculation."

"That is the totalfulness of the honourable loan."

"It would be simpler to stick to round figures. Put another tanner to it, and then it will be exactly half the original amount of the proposed loan."

Nugent added a sixpence to the nabob's half-crown.

"Good!" said Bunter, wrinkling his brows thoughtfully.

"Lemme see. I shall return you four shillings for this three, and that will be at the same rate of interest. Twelve thousand per cent. per annum. You will be making a jolly good thing out of it, but the ready money is so necessary to me that I don't mind. I will hand over principal and interest when my postal order comes, and you two can settle it between you."

"Right-ho!" said Nugent, grinning.

"The righthoffulness is terrific."
 "And now let's go and get some cricket," said Hazeldene.
 Billy Bunter made a direct line for the tuck-shop, and the chums of the Remove, laughing heartily, made their way down to the cricket-field.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Under a Cloud.

THE mystery of the pantry formed an inexhaustible topic of conversation in the Greyfriars Remove that day, and in the other Forms as well. The Upper Fourth, headed by Temple, Dabney & Co., had, of course, a great deal to say about the matter. The prefects, who were supposed to be investigating the occurrence, growled audibly at the trouble, and snapped at the Removites. And the Remove were worried.

Strained relations with Quelch, after a sheer waste of several days in good behaviour, worried them. The chipping of the Upper Fourth worried them, too. The doubt that hung over the Form worried them. It was a serious matter, and it was impossible to divine who was the guilty party.

Levison shrugged his shoulders knowingly when the matter was discussed. He looked like one who was sure he knew all about it, though, as a rule, he confined himself to hints.

Most of the others were quite puzzled. Some agreed with Levison, some opined that Billy Bunter was the culprit. Nobody had any theory to advance which had much to be said in its favour.

The Remove were under a cloud. Suspicion rested upon the whole Form until the matter was cleared up, and Mr. Quelch's face remained grim.

The boys retired that night, still wondering about the mysterious occurrence. Carberry, the prefect, came to see lights out. He growled as he looked into the dormitory, in his usual amiable way:

"Don't keep me waiting, you rats!"

"Don't wait," said Bob Cherry. "Take your face away and bury it, old chap. That's all we ask of you."

"None of your cheek, Bob Cherry. Get into bed. And if there's anybody in this Form wandering about to-night, he'd better look out for squalls."

"There's a good chance for somebody," said Billy Bunter. "There's a lot of cold rabbit-pies in the pantry."

"How do you know?" demanded Nugent.

"Oh, I happened to see them! I asked the cook to let me have one of them, but she refused quite rudely."

"Ha, ha!"

"I don't see why she couldn't have let me have one. I went down to see if the lock had been mended, you know."

"Thinking of going there, I suppose," said Bulstrode.

"Well, if the door had been left unfastened, you know, a fellow might have had a rabbit-pie. But the lock has been mended; and, of course, I wouldn't raid the pantry, anyway," said Bunter, suddenly remembering that there was a prefect present.

"Of course you wouldn't!" snarled Carberry. "I dare say you are the young scoundrel all along, if the truth were known."

"Not at all, Carberry. I'm sincerely sorry that you should entertain such a suspicion. You are quite mistaken."

"Oh, get into bed!"

"Certainly; but as I was saying——"

"Get into bed, and mind there's no wandering about to-night. We prefects have been put to enough trouble already."

"Certainly," said Bunter. "You see——"

"Shut up, and get to bed!"

The door was open, and Carberry gave it a kick and slammed it. Billy Bunter had taken off his glasses, and he blinked round, and without his glasses he was blinder than an owl. He heard the door shut, and concluded that the prefect was gone.

"My hat," he said, "that silly ass Carberry has gone out without turning the light out! Ill-tempered beast, isn't he? What are you making faces at me for, Cherry?"

"Ill-tempered beast, am I?" exclaimed Carberry, striding towards the shortsighted junior. "You cheeky young rascal!"

Billy Bunter jumped clear of the floor in his amazement.

"I—I—I say, Carberry, I thought you were gone, you know! I—I didn't mean to call you an ill-tempered beast."

"What did you mean to call me, then?" demanded Carberry.

"I—I didn't really mean to call you anything. The words slipped out. What I really meant was that you were a jolly good-tempered fellow, whom we all like and respect!"

The prefect burst into a laugh in spite of himself.

"You young ass!"

"You see, I wouldn't call you an ill-tempered beast—at least, when you could hear me!" said Billy Bunter. "Besides, I'm too polite to always say what I think, and——"

"You young imbecile, get to bed!"

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"Certainly, Carberry! I would do anything to oblige a fellow I like as much as I do you, and——"

The prefect made a threatening gesture, and Billy Bunter bolted into bed like a scared rabbit into a burrow.

Carberry turned out the light, growled again, and quitted the dormitory.

"Ill-tempered beast, isn't he?" said Bunter. "Just like him to make me think he was gone when he wasn't."

"You young ass, it's a wonder he didn't lick you!" said Nugent. "It would have served you jolly well right."

"I don't see it. I am awfully hungry, Nugent, old man. They are getting very skimpy with the supper at this school. Might as well be under Chesham again if we're only going to have bread and cheese for supper."

"You ate enough for a couple of navvies."

"Really, Nugent——"

"Rats! Go to sleep!"

"I'm afraid I'm too hungry to sleep. I was going to have a feed after tea, only my postal order hasn't come——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, it's a disappointment, and it's rather unfeeling of you to laugh. Now, I sha'n't be able to pay Inky and you the money I owe you, with the interest——"

"Hallo!" broke in Bulstrode's voice. "What's that?"

"Nothing to do with you!" said Nugent.

"What is it, Billy? Has Nugent been lending you money at interest?"

"Yes; at twelve thousand per cent!"

"At what?"

"Inky and Nugent lent me three bob between them, at the rate of twelve thousand per cent. per annum interest."

"My only hat! So that lot in Study No. 1 have started as moneylenders, have they?"

"Nothing of the sort," said Harry Wharton impatiently.

"Inky and Nugent gave Billy the money, and he's not going to repay it. It's only his silly gas about paying interest."

"Really, Wharton, you've got no right to say anything of the kind. I'm going to repay the loan, with interest at the rate of twelve thousand per cent. per annum——"

"Rats!"

"The ratfulness is terrific."

"Oh, you can't crawl out of that!" said Bulstrode. "You've been lending money at interest, and you ought to be jolly well sent to Coventry, you set of rotten Shylocks! You'd be expelled if the Head knew!"

"I say, you fellows, of course I sha'n't tell the Head. You ground me down a bit in the matter of interest for the loan, but I shall regard it as a point of honour to keep the whole transaction a secret."

"Shut up, ass!"

"Yes; but really——"

"Oh, it's all right," sneered Bulstrode; "you can't keep it a secret from me, anyway! I know what Wharton and his gang have been up to now——"

"Hold your tongue!" said Harry

"Sha'n't! I say——"

"If you say another word on that subject, Bulstrode, I'll have you out of bed in a jiffy!" exclaimed Wharton angrily. Bulstrode yawned.

"Guilty conscience, I suppose! Never mind, I'm going to sleep."

"You'd better!"

"The betterfulness is terrific."

Bulstrode yawned, and pretended to sleep. The desultory talk of the dormitory ceased at last, and Bulstrode's snore became a genuine one. One by one the Remove dropped off to sleep, till silence and slumber wrapped the dormitory.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Another Raid.

CREAK!

Harry Wharton started.

It was a close, hot night, and Harry had been sleeping very lightly. The thought of the unsolved mystery was in his mind, too, and mingled with his dreams. When he started into wakefulness he was thinking of it, and the creak of the opening door made him start.

He sat up in bed with a curious thrill at his heart.

The dormitory was very dark, and he could see nothing. What the hour was he had no idea, but from the silence of the house he knew that it must be very late.

Creak!

The door had closed again.

"My hat," murmured Harry, straining his ears to listen; "it's the rotter again, whoever he is! The question is, has he gone out of the dormitory, or come in?"

He listened intently.

If the night-wanderer had left the room, Harry had

only to strike a match and discover by the empty bed which of the boys was absent.

But a sound of fumbling with bedclothes warned him that the wakeful one was not out of the room. Harry had awakened in time to hear his return.

Harry reached out for his jacket, to feel for a box of matches. He heard a faint sound of someone getting into bed, and he felt in a hurry for the matches, but for a moment could not find them.

The box was in his hand at last.

Scratch!

The flare of the match glimmered through the darkness of the dormitory. Harry stepped out of bed and looked quickly round him. So far as he could see, every bed was tenanted by a slumbering Removite. He lighted a candle-end and went along the row, looking at each sleeper.

But all were asleep, and if one was shamming, he was doing it so well that Harry Wharton could not detect the imposture.

The junior paused, baffled.

He had no doubt that the marauder had been at work again, and that the morning would show a fresh raid on the pantry. There could be no doubt that the culprit was a Removite. But which?

There was a yawn from Bob Cherry's bed.

"Hallo, what's that light?"

"It is only I," said Harry quietly.

Bob Cherry rubbed his eyes and sat up.

"What's the matter, then?"

"Someone has just come into the dormitory and got into bed."

"My hat!"

"I was trying to see which it was, but I can't. The rotter is pretending to be asleep, I suppose?"

"That means another raid below stairs, Harry."

"I suppose so."

"Well, I don't see what could be done," said Bob Cherry, after a pause. "If you knew which one it was, you couldn't give him away to the masters."

"But I could give him a thundering good hiding, which would stop him from getting the Form into disgrace," said Harry Wharton grimly.

Bob Cherry chuckled.

"I say, you fellows—"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! There's Bunter woke up now, and he won't let us go to sleep again to-night!" yawned Bob Cherry. "Don't answer him."

"I say, you fellows, have you been raiding the pantry?"

"No," said Harry Wharton, laughing. "Go to sleep, Billy."

"Of course, I don't doubt your word, Wharton; but if you have been raiding the pantry, I should like to have some of the cold rabbit-pies!"

"Oh, shut up and go to sleep!"

"I feel that I ought to have something to eat. When I wake up at night I am generally hungry, but I don't feel hungry now. That shows that there is something wrong with my constitution. It is all due, of course, to the way I suffered under that ass, Chesham. I feel that I ought to have something to eat to keep me up."

"You don't want to be kept up at this time of night," grinned Bob Cherry. "Go to sleep."

"I mean to keep me up physically."

"Oh, go to sleep!"

Harry Wharton got into bed, and soon sank into slumber again. There was no hope of solving the mystery that night, and he was tired. He did not wake again till the rising-bell was clanging unmusically through the morning air.

Billy Bunter, for a wonder, was first out of bed in the dormitory. He came towards Harry's bed as the hero of the Remove was rising.

"I say, Wharton," he said, in a mysterious whisper.

"Well, what is it, Billy?"

"You don't mind if I ask you a question?"

"No."

"You won't get waxy?"

"Certainly not."

"Well, where are the rabbit-pies?"

"The what?"

"The rabbit-pies. You and Cherry couldn't have eaten them all last night. I've got up with a fearful hunger on me, and you know we never get enough breakfast! If you'd let me have one of the rabbit-pies—"

"You utter young ass!"

"I think you might! I suppose you collared plenty while you were about it?"

"I told you last night that I hadn't raided the pantry—"

"Yes; but I think you might let me have just one!"

"Oh, get away!"

"Just half of one, Wharton; that won't hurt you!"

"You confounded young ass!" exclaimed Harry angrily. "I tell you—"

"You promised not to get waxy."

Harry laughed in spite of himself.

"Look here, you young ass," he said quietly; "I suppose it's no good arguing with you, and you're not worth licking; but I didn't go to the pantry last night, and I don't know anything about the rabbit-pies. Don't you believe it?"

"Yes, of course; I believe anything you tell me, Wharton."

"Well, then, get off the subject, for goodness' sake!"

"Certainly, Wharton. I'd do anything to oblige a fellow I like as much as I do you, and I'll get off the subject if you like. All the same—"

"Well, what?"

"All the same, I think you might let me have one of the rabbit-pies!"

Harry made a threatening gesture and Billy Bunter scuttled off. The Removites dressed and went downstairs; the famous four in an expectant mood. Nugent and Hurree Singh had been told of the incident of the night, and they agreed with Harry's opinion that it could only mean another raid on the larder.

That something had happened was evident from Mr. Quelch's face when they met him in the dining-room. The Remove master had a brow of thunder, and his answer to the boys' greeting was very short and brusque.

Breakfast went off rather dimly; a thundercloud hanging, as it were, over the Remove table. The boys expected the storm to burst as soon as they were in the class-room, and they were not disappointed.

"Boys!"

Mr. Quelch rapped out the word in tones that electrified the class. The Remove were all attention at once.

"Boys, there has been another outrage in this school! The pantry was broken open last night, the lock being forced in exactly the same manner as before; and there is little doubt that it was the same culprit!"

The Remove were silent.

"This repetition of a disgraceful proceeding," went on Mr. Quelch, his voice trembling with anger, "disgraces this Form in the eyes of all Greyfriars! The culprit must be discovered!"

Dead silence.

"It seems impossible to me that the rascal is not known; at least, to some of you," pursued Mr. Quelch; "I leave it to the Remove to find him out! Mind, the individual— whoever he is—is in the Remove, and it is the duty of the Form to see that these depredations are exposed and punished. Until the culprit is discovered, the Remove is detained for every half-holiday!"

There was a general gasp.

To visit punishment upon the whole Form for the fault of a single member was certainly drastic; yet, under the circumstances, it was difficult to say what else the Form master could have done.

The boys looked at one another in wrathful dismay.

"Every half-holiday!" murmured Bob Cherry. "My hat!"

"I think the culprit ought to confess," said Levison.

"Go ahead, then."

"Better tell Wharton that."

"Liar!" said Bob Cherry cheerfully.

"Silence!" said Mr. Quelch. "Once more I offer the delinquent a chance of confessing, and thus putting an end to a scandal. Let him speak!"

No one spoke.

"I regret very much," said Mr. Quelch, in measured tones, "that the delinquent has not sufficient manliness to own up to his fault, and save the rest of the Form from punishment!"

There was a murmur.

"You will note, then, that the Form is detained for every half-holiday until the guilty party is discovered," said Mr. Quelch. "If this is not effective, I shall have to try more drastic measures. We shall now commence."

The Remove was silent with dismay.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Billy Bunter is not Convinced.

"IT'S a shame," broke out Bulstrode fiercely, the moment the Lower Fourth came out of the class-room; "it's a rotten shame!"

"It's beastly!" said Levison. "The guilty party ought to own up!"

"Do you know who it is?" asked Bob Cherry, turning upon him suddenly.

Levison shrugged his shoulders.

"Oh, of course, I don't know anything about it!"

"Then shut up!"

"I shall shut up when I choose!"



"What are you all awake for?" asked Bunter, sitting up in bed. "Because we're not asleep, Bunt. Good-night!" answered a voice from the darkness.

"You will shut up now," said Bob Cherry; "or I'll shut you up! You can take your choice about it."

Levison put his hands in his pockets and walked away whistling. Billy Bunter nudged the wrathful Bob under the arm.

"I say, Cherry—"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!"

"Can I speak to you a minute?"

"Yes; go ahead."

"It's private," said Billy Bunter, looking round at the crowd of juniors, who were standing about discussing the new development on the part of the Form master. "Come along under the elms."

"Oh, rats! No time for jaw, Billy."

"It's important."

"Bosh!"

"It's about last night."

Bob Cherry started, and looked attentively at the Owl of the Remove.

"Do you know anything about that, Billy?"

Billy Bunter grinned.

"You know I woke up when you and Wharton were talking, Cherry."

"Yes, I know you did. What about it?"

"Well, come into the Close and I can speak."

"If you raided the pantry, Billy, you'd better not tell me about it, as I should probably consider it my duty to show you up."

"But I didn't. Do come!"

"Oh, very well!" said Bob resignedly.

He accompanied the Owl of the Remove into the Close. Billy Bunter was looking very mysterious, but as he frequently looked mysterious over trifling matters, Bob Cherry did not attach much importance to that.

"Now, you see," said Bunter, stopping under the elms, "this is how it is—"

"Buck up!"

"One good turn deserves another—"

"I suppose so. Cut it short."

"If I do you a good turn, you ought to do me one—"

"Go ahead! What on earth are you driving at?"

"I've spoken to Wharton, and he cut up rough about it, though he promised not to get waxy. I'd rather you kept your temper."

Bob Cherry laughed.

"I'll keep my temper, Billy, if only you won't be so precious long-winded. What on earth have you got in your silly noddle this time? Get it out!"

"Well, I woke up and heard you and Wharton talking."

"I know you did."

"Wharton won't give me any of the rabbit-pies."

"Eh?"

"Wharton won't give me any of the rabbit-pies."

"What?"

"You heard what I said, Bob Cherry. Wharton won't give me any of the rabbit-pies. Are you going to give me some?"

"What rabbit-pies?" demanded the amazed Bob.

"Those you scoffed from the pantry last night. You can't possibly have wolfed them all, and I think—"

"You utter ass—"

"That is what Wharton said, but it's no argument. One good turn deserves another. If I keep the secret I think I ought to have some of the rabbit-pies."

"You shrieking idiot!"

"It's no good calling me names, Bob Cherry. It's not fair that I should have all the trouble and risk of keeping the secret, and not have any of the grub."

"But we didn't raid the pantry."

"If you gave me a couple of the pies—"

"I tell you we didn't—"

"Well, just one, then."

"You confounded young fool, we didn't—"

"I'm awfully hungry, and dinner is never big enough. It's beastly mean of you to want to keep the grub all to yourselves, and when I'm keeping a secret for you, I think—"

"But I tell you—"

"Just one, or even half if you haven't many left," said Billy Bunter persuasively. "If you are mean about the matter, I may feel it my duty to give you away."

"I tell you—"

"After all, it's a disgrace to the Form, and you ought to be shown up. Ow—leave go, you beast! If you shake me like that you'll make my spectacles fall off, and if you break them you will have to pay for them."

"There, you young ass! If you say another word about rabbit-pies I'll wring your neck next time," said Bob Cherry, and he left the Owl gasping for breath.

Bob was half angry and half laughing when he rejoined his chums. He explained to them the mysterious communication Bunter had had to make.

"The young ass," said Wharton. "Nothing will get the idea out of his head that we raided the pantry, and he firmly believes that we've got a lot of rabbit-pies hidden away somewhere."

"It may be deuced awkward if he spreads the yarn among the fellows."

"As he certainly will."

"The awkwardfulness would be terrific. It is a pity that we cannot gag the esteemed Bunter, or amputate his honourable tongue."

"I say, it's rough about the half-holidays being stopped," said Nugent. "The whole Form is wild about it, and no wonder."

"The rotter, whoever he is, ought to own up," said Wharton, his brows knitting angrily. "Mr. Quelch has left it to the Remove to find him. I vote that we find the beast and make an example of him!"

"Ratherfully!"

"If we found him out and ragged him, and explained to Quelch, I think he'd be satisfied without our giving the rotter away to him."

"Very likely."

"That's the idea, then. The rotter seems to be making a regular habit of these visits to the pantry. He may go again to-night."

"My hat! We'll keep watch, then."

"That's what I was thinking of. Mind, not a word to a soul. We'll keep watch from our beds, without giving a hint of our intention, and then the rotter, if he gets out of bed, won't have any suspicion we're on the watch—and we can nail him."

"The idea is a wheezy good one!" exclaimed the nabob heartily. "The rascally bounder will fall into the trapful snare, and we shall give him the showing-up."

"And a jolly good hiding, too," said Nugent.

Harry Wharton nodded.

"Yes, he wants that, whoever it is. As a matter of fact, I haven't the faintest idea who it can be, except that I know it's a Remove fellow. I should have suspected Bunter, but he hasn't nerve enough, and besides, he has proved his innocence by suspecting Cherry and myself."

"Yes, he was certainly in deadly earnest about those rabbit-pies," said Bob Cherry, laughing.

"Then it might be Bulstrode, only he has plenty of money, and doesn't need to scoff grub from the larder. He could have all the rabbit-pies he wanted at the tuckshop."

"That's so."

"Then there's Levison. He seems to be pretty busy, trying to throw suspicion upon us. But he's a suspicious beast, anyway. I don't think it was Levison."

"Then who could it have been," said Nugent, looking puzzled. "I'm quite in the dark. I suppose it's not Vaseline up to his old tricks again, is it?"

Harry Wharton shook his head.

"No. Hazeldene is going straight enough now. He has been as straight as a die ever since that moneylender business."

"The straightfulness of the esteemed Hazeldene is terrific."

"It wasn't Skinner, either. He wouldn't risk it. I can't imagine whom it was. Micky Desmond is reckless enough to do it, but he would have owned up like a shot to save the whole Form from being punished."

"Oh, yes, it wasn't Micky!"

"What about those foreign chaps?" said Nugent. "Fritz Hoffmann is something like Bunter in the eating line, and he—"

"Well, it might have been Hoffmann," said Harry Wharton thoughtfully, "or it might have been Adolphe Meunier, the French kid. But it's not fair to suspect them without an atom of proof."

"If we keep watch to-night that will settle it."

"Yes, if the raider goes raiding again. Let's get down to the nets now."

"I say, you fellows—"

"Run along and play, Billy."

"I say, I'm hungry, and dinner's some time off yet. I should like one of those rabbit-pies, Wharton."

"Oh, get away!"

"I say, Cherry, if you let me have just a snack—"

"Oh, cheese it!"

"But I say, you fellows, I think I ought to have one of the rabbit-pies—"

"What's that?" said Levison, coming by and stopping.

"What's that about rabbit-pies, Bunter?"

"Oh, nothing, Levison! They can be as mean as they like, but I'm not going to give them away."

"You young ass!" said Harry Wharton, and he walked away with his chums towards the cricket-field.

Billy Bunter blinked after him through his big glasses.

"I call that mean," he said. "I hear that there were seven or eight rabbit-pies taken, and they can't have eaten them all."

"So it was Wharton?" said Levison, with a grin.

"I'm not going to give him away to you, Levison," said Billy Bunter magnanimously. "He can be as mean as he likes, but I shall keep his secret."

And Bunter walked away. He left Levison grinning; and in the course of about ten minutes Levison had acquainted the whole Remove with what he had learned from Bunter.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Wharton Is Suspected.

THE Famous Four came in only just in time for dinner, and it was not till after that meal that they noticed anything unusual afoot. But when the Removites went out of the dining-hall, a change could hardly fail to be noticed.

Most of the fellows were looking curiously at the chums, and some of them were openly sneering.

"Something's up," said Nugent, catching the strange expression on many faces at once. "I wonder what the matter is."

"The upfulness is terrific," said Hurree Singh. "Is it that the esteemed Bunterful ass has been talking in his honourable, fatheaded way?"

"Looks like it."

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! What's the matter with you asses?" called out Bob Cherry. "Russell! Skinner! What's the matter with you?"

"Nothing," said Russell.

"Why don't you own up?" said Skinner.

"Own up about what?"

"The rabbit-pies."

Bob Cherry's face went scarlet.

"Skinner! Do you think I raided the pantry?"

"I know you did!"

"How can you know anything of the sort, ass?"

"Bunter heard you talking about it when you came back to the dormitory."

"Bunter is an ass!"

"Well, you did it, and you know you did."

"I didn't!"

"Of course, I believe you—I don't think!"

"Look here, Skinner—"

"Oh, own up!" said Skinner, walking away with Russell.

Bob Cherry turned an angry and excited face towards his chums. They were all looking rather grim.

"This is nice, isn't it?" exclaimed Bob. "I thought that young ass would be up to something of the sort."

"The assfulness of the esteemed rotter is terrific."

"What's going to be done?" growled Nugent. "The fellows ought to have more sense. They ought to know us better. Hallo, here they come!"

A dozen or more of the Remove, with Bulstrode and Levison at their head, came up to the chums in the Close. Levison's face wore a sneer, and Bulstrode was looking threatening. It was the first time since his fall that the

ally of the Remove had found any faction in the Form to back him up against Harry Wharton.

"Look here," said Bulstrode, in a blustering tone, "what are you chaps going to do about this?"

"About what?" asked Harry Wharton quietly, but with a glint in his eyes.

"About the Form being detained because you won't own up."

"That's it," said Levison. "I said all along that Wharton was the party, and now we've got proof."

"He ought to be shown up," said Price.

Wharton gritted his teeth.

"Look here——"

"Oh, we've had enough of your gas!" broke in Bulstrode rudely. "What we want to know is, are you going to own up?"

"That's it; own up!"

"I'm not speaking to you, Bulstrode. I'm speaking to these chaps, whom you're trying to lead by the nose. Fellows, I didn't have any hand in the raid on the pantry, and I don't know anything about it. I think my word ought to be good enough for you. If any fellow here has ever known me to tell a lie let him stand out and say so."

The Removites looked at one another.

"Well, if you say out plain that you didn't do it," began Price lamely.

"I do."

"Honour bright?" asked Russell.

"Yes, honour bright."

"Well, I believe you, for one. But what about Bunter?"

"Bunter is a silly ass. He woke up and heard Cherry talking to me, and jumped to the conclusion that we had been on a raid."

"He says you were both out of bed," said Levison.

"I was out of bed, certainly. I had heard the fellow, whoever he was, come into the dormitory and get into bed, and I wanted to see who it was."

"And did you?"

"No."

"A likely story," said Bulstrode.

"I hope you fellows believe me," said Wharton, without looking at Bulstrode. "I think you know I'm not the fellow to lie, or to refuse to own up if there were any owning up to be done."

"Oh, that's all right," said Russell. "We believe you, if you put it like that. It's not a thing much in your line, anyway. I'd advise you to shut up Billy Bunter, that's all. He thinks you did it."

"And he's jolly well right," said Levison.

"That's what I say," said Bulstrode emphatically. "Wharton ought to own up to Mr. Quelch, and get the Form out of a fix."

"I would own up like a shot if I had done it."

"Well, now's your chance."

Harry's eyes glinted dangerously.

"I suppose every fellow is entitled to his own opinion," he said quietly, "but I won't have doubt cast on my word in my presence, Bulstrode. You can think what you like, but if you say that again I'll knock you flying."

"Rats!" said Bulstrode.

But he walked away with Levison without pursuing the subject. The Removites dispersed, discussing the matter. Harry's words carried weight with most of them, but there was still a lingering doubt in some minds.

"We'd better look for that silly cuckoo, Bunter, and muzzle him," said Bob Cherry wrathfully. "Hallo, Hazeldene! Do you believe this yarn the fellows are spreading?"

"Not if you deny it," said Hazeldene.

"Well, we do deny it, from start to finish."

"That's all right, then. Levison has been getting it out of Bunter, and making him say all sorts of things he didn't really mean to say," said Hazeldene. "Bunter is feeling injured because he hasn't had any of the rabbit pies."

"The young ass! Let's go and muzzle him," said Bob Cherry, and in a few minutes the chums of the Remove ran the chatterbox of the Form down in the Close. Billy Bunter did not seem alarmed at their approach. He beamed upon them through his big spectacles.

"You've changed your minds?" he asked.

"Eh?" growled Bob Cherry.

"You're going to let me have some of the rabbit pies? I think you ought, as I'm keeping the secret. You see, I really ought to tell Quelch, but I'm keeping it strictly dark out of regard for you."

"You silly ass!"

"I don't think you ought to call me names when I'm really taking a lot of risk and trouble to do you a service. I've had my dinner now, and I don't feel so hungry, but I could do with a rabbit pie—— Don't shake me like that, Cherry——"

"It's not Cherry, it's I," said Harry Wharton, shaking the fat junior wrathfully. "You have been spreading a yarn about us——"

"Oh, is it you, Wharton? I'm rather short-sighted, you

know. I wish you wouldn't shake me. You might make my glasses fall off, and then——"

"You've been telling the fellows we raided the rabbit pies——"

"No, I haven't."

"Levison got it all out of you."

"Well, I suppose he might have gathered something from what I said, but he won't tell Quelch. Unless you like to own up, Quelch won't know that you robbed the pantry."

"But we didn't, you silly cuckoo."

"I suppose the fact of the matter is that you've eaten all the rabbit pies, and there aren't any left——"

"We never had any."

"Well, I can understand a fellow scoffing the lot, of course, if he's hungry," said Bunter, "but I don't see why you should cut up rough because I've asked you for some. Why couldn't you say they were all gone?"

"Oh, it's no good talking to him!" exclaimed Harry Wharton, laughing. "The young ass firmly believes it, and he hasn't sense enough to understand. Come on."

"I say you fellows——"

The chums of the Remove walked away. Billy Bunter blinked after them and shook his head solemnly.

"Fancy Wharton eating up half-a-dozen pies, him and Cherry by themselves," he murmured. "It's enough to make them ill; and considering that I'm guarding their secret and saving them from getting into a row, I think they might be a little better-tempered towards me. If all the pies are gone they might stand me one at the tuckshop. But fellows are so selfish!"

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

A Startling Discovery.

THE Remove went to bed in a bad humour that night. The following day was a half-holiday, and unless Mr. Quelch relented, the bright summer's afternoon would have to be spent in the stuffy class-room instead of in the green fields or by the shining river. The thought was enough to worry the Removites, for Mr. Quelch was quite certain not to relent unless the culprit was discovered.

Harry Wharton and his chums had not said a word about their intention to keep watch. The thought had crossed other minds, but it was not easy for healthy lads, tired with the day's work and play, to remain awake all night. But Wharton, at least, was determined.

"You chaps can go to sleep if you like," Wharton remarked in a low voice. "You can trust me to keep awake, and to call you, if necessary."

"Well, if you think you can do it I'll accept your offer," said Bob Cherry. "I'm feeling jolly sleepy."

"I'll keep awake," said Nugent.

"And I also," said the nabob. "The wakefulness of my esteemed self will be terrific."

The chums went to bed, and for a time there was a buzz of talk in the dormitory as usual. When all was silent Harry Wharton sat up in bed and leaned back against the hard head-rail. He was not likely to drop off to sleep in that position.

Ten boomed out from the clock tower.

"Asleep, you fellows?" said Wharton in a low voice.

"I'm not," came back in drowsy tones from Nugent's bed.

"And I alsofully," said the nabob.

Bob Cherry was fast asleep, and so were the rest of the Remove. The quarters chimed away, and eleven boomed out. There was a sound of someone shifting in bed, and Harry Wharton started and listened. But it was only Nugent turning over to go to sleep.

Wharton looked through the dense gloom of the dormitory towards the nabob's bed. He caught a glimmer of two bright eyes—as bright as a parrot's in the gloom. The Nabob of Bhanipur was still wide awake.

Neither of the wakeful chums spoke a word now. It was near time for the raider to get out of bed, if the raid was to be repeated. And it was extremely probable, in Harry's opinion, that the immunity that had attended the two raids might encourage the unknown raider to make a third. If he made it he was lost, for sleep would not visit Harry Wharton's eyes that night.

Twelve!

The strokes boomed out from the clock tower.

Still there was no sound in the dormitory. Harry could see the bright eyes of the nabob in the gloom. His heart sank a little. The loss of sleep meant weariness and lassitude on the morrow, and apparently it was all for nothing.

But just after the quarter past twelve had chimed out the silence was broken by an unmistakable sound.

Harry started and listened. He heard bedclothes pushed back, and a faint footfall on the floor.

Someone was getting out of bed.



It was too dark to see from which bed the sound came, but there was no mistaking it. Harry Wharton felt a thrill. The raider was up at last!

He did not move. His idea was to allow the fellow, whoever he was, to get fairly out before spotting him, in order that there could be no doubt whatever about the matter. He heard the creak of the door.

The raider was gone from the dormitory.

Harry Wharton stepped quickly out of bed and struck a match. The nabob's sleepless eyes met his.

"He's gone!" whispered Harry.

"I heard him clearly."

"Call the others while I see which bed is empty."

"Goodful!"

The nabob slipped out of bed and called Bob Cherry and Nugent quietly. They rose at once and began to slip on their trousers. Harry Wharton lighted a candle-end and looked along the beds. He gave a violent start as he came to an empty one, and stared at it in amazement. Then he came back quickly towards his chums.

"Who is gone?" asked Bob Cherry.

"Billy Bunter!"

"What?"

"It's a fact! It's Billy!"

"My only hat!"

Bob Cherry stepped quickly towards Bunter's bed and looked at it. It was empty, and the clothes had been thrown back and were still warm. Billy Bunter was gone!

"The young villain!" muttered Nugent. "Then he was taking us in all the time!"

Harry Wharton looked troubled.

"I can't understand it," he said, in a low voice.

"Bunter was certainly in earnest about the rabbit-pies."

"But if he is the raider—"

"He may only be following the raider's lead."

"True!"

"Or there may be something wrong. Let us follow him, anyway. Wait a second while I light my bicycle lantern."

Wharton had placed his bicycle lantern in readiness. It was soon alight, and the chums of the Remove quitted the dormitory and closed the door behind them. With cautious footsteps they passed along the corridor and descended the stairs. Billy Bunter had a good start, and he was out of sight.

The famous four halted at the head of the kitchen stairs.

"He's down there!" whispered Nugent. "This door here is always fastened of a night, and you see, it's wide open now."

"He's not got a light, then."

"I suppose he knows the way pretty well by this time," murmured Bob Cherry, with a chuckle.

"Hark!"

There was a dull sound from below. The Removes knew what it was, distant as it was in the deep gloom.

"It's the lock!"

"He's busted it again!"

"The cheeky young bounder! It's too late to stop that now! There will be a fearful row about it to-morrow!"

Bob Cherry stepped on the stairs.

Wharton pulled his arm.

"Don't go down, Bob!"

Bob Cherry looked round.

"Why not?"

"He might give us the slip in the passages down there. We don't want a long hunt in the dark, and perhaps wake the house. He can't come back any way but this. We can wait for him here."

"Good!" said Bob, stepping back. "Better put the light out, then."

"Yes; and I'll light it again as soon as he's here," said Harry, "when it's too late for him to dodge."

The chums of the Remove waited. In a few minutes low footfalls were heard on the kitchen stairs. The raider was returning!

They crowded back. The footsteps sounded strangely uncanny in the darkness, where not a glimpse could be obtained of the walker. The unseen raider came out of the lower staircase and walked along the passage.

Harry Wharton struck a match and lighted the lantern again in a twinkling.

"Now then!" he exclaimed.

The light flared out. It fell upon a form clad in pyjamas—a plump form well-known to the chums of the Remove.

It was Billy Bunter!

But, curiously enough, although the light fell full upon his face, and the chums of the Remove were round him, Bunter did not stop or speak. He walked straight on, looking neither to right nor left, and in spite of themselves the juniors felt an uncanny influence, and receded from his path to let him pass.

Bunter's eyes were half-open, and fixed on vacancy. He

had a large cake under his left arm, showing what he had been downstairs for. He walked straight on without a sound.

Harry Wharton held out the lantern, and the light shone on his face, and showed no sign of consciousness there.

Then the juniors understood!

The unknown raider was Billy Bunter—and Billy Bunter was walking in his sleep!

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

The Somnambulist—A Narrow Escape.

BILLY BUNTER walked straight on, and the chums of the Remove looked at one another in dismay and amazement. They had not been prepared for anything like this. They had not known that the fat junior was a victim of somnambulism; but it was quite clear now. The mystery of the pantry was explained clearly enough.

"I say, we'd better stop him," said Nugent.

Harry Wharton shook his head.

"I've heard that it's dangerous to awaken a sleep-walker," he said. "It may have some dangerous effect on him. Better let him get back to bed."

"The betterfulness is terrific."

The chums of the Remove silently followed the somnambulist down the passage.

Nugent gave a sudden start.

"He's not going upstairs!"

"By Jove!"

It was true! Bunter had stopped at the great door in the hall, and removed the chain and pushed back the catch.

The Removes hesitated. Bunter was going out into the Close, doubtless with some dreamy fancy in his sleepy brain that it was safer to get to a distance with the purloined cake.

To wake him might have ill consequences, but—

While the chums were debating the matter in their minds the great door swung open, and the junior disappeared.

"Come on!" said Wharton quickly.

They hurried out into the Close. For some minutes they could see nothing of the somnambulist. Then the nabob's keen eyes caught a glimpse of white in the moonlight. The moon was climbing over the ivy-clad clock-tower of Greyfriars, and, once outside the house, it was not difficult to see.

"There he is!"

Harry Wharton caught his breath quickly.

"Look! Do you see what he is doing?"

"By Jove! He's climbing the old tower!"

For a moment the chums of the Remove stood petrified.

In that dim corner of the rambling old Close stood the ivy-covered ruins of an ancient tower—one of the oldest relics of the original abbey of Greyfriars. The clock-tower was a comparatively modern structure, though it numbered centuries in its age. The ruined tower lay, a black mass of crumbling masonry and clinging ivy, fifty feet high in the dim moonlight. Bunter was climbing the ivy, with the cake tucked under one arm. Awake, he would have shrunk from such a climb, even without anything to carry. But a somnambulist knows no fear.

"We must stop him!" gasped Harry Wharton. "Good heavens! A fall there means death! He must be stopped at any risk!"

"Right-ho! Come on!"

The chums of the Remove dashed towards the ruined tower at top-speed.

But Bunter was already a dozen feet from the ground when they reached it, and they stopped in helpless dismay.

To wake him now might be fatal!

He would be certain to fall, and a fall meant terrible injury on the hard ground—if not death.

They could only stand in utter dismay, and watch the progress of the somnambulist as he climbed the ivy, in momentary terror of seeing him fall.

It was certain that the fuss that had been made about the robberies of the pantry had lingered in the mind of the sleep-walker. Some curious idea of getting the loot into a place of safety, where he could eat it undisturbed, had driven Bunter out in the small hours of the night.

"He will do it!" muttered Nugent.

"Stand ready if he falls," said Harry. "We can't do much, but we may break his fall."

The chums of the Remove stood with craning necks, watching.

Higher and higher went the climber, till he reached the top of the old wall, where a low stone parapet surrounded the ruined tower. Over this the ivy clambered thickly. The somnambulist drew himself up on the parapet, and there he stopped.

Harry Wharton gave a gasp of relief.

He had climbed that tower once, and he knew that the old roof was broken in in many places, and that for a somnambulist to step upon it was almost certain death.

But Bunter's present position was one of awful peril.

He sat on the parapet, with his legs dangling in the ivy, and a sheer drop of fifty feet below him.

"Heaven help him!" murmured Nugent.

Harry Wharton set his teeth.

"We must help him!" he said quietly.

"You cannot reach him."

"I could climb the ivy on the other side of the tower——"

"The roof is full of gaps, and shaky all over."

"I can risk it."

"You can't!" Nugent was pale as death. "It's death, Harry; the roof wouldn't bear you! It's no good two going instead of one!"

"I'm going to try——"

"You can't! You sha'n't! Anyway, you couldn't reach him! If you touched him, he'd slip off the parapet, and then——" Nugent broke off with a shudder.

"I couldn't get near enough to touch him," said Wharton. "I could only get near by crawling round the parapet on the other side—and it's broken away in places. If I could sling a rope round him——"

"Lasso him, do you mean?"

"Yes!"

"He'd drag you down, too—to death!"

"It must be risked!" Harry spoke with quiet decision.

"Look here! You fellows go and wake Mr. Quelch, and bring him out here. I'll get a rope out of the wood-shed, and climb the ivy on the other side."

"Wait till Mr. Quelch comes——"

"He would want to stop me. Besides, Bunter may fall at any moment. If he should wake up there, he would be frightened to death, and would be certain to fall."

"I suppose so, but——"

"Look at him!" muttered Bob Cherry.

They looked up again. Bunter's figure was clear in the moonlight. He was eating the cake. He had broken off a huge portion, and laid it down beside his knee—in space. The lump of cake came whizzing downward, and broke into fragments on the ground at the feet of the Removites. Bunter, munching away at what remained, was quite unaware of what had happened.

"I'm going," said Harry shortly.

He hurried away towards the wood-shed. Nugent ran towards the house, to bring Mr. Quelch; and Bob Cherry and Hurree Jamsat Ram Singh remained watching. Harry had the rope in a few minutes, and he came back towards the ruined tower.

Bob Cherry caught him by the arm.

"Think first, old fellow——"

"I've thought, Bob. Give me a bunk up!"

The next moment Harry Wharton was climbing the ivy. It was thick and strong at the back of the old tower, and the active junior went up swiftly, the rope slung over his shoulder.

He climbed to the top, and threw one arm over the parapet. The moon was clear above the clock-tower now, and glimmering in silver light upon the scene.

Wharton rose to his feet. The parapet was a foot wide, and covered with ivy. The roof of the tower glimmered in the moonlight, riven by black gashes and gaps. It was death to tread it.

Harry looked across. Billy Bunter was still seated there, his legs dangling over space, munching away at the cake. He had almost finished the cake now, and when he came to the end it was probable that he would feel for the piece he had laid down. Harry could imagine what would happen when he started groping for it—in space!

The brave lad drew a deep breath. He was risking his life at every movement he made now, but he did not hesitate.

He went slowly along the ivy-covered parapet on hands and knees, with the rotten roof on one side of him, and a sheer drop of fifty feet on the other.

Closer and closer he crept to the somnambulist, till a gap in the crumbled parapet stopped him. He could get no nearer. There was no help for it. If he had climbed up close to Bunter, he would almost certainly have startled him into falling, and both would have gone down to death. When the gap in the masonry stopped him, he was within six feet of the somnambulist.

He sat astride of the wall, with his face turned to Bunter, and made a noose at the end of the rope. Harry Wharton had practised casting the lasso, as an exercise, in the Greyfriars gym., and he was somewhat expert. His skill would stand him—and Billy Bunter—in good stead now.

Bunter had finished munching the cake, and his right hand was groping out for the piece he had laid down, and which had fallen into the Close.

Harry set his teeth hard.

Not finding the cake, Bunter was reaching out further;

bending forward more and more. It was only a matter of seconds now before he slipped from the parapet.

Harry caught a glimpse below of half a dozen white faces upturned. Mr. Quelch was there now, and the Head, and Wingate, and several others, with the chums of the Remove. They were watching in terrible anxiety.

Bunter reached further forward—over space! There was a gasp of horror from below; a whizz of a rope from above. The noose dropped over Bunter's head and arms, and caught round his waist. Harry had taken a turn of the loose end of the rope round a projection close at hand. The junior was slipping from the wall, when the jerk of the tightening rope pulled him back upon the parapet.

And Billy Bunter awoke.

Harry, his face white as death with fear—for Bunter, not for himself—held on to the rope. If Bunter fell, he might sustain his weight—he might not—but he would never let go the rope.

"I say, you fellows——"

Bunter blinked round him. He was without his glasses, and without them he was as blind as an owl. He evidently had not the faintest idea where he was.

"I say, you fellows"—a tremor was coming into his voice—

"I—I say! Where am I? What has happened?"

"It's all right, Billy!"

Harry Wharton tried to speak in his usual tones, but his voice was husky, in spite of himself.

"Is that you, Wharton?"

"Yes, it's all right, Billy! It's only a little game, you know! Don't be scared; I'm looking after you!"

"That's all very well, Wharton; but I don't like being taken out of bed for a little game! I'm not strong, as you know, and it's bad for my constitution. I went to bed hungry, but I think I've been sleeping pretty soundly. I dreamt I was eating a cake, you know. Where am I? I can't see without my glasses!"

"It's all right, Billy; don't move!"

"Well, where am I, then? Why, we're in the open air! I—I— Oh!" A whimper was creeping into his voice.

"We—we're on the old tower; I know the ivy! We shall be killed! You had no right to get me up here, Wharton!"

"I've got a rope round you, Billy; you're quite safe! I'm going to let you down again!"

"I—I—I— Oh, dear, we shall be killed!"

"It's all right, Billy! I know it's rough on you, but I'll stand a feed in the tuckshop to-morrow morning—honour bright!"

"Well, that's decent of you; though you ought to have let me have some of those rabbit-pies!"

"You shall have as many rabbit-pies as you can eat!"

"Good! I dare say a dozen will be enough for me! I can't see very well, but I suppose there's no danger if you've got that rope safe! I don't like tricks like this, though; they might end seriously!"

"Oh, it's all right; think of that feed to-morrow morning!" said Harry, glad to say anything that would remove Billy Bunter's thoughts from his terrible peril. "Look here; I'll let out the rope slowly, while you climb down the ivy. Nugent will climb up and help you down. He's coming up already, and they're getting a ladder, too!"

"Oh, all right, Wharton! Hold that rope tight!"

"I've got it."

Billy Bunter began to climb down the ivy. Harry paid the rope out slowly. Nugent, clinging to the ivy, got a grip on Bunter with one hand, and helped him. Mr. Quelch and Wingate had reared a ladder against the tower. It reached up only half-way, but Bunter was soon at the top of it, and then the descent was easy. He landed in the Close, shaking in every limb, and looked amazed at finding the Form master and the Head there.

"Take him back to bed at once, and don't explain to him till the morning," said Mr. Quelch, in a low voice, to Nugent.

"Yes, sir."

And Nugent linked his arm in Bunter's and led him away. Harry Wharton, on the parapet of the tower, made his way back to the spot where he had climbed up. The relief turned him almost sick and giddy for some moments, and he rested—lying on his chest—for a minute or two ere he commenced the descent. But he was quite himself when he swung down the ivy, and dropped to the ground.

Mr. Quelch grasped him by the hand. There was a suspicious moisture in the eyes of the Form master.

"My brave lad," he said, gripping Harry's hand very hard; "my brave lad, we are all proud of you!"

And Dr. Locke shook hands with the boy.

"You have saved Bunter's life, Wharton!" he said, with

deep emotion in his voice. "I can only repeat your master's words—we are all proud of you!"

And Bob Cherry and Hurree Singh said the same, as they walked back to the Remove dormitory with Harry Wharton.

It was a nine days' wonder at Greyfriars. The mystery of the pantry was fully explained now, by the discovery that Billy Bunter was a somnambulist. Harry Wharton was the hero of the hour, and he deserved it. He had risked his life for Billy Bunter. The clearing-up of the mystery, of course, relieved the Form of the "gating." There could be no question of punishing a sleep-walker, either.

Billy Bunter was the most amazed of all when he learned the facts. He had been firmly convinced that he had been taken up the ruined tower for a "jape" by the chums of the Remove, and he was inclined to be incredulous at first, when the true explanation was given him.

"Well, I suppose it's true, if you say so," he said at last. "I know I walked in my sleep when I was a kid. I suppose my fearful sufferings under that faddist Chesham started it again—going without grub, you know, and all that. I've never really had enough to make me feel quite satisfied since that awful time, and I suppose it preyed on my mind. It's curious, too! I suppose that accounts for my not waking up hungry in the morning, too. Speaking of being hungry, I'm hungry now, Wharton! What about that feed?"

"What feed?"

"Why the one you promised me last night on the tower! You remember; I was to have as many rabbit-pies as I could eat!"

"Why, you young cormorant," exclaimed Nugent, "that was only to keep you quiet, so that you wouldn't break your neck!"

"That's all very well, Nugent; but I don't suppose I should have broken my neck, anyway, and Wharton is a fellow of his word! What about the feed, Wharton?"

Harry Wharton laughed.

"Come along," he said, "let's go to the tuckshop; and if you clear out half Mrs. Mumble's stock, you may leave the pantry alone to-night! Come on!"

And Billy Bunter came on, and, as the feed was unlimited, it is needless to add that he really distinguished himself!

THE END.

(Another splendid long, complete school tale, dealing with the chums of Greyfriars, next Tuesday, entitled "The Reformation of Greyfriars," by Frank Richards. Please order your MAGNET in advance, Price 1/6d.)

GRAND TALE OF ARMY LIFE.



145 WORDS THAT WILL TELL YOU WHAT HAS TAKEN PLACE.

The story opens with a review of the Redminster Cadet Corps, led by young Lieutenant Jack Dashwood. The proceedings are interrupted when the Headmaster receives a telegram asking him to send Jack home at once, as his father—Colonel Sir Harry Dashwood—is dangerously ill. Dick Vivian goes with his chum, and soon after their arrival at the house the Colonel passes away. Finding he has been practically disinherited in favour of his Uncle Dominic and Cousin Leonard, Jack enlists in the 25th Hussars under the name of Howard, and is soon promoted to corporal. He fights Bill Sloggett, a recruit, and defeats him. Through this act he incurs the hatred of Alf Sligo, who swears to champion Sloggett. Tom has a shock when he hears that his cousin, Leonard, is attached to the 25th, as second lieutenant, and is about to inspect the horse-lines. (Now go on with the story.)

Degradation!

During the few moments that Corporal Tom Howard had been busy elsewhere, Alf Sligo had made search for a lost hoofpick, and his search had taken him to the neighbourhood of Howard's mare. When he came back to his own post, he was still empty-handed, but there was an evil leer on his pasty face, and he cast a glance at Bill Sloggett as he stood to attention, his knock-knees pressed together, and his splay feet almost at right-angles.

The sun shone on a bright gold band, on a brand-new forage-cap, and a tall, good-looking officer came along the expectant line of men and horses.

He had an eyeglass screwed tightly into his eye, and it seemed to give him some trouble.

He stopped repeatedly as he advanced, escorted by a ser-

geant, and wherever it was possible to find fault, he found it.

His cavalry stride was even more pronounced than that of the junior major, whose action was the pride and glory of the 25th. And the regimental sergeant-major, who remembered the stride of Sir Harry Dashwood, made some subsequent comparisons between uncle and nephew, in the seclusion of the sergeants' mess that would have caused Leonard Dashwood's cheek to redden.

All this while, Corporal Tom Howard had stood rigidly at attention beside his mare, looking straight before him, and nerving himself for the ordeal.

"It's coming—it's coming!" he kept whispering through his set teeth, as every halt the officer made prolonged the agony.

And then it came; and, all his resolves vanishing like smoke in the actual presence of his cousin, Jack Dashwood gazed at him, and the glass fell from Leonard's eye.

The officer grew deadly pale for an instant, but repressed the inclination to start back, and Sergeant Clavering mistook his silence for surprise at the new face.

"Corporal Howard only returned from leave last night, sir," he said quickly, adding, in his anxiety to do his friend a good turn: "Smartest man in our squadron, sir."

"Is he?" said Leonard Dashwood, with a grimace-like contortion of his features, and a sarcastic ring in his tone. "What do you call that, eh?"

And he pointed with his whip to the mare's mane.

Clavering's brow puckered, and Tom Howard flushed scarlet.

The mare's mane was full of chaff—dusty particles of most unmistakable chaff.

"This comes of fraudulent enlistment—under age, Corporal Sir John Dashwood!" said Leonard, in a low voice that trembled with delirious joy, as he pretended to

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bend down and examine the offending spectacle. "I think it is my turn now, eh, corporal?"

Tom Howard made a half-stride towards him, raising his clenched fist involuntarily. And Clavering, who could not help seeing the action, seized him by the elbow.

"Are you mad?" he said.

"I should rather think he must be drunk!" sneered Mr. Dashwood, fixing his eyeglass, and giving an evil smile. "Take him to the guard-tent, and put him under arrest, Sergeant Clavering. You were witness to the intended assault." And Dashwood's voice was as full of meaning as an egg is of meat. "In the meantime, we will see if there are any more of these smart men in the squadron."

Every head in the squadron turned, as if someone had pulled a string, as Jim Clavering and his prisoner marched down the lines to the guard tent.

"What the thunder did you do that for, Tom? Have you lost your senses?" said the sergeant, when they had got out of earshot. "You've met Mr. Dashwood before?"

"Yes, I have met him before," answered the corporal, in a far-away voice. "Tell me this, Jim; what does a man get for enlisting under age?"

"Not much, you bet, if he's a smart soldier!" said Clavering.

"And what will the chief give me for this morning's work?"

"You will be reduced to the ranks for a moral certainty," said the sergeant gravely. "It all depends what the officer says when you are up on the carpet."

"H'm; I don't think he will say much!" said Tom. "I will see it through, and await developments. You said you'd stand my friend, Jim? If ever a man wanted a pal, I do! I wonder who'd been fooling with the mare's mane?"

"What about Bill Sloggett?" said the sergeant.

"I don't think so," said Tom. And then he was handed over to the charge of the guard, and went into the tent and sat down and took his head in his hands; and, now that he had time to think and look into the future, Corporal Howard felt very wretched.

The colonel of the 25th Hussars was a spare-built man, with a long row of medal ribbons on his left breast, well set-up, active and sinewy, and a magnificent horseman; and, being in a particularly amiable frame of mind that morning, he responded briskly to the salutes of the sergeant-major and orderly-room clerk, and took his seat at the little knee-hole desk.

"Well, sergeant-major, anything important this morning?" said Colonel Greville.

"Yes, sir. There's only one charge, but I am sorry to say it's rather serious! Mr. Dashwood has placed Corporal Howard, of 'B' Squadron, under arrest, for threatening to strike him in the horse lines just now."

The colonel raised his eyebrows and looked at the sergeant-major.

"Great heavens! What is the meaning of this?" said the chief. "The lad is full corporal in ten months, and one of the likeliest youngsters we have in the regiment! Is Mr. Dashwood here?"

Lieutenant Dashwood came into the orderly-room as the chief spoke, saluted, and screwed in his eyeglass; and through the doorway came the delinquent, in charge of Sergeant Clavering and a trooper. The colonel scrutinised the prisoner closely, and then turned to his accuser.

"What is this I hear, Mr. Dashwood? Am I to understand that Howard has threatened you?"

"Yes, sir; he certainly did threaten me, and would have struck me if Sergeant Clavering had not held back his arm!" And Leonard, in a clear, well-bred voice, related the circumstances.

"What have you to say, prisoner? Was it your intention to strike Mr. Dashwood?"

"It was, sir."

The colonel sat back in his chair and gasped.

"This is the first time you have been before me, and I cannot understand it, Howard. I never suspected you of possessing a particularly violent temper! Perhaps you will be good enough to tell me what the dickens you mean, sir?"

The corporal riveted his eyes on the straight parting on the top of the colonel's head, and maintained a stony silence.

"Will you throw a little light on the affair, Mr. Dashwood?" said the chief, rather angrily. "I have had such a remarkably good opinion of this man's capability and conduct, that I am quite at a loss to account for his behaviour. Did you—I mean were you a little severe, Mr. Dashwood, when you pointed this thing out?"

Leonard's face, in spite of the restraint he was putting on himself, flushed and paled; and the colonel's eyelids closed down a little, and he looked at him sharply.

"Do you know this man, Dashwood?" he interrupted quickly, before Leonard could speak. And the prisoner drew in his breath so sharply that Clavering and the trooper both heard it.

"I never saw him before in my life, sir!" said Leonard. And Tom Howard felt his heart give a great leap.

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"There's something I do not understand," said the chief testily, taking up a quill and writing some words on a blue form. "I shall treat this matter as one of insubordination. You are reduced to the ranks, Howard, and confined to barracks for a month. Take him away, sergeant!" And the chief continued to write so hastily that his pen spluttered and blotted the paper.

"I think, sir—" began Leonard Dashwood, as the prisoner left the orderly-room.

"The incident is closed," said the colonel; "it is not a bit of use thinking! I have had occasion to notice, Dashwood, that your manner is particularly high-handed with the men; and I am pretty certain that, not knowing Howard to be a perfect gentleman, you unwittingly exasperated him, and made him forget his present position. This sort of thing won't do in the 25th, Dashwood, and I must request that there be no more of it!" And the chief turned such a severe eye on the lieutenant, that the latter saluted mechanically and withdrew.

Somehow his triumph had not been all that he could have desired, and, as he strode away, he bit his lip until the blood came.

"Perhaps I have been in too great a hurry," he thought to himself as he went to his quarters. "Still, I have a big hold over him, and, by heavens, whatever the cost and whatever the consequences, I will make his life a perfect curse, or my name is not what it is!"

And his mind going back to the incident on the terrace at Dashwood Hall, he recalled the exceeding sharpness of the gravel with which he had come in contact, and, turning into the officer's mess, he drank a whisky-peg at one gulp, and smiled to himself in satisfaction.

When Dashwood reached his quarters he opened his letter-case and wrote to his father, grinning savagely as his pen travelled over the paper. And when Lawyer Dashwood received it, he, too, lay back in his chair and placed the white tips of his fingers together and smiled on the oak casing of his office ceiling for a good half-hour, to the exclusion of all other business.

But when the elder man had to some extent gratified his revenge, his legal mind suggested sage caution, and his letter to Leonard made that young man pause as he realised the justice of his father's remarks.

"Yes," muttered Leonard; "the old man's right, and I must be very careful. Jack has evidently too many friends in the regiment, and I could see that the colonel was suspicious the other day. But, oh, to think of it!" And lying back in his chair he laughed aloud. "Only to think of Jack Dashwood—Sir Jack Dashwood—cock of the walk at Redminster, liked by everybody, petted by everybody, and now absolutely under my thumb!"

While the officer was gloating over his miserable triumph, the men were talking of the matter in a very different strain.

The canteen was full of it, and the horse lines were full of it, and they talked of nothing else on main guard. And then Trooper Alf Sligo, seizing an opportunity when he chanced to be alone with his hero, Bill Sloggett, unbosomed himself of the great secret that he had kept in his own breast so long that it had begun to absolutely hurt him.

"Bill," he whispered; "bet you a pot you won't guess the rights of that matter!"

"What matter?" replied Bill Sloggett, who was not in the best of tempers that morning.

"Why, about 'Oward! D'yer know who shoved that 'andful of chaff into 'is mare's mane?"

"No," said Bill Sloggett, opening his eyes.

"I did!" said Alf Sligo, chuckling in anticipation of the praise he was about to receive. But to his intense astonishment, Bill Sloggett immediately knocked him down.

"You dirty dog!" said Trooper William Sloggett, standing over the prostrate coward with fists clenched and eyes blazing.

"What did you do that for?" whimpered Sligo, picking himself up gingerly. "I thought I was 'elping yer to get a bit of yer own 'back!" Whereupon Bill Sloggett knocked him down again.

"Now, look here, young 'un," said Bill Sloggett, raising his voice as his temper got the better of him; "don't you meddle in matters where you ain't got no concern! Jest leave me to settle my own business in my own way, else I'll break every bone in yer body, yer miserable—"

And then, dropping his hands to his sides, Bill Sloggett went over to the canteen, his face as black as a thundercloud, leaving Alf Sligo staring after him, a crimson blotch on his pasty cheeks, and a very wicked glitter in his fishy eyes—one of which was presently to turn a beautiful black.

A touch on his shoulder made him start. A touch on his shoulder always suggested that the police were after him, and Sligo sprang round with a little cry, and then came to attention. It was Leonard Dashwood, who, coming through

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the tents, had witnessed the incident and overheard some of the conversation.

"What does all this mean, my man?" said Mr. Dashwood, screwing in his eyeglass. "You fellows seem to be a pretty violent crowd; do you all take after that man Howard? Is he a particular friend of yours?"

"Friend of mine, sir?" snarled Alf Sligo. "No; he ain't no particular friend of mine, and I reckon he got what he deserved!"

Leonard Dashwood looked hard at the unprepossessing hooligan before him, and drew a two-shilling piece from his pocket.

"Better go and get something for that eye of yours; and don't let me find you brawling in the lines again," he said, with a peculiar look at the trooper.

Sligo saluted obsequiously, and went away, clutching the florin.

"Now, what's 'is game?" he muttered. "'E ain't particularly friendly with Tom 'Oward neither, I reckon! I'll watch this!"

And as the lieutenant went his way, he, too, smiled to himself, and saw that future possibilities might arise out of that morning's work.

Said the colonel to the adjutant, that day after Tom Howard's degradation:

"What do you think of young Dashwood, Vavaseur?"

And Captain Vavaseur, tipping the ash off his cigar, looked down at his boots and replied:

"He seems very keen on his work, sir!"

"That is not what I mean, Vavaseur," said the chief drily. "Do you like him?"

Captain Vavaseur smoothed a wrinkle out of his coat-sleeve, and looked at the colonel with a twinkle in his eye.

"Candidly, sir; I don't!"

"Neither do I!" said the chief. And that was the end of it.

In the sergeant's mess the same question was put by the regimental sergeant-major, and the reply was identical with the adjutant's; only expressed much more forcibly.

"Like him, major?" said one of the sergeants. "No; I'm hanged if I do! We don't want any old women in the 25th!"

"Old women?" laughed one of the others. "I'd rather have an old woman than a young cad, any day! What do you say, Clavering?"

"I say nothing," said that individual; "for the simple reason that perhaps I know more than you chaps." And the mess, having a high opinion of Jim Clavering's common-sense, said nothing, but looked unutterably wise.

And so, with a bursting heart, Tom Howard reverted to the ranks, with its nominal 13d. a day, its three-quarters of a pound of meat, and one pound of bread, and went about his work with a set face and with the sympathy of all his comrades; only excepting Alf Sligo.

He knew that in process of time he would win his stripes again, although the offence for which he had been punished, however great the provocation, would stand in his way. And he also knew that his enemy would lose no opportunity of

breaking him again, and Tom Howard began to school himself against all the possibilities of the future. He was growing fond of the life, and looked forward to the time—now fast approaching—when the regiment would leave for India, the scene of so many of his father's exploits, and where there was always the chance of active service in the numerous little tribal wars that set the frontier a-blaze.

There was one alternative that offered itself, and that was to effect an exchange into another regiment. But that course did not appeal to him, savouring too much of running away in the face of the enemy, and he made up his mind, in slang phrase, to "stick it" as long as it was possible to do so.

One thing that puzzled our hero not a little was the behaviour of Bill Sloggett. He took the first opportunity of going up to that individual and putting a straight question to him.

"Was that your doing, Sloggett?" he said, pointing to his mare, and looking his ancient enemy straight in the eyes.

"I'll take my oath it wasn't!" replied Bill Sloggett, returning the gaze steadily.

"Do you know who did it?" said Tom.

"Look 'ere, 'Oward," said Sloggett; "maybe I do—maybe I don't! I'm not going to say one way or another!"

And Tom, realising perfectly well that Bill Sloggett did know, respected his reticence; and Bill Sloggett, realising that he did so, appreciated the circumstance, and laid it away in lavender for the future.

It was about that time that the men of the squadron noticed that Bill Sloggett took a good deal of work on his own shoulders that belonged by rights to Trooper Howard, and the men of the squadron marvelled thereat.

A fortnight later a strange thing happened in the 25th. Somebody began saddle-cutting. If there is a dirty, underhanded practice it is saddle-cutting, and such a thing had been practically unknown in the regiment since its formation. It began in B Squadron. Eight girths were found severed by a razor, and half a dozen stirrup-leathers, and the strictest inquiry failed to find the perpetrator. The regimental sergeant-major was almost beside himself, and the C.O. convened a special meeting of all the non-coms., and said some very strong things to them. Two days later more saddles were cut, and a murmur went through the regiment like the hum of a hive of bees.

"What the dickens does this mean, Vavaseur?" said the C.O. to the adjutant.

"I don't know, sir. There's not a grievance that I know of in the regiment, and we have no distinctly bad characters. I was going to put in for leave, but I shall postpone that and see this business through."

When the colonel was met on the third consecutive day with the announcement that five more saddles had been slashed to ribbons during the night, he nearly had a fit, and straightway stopped all leave, and over the whole of that gallant corps there hung a heavy shadow. The cutting had taken place exclusively in "B" Squadron, and though double guards were put over the horse-lines, they could get no clue to the miscreant. Then one morning the "regimental" sought out the C.O., with unusual gravity in his face, and produced a stirrup-iron with a cut leather attached to it; and the C.O. knew from the "regimental's" face that he had made a discovery.

"Well, Middleton, have you got him?" said the colonel quickly, with a ring in his voice which foretold a bad time for the delinquent.

"No, sir, I can't say that I've got him; but there's something very strange about the whole matter. Private Howard's kit is the only one that has not been touched all through, and I'm sorry to say that I've found this stirrup in his kitbag this morning."

The chief was very troubled, and looked at the sergeant-major for several moments.

"Bring Trooper Howard to me!" he said, turning away and switching his boot savagely.

"Pass the word for Trooper Howard, there. The colonel wants him!"

And Tom, who had been rolling blankets in his tent, marched off with the sergeant-major, and was ushered into the presence of the chief.

"Sergeant-major Middleton has found this in your kitbag, Howard," said the colonel, producing the cut stirrup. "How did it get there?"

Tom mechanically held out his hand, and the colonel dropped the stirrup into it.

"Surely you don't think, sir, that I placed it there?" said our hero.

And his voice rang so true and fearless that the colonel tugged at his moustache, and muttered something under his breath.

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